

## 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 *Middle Childhood Science* include: **function, vocabulary, 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 (Task 1- Prompts 4a/b).
- Candidates are then asked to identify *vocabulary and one additional language demand* related to the language function and learning task (Task 1 – Prompt 4c).
- Finally, candidates must identify and describe the *instructional and/or language supports* they have planned to address the language demands (Task 1 - 4d). *Language supports* are scaffolds, representations, and instructional strategies 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 Handbook glossary and the Understanding Rubric Level Progressions for Middle Childhood Science for additional examples of language demands.**

### A Few Notes about Discourse and Syntax:

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.

## LANGUAGE DEMANDS

I. Functions	
Definition	Examples (bolded and underlined within learning objectives)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Purposes for which language is used.</li> <li>Content and language focus of learning tasks often represented by the <b>active verbs within the learning outcomes</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students will be able to <b><u>classify</u></b> various examples under living and non-living categories.</li> <li>Students will be able to <b><u>explain</u></b> a model of the lunar eclipse.</li> <li>Students will be able to <b><u>justify</u></b> their conclusion using data and observation collected during the lab.</li> </ul>

II. Vocabulary - Includes words, phrases and symbols used within disciplines.	
Definition	Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Words and phrases with subject-specific meanings that differ from meanings used in everyday life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>table, ruler, variable, control, cell</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>General academic vocabulary used across disciplines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>compare, explain, analyze, evaluate</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Subject-specific words and/or symbols defined for use in the discipline</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>hypothesis, data, evidence, equation, <math>g = \text{gram}</math></li> </ul>

III. Discourse	
Definition	Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How members of the discipline talk, write, and participate in knowledge construction, using the structures of written and oral language</li> <li>Discipline-specific discourse has distinctive features or ways of structuring oral or written language (text structures) or representing knowledge visually.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completing Lab Reports</li> <li>Writing analysis &amp; conclusions sections of lab reports</li> <li>Interpreting Graphic Representations (e. g. graphs, diagrams)</li> <li>Explaining Materials Lists</li> <li>Making predictions</li> </ul>

IV. Syntax	
Definition	Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The rules for organizing words or symbols together into phrases, clauses, sentences or visual representations.</li> <li>■ One of the main functions of syntax is to organize language in order to convey meaning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Mathematical sentences (using words or symbols) including</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formulas, <math>w = mg</math> or weight equals mass times gravity.</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ <b>Long or elaborate noun phrases</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write a balanced chemical equation that represents the formation of water.</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ <b>Conditional sentences</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If there are two atoms of Hydrogen in <math>H_2O</math>, how many Oxygen atoms are there?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

### 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 in science.**

The chart below identifies sample language demands with related examples of supports based on one selected science learning objective.

**Example learning objective: Students will *explain* how they know whether a material is a *conductor* or *resistor* using a *sentence frame*.**

Identified Language Demands	Planned Language Supports
Explain (Function)	Write explanations together as guided practice and discuss
Conductor, resistor (Vocabulary)	Review wall chart with definitions and examples
Conclusion statements using “because” (Syntax)	Model use of and provide a sentence frame for writing conclusion statements (e.g., The ____ is a conductor/resistor because...)