

Language Demands—Academic English Language Functions

Academic English Language Function		Operational Definition—The language needed to engage with and achieve in the content (standard or item) consists of the use of:	Academic English Language Function		Operational Definition—The language needed to engage with and achieve in the content (standard or item) consists of the use of:
A	Identification	a word or phrase to name an object, action, event, idea, fact, problem, need, or process.	K	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.
	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.		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> .
B	Classification	words, phrases, or sentences to assign/associate an object, action, event, or idea to the category or type to which it belongs.			Prediction
	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> .	Hypothesizing		
	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> .		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</i> , and adverbials such as <i>since, because, although, however</i> .
C	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> .	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</i> , and adverbials such as <i>since, because, although, however</i> .
	D	Inquiring			words, phrases, or sentences to solicit information (e.g., <i>yes-no</i> questions, <i>wh</i> -questions, statements used as questions).
E	Description	word, phrase, or sentence to express or observe the attributes or properties of an object, action, event, idea, or solution.		Synthesizing	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> .
F	Definition	word, phrase, or sentence to express the meaning of a given word, phrase, or expression.	Critiquing		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> .
G	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> .		Evaluation	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.
			H		Retelling
I	Interpretation	phrases, sentences, or symbols to express understanding of the intended or alternate meaning of information.		Symbolization & Representation	symbols, numerals, and letters, to represent meaning within a conventional context (e.g., +, -, CO ₂ , >, Δ, π, cos, y=3x+4, c ² =a ² +b ² , h/2(b ₁ +b ₂), <i>cat</i> vs. <i>cat</i>).
			J		Analyzing

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

Language Complexity

Language complexity is influenced by both density and construction as defined below.

Density

Low	High
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Length ranges from a word to paragraphs • No/little variation in words and/or phrases in sentences/paragraphs; consistent use of language • Repetition of key words/phrases/sentences <i>reinforces</i> information • Language is used to present critical/central details • No/little abstraction; language reflects more literal/concrete information; illustrative language is used; language is used to define/explain abstract information • Graphics and/or relevant text features reinforce critical information/details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Length ranges from a word to paragraphs • Some variation in words and/or phrases in sentences/paragraphs • Repetition of key words/phrases/sentences <i>introduces new or extends</i> information • Language is used to present critical/central details, but non-essential detail also is presented • 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 • Graphics and/or relevant text features <i>may or may not</i> reinforce critical information/details

Construction

Simple	Complex
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly common/familiar words/phrases; no/few uncommon words/phrases, compound words, gerunds, figurative language, and/or idioms • Language is organized/structured • Mostly simple sentence construction • No/little passive voice • Little variation in tense • Mostly one idea/detail per sentence • Mostly familiar construction (e.g., -'s for possessive; -s and -es for plural) • Mostly familiar text features (e.g., bulleted lists, bold face) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some common/familiar words/phrases; some uncommon words/phrases, compound words, gerunds, figurative language, and/or idioms • Language <i>may or may not</i> be organized/structured • Varied sentence construction, including complex sentence construction • Some passive voice • Variation in tense • Multiple ideas/details per sentence • Some less familiar/irregular construction • Some less familiar text features (e.g., pronunciation keys, text boxes)

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.