Understanding Academic Language in edTPA: Supporting Learning and Language Development

Academic language (AL) is the oral and written language used for academic purposes. AL is the "language of the discipline" used to engage students in learning and includes the means by which students develop and express content understandings.

When completing their edTPA, candidates must consider the AL (i.e. **language demands**) present throughout the learning segment in order to support student learning and language development. The language demands include **function, vocabulary/symbols, discourse, and syntax.**

As stated in the edTPA handbook:

- Candidates identify a key *language function* and one essential learning task within their learning segment lesson plans that allows students to practice the function.
- Candidates are then asked to identify *vocabulary* and *one additional language demand* (discourse or syntax) related to the language function and learning task.
- Finally, candidates must identify and describe the instructional and/or *language supports* they have planned to address the language demands. Language supports are scaffolds, representations, and instructional strategies that teachers intentionally provide to help learners understand and use the language they need to learn within disciplines.
- **Note**: Early Childhood Education only focuses on vocabulary. World Languages and Special Education do not use academic language. Special Education focuses on Communication Skills and World Languages focuses on Communicative Proficiency in the Target Language.

It is important to realize that not all learning tasks focus on both discourse and syntax. As candidates decide which additional language demands (i.e., syntax and/or discourse) are relevant to their identified function, they should examine the language understandings and use that are most relevant to the learning task they have chosen. Then, teacher candidates should plan to provide appropriate and targeted language supports for students to learn and practice the language demands within the chosen learning task.

This AL handout provides definitions and a few examples of language demands and supports for each content area.

Language Demands

I. Language Function is the purpose for which language is used. The language function is often represented by the active verbs within the learning outcomes.

Content Area	**Examples of Language Function** (bolded and underlined within learning objectives)

Elementary Literacy	Students will be able to **compare** two characters in a story. Students will be able to **explain** how claims support an argument. Students will be able to **describe** how the character resolves a conflict in the story.
Elementary & Secondary Mathematics	Students will be able to **compare** the lengths of various objects in the classroom. Students will be able to **explain** what strategy(ies) they used to solve a problem. Students will be able to **describe** the specific attributes of a parallelogram.
Secondary Social Studies	Students will be able to **compare** the civilizations of the Incas and Aztecs. Students will be able to **explain** the impact of minor political parties on elections. Students will be able to **describe** two events that led to the Revolutionary War.
Secondary English	Students will be able to **compare** the characters from two texts. Students will be able to **explain** what makes a story allegorical. Students will be able to **analyze** two scenes that represent satire.
Secondary Science	Students will be able to **compare** the densities of various objects in the classroom. Students will be able to **explain** the difference between a food chain and a food web. Students will be able to **describe** processes and procedures used in an experiment.
Visual Arts	Students will be able to **compare** two works of art from a similar genre. Students will be able to **explain** the context for a work of art/design. Students will be able to **evaluate** the extent to which elements work together to create an impact or convey an intended message.
Performance Arts	Students will be able to **compare** the lengths of various notes. Students will be able to **explain** what makes a play melodramatic. Students will be able to **describe** the features of an observed dance. Students will be able to **evaluate** the pitch of a song sung by their peer.
Health Education	Students will be able to **describe** health promoting behaviors. Students will be able to **explain** the components of a food label. Students will be able to **analyze** risk and protective factors of lifestyle choices

II. Vocabulary includes words, phrases, and symbols used within disciplines. There are three categories of vocabulary: **(1)** words and phrases with subject-specific meanings that differ from meanings used in everyday life, **(2)** general academic vocabulary used across disciplines, and **(3)** subject-specific words and/or symbols defined for use in the discipline.

Content Area	**Examples of Vocabulary**
Elementary Literacy	**1.** Plot, conflict, character, setting **2.** Compare, analyze, evaluate **3.** Onomatopoeia, metaphor, vowels, consonants
Elementary & Secondary	**1.** Table, ruler, square, face, chord, digit, event, times, set **2.** Compare, analyze, evaluate, describe, sequences, classify

Mathematics	**3.** Exponent, numerator, denominator, equilateral, divisor, least common multiple, ÷, ≥, × (symbols)
Secondary Social Studies	**1.** Table, ruler, key, power, class, charter, state **2.** Compare, analyze, evaluate, describe **3.** Constitution, republic, colony, frontier, alliance, neutrality
Secondary English	**1.** Warrant, meter, argument **2.** Compare, analyze, evaluate **3.** Soliloquy, denouement, static and dynamic characters, thesis statement
Secondary Science	**1.** Table, control, alcohol, balance, cell, producer **2.** Compare, contrast, analyze, evaluate, summarize, justify, explain, interpret, classify **3.** Proton, food web, photosynthesis, density, acceleration due to gravity (g) , hypothesis, K = potassium, atomic number
Visual Arts	**1.** Elements, shade, value **2.** Compare, analyze, evaluate, describe **3.** Sculpture, texture, artist statements, creative expression
Performance Arts	**1.** Rhythm, note, pitch, beat **2.** Compare, analyze, evaluate, describe **3.** Allegro, picturization, improvisation, ensemble
Health Education	**1.** Table, risk, factors, culture, pressure **2.** Compare, analyze, evaluate, describe, sequence, demonstrate, classify **3.** Protective factors, health-enhancing skills and behaviors, risk behaviors

III. Discourse is how members of the discipline talk, write, and participate in knowledge construction, using the structures of written and oral language. Discipline-specific discourse has distinctive features or ways of structuring oral or written language (text structures) or representing knowledge visually.

Content Area	**Examples of Discourse**
Elementary Literacy	● Writing narrative texts ● Constructing argument texts ● Interpreting graphic representations ● Composing essays (e.g., citing textual evidence)
Elementary Mathematics	● Making and supporting a conjecture ● Constructing a definition based on comparing examples and non-examples of polygons ● Interpreting graphic representations (e.g., graphs, diagrams)
Secondary Mathematics	● Constructing an argument (two-column proof) ● Interpreting graphic representations (e.g., graphs, diagrams)

	● Making and supporting a conjecture
Secondary Social Studies	● Constructing arguments (e.g., debates) ● Interpreting primary/secondary sources ● Writing speeches or essays ● Analyzing newspaper editorials ● Interpreting graphic representations (e.g., maps, graphs) ● Analyzing political cartoons
Secondary English	● Constructing arguments ● Writing narrative texts ● Analyzing or writing poetry (e.g., sonnet) ● Interpreting or constructing graphic representations (e.g., story map) ● Note-taking (Cornell)
Secondary Science	● Completing lab reports ● Writing analysis & conclusions sections of lab reports ● Interpreting graphic representations (e.g., graphs, diagrams) ● Explaining materials lists ● Analyzing tabular representations
Visual Arts	● Writing artist statements ● Developing critiques of works of art ● Selecting and arranging artwork for group display ● Creating works of art using techniques/style of artistic genres as a means of expression
Performance Arts	● Writing responses and reviews of performing arts ● Analyzing the structures of dance, music, or theater ● Comparing and contrasting different genres of music, dance, or theater ● Examining structural elements of a play: point-of-attack, inciting incident, crisis, climax, denouement
Health Education	● Evaluating the reliability and validity of health resources ● Developing goal setting plans ● Arguments supporting a healthy lifestyle choice ● Using health communication strategies such as refusal skills ● Writing research reports that include narrative sections and/or representations of data (e.g., graphs, tables) or visual representations of information for advocacy purposes

IV. Syntax are the rules for organizing words or symbols together into phrases, clauses, sentences or visual representations. One of the main functions of syntax is to organize language in order to convey meaning.

Content Area	Examples of Syntax
Elementary Literacy	● Ordinal numbers to sequence events (e.g., first, next, last) ● Sentence structure for metaphors or analogies ● Rhyming or word patterns for poetry ● Simple to complex sentences in essay writing
Elementary & Secondary Mathematics	Mathematical sentences (using words or symbols) including: ● $6 \geq 4$ ● There are 5 times as many apples as oranges. Long or elaborate noun phrases ● Write an inequality that, when solved, will give the amount of sales Mandy needs to cover her planned expenses. Conditional sentences ● If 50% of a number is 25, what is 75% of the number?
Secondary Social Studies	● Sentences (e.g., cause and effect) ● Using longitude and latitude for location ● Claims ● Citations
Secondary English	Sentences ● Independent and dependent clauses ● Transition phrases ● Misplaced modifiers Within Essay Writing ● Thesis statements ● Topic sentence ● Claims ● Warrants ● Citations (e.g., textual references)
Secondary Science	Mathematical sentences (using words or symbols) including ● Formulas, D = m/V or Density equals mass divided by volume Symbols replacing reactants and products in chemical reactions ● Write the symbolic representation for the combustion of methane. Punnett Squares ● If a heterozygous black-furred male rabbit is crossed with a homozygous recessive white-furred female rabbit, what resultant offspring genotypes could occur?
Visual Arts	Comparative responses: ● Ex: The illustrations in The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle are _____, but the illustrations in Busy Town by Richard Scarry are _____. Essay and Critique Writing ● Thesis statements ● Topic sentence

	● Claims ● Citations
Performance Arts	● Musical Notation: measures, key signature, time signature ● Labanotation ● Dialogue in a script ● Chord progression
Health Education	● Guidelines for how ingredients and nutritional information is organized on food labels ● Sentence or phrase structures for writing I-Messages ● Format for writing a SMART goal

Examples of Planned Language Supports

To help programs and candidates begin to develop their understanding of language supports, **start by examining a key standard or learning objective.**

The chart below identifies sample language demands with related examples of supports based on one selected learning objective in each content area.

Content Area & Learning Objective	**Identified Language Demands**	**Example of Planned Language Supports**
Elementary Literacy: **Students will analyze character traits**	Analyze (Function)	Model analyzing characters
	Caring, stubborn (Vocabulary)	Review vocabulary and word chart
	Descriptive sentences (Syntax)	Create sentence stems to show structure of description
Elementary & Secondary Mathematics: **Students will interpret a word problem to find the part or whole prior to setting up and solving the problem.**	Interpret (Function)	Model interpreting a word problem
	Part, whole (Vocabulary)	Review vocabulary and word chart and discuss meanings in the context of the word problems modeled
	Word Problem (Syntax)	Break down sentences within word problems with the whole class to identify essential information and paths to solution

Secondary Social Studies: **Students will compare and contrast monarchies, democracies and dictatorships.**	Compare and Contrast (Function)	Provide and model how to use the Venn Diagram to compare and contrast
	Monarch, Dictator, Democracy (Vocabulary)	Present examples of terms
	Persuasive Essay (Discourse)	Provide a sample essay
Secondary English: **Students will use textual references to justify their interpretation of a character's traits.**	Justify (Function)	Model textual references to justify
	Character traits (Vocabulary)	Review vocabulary and word chart and discuss meanings in relation to characters
	Justification statement (Syntax)	Mini lecture with samples of justification statements including citations from the text
Secondary Science: **Students will apply scientific principles and evidence to provide an explanation about the effects of changing the temperature or concentration of the reacting particles on the rate at which the reaction occurs.**	Explain (Function)	Model an explanation, that includes data gathered from school's ski team, to account for the slope conditions that are best for fast downhill runs while skiing or snowboarding
	Molarity, [R] = concentration of reactant in M, temperature in ℃, reaction rate (Vocabulary and Symbols)	Review symbols and vocabulary from guided notes
	Constructing analyses (Discourse)	Provide sentence stems to help students explain the relationship observed for temperature to reaction rate. For example: When the concentration of NaOH (aq) was ___ M the reaction started in _____s and when the concentration of the reactant was ____M the reaction started in ____s which shows a(n) direct/indirect relationship (circle one of the underlined words). As concentration increases/decreases the reaction rate _____.
Visual Arts: **Students will**	Interpret	Model how to interpret the two works of art

interpret the work of two artists from related genres to compare and contrast their intent and meaning in painting landscapes.	(Function)	by using a Venn Diagram
	Compare, contrast, line, color, shape, pattern (Vocabulary)	Review vocabulary and word chart
	Art genres (Discourse)	Discuss and list elements of each artist's genre
Performance Arts: **Students will perform rhythms using quarter notes, eighth notes, and sixteenth notes along with their corresponding rests.**	Perform (Function)	Model proper way to perform selected rhythms from sheet
	Quarter notes/rests, eighth notes/rests, sixteenth notes/rests (Vocabulary)	Present and discuss examples of terms
	Read rhythms on rhythm sheet representing Bb concert scale (Discourse)	Model how to count and write the count under each rhythm category (quarter, eighth, sixteenth)
Health Education: **Students will justify a healthy lifestyle choice using related vocabulary in an I-Message to a peer.**	Justify (Function)	Think aloud demonstrating justification for a healthy lifestyle choice
	Addiction, habit, abuse, overdose, intervention (Vocabulary)	Review vocabulary and word chart and discuss meanings in the context of the desired healthy behavior
	I-Message (Syntax)	Model and guide whole class practice for constructing proper format of I-Message