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 Health Education 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 (Planning 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 (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.

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.

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 Health Education Assessment Handbook glossary and the Understanding Rubric Level Progressions for Health Education for additional examples of language demands.

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.

SCALE
Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, & Equity

AL_HED_v01

Language Demands

I. Functions

Definition	Examples (bolded and underlined within learning objectives)
• Purposes for which language is used • Content and language focus of learning tasks often represented by the **active verbs within the learning outcomes**	Learning Objectives: • Students will be able to **<u>describe</u>** health-promoting behaviors. • Students will be able to **<u>explain</u>** the components of a food label. • Students will be able to **<u>analyze</u>** risk and protective factors of lifestyle choices.

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, risk, factors, culture, pressure
General academic vocabulary used across disciplines	compare, analyze, evaluate, describe, sequence, demonstrate, classify
Subject-specific words defined for use in the discipline	protective factors, health-enhancing skills and behaviors, risk behaviors

III. Discourse

Definition	Examples
• How members of the discipline talk, write, and participate in knowledge construction, using the structures of written and oral language • Discipline-specific discourse has distinctive features or ways of structuring oral or written language (text structures) or representing knowledge visually.	• Evaluating the reliability and validity of **health resources** • Developing **goal setting plans** • Arguments supporting a healthy lifestyle choice • Using **health communication strategies** such as refusal skills • Writing **research reports** that include narrative sections and/or representations of data (e.g., graphs, tables) or visual representations of information for advocacy purposes

IV. Syntax

Definition	Examples
• The rules for organizing words or symbols together into phrases, clauses, sentences, or visual representations • One of the main functions of syntax is to organize language in order to convey meaning.	• Guidelines for how ingredients and nutritional information is organized on food labels • Sentence or phrase structures for writing I-Messages • Format for writing a SMART goal

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 health education.

Example learning objective: Students will *justify a healthy lifestyle choice* using related vocabulary in an I-Message to a peer.

Identified Language Demands	Planned Language Supports
Justify (Function)	Think aloud demonstrating justification for a healthy lifestyle choice
Addiction, habit, abuse, overdose, intervention (Vocabulary)	Review vocabulary and word chart and discuss meanings in the context of the desired healthy behavior
I-Message (Syntax)	Model and guide whole class practice for constructing proper format of I-Message