

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** in English as an Additional Language include **the function, vocabulary/key phrases, and language competencies (grammatical, discourse, pragmatic, and metalinguistic)**.

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 (Planning Task 1, Prompts 4a/b).
- Candidates are then asked to identify *vocabulary and/or key phrases and at least one additional language demand (language competencies)* related to the language function and learning task (Planning Task 1, Prompt 4c).
- Finally, candidates must identify and describe the *instructional and/or language supports* they have planned to address the language demands (Planning Task 1, Prompt 4d). *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.

This AL handout provides definitions and a few examples of language demands and supports to help teacher candidates and educator preparation programs understand edTPA Rubrics 4 and 14. See the edTPA English as an Additional Language Assessment Handbook glossary and the Understanding Rubric Level Progressions for English as an Additional Language for additional examples.

Another valuable resource is the website of [Understanding Language](#), the center that recently merged with SCALE. This website has a number of papers on academic language for all students, archived webinars (listed under "Events"), and periodic MOOC offerings. The most relevant resources for teacher candidates are the teaching resources in English/language arts (with an example based on history/social science texts) and mathematics, with materials forthcoming in science. These teaching resources are explained and annotated to illustrate how to combine academic language development and content pedagogy for all students, including English learners.

Language Demands

I. Functions

| Definition | Examples (bolded and underlined within learning objectives) |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purposes for which language is used • Content and language focus of learning tasks often represented by the active verbs within the learning outcomes | <p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will be able to compare the lengths of various objects in the classroom. • Students will be able to explain what makes a story allegorical. • Students will be able to describe two events that led to the Revolutionary War. |

II. Vocabulary—Includes words, phrases, and symbols used within disciplines

| Definition | Examples |
|--|--|
| Words and phrases with subject-specific meanings that differ from meanings used in everyday life | table, ruler, force, balance |
| General academic vocabulary used across disciplines | compare, analyze, evaluate, describe |
| Subject-specific words and/or symbols defined for use in the discipline | exponent, numerator, photosynthesis, setting, hypothesis, constitution |

III. Four Language Competencies

| Competency | Definition of Each Competency |
|------------------------------|---|
| 1. Grammatical competence | 1. The ability to use correct vocabulary and sentence structures |
| 2. Discourse competence | 2. The ability to produce coherent and cohesive written or spoken discourse (e.g., paragraphs or conversations) that conforms to the norms of different genres (e.g., letter, essay, interview) |
| 3. Pragmatic competence | 3. The ability to use appropriately in communication based on the context and the relationship between the speaker and writer and listener and reader |
| 4. Metalinguistic competence | 4. The knowledge of linguistic/grammatical concepts and functions, and the ability to use linguistic terminology to discuss them |

Example 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 the relevant content area.

Example learning objective: Students will *identify* the main topic of paragraphs within multi-paragraph texts. They will be expected to be able to tell the difference between the *title, main idea, details*, and key details of a nonfiction text.

| Identified Language Demands | Identified Language Supports |
|---|--|
| Identify (Function) | Model how to identify the parts of a paragraph |
| Title, main topic, details (Vocabulary) | Review vocabulary and make a word chart |
| Paragraph (Discourse competency) | Label a paragraph as a class |