

# Scaffolding Text with AI: Sample Prompts

## Overview

English language learners (ELLs) may need support with reading comprehension. One helpful strategy for this skill is [text engineering](#), which embeds scaffolds directly into grade-level text, such as:

1. Chunking a text
2. Adding a guiding question or heading
3. Adding images with captions
4. Adding cognates and translated words for key terms
5. Adding user-friendly definitions and synonyms

## Using AI to Scaffold Text

Educators can use Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to scaffold and engineer a text, or to brainstorm ideas on what kinds of scaffolds to include. Keep in mind that:

- Changing the prompt slightly will change the response
- Putting the same prompt into different AI tools will generate different responses
- You can provide feedback on the initial results to refine and improve them

To show what this looks like, we have put together a series of four prompts that were entered into an AI tool (ClaudeAI). The prompts feature the same paragraph of text but vary in wording. You will have an opportunity compare the responses and see where they overlap and where they differ.

## Professional Learning Activities

We have included **Discussion Questions** throughout the document for professional learning sessions.



# Sample Prompts and Responses

The following prompts feature a paragraph from the Colorín Colorado article [Taking a Museum Tour in Spanish: What It Feels Like to Be a Language Learner](#).

## Version #1: Prompt

Using the strategies from Colorin Colorado's text engineering strategy, <https://www.colorincolorado.org/teaching-ells/ell-classroom-strategy-library/text-engineering>, share some examples of how to engineer this text:

*"I learned that the factory had been built by two brothers from Spain during the Industrial Revolution who chose the site because of its proximity to the railway line. They imported machines from England (which maybe explained why images of the BBC's North and South were running through my mind) and were known for their high-quality fabrics, remaining in operation until the 1980s. Who had worked here, I wondered? What had the conditions been like? What were the differences between what men and women did on the factory floor, if any?"*

## Claude AI Response

Based on Colorín Colorado's text engineering strategy, here are examples of how to engineer your text using their key techniques:

### Engineered Version Example

#### How was the factory built?

I learned that the factory had been built by two brothers from Spain during the **Industrial Revolution** (a time in the 1800s when many factories were built). The brothers chose this location (place) because of its **proximity** (nearness) to the railway line.

![[Image: Historic railway line with industrial buildings nearby] Caption: Factories were often built near railway lines for easy transport of goods



### Where did the equipment come from?

They **imported** (brought in from another country) machines from England. This maybe explained why images of the BBC's *North and South* were running through my mind. The factory was known for its high-quality fabrics and **remained in operation** (stayed open and working) until the 1980s.

![[Image: Industrial textile machinery from the 1800s] *Caption: Textile machines like these were imported from England*

### What questions remain about the workers?

- Who had worked here, I wondered?
- What had the conditions been like?
- What were the differences between what men and women did on the factory floor, if any?

### Key Engineering Techniques Applied:

1. **Chunking** - Broke the long paragraph into three shorter sections
2. **Guiding questions as headings** - Added questions that preview each chunk's main idea
3. **Synonym insertions** - Added parenthetical definitions: proximity (nearness), imported (brought in), remained in operation (stayed open)
4. **Labeled visuals** - Suggested relevant images with captions
5. **Academic vocabulary support** - Defined "Industrial Revolution" and "proximity"
6. **Bulleted questions** - Made the final questions easier to process

This engineered version maintains the original content while making it more accessible to English Language Learners through embedded scaffolds.



## Discussion Questions

1. There are six types of scaffolds listed at the end of this response. Find an example of each one in the response.
2. What do you notice about how the response is organized?
3. What are your “a-ha” moments when you look at this response?
4. How might an ELL teacher use this example with a content-area teacher, such as a Social Studies teacher or ELL educator?



## Version #2: Prompt

Using the strategies from Colorín Colorado's text engineering strategy, share some examples of how to engineer this text: <https://www.colorincolorado.org/teaching-ells/ell-classroom-strategy-library/text-engineering>

*"I learned that the factory had been built by two brothers from Spain during the Industrial Revolution who chose the site because of its proximity to the railway line. They imported machines from England (which maybe explained why images of the BBC's North and South were running through my mind) and were known for their high-quality fabrics, remaining in operation until the 1980s. Who had worked here, I wondered? What had the conditions been like? What were the differences between what men and women did on the factory floor, if any?"*

## Claude AI Response

I'll help you apply text engineering strategies to make this passage more accessible for ELLs:

### Example 1: Simplifying Vocabulary & Sentence Structure

**Original:** "I learned that the factory had been built by two brothers from Spain during the Industrial Revolution who chose the site because of its proximity to the railway line."

**Engineered:** "Two brothers from Spain built the factory during the Industrial Revolution. They chose this place because it was close to the railway line."

*Changes: Simplified passive voice, broke into two sentences, replaced "proximity" with "close to"*

### Example 2: Adding Visual Support & Context Clues

**Engineered version with supports:** "Two brothers from Spain built the factory during the Industrial Revolution (the 1800s). They chose this place because it was **close to** (near) the railway line."

*Changes: Added date context, included synonym in parentheses*



### Example 3: Chunking Information with Headers

#### The Factory's History

Two brothers from Spain built the factory in the 1800s. They picked this location because it was near the train tracks.

#### The Machines

The brothers bought machines from England. These machines made high-quality cloth (fabric).

#### Questions About the Workers

- Who worked in this factory?
- What were the working conditions like?
- Did men and women do different jobs?

*Changes: Organized into sections, converted reflection into bulleted questions*

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### Example 4: Reducing Complexity

**Engineered:** "The factory was built by two Spanish brothers in the 1800s. It was near the railway, which made it a good location. They bought English machines to make quality fabrics. The factory operated until the 1980s. I wondered: Who worked here? What was it like to work here?"

*Changes: Shortened sentences, removed literary reference, simplified rhetorical questions*

These modifications make the text more comprehensible while preserving the essential meaning and inquiry-based tone.





## Discussion Questions

1. How is the prompt different from Version #1?
2. How is this response different from Version #1?
3. Which scaffolds are the same? Which are different?
4. What do you notice about how the response is organized?
5. Why might an ELL teacher choose to use this version instead of Version #1?



### Version #3: Prompt

Using the strategies from Colorín Colorado's text engineering strategy, <https://www.colorincolorado.org/teaching-ells/ell-classroom-strategy-library/text-engineering>, share some examples of how to engineer this text. Please highlight English-Spanish cognates.

*"I learned that the factory had been built by two brothers from Spain during the Industrial Revolution who chose the site because of its proximity to the railway line. They imported machines from England (which maybe explained why images of the BBC's North and South were running through my mind) and were known for their high-quality fabrics, remaining in operation until the 1980s. Who had worked here, I wondered? What had the conditions been like? What were the differences between what men and women did on the factory floor, if any?"*

### Claude AI Response

#### Text Engineering Examples for ELL Students

Using the Colorín Colorado text engineering strategy, here are ways to modify this passage for different proficiency levels:

#### Level 1: Beginning ELLs

**Simplified Version:** "Two brothers from Spain built a factory. They built it during the Industrial Revolution. The factory was near the railway. The brothers brought machines from England. They made high-quality fabric. The factory closed in the 1980s. Who worked here? What were the conditions like? Did men and women do different work?"

#### Support added:

- Shorter sentences
- Simple present/past tense
- Basic vocabulary
- Questions separated for clarity





## Level 2: Intermediate ELLs

**Modified Version:** "I learned that two brothers from Spain built the **factory** during the **Industrial Revolution**. They chose this place because it was close to the railway line. They **imported machines** from England to make high-**quality fabrics**. The **factory** stayed open until the 1980s. I wondered: Who worked here? What were the **conditions** like? Did men and women do **different** jobs on the **factory** floor?"

### Support added:

- Some complex sentences broken down
- Key vocabulary bolded
- Clearer transitions

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## Level 3: Advanced ELLs

**Lightly Modified Version:** "I learned that the **factory** had been built by two brothers from Spain during the **Industrial Revolution**. They chose the site because of its closeness to the railway line. They **imported machines** from England (which maybe explains why images of the BBC's *North and South* were running through my mind). They were known for their high-**quality fabrics**, and the **factory** remained open until the 1980s. Who had worked here, I wondered? What had the **conditions** been like? Were there **differences** between what men and women did on the **factory** floor?"

### Support added:

- Original complexity mostly preserved
- Some passive voice simplified
- Challenging vocabulary highlighted
- Minor clarifications



## English-Spanish Cognates Highlighted

Here are the cognates that Spanish-speaking ELLs can leverage:

- **factory** = fábrica
- **Industrial** = industrial
- **Revolution** = revolución
- **proximity** = proximidad
- **imported** = importaron
- **machines** = máquinas
- **images** = imágenes
- **quality** = calidad
- **fabrics** = fábricas/telas
- **operation** = operación
- **conditions** = condiciones
- **differences** = diferencias

**Teaching Tip:** Preview these cognates before reading to activate prior knowledge and boost comprehension confidence for Spanish-speaking students!

## Discussion Questions

1. How is this response different from Versions #1 and #2?
2. What do you notice about how the response is organized?
3. How are cognates highlighted?



## Version #4: Prompt

Using the strategies from Colorín Colorado's text engineering strategy, share some examples of how to engineer this text. Please highlight English-Spanish cognates.

<https://www.colorincolorado.org/teaching-ells/ell-classroom-strategy-library/text-engineering>

*"I learned that the factory had been built by two brothers from Spain during the Industrial Revolution who chose the site because of its proximity to the railway line. They imported machines from England (which maybe explained why images of the BBC's North and South were running through my mind) and were known for their high-quality fabrics, remaining in operation until the 1980s. Who had worked here, I wondered? What had the conditions been like? What were the differences between what men and women did on the factory floor, if any?"*

## Claude AI Response

Based on Colorín Colorado's text engineering strategy, here's how to engineer your text with embedded scaffolds and supports:

### Engineered Text Example

#### Chunk 1: The Factory's Origins

*Who built this factory and why was this location chosen?*

I learned that the **factory** (building where goods are made) had been built by two brothers from Spain during the **Industrial Revolution** (period of major industrial growth in the 1700s-1800s) who chose the site because of its **proximity** (closeness) to the railway line.

#### English-Spanish Cognates:

- **factory** = *fábrica*
- **Industrial Revolution** = *Revolución Industrial*
- **proximity** = *proximidad*



## Chunk 2: Equipment and Inspiration

*Where did the machinery come from?*

They **imported** (brought in from another country) **machines** (equipment) from England (which maybe explained why images of the BBC's *North and South* were running through my mind) and were known for their high-**quality** (excellence) **fabrics** (cloth/textiles), remaining in **operation** (working/functioning) until the 1980s.

### English-Spanish Cognates:

- **imported** = *importaron*
- **machines** = *máquinas*
- **quality** = *calidad*
- **fabrics** = *fábricas* (false friend - means factories!) / **textiles** = *textiles*
- **operation** = *operación*

## Chunk 3: Questions About the Workers

*What was life like for the people who worked here?*

Who had worked here, I wondered? What had the **conditions** (circumstances/situation) been like? What were the **differences** (distinctions) between what men and women did on the factory floor, if any?

### English-Spanish Cognates:

- **conditions** = *condiciones*
- **differences** = *diferencias*



### Key Text Engineering Features Used:

1. **Chunking:** Divided into 3 manageable sections
2. **Guiding questions:** Added as headings for each chunk
3. **Synonyms in parentheses:** Added after academic vocabulary
4. **Cognates highlighted:** Identified Spanish-English word connections
5. **Definitions:** Brief, user-friendly explanations for key terms

This engineered version makes the grade-level text more accessible to English language learners while maintaining the original content and complexity.

### Discussion Questions

1. How is this response different from Version #3?
2. How and where are the cognates incorporated?

As you think back over these examples:

3. What are your takeaways?
4. What are some ways that an ELL educator's expertise would be helpful in reviewing these examples and options?
5. If you had to choose, which version would you select and why?
6. How could you use these kinds of AI prompts in your teaching, coaching, or co-teaching?