

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 Business 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 Business Education Assessment Handbook glossary and the Understanding Rubric Level Progressions for Business 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.

Language Demands

I. Functions

Definition	Examples (bolded and underlined within learning objectives)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Purposes for which language is used Content and language focus of learning tasks often represented by the active verbs within the learning outcomes 	<p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will be able to <u>compare</u> the features of web development software. Students will be able to <u>develop</u> a marketing plan for a domestic product. Students will be able to <u>describe</u> the relationship between the data provided in each type of financial statement.

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	debit, credit, staff, value, principal, benefit, features, circulation, branch, statement, article, party, fire, promotion, customs, ship, premium, segmentation
General academic vocabulary used across disciplines	compare, analyze, evaluate, describe, sequence, classify
Subject-specific words and/or symbols defined for use in the discipline	mailable format, bill of lading, loss adjuster, pro forma invoice, certificate of origin, non-personal persuasion

III. Discourse

Definition	Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing research reports or business plans Developing sales presentations Demonstrating effective negotiation skills Interpreting graphic representations (e.g., spreadsheets, graphs) Creating formal application letter for a job opportunity

IV. Syntax

Definition	Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 	<p>Transitions within speech</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sequence: first, second, third, last • Similarity: equally, in the same way, just as we have seen <p>Formulas and functions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write an IF statement that, when solved, will calculate which customers are more than 30 days past due. <p>Using active tense</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have attached the quarterly income statement.

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 business education.

Example learning objective: Students will evaluate a formal application letter for a job opportunity to see how effectively it meets the job requirements advertised.

Identified Language Demands	Planned Language Supports
Evaluate (Function)	Model evaluating a sample application letter with the whole class, identifying the strengths in relation to job requirements
Requirements, tone, audience, related experiences, qualifications (Vocabulary)	Lecture on vocabulary directing students to develop definition and add to wall word chart. Have students record definitions in their own words in vocabulary journal
Sample (Discourse)	Provide sample letter of application with key elements labeled