Understanding Academic Language in edTPA:
Supporting Learning Language Development

Academic language (AL) is the oral and written language used for academic purposes. AL is the means by which students develop and express content understandings. This includes the "language of the discipline" that is used to engage students in learning and using content knowledge.

In edTPA, the **language demands** candidates need to consider as they plan to support student learning in Performing Arts include **function, vocabulary/symbols, 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.

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 K–12 Performing Arts Assessment Handbook glossary and the Understanding Rubric Level Progressions for Performing Arts 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.

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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**	• Students will be able to **<u>compare</u>** the lengths of various notes. • Students will be able to **<u>explain</u>** what makes a play melodramatic. • Students will be able to **<u>describe</u>** the features of an observed dance. • Students will be able to **<u>evaluate</u>** the pitch of a song sung by their peer.

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	rhythm, note, pitch, beat
General academic vocabulary used across disciplines	compare, analyze, evaluate, describe
Subject-specific words and/or symbols defined for use in the discipline	allegro, picturization, improvisation, ensemble

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.	• Writing responses and reviews of performing arts • Analyzing the structures of dance, music, or theater • Comparing and contrasting different genres of music, dance, or theater • Examining structural elements of a play**:** point-of-attack, inciting incident, crisis, climax, denouement

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.	• Musical Notation: measures, key signature, time signature • Labanotation • Dialogue in a script • Chord progression

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 performing arts.

Example learning objective: Students will *perform rhythms using quarter notes, eighth notes, and sixteenth notes along with their corresponding rests*.

Identified Language Demand	Identified Language Support
Perform (Function)	Model proper way to perform selected rhythms from sheet
Quarter notes/rests, eighth notes/rests, sixteenth notes/rests (Vocabulary)	Present and discuss examples of terms
Read rhythms on rhythm sheet representing Bb concert scale (Discourse)	Model how to count and write the count under each rhythm category (quarter, eighth, sixteenth)