

Join the national conversation!



Word Generation - Unit 2.11

## Focus Words

specify | establish | cohesive | constrain | xenophobia



## Weekly Passage

If you ride the bus through an American city, you will hear many languages spoken. Many new immigrants have come to the U.S., speaking languages like Vietnamese, Russian, Spanish, and Creole.

Immigrants want to be able to use public services. Interpreters and written information in different languages help them use hospitals, libraries, and schools. If immigrants go to court, they want to understand what is being said. When new citizens vote, they want to be able to read the voting ballot.

Right now, the U.S. does not specify what languages can be used by the government. For example in many states, people can take the driver's test in their home language. But some people want to establish English as our official language. If

English is the only official language, they say the country will be more unified or cohesive. Using other languages in schools, courts, and city hospitals would be constrained by law. Immigrants would need to learn English right away or miss out on services.

Other people say this is just xenophobia, a fear of foreign people. Immigrants are learning English as fast as they can. They deserve services and information in the language they know.

What do you think? Should immigrants be provided government services in their home language? Or do you think making English the official language of the United States will help us come together?

**Unit 2.1 I**

# Should English be the official language of the United States?

## Focus Word Chart

### Focus Word Chart

Word	Meaning	Forms	Examples of Use	Notes
specify	(v.) - to clearly define			
establish	(v.) - to cause to be recognized and accepted			
cohesive	(adj.) - unified			
constrain	(v.) - to hold back			
xenophobia	(n.) - a fear of foreign people			

# Should English be the official language of the United States?

## Problem of the Week



Immigrant families around the world face many difficulties. They face **xenophobia** as well as day-to-day struggles with things from buying food to making friends. Using their first language at home helps families be **cohesive**. It helps them stay connected to their roots. **Establishing** English as the official language of the U.S. would not legally **constrain** the everyday use of other languages. However, some people think that having an official language would decrease the use of other languages, even in people's homes. The 2000 United States census asked people to **specify** which language they speak at home.

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**Option 1:** The most common non-English language spoken at home in the U.S. is Spanish. The 2000 U.S. Census counted 262,375,152 U.S. residents. Of these, 28,101,052 spoke Spanish at home. What percent of Americans speak Spanish at home?

- A) about 10.7%
- B) about 28.2%
- C) about 32.6%
- D) about 45.1%

**Option 2:** The second and third most popular non-English languages spoken at home in the U.S. are Chinese and French. Of the 262,375,152 people counted on the 2000 Census, 2,022,143 spoke Chinese, and 1,643,838 spoke French. If an American is selected at random, what is the probability that he or she speaks Chinese or French at home?

**Discussion Question:** Most people who want English **established** as the official language say that they are not **xenophobic**, they just want to preserve America's national culture. **Specifying** a national language will give Americans more incentive to speak fluent English. How can we be a **cohesive** nation, they ask, if we can't talk to our neighbors? However, learning a new language is difficult, and takes time. Have you ever been in a place where people used a language you couldn't understand? Did it **constrain** your behavior? Did it prevent you from doing things? Why or why not?

# Should English be the official language of the United States?

## Debating the Issue



## I. Get ready...

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

**A** English should be the official language of the United States. This will make us a more cohesive nation would be helpful to everyone. No other languages should be used for government services.

**B** The United States should not have an official language. Having one would take away people's rights to free speech.

**C** Children in U.S. schools should be required to learn English, but adult immigrants should only learn English if they choose to do so.

**D** Making English the official language of the U.S. is a good idea, but people should still receive government services in their home language if they do not know English.

**E** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# GO!

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

*In my experience . . .*

*that's similar to what I think too...*

*What makes you think that?*

*When I re-read the text, it reminded me...*

## 2. Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes:

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## Unit 2.11

# Should English be the official language of the United States?

### Science Activity



This activity is designed to help you practice thinking like a scientist and to use this week's focus words. Sometimes the data are based on real research, but they should never be considered true or factual.

Professor Kahn's class is discussing ProEnglish, a group that wants to make English the official language of the U.S.

"That's a **xenophobic** view," says Louis. "Immigrants are Americans, too! States can help people by printing important information in languages immigrants can read. **Establishing** an official language will **constrain** the use of other languages."

"Hold on," says Richard. "If we don't **specify** a national language, immigrants might never learn English. Their kids might never learn English. There could be whole states where people speak only Spanish or Chinese. We would not be a **cohesive** nation!"

"I think I have some data about children and grandchildren of immigrants from Mexico," says Professor Kahn. "Do they speak English? Let's take a look!"

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### Question:

Do the children and grandchildren of immigrants from Mexico speak Spanish, English, or both?

### Hypothesis:

Over 50% of the Mexican immigrants' grandchildren speak fluent English, and under 50% speak fluent Spanish.

### Materials:

- ▶ 200 people who immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico.
- ▶ 200 people who were born in the U.S. and are the children of Mexican immigrants.
- ▶ 200 people who were born in the U.S. and are the grandchildren of Mexican immigrants.

**Procedure:**

1. Recruit subjects.
2. Test their fluency in Spanish and English.
3. Calculate the percentage of people who are fluent in Spanish, and the percentage who are fluent in English.

**Data:**

	<b>Percentage who are fluent Spanish speakers</b>	<b>Percentage who are fluent English speakers</b>
Immigrants from Mexico	<b>99%</b>	<b>23%</b>
Children of Mexican immigrants	<b>35%</b>	<b>88%</b>
Grandchildren of Mexican immigrants	<b>7%</b>	<b>94%</b>

**Conclusion:**

Is the hypothesis supported or not by the data?

What evidence supports your conclusion?

How would you make this a better experiment?



# Writing Prompt

Should English be the  
official language of the  
United States?

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

## Focus Words

specify | establish | cohesive | constrain | xenophobia

### A tool to help you think about your own writing!

Remember you can use focus words from any of the WG Units.

Check off what you accomplished:

#### Good Start

- ☐ Stated my own position
- ☐ Included 1 focus word

#### Pretty Good

- ☐ Stated my own position clearly
- ☐ Included 1-2 arguments
- ☐ Included 1-2 focus words

#### Exemplary

- ☐ Stated my own position clearly
- ☐ Included 1-2 arguments
- ☐ Included 1 counterargument
- ☐ Used 2-5 focus words

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