

## Language for Achievement—A Framework for Academic English Language

### Handout description:

The *Language for Achievement Framework* (page 2) is theory and research based, and aspects of the framework have been used in the evaluation and development of English language proficiency (ELP) standards and assessments in a number of states, as well as in examinations of linkage or correspondence between state ELP and academic content standards (i.e., to identify aspects of English language needed to facilitate student access to and meaningful engagement with academic content).

This handout also includes a *taxonomy* (page 3) that focuses on academic language functions (as opposed to, for example, social language and linguistic skills) that is intended to serve for the language domain the role that Bloom’s taxonomy, for example, serves for the cognitive domain—Bloom’s taxonomy serves as a classification system for thinking behaviors that are important to the learning process (Forehand, 2005; Hancock, 1994; Kreitzer & Madaus, 1994; Seddon, 1978). The taxonomy provides a structure for arranging content learning objectives according to the academic language necessary for students to meet a content objective, or set of related objectives. The taxonomy can inform the development of *language progressions* which place the academic language skills and knowledge of the taxonomy on a developmental continuum, reflecting a progression from the most basic and foundational English language skills and knowledge to the most advanced and developed language skills and knowledge relevant to accessing and achieving rigorous academic content. Therefore, the taxonomy has important implications for instructional practices that can support the language related to academic achievement not only of EL students but of *all* students working to meet more rigorous and higher academic expectations.

Also associated with the framework are rubrics related to language complexity (pages 4-6). The language demands represented in the framework (i.e., academic vocabulary and grammar, functions, spoken and written text, classroom discourse) interact with language complexity.

Information presented in this handout is intended for the following purposes:

- to help analyze the content and language in standards, assessment tasks, and instructional materials;
- to help make explicit the expectations (cognitive, language) of students;
- to help inform instructional planning and practice so that they are intentional and appropriate in supporting students’ progress (cognitive, linguistic) toward proficiency and achievement; and
- to serve as a tool for cross-disciplinary discussions related to appropriately addressing the content and language needs of English learner students and facilitating their achievement in school.

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### Notes:

- For use and distribution of information contained in this packet, please contact Dr. Edynn Sato (contact information listed above).
- The information in this handout was originally developed for research purposes. The information is not necessarily comprehensive (e.g., list of functions).

# Language for Achievement: Overview

Situational and socio-cultural contexts

## Spoken and Written Academic Text

Text Structure

Functions

Grammar

Vocabulary

## Instructional Academic Language

Classroom Discourse

Functions

Grammar

Vocabulary

Additional considerations include: receptive (listening, reading) and productive (speaking, writing) language; language complexity

**Language for Achievement—Taxonomy:**

Academic English Language Function	Operational Definition— <i>The language needed to engage with and achieve in the content (standard or item) consists of the use of:</i>
<b>A</b>	Identification a word or phrase to name an object, action, event, idea, fact, problem, need, or process.
	Labeling a word or phrase to name an object, action, event, or idea.
	Enumeration words or phrases to name distinct objects, actions, events, or ideas in a series, set, or in steps.
<b>B</b>	Classification words, phrases, or sentences to assign/associate an object, action, event, or idea to the category or type to which it belongs.
	Sequencing words, phrases, or sentences to express the order of information (e.g., a series of objects, actions, events, ideas). Discourse markers include adverbials such as <i>first, next, then, finally</i> .
<b>C</b>	Organization words, phrases, or sentences to express relationships between/among objects, actions, events, or ideas, or the structure or arrangement of information. Discourse markers include coordinating conjunctions such as <i>and, but, yet, or</i> , and adverbials such as <i>first, next, then, finally</i> .
	Comparison/Contrast words, phrases, or sentences to express similarities and/or differences, or to distinguish between two or more objects, actions, events, or ideas. Discourse markers include coordinating conjunctions <i>and, but, yet, or</i> , and adverbials such as <i>similarly, likewise, in contrast, instead, despite this</i> .
<b>D</b>	Inquiring words, phrases, or sentences to solicit information (e.g., <i>yes-no</i> questions, <i>wh-</i> questions, statements used as questions).
<b>E</b>	Description word, phrase, or sentence to express or observe the attributes or properties of an object, action, event, idea, or solution.
<b>F</b>	Definition word, phrase, or sentence to express the meaning of a given word, phrase, or expression.
<b>G</b>	Explanation phrases or sentences to express the rationale, reasons, causes, or relationships related to one or more actions, events, ideas, or processes. Discourse markers include coordinating conjunctions <i>so, for</i> , and adverbials such as <i>therefore, as a result, for that reason</i> .
	Retelling phrases or sentences to relate or repeat information. Discourse markers include coordinating conjunctions such as <i>and, but</i> , and adverbials such as <i>first, next, then, finally</i> .
<b>H</b>	Summarization phrases or sentences to express important facts or ideas and relevant details about one or more objects, actions, events, ideas, or processes. Discourse structures include: beginning with an introductory sentence that specifies purpose or topic.
	Interpretation phrases, sentences, or symbols to express understanding of the intended or alternate meaning of information.
<b>J</b>	Analyzing phrases or sentences to indicate parts of a whole and/or the relationship between/among parts of an action, event, idea, or process. Relationship verbs such as <i>contain, entail, consist of</i> , partitives such as <i>a part of, a segment of</i> , and quantifiers such as <i>some, a good number of, almost all, a few, hardly</i> any often are used.

**Academic English Language Functions**

Academic English Language Function	Operational Definition— <i>The language needed to engage with and achieve in the content (standard or item) consists of the use of:</i>
<b>K</b>	Generalization phrases or sentences to express an opinion, principle, trend, or conclusion that is based on facts, statistics, or other information, and/or to extend that opinion/principle/etc. to other relevant situations/context/etc.
	Inferring words, phrases, or sentences to express understanding of implied/implicit based on available information. Discourse markers include inferential logical connectors such as <i>although, while, thus, therefore</i> .
	Prediction words, phrases, or sentences to express an idea or notion about a future action or event based on available information. Discourse markers include adverbials such as <i>maybe, perhaps, obviously, evidently</i> .
	Hypothesizing phrases or sentences to express an idea/expectation or possible outcome based on available information. Discourse markers include adverbials such as <i>generally, typically, obviously, evidently</i> .
<b>L</b>	Argumentation phrases or sentences to present a point of view with the intent of communicating or supporting a particular position or conviction. Discourse structures include expressions such as <i>in my opinion, it seems to me, and adverbials such as since, because, although, however</i> .
	Persuasion phrases or sentences to present ideas, opinions, and/or principles with the intent of creating agreement around or convincing others of a position or conviction. Discourse markers include expressions such as <i>in my opinion, it seems to me, and adverbials such as since, because, although, however</i> .
<b>M</b>	Negotiation phrases or sentences to engage in a discussion with the purpose of creating mutual agreement from two or more different points of view.
	Synthesizing phrases or sentences to express, describe, or explain relationships among two or more ideas. Relationship verbs such as <i>contain, entail, consist of</i> , partitives such as <i>a part of, a segment of</i> , and quantifiers such as <i>some, a good number of, almost all, a few, hardly</i> any often are used.
<b>N</b>	Critiquing phrases or sentences to express a focused review or analysis of an object, action, event, idea, or text.
<b>O</b>	Evaluation phrases or sentences to express a judgment about the meaning, importance, or significance of an action, event, idea, or text.
<b>P</b>	Symbolization & Representation symbols, numerals, and letters, to represent meaning within a conventional context (e.g., $+$ , $-$ , $\times$ , $\div$ , $\text{CO}_2$ , $>$ , $\Delta$ , $\pi$ , $\cos$ , $y=3x+4$ , $c^2=a^2+b^2$ , $h/2(b_1+b_2)$ , <i>cat</i> vs. <i>cat</i> ).
	No Academic Language Function item or standard does not contain any academic language functions; may contain linguistic skills (e.g., phonemic awareness, syllabication).

Note: This taxonomy focuses on academic language functions and does not address the identification or definition of linguistic skills (e.g., phonology, morphology).

### *Language for Achievement*—Language Complexity

The *Language for Achievement* language demands (i.e., academic vocabulary and grammar, functions, spoken and written text, classroom discourse) interact with language complexity. Language complexity, as used in this framework, is defined below.

Vocabulary and Grammar	
<p><b>Lower Complexity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Semantically simple words and phrases</li> <li>• Common, high-frequency words and phrases</li> <li>• Simple, high-frequency morphological structures (e.g., common affixes, common compound words)</li> <li>• Short, simple sentences with limited modifying words or phrases</li> <li>• SVO sentence structure; simple verb and noun phrase constructions</li> <li>• Simple, familiar modals (e.g., <i>can</i>)</li> <li>• Simple <i>wh-</i> and <i>yes/no</i> questions</li> <li>• Direct (quoted) speech</li> <li>• Verbs in present tense, simple past tense, and future with <i>going to</i> and <i>will</i></li> <li>• Simple, high-frequency noun, adjective, and adverb constructions</li> </ul>	<p><b>Higher Complexity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Semantically complex words and phrases (e.g., multiple-meaning words, idioms, figurative language)</li> <li>• Specialized or technical words and phrases</li> <li>• Complex, higher level morphological structures (e.g., higher level affixes and compound words)</li> <li>• Compound and complex sentences; longer sentences with modifying words, phrases, and clauses</li> <li>• High level phrase and clause constructions (e.g., passive constructions, gerunds and infinitives as subjects and objects, conditional constructions)</li> <li>• Multiple-meaning modals, past forms of modals</li> <li>• Complex <i>wh-</i> and <i>yes/no</i> question constructions, tag questions</li> <li>• Indirect (reported) speech</li> <li>• Present, past, and future progressive and perfect verb structures</li> <li>• Complex, higher level noun, adjective, and adverb constructions</li> </ul>

**Functions**

<b>Lower Complexity</b>	<b>Higher Complexity</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Length ranges from a word to paragraphs</li> <li>• No/little variation in words and/or phrases in sentences/paragraphs; consistent use of language</li> <li>• Repetition of key words/phrases/sentences <i>reinforces</i> information</li> <li>• Language is used to present critical/central details</li> <li>• No/little abstraction; language reflects more literal/concrete information; illustrative language is used; language is used to define/explain abstract information</li> <li>• Graphics and/or relevant text features reinforce critical information/details</li> <li>• Mostly common/familiar words/phrases; no/few uncommon words/phrases, compound words, gerunds, figurative language, and/or idioms</li> <li>• Language is organized/structured</li> <li>• Mostly simple sentence construction</li> <li>• No/little passive voice</li> <li>• Little variation in tense</li> <li>• Mostly one idea/detail per sentence</li> <li>• Mostly familiar construction (e.g., 's for possessive; s and es for plural)</li> <li>• Mostly familiar text features (e.g., bulleted lists, bold face)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Length ranges from a word to paragraphs</li> <li>• Some variation in words and/or phrases in sentences/paragraphs</li> <li>• Repetition of key words/phrases/sentences <i>introduces new or extends</i> information</li> <li>• Language is used to present critical/central details, but non-essential detail also is presented</li> <li>• Some abstraction; language <i>may or may not</i> be used to define/explain abstract information; illustrative language <i>may or may not</i> be used; technical words/phrases are used</li> <li>• Graphics and/or relevant text features <i>may or may not</i> reinforce critical information/details</li> <li>• Some common/familiar words/phrases; some uncommon words/phrases, compound words, gerunds, figurative language, and/or idioms</li> <li>• Language <i>may or may not</i> be organized/structured</li> <li>• Varied sentence construction, including complex sentence construction</li> <li>• Some passive voice</li> <li>• Variation in tense</li> <li>• Multiple ideas/details per sentence</li> <li>• Some less familiar/irregular construction</li> <li>• Some less familiar text features (e.g., pronunciation keys, text boxes)</li> </ul>

**Spoken and Written Texts**

<b>Lower Complexity</b>	<b>Higher Complexity</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short texts, or longer texts chunked into short sections (words, phrases, single sentences, short paragraphs)</li> <li>• No or little variation of words/phrases in sentences/paragraphs</li> <li>• Repetition of key words/phrases <i>reinforces</i> information</li> <li>• One idea/detail per sentence; only critical/central ideas included</li> <li>• No or little abstraction; mostly literal/concrete information; abstract information is defined or explained</li> <li>• Visual aids, graphics, and/or text features reinforce critical information/details</li> <li>• Common text features (e.g. bulleted lists, boldface font)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long texts (long lists of words/phrases, a series of sentences, long paragraphs, multiple-paragraph texts)</li> <li>• Variation of words/phrases in sentences/paragraphs</li> <li>• Repetition of key words/phrases <i>introduces new information or extends</i> information</li> <li>• Multiple ideas/details per sentence; non-essential ideas included</li> <li>• Some or much abstraction that is not explicitly defined or explained</li> <li>• Visual aids, graphics, and/or text features <i>may not</i> reinforce critical information/details</li> <li>• Higher level text features (e.g., pronunciation keys, text boxes)</li> </ul>

Classroom Discourse	Lower Complexity	Higher Complexity
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Semantically simple words and phrases</li> <li>• Common, high-frequency words and phrases</li> <li>• Simple, high-frequency morphological structures (e.g., common affixes, common compound words)</li> <li>• Short, simple sentences with limited modifying words or phrases</li> <li>• SVO sentence structure; simple verb and noun phrase constructions</li> <li>• Simple, familiar modals (e.g., can)</li> <li>• Simple wh- and yes/no questions</li> <li>• Direct (quoted) speech</li> <li>• Verbs in present tense, simple past tense, and future with going to and will</li> <li>• Simple, high-frequency noun, adjective, and adverb constructions</li> </ul> <p>Note: To the extent that spoken “texts” (planned, connected utterances) are used in classroom discourse, elements of lower complexity spoken text, as defined previously, apply here.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Semantically complex words and phrases (e.g., multiple-meaning words, idioms, figurative language)</li> <li>• Specialized or technical words and phrases</li> <li>• Complex, higher level morphological structures (e.g., higher level affixes and compound words)</li> <li>• Compound and complex sentences; longer sentences with modifying words, phrases, and clauses</li> <li>• High level phrase and clause constructions (e.g., passive constructions, gerunds and infinitives as subjects and objects, conditional constructions)</li> <li>• Multiple-meaning modals, past forms of modals</li> <li>• Complex wh- and yes/no question constructions, tag questions</li> <li>• Indirect (reported) speech</li> <li>• Present, past, and future progressive and perfect verb structures</li> <li>• Complex, higher level noun, adjective, and adverb constructions</li> </ul> <p>Note: To the extent that spoken “texts” (planned, connected utterances) are used in classroom discourse, elements of higher complexity spoken text, as defined previously, apply here.</p>

Definition from the *Framework for High-Quality ELP Standards and Assessments* (AACC, 2009):

**Academic language**, broadly defined, includes the language students need to meaningfully engage with academic content within the academic context. This should *not* be interpreted to suggest that separate word lists and/or definitions of content-related language should be developed for each academic subject. Rather, academic language includes the words, grammatical structures, and discourse markers needed in, for example, describing, sequencing, summarizing, and evaluating — these are language demands (skills, knowledge) that facilitate student access to and engagement with grade-level academic content. These academic language demands are different from cognitive demands (e.g., per Bloom’s taxonomy). Although there may not be just one accepted definition of academic language, there are a good number of resources available that address the issue of academic language and may be considered in the development of state ELP standards and assessments. For example: Aguirre-Munoz, Parks, Benner, Amabisca, & Boscardin, 2006; Bailey, 2007; Bailey, Butler, & Sato, 2007; Butler, Bailey, Stevens, Huang, & Lord, 2004; Chamot & O’Malley, 1994; Cummins, 1980; Cummins, 2005; Halliday, 1994; Sato, 2007; Scarcella & Zimmerman, 1998; Schleppegrell, 2001.

For a free download of the *Framework for High-Quality ELP Standards and Assessments*, go to [http://www.aacompcenter.org/cs/aacc/print/htdocs/aacc/resources\\_sp.htm](http://www.aacompcenter.org/cs/aacc/print/htdocs/aacc/resources_sp.htm).