

Teaching Academic Language
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I. Academic Language: What is it and why is it important?

Teaching technique: Give one/get one

Directions: For each of the samples of speech below, decide whether you would classify it as "academic" or "everyday" language. Make notes about why you chose that category. When you've gone through the list, get up and find a partner. "Give" one of your choices and reasons and then "get" one of the partner's choices and reasons. Make note of any new or different ideas.

1. Sausage biscuits again! BOOOORING.
2. Experts say that two contributors to deforestation are beef ranching in South America and the production of Indonesian palm oil, a product used in cooking oils, cosmetics and soap.
3. Harold's family ordered an extra super deluxe supreme pizza. They ate $\frac{1}{4}$ of the pizza in the parking lot and another $\frac{2}{4}$ in the car on the way home. In all, how much pizza was eaten before they got home?
4. Food banks and those who rely on them have been hit by a perfect storm. More efficient manufacturing and retail practices have reduced surplus food availability. Economic recession and changing weather patterns have impacted food supply. Rising fuel costs have made it more expensive to transport food. Together, these changes mean that food donations are down, the cost of food is up, and hunger has spread to new locations.
5. In bivariate analyses, adolescents who typically brought their lunch from home 5 days per week ate fast food on fewer occasions; consumed fewer servings of soda, fried potatoes, and high-sugar foods; and ate more fruit and vegetables compared with adolescents who never brought their lunch to school.
6. Does anyone ask why you are taking pictures of your lunch?-Haha yeah, all the time. I have to explain myself at least twice a day!

Teaching technique: Translating back and forth between everyday and academic language

Pair work: Using the examples in Part I, work with a partner to develop "translations" for the items. If you classified something as everyday language, how might you say it in a more academic way? If it was academic, how might you say it in an everyday way?

Teaching technique: Sentence Matching activity

(from Gibbons, P.2009. *English Learners Academic Literacy, and Thinking: Learning in the Challenge Zone*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, p. 77)

Directions: Have students draw lines to match the sentences on the left with equivalent meanings on the right. Discuss the features that make them different and the contexts where each may be used.

<i>Where might we use this language?</i>	<i>Where might we use this language?</i>
A lot of artists at that time painted pictures of city life.	The melting of the ice caps is a result of global warming.
Magnets attract metals that contain iron.	Famine caused mass starvation.
There was no food and many people starved and died.	Urban scenes were popular among artists of the era.
The ice caps are starting to melt because the earth is getting hotter.	Magnetic attraction occurs between magnets and ferrous metals.

Definition of academic language:

- “..academic language is the set of words, grammar, and organizational strategies used to describe complex ideas, higher order thinking processes, and abstract concepts.”
– (Zwiers, J. 2008. *Building academic language*, p. 20)

II. How can we analyze the academic language demands of a lesson? What are the various aspects of academic language demands in the edTPA?

A. edTPA categories of language demands: discourse, syntax, vocabulary

Teaching technique: Making comparisons

Take a handout with excerpts from one of the edTPA handbooks related to academic language. Find a partner with excerpts from a different handbook. Take turns reading parts of the definitions of academic language, discourse, and syntax on your handouts. Note the parts that are the same and different. Then write a summary of the differences and similarities together. Use appropriate academic terms and sentence forms to show comparison and contrast, such as "Both ____ and ____", "____ and ____ share the same ____", "while ____ , ____"

Use this space to add notes about definitions of academic language that are useful in your content.

B. edTPA categories of language demands: Lesson tasks vs. academic language functions

Application: Underline the main verb in each of these lesson objectives. Then decide if it describes a general task or a specific language function. If it is a task, suggest some language functions that might be involved in doing it. (Language functions should be things students say or write. Tasks are more general and may involve several activities or steps.)

1. Students will practice longitude and latitude plotting skills.
2. Students will write a narrative about a natural disaster.
3. Students will make a poster to show how communities can prepare for disaster.
4. Students will explain how a hurricane is formed.
5. Students will describe features of environments that influence the occurrence of disasters.
6. Students will create severe weather safety preparation charts.
7. Students will give advice for preparing for severe weather.
8. Students will predict the damage that may be done in the case of a natural disaster in a given area.

C. Analyzing academic language demands:

Application: If the lesson uses a text including the following portion, what would be some academic language demands in terms of discourse, syntax, and vocabulary?

"There are three conditions required for a disturbance to form and strengthen into a hurricane. First, the disturbance must gather heat and energy through contact with warm ocean waters. Next, added moisture evaporated from the sea surface then powers the seedling tropical storm like a giant heat engine. Finally, the seedling storm forms a wind pattern near the ocean surface that spirals air inward. Bands of thunderstorms form, allowing the air to warm further and rise higher into the atmosphere. If the winds at these higher levels are relatively light, this structure can remain intact and further strengthen the hurricane."

(from Hurricanes: Unleashing Nature's Fury, A preparedness guide. US Dept of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, January 2007 retrieved from <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/hurricane/pdfs/HurricanesUNF07.pdf>)

Discourse features	Syntax features (grammar, sentence types)	Vocabulary

If a lesson has a task that requires students to create a poster to communicate the danger of hurricanes and advise communities on safety precautions, what might be some academic language demands for the lesson in terms of discourse, syntax, and vocabulary?

Discourse	Syntax	Vocabulary

III. Teaching academic language: How can we plan lessons to support students in understanding and using academic language?

A. Teaching vocabulary.

1. Select high utility academic words as well as content-specific words. Use word lists or think about words that are useful in many academic subjects and contexts.

Academic Word List (AWL) See <http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/resources/academicwordlist/sublists> for information and the 10 sublists that make up the AWL . For ideas about using it in teaching and a highlighter tool to identify AWL words in texts, see <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/alzsh3/acvocab/>

Other word lists: See <http://textproject.org/teachers/word-lists/> for Elfrieda Hiebert's lists of words and categories of words useful in literacy instruction at the elementary level.

2. Define new vocabulary clearly and provide examples.

Learner's Dictionaries

Merriam Webster: <http://www.learnersdictionary.com/>

Cambridge: <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/learner-english/>

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary: <http://oald8.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/>

Longman: <http://www.ldoconline.com/>

3. Present new words in a way that allows students to hear, see, say, and understand the word.

**Teaching technique: Introducing new vocabulary:
Steps for Introducing New Vocabulary**

- 1 Teacher says the word.
- 2 Teacher states the word in context from the text.
- 3 Teacher provides the dictionary definition(s).
- 4 Teacher explains meaning with student-friendly definitions.
- 5 Asks students to repeat the word 3 times.
- 6 Engages students in activities to develop word/concept knowledge.
- 7 Students say the word again or the whole sentence where it is found.

(Calderon, M. 2007. Teaching Reading to English Language Learners, Grades 6-12: A Framework for Improving Achievement in the Content Areas, Corwin Press.)

4. Provide opportunities for students to use the words in meaningful contexts

Teaching techniques for practicing vocabulary

- Have you ever? Ex: Describe a time when you might *restrict* something./ Describe a time when you felt *satiated*.
- Idea completion Ex: It's useful to make an *estimate* when....., The celebrity was treated with *derision* because.....
- I have/who has (A game in which a group of students have cards with words and other cards with definitions. One student takes a definition and says "Who has....?" The student whose word fits the definition says "I have....." and they continue. For practicing the use of words in context, provide meaningful sentences with the word left blank instead of definitions.)
- Use meaningful speaking and writing activities and encourage students to use the new words.

B. Teaching syntax

1. Pay attention to sentences that may be challenging for students: long sentences with many clauses, sentences with extended noun phrases, conditional sentences, passive voice, etc. Think about sentence structures that seem more complex than what you use in conversation.
2. Talk about how you understand the parts of the sentence – You don't need to explain grammar terms! Show how you chunk information in the sentence and what different parts mean.

Teaching technique: Using sentence frames as a scaffold

- Take your content objective or a question that you want students to respond to. Think of a model academic-sounding sentence that would be used to answer your questions.
- Provide a skeleton of that sentence orally and visually for students to use in developing their own answers.
- To differentiate, provide different options for sentence frames and let students choose one.

Sample use of sentence frame

Content objective: *Students will explain how a hurricane is formed.*

Language Objective: *SWBAT explain how a hurricane is formed using these frames:*

When the temperatures over the oceans are _____, areas of _____ form. This leads to _____. As _____, the hurricane _____.

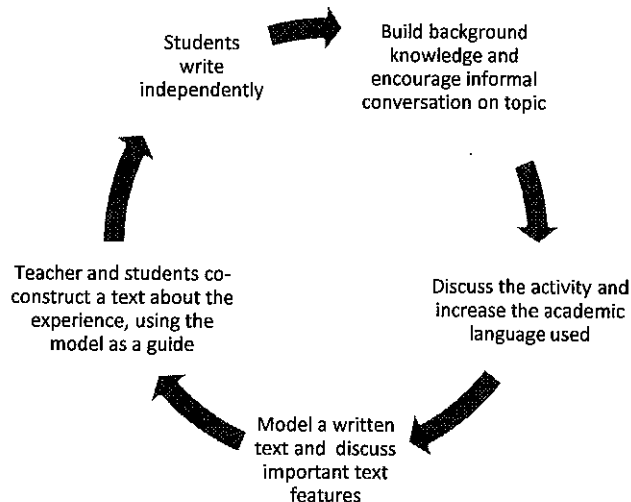
C. Teaching Discourse.

1. Identify key features of the genre (i.e. narrative writing, report, poster, powerpoint presentation, oral presentation, debate) you want students to produce. (See appendices from Gibbons, P. 2009. *English Learners Academic Literacy, and Thinking: Learning in the Challenge Zone.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann for descriptions of several academic genres.)
2. Provide models and explanations of the features that you want students to use.

Teaching technique: The teaching-learning cycle for writing

- Build awareness of discourse and sentence patterns through analysis and co-construction of writing
- Use gradual release to scaffold students into academic genres and writing tasks
- Build from one writing experience to the next in a cycle

Using the teaching/learning cycle in teaching writing



IV. Oral language development: What helps students develop oral academic language?

Students need:

- Opportunities to talk!
- Open-ended questions that demand more than one-word answers
- Opportunities for extended conversations with an academic purpose
- Language models such as sentence frames

Teaching technique: Fishbowl discussions and specific academic conversation skills

- Do a fishbowl discussion, starting with a small group in an inner circle and others standing on the outside. Students take turns in the inner circle when they have something to say. When someone in the outer circle wants to participate, they take the place of someone in the inner circle.
- In the discussion, practice elaborating on others' points or asking others to elaborate on what they said.

Topic for discussion: What do you feel are three must-know concepts for students in your content area? Why?

Pro-Con: An activity to practice connective words and different perspectives (Zwiers, 2008)

1. Have students prepare by making notes about different sides of an issue
2. Teach particular words to show connections between ideas (See examples below)
3. Have students take turns giving an argument and then switching to the opposing argument with connecting words
4. Or have students choose a side and do it as a dialogue

Activity: Try out a pro-con with a partner, using one of these topics:

Supersized soft drinks should be banned.

Soft drinks should not be sold in schools.

Soft drinks should be taxed higher than other items.

School lunches should restrict the number of calories per lunch.

Sample connective words: moreover, in addition, in fact, on top of that, however, on the other hand, in contrast,

V. Demonstrating student use of academic language and providing feedback to students

A. Key points from edTPA Task 3: Evidence of Language Understanding and Use

1. For Task 3, evidence of language use may come from video clips for oral language or from written student work samples.
2. Note that you need to demonstrate that STUDENTS use the language (selected function, vocabulary, symbols, and additional identified demands) to develop content understandings.

Application: Rate the following activities in terms of how well they demonstrate student use of language to develop content understandings.

- a) Teacher provides a definition of an academic word necessary to the content lesson.
- b) Students take a list of vocabulary words and write original sentences with them.
- c) Using sentence frames and word walls, students write summaries of key points from a content lesson.
- d) Students make corrections in sample sentences to practice grammar and punctuation.

- e) Following instruction on using embedded clauses to add information to sentences, students revise their compositions to add details using embedded (relative) clauses.
- f) With teacher scaffolding, students formulate more academic ways of phrasing concepts they are discussing.
- g) Students take sentence strips about a topic such as a weather event and work in groups to put them in order for a well-formed explanatory paragraph, discussing the meaning and organization of ideas as they work together.
- h) Students complete worksheets that identify elements of persuasive writing.

B. Feedback on language use.

Tips for providing effective feedback students learning academic language:

- Feedback should be specific (tailored to the student) and should highlight both strengths and areas for growth.
- Keep explicit error correction during informal speaking to a minimum. Focus on helping students communicate effectively by asking for clarification when they are unclear.
- Don't try to correct all errors. Covering a paper in red ink amounts to information overload and is discouraging.
- Focus your feedback on common errors that are repeated throughout the paper or on errors that interfere with communication.
- Encourage students to self correct by asking questions, giving clues, or giving specific directions for finding and correcting errors.
- Error correction will only be useful for forms students are ready to learn. For example, trying to teach an early intermediate English learner a complicated verb form before they have mastered simpler forms is unrealistic.
- Encourage students to try complex academic forms by rewarding their efforts and guiding them to master these forms. Don't focus only on the number of errors, but remember that errors can be a sign of growth.

VI. Putting it together in planning

Take your sample lesson plans and work with others to analyze academic language demands and to think about how to plan for language supports. You may want to follow the steps noted in the presentation:

Selecting Language Demands from Lesson Plans

1. Consider the key content objectives.
2. Examine the language tasks needed to fulfill the content objectives: What do students need to do in terms of writing/speaking?
3. Consider the language functions that students will produce (in speaking/writing).
4. Link the language function (i.e. explain, justify) with language forms (vocabulary, sentence types, or genres) that can be used to do the function.
5. Choose a language form/function that is important and that students need support with.

Useful Resources for Academic Language Instruction

Websites

- Jeff Zwiers' website: www.jeffzwiers.com
- Margarita Calderon's website: www.margaritacalderon.org
- Colorín Colorado: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/>
- Academic Language Development Network: <http://aldnetwork.org>
- Kate Kinsella <http://pubs.cde.ca.gov/tcsii/prolearningtoolkit/kinsellaindex.aspx>

Books

- Calderon, M. (2007) *Teaching reading to English language learners, Grades 6-12*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Colombo, M. & Furbush, D. (2009). *Teaching English language learners: Content in middle and secondary mainstream classrooms*. New York: Routledge
- Derewianka, B. (1990). *Exploring how texts work*. Newton, Australia: Primary English Teaching Association
- Gibbons, P. 2009. *English learners academic literacy and thinking: learning in the challenge zone*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Himmele, P. & Himmele, W. (2009). *The language-rich classroom: A research-based framework for teaching English language learners*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Swinney, R. & Velasco, P. (2011) *Connecting content and academic language for English Learners and struggling students grades 2-6*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. (elementary)
- Zwiers, J. (2008). *Building academic language: Essential practices for content classrooms*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Zwiers, J. and M. Crawford. 2011. *Academic conversations: Classroom talk that fosters critical thinking and content understandings*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

Articles

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- Fang, Z. (2008). Going beyond the fab five: Helping students cope with the unique linguistic challenges of expository reading in intermediate grades. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 51 (6), 476-487.
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- Zwiers, J. & Crawford, M. (2009). How to start academic conversations. *Educational Leadership*, 70-73.
- Zwiers, J. (2006). Integrating academic language, thinking and content: Learning scaffolds for non-native speakers in the middle grades. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 5, 317-332.