



Academic Language refers to the vocabulary used within a discipline. Effective teachers use this vocabulary regularly when introducing new content and throughout the learning time. Academic language is what students will see on assessments and in textbooks, but is also the vocabulary they will likely see and hear in college and in their careers. When teachers encourage this specific vocabulary, it gives students the correct and sophisticated language to accurately describe the content, relationships, and their ideas at a high level. Teaching students academic language will enable them to better understand teacher explanations, participate in student discussions, and produce quality student work products.

- Identify words that are pertinent for acquiring content knowledge.
- Choose 1-3 words per week, per subject area, to focus on. These words should reoccur in current content and possibly occur in other content areas.
- Plan to provide students with decoding and context for each word. Explain the terms and why they are important to learn. Share how experts in the discipline use the terms.
- Teach word learning strategies, such as context clues, using the dictionary or word deconstruction (affixes and root words) by using the plan from the prep-work.
- Ask students to restate the meaning of each word in their own words and create a picture or symbol to represent the term. Once each word has been introduced use the academic vocabulary in whole class and small group discussions.
- Provide opportunities for students to use academic vocabulary in real world situations such as discussions and work products. Allow time for students to refine and reflect their meaning of the terms. Involve students in games to practice the vocabulary terms.
- Use technology to enhance vocabulary attainment, such as online dictionaries, thesaurus', and word generators that show relationships.
- Re-teach and scaffold for struggling learners.



Additional Tools

Think Like a Disciplinarian

In this variation, students approach the content or task through the perspective of a disciplinarian. The teacher defines and teaches the specialized language, tools, and methods of the specific discipline. The students take on the role of the disciplinarian and apply these to the content they are studying by relating and sharing information as the disciplinarian with others. Students can role-play using interviews, public service announcements or short talk show skits.

For more strategies and/or resources, visit houstonisd.org/EffectivePractices



ALERTS

There are many words to choose from for each subject area. Choose the essential vocabulary that students will see often and the words that are crucial for successful interaction with the content.



QUICK TIPS

Teachers can use a story, examples, or pictures to explain the term and assist in activating background knowledge. Mix it up by using videos or current events to connect students with the meaning of each term.