This interactive guide provides information and resources important to the academic language component of the edTPA.
Table of Contents

Academic Language, edTPA & You.................................................................2-3

   Figure 1: Cycle of Effective Teaching and edTPA

   Figure 2: Academic Language Within & Across Certification Areas
   Copyright © 2013 by Sandra Cimbricz

Language & Learning: Why Important?......................................................4-6

What is Academic Language?.................................................................6-7

Embedding Academic Language into Planning, Instruction, and Assessment:
Some How To’s.........................................................................................8-11

   Identifying, Supporting, & Analyzing Academic Language Demands

   Figure 3: Graphic Organizer of a Framework for Integrating Language
   and Content Instruction

   Another Way, Another Try!

Resources & References........................................................................12-13
edTPA, Academic Language & You

Academic Language is important to all edTPA assessments and thus, all certification areas. As the figure below suggests, Academic Language acts as a thread that ties planning, instruction, and assessment together around student learning.

Consequently, you will be asked to demonstrate your ability to support students’ oral and written use of academic language to deepen subject matter understandings. Your ability to facilitate student learning of academic language is to be made evident via the unedited video clips, student work samples, and planning and assessment commentaries you submit.

Save for special education, Rubrics 4 and 14 (found in your respective Handbooks) assess academic language. The title and focus of these rubrics are as follows:

- **Rubric 4: Identifying & Supporting Language Demands**
  - Focus Question: How does the candidate identify and support the language demands associated with a key and content-based learning task?

- **Rubric 14: Analyzing Students’ Language**
  - Focus Question: How does the candidate analyze students’ use of language to develop content-based understanding?
Depending on your certification area, academic language may be assessed implicitly and/or more robustly via additional rubrics. For that reason, it will be important to know what academic language is and how it is defined and/or found in your particular Handbooks. Figure 2 highlights what academic language entails within and across all certification areas.

Figure 2. Academic Language Within & Across Certification Areas  
Copyright © 2013 by Sandra Cimbricz

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>vocabulary and/or key phrases, symbols</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mathematical precision</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communicative proficiency in target language in meaningful cultural context(s)</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Function: (These are examples provided in the edTPA Handbooks; please refer to national and state standards appropriate to your certification area for a complete.)

- analyze
- argue
- categorize and/or classify
- compare/contrast
- construct and/or (re)present
- define
- describe
- evaluate
- examine
- explain
- identify
- interpret
- justify (w/evidence) /prove
- locate
- persuade
- predict and/or conjecture
- question
- retell
- summarize and/or synthesize

PLUS at least one of the following

- discourse
- syntax

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>assistive technology &amp; other mediators</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>instructional strategies and/or supports (prior &amp; during)</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Language & Learning: Why Important?

Before delving into the specifics of academic language, let’s think about the relationship(s) between learning and language. No doubt, Figure 1: Cycle of Effective Teaching and edTPA already provides some sense of what those relationships are. Still, the definition of language that Gee and Hayes (2001) provide in the book, Language and Learning in the Digital Age, seems important to consider. They say:

Language is a “system” of social conventions about how to make meanings that can be expressed or delivered in different ways (e.g., speech, thought, signing, writing). (p.15)

So let’s play with this idea a bit! Provided below is an excerpt that demonstrates use of the English language in an authentic context. Read this passage with the intent of answering this question: **What is this passage is about?**

So this was Excellent? Lots of traps on this one, I thought as I walked. From the line I saw the tunnel to the triple and the weave to the see-saw – talk about discrimination! Maybe I will lead out. Planning ahead, I would probably have to pivot or flip to get to the table. After that maybe a front cross to the double and rear cross to the walk? That serpentine will cause problems getting her to scramble. Better hit my contact—running or target? I think this should be easier since we are at 20 now—Preferred. No MACH in our future no matter what happens today, but at least we can double Q. (p. 25)


Okay, so what do you think this passage is about? Did you think that it might have to do something with flying or the military because of words like MACH, contact, pivot, and flip? Might it be game-speak or language important to playing a particular game? What about snowboarding or gymnastics? With the capitalization of “Excellent,” did you infer that the speaker or narrator is looking at something that can be named, possibly a place?
Think about what you just experienced (which may have included some degree of frustration, intrigue, and/or disinterest). Given your experience and response, what might your students do, think, or experience when they encounter language like this (even if it is their first language)?

Mathematics: A Foreign Language?

Now let’s examine the relationship(s) between language and learning by looking at a content area that some argue is not only a language, but a foreign language for many students: Mathematics. Consider some of the points that Kenney, Hancewicz, & Heuer (2005) use to prove this point. They say mathematics is a foreign language because:

- Mathematics is learned almost entirely at school and is not spoken at home.
- Mathematics is not a “first” language; that is, it does not originate as a spoken language, except for the naming of small whole numbers.
- Mathematics has both formal and informal expressions, which we might characterize as “school math” and “street math.”
- Colloquial or “street” language does not always map directly or correctly onto the mathematical syntax. For example, suppose a pre-algebra student is asked to symbolically express that there are twice as many dogs as cats in the local animal shelter. The equation $2C=D$ describes the distribution, but is it true that two cats are equivalent to one dog?

Do you agree? Why or why not? Should you remain unconvinced, consider this passage found in the CCSS for Mathematics section on Functions for Grade 8. When you finish reading, ask yourself: What might it take for a student or any student (including an English Language Learner [ELL]) to achieve this task?

Compare properties of two functions each represented in a different way (algebraically, graphically, numerically in tables, or verbal descriptions). For example, given a linear function represented by a table of values and a linear function represented by an algebraic expression, determine which function has the greater rate of change. (http://www.corestandards.org/).
In their work around Language and the Common Core, van Lier & Walqui (2012) suggest that while a student might understand algebraic, graphical, and numerical representations, s/he would very likely need to “work verbally through the problem under the guidance of the teacher and peers, and then be able to express his or her understanding through language, possibly accompanied by graphs and equations or tables of values” (p. 1). Confirmed in all of this work, is the idea that thinking and language are intimately intertwined. For more information and van Lier & Walqui’s discussion of language and its relevance to the Common Core, see: http://ell.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/pdf/academic-papers/04-Van%20Lier%20Walqui%20Language%20and%20CCSS%20FINAL.pdf.

Perhaps at this point, you are thinking that language and learning are intertwined and difficult to separate. If so, that’s good thinking! In fact, studies that examine how students gain disciplinary knowledge and literacy confirm: “Content knowledge cannot be separated from the language to represent it” (Schleppegrell, 2004, in McConachie & Petrosky, 2010, 4). More recent work in this area (Cimbricz, Smith, Zdanowski, & Wilkins, 2013) makes this point even clearer: All students benefit from instruction that purposefully:

- builds more extensive background knowledge;
- helps them acquire and use academic language that builds and deepens students’ disciplinary knowledge and understanding; and
- develops students’ ability to make meanings that can be expressed or delivered in different ways (e.g., speech, thought, signing, writing).

Here, the construct of academic language and the edTPA Rubric 4 and 14 resurface as important. To refresh, these rubrics assess the extent to which you identify and support language demands and analyze students’ use of language to deepen a content-based understanding. In the next section, you will delve deeper into the “language of school, literacy, content and higher learning” important to academic literacy (Dutro & Moran, 2002).

**What is Academic Language?**

Although definitions of academic language vary, there is overall agreement that academic language “represents the entire range of language used in academic settings, including elementary and secondary schools” (Echevarria, Vogt & Short, 2004., p. 3). Included below is a sampling of those definitions.
Now go the glossary section of your particular edTPA Handbook and make note of how academic language is defined in your certification area. Also conduct a search the document for the words academic language and language demands. What did you find? Do they match with the definition below?

**academic language** (à la edTPA and as found in most edTPA Handbook glossaries):
Oral and written language used for academic purposes. Academic language is the means by which students develop and express content understandings. Academic language represents the language of the discipline that students need to learn and use to participate and engage in meaningful ways in the content area. There are **language demands** that teachers need to consider as they plan to support student learning and content. These language demands include **vocabulary, language functions, syntax**, and **discourse**.

Record key information in the space provided below. Consider using these questions to guide your review of this information:
Step 1:

1. What information is provided?
2. What’s familiar?
3. What ideas seem to be the most important?
4. What are you now wondering? What connections are you making that you think are important to note (and perhaps share)?

**Key Terms & Definitions:**

Step 2: How does what you’ve recorded compare to what’s listed in *Figure 2. Academic Language Within & Across Certification Areas*?

1. What information is provided?
2. What’s familiar?
3. What ideas seem to be the most important?
4. What are you now wondering? What connections are you making that you think are important to note (and perhaps share)?
Academic Language into Planning, Instruction, and Assessment: Some How-To’s


According to O’Hara, Pritchard & Zwiers (2013), the CCSS “require effective, simultaneous teaching of academic language skills and the rigorous content that all students must master” specifically the ability to

- reason abstractly and quantitatively;
- construct viable arguments and critiquing reasoning of others;
- construct explanations and designing solutions;
- engage in argument from evidence; and
- ask questions and define problems.

What Is Academic Language?

O’Hara, Pritchard & Zwiers also point out that “academic language—which includes the vocabulary, syntax, and discourse styles of particular content areas—is complex and requires both teachers and students to understand the specific academic language demands of the content.” For example, here is a number of language demands particular to math and science worth considering:

- Use of symbolic notation
- Visual displays, such as graphs
- Technical vocabulary
- Grammatical features, including complex noun phrases

Additionally, O’Hara et al. suggest that “the language of academic texts, both the ones students read and the ones they produce, has distinctive features and meanings that may contrast with the language they use in informal spoken interactions (August & Shanahan, 2006; Schleppegrell, 2007).”

Identifying, Supporting, & Analyzing Academic Language Demands: Important Considerations

O’Hara et al. recommend that the identification of “specific academic language demands” involve analysis of the text, tasks, and tests to be used in a lesson. What follows is a look at the process these authors have developed and implemented with teachers to help them identify and support academic language demands. To refresh, the identification and support of academic language demands is important to edTPA (e.g., Rubric 4).
Figure 3: Graphic Organizer of a Framework for Integrating Language and Content Instruction O’Hara, Pritchard & Zwiers (2013)
Return to the notes you recorded in your search for the words academic language and language demands. What connections can you make between your notes and this planning template?

**Another Way and Another Try**

**CONTENT OBJECTIVE:**

Compare properties of two functions each represented in a different way (algebraically, graphically, numerically in tables, or verbal descriptions). For example, given a linear function represented by a table of values and a linear function represented by an algebraic expression, determine which function has the greater rate of change. ([http://www.corestandards.org/](http://www.corestandards.org/))

**TEXT:** What text(s) (written, spoken, and/or visual) or information will students need to be able to comprehend? What important to keep in mind about these particular kinds or types of text?

**TASK:** What are students to create or do with the text(s) or information?

**LANGUAGE DEMAND:** Language Functions: Represented by an action verb in the learning outcome. See Figure 2.

**ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE DEMANDS:** Specific ways that students use academic language to participate in learning tasks through reading, writing, listening, and/or speaking to learn AND demonstrate their disciplinary understanding.

**VOCABULARY and/or symbols or phrases:** What are words, phrases & key concepts that students will need to comprehend, acquire and use?

**MATHEMATICAL PRECISION:** (e.g., using clear definitions, labeling axes, specifying units of measures, stating meaning of symbols) appropriate to your students’ mathematical and language development.

**PLUS (+?) at least one of the following**

**SYNTAX:** What conventions for organizing symbols, words, and phrases together into structures (e.g., sentence, graphs, tables) will students need to be able to comprehend, acquire, and use?

**DISCOURSE:** What are the discipline-specific structures and ways of participating, constructing, and communicating understanding (e.g., function, language function and linear function).

* important to mathematics only.
References:


The passage is written from a point of view of a dog trainer who is watching a 1-minute video of a dog running an agility course and talking aloud as she does so.