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## Strategies for Academic Language Development

*The mastery of content is dependent on language that students can understand.*

—Sherry Vermette  
Special education teacher in  
Hampton Bays, NY

### OVERVIEW

It has been well established both by researchers and practitioners that academic language is critical for student success in the content areas (see key resources on this topic at the end of the chapter). Judith Lessow-Hurley (2003) cautioned that “simplistic notions of language and language development are all too often at the heart of both the politics and programs for students who don’t speak English” (p. 15). Academic language is commonly defined as the language competence required for students to gain access to and master content taught in English. Connecting it to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), academic language is the type of abstract and cognitively demanding language students need in order to be college and career ready. Along with new concepts and complex information presented in the content areas, students must recognize, internalize, and apply the unique ways language is used in English language arts,

math, science, social studies, and all other subject matters. As such, special attention must be paid to

- discipline-specific vocabulary;
- phrases and idiomatic expressions associated with the target content;
- typical sentence structures used in the lessons;
- grammatical constructs used in academic text; and
- text-level features of standard American English.

In sum, for our purposes, academic language is possibly best defined by WIDA (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment, 2011) as “the language required to succeed in school that includes deep understandings of content and communication of that language in the classroom environment. These understandings revolve around specific criteria related to discourse, sentence, and word/phrase levels of language” (p. 1).

## **WHY DIVERSE LEARNERS NEED EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION IN ACADEMIC LANGUAGE**

Diverse learners may have dissimilar issues which amount to the same difficulties with developing academic language. Some students are unfamiliar with standard American English either due to their families speaking a dialect other than Standard English, or they come from homes where little or no English is spoken. Poverty also places certain children in tenuous situations. Children coming from low-income families with parents who have little or no education often lack the background knowledge that is a stepping-stone for acquiring academic language. In addition, some students with disabilities are speech and language impaired and struggle with expressing their ideas, which impedes their learning.

There is a growing population of language-minority youngsters that often appear to be fluent in English but are not. This pseudo fluency is apparent in the distinction between BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency), which may be traced back to Cummins’s (1984) most frequently cited contributions to the field of English to speakers of other languages (ESOL). BICS refers to the ability to use language in social contexts, whereas CALP identifies the type of language necessary to develop conceptual understanding of cognitively and academically challenging content matter. More recently, however, Cummins and Man (2007) further refined the original dichotomy and distinguished among three types of language skills:

1. *Conversational fluency*, which refers to a learner's ability to engage in everyday conversations that often take place in familiar, face-to-face situations
2. *Discrete language skills*, which refer to the learning of rule-governed aspects of language
3. *Academic language proficiency*, which indicate the learner's command of the type of oral and written academic forms of English necessary for successful participation in school

Cummins and Man (2007) also noted that there is limited transfer between the development of the first two language skills (conversational competence and distinct language skills) and of academic language proficiency. They also suggested that all three types of language skills should be developed using appropriate methodologies. The most important implication of this distinction is that these three language skills often have three distinctive developmental trajectories both for first- and second-language learners.

Among many others, Collier and Thomas's (1999) research suggests that it takes most ELLs five to seven years to develop native-like academic language proficiency and literacy. However, they documented that students with interrupted formal education (SIFE) or those whose native-language literacy was below grade level took seven to ten years to develop grade-level proficiency and literacy skills in English. Hakuta, Butler, and Witt (2000) concurred that ELLs need a minimum of three to five years to develop oral proficiency (communicative skills), whereas academic English proficiency can take even longer, at least four to seven years.

Goldenberg and Coleman (2010) noted that learning content area matter will require students to acquire and use the specific register associated with that subject, going beyond the vocabulary unique to the content taught. Coleman and Goldenberg (2010) emphasized that "students may know the meanings of individual content-specific words, yet still not be able to understand the larger meaning when reading them in a sentence or be able to combine them to write a sentence" (p. 62) or produce even longer, more complex oral or written responses to content-based prompts.

An additional challenge in the acquisition of academic language is that students need not only develop their receptive language skills (having opportunities to comprehend academic English by listening to or reading challenging language input) but also to build their productive language skills by creating sentences, paragraphs, and longer academic texts both orally and written. In sum, students need both explicit instruction in academic language and sustained, meaningful opportunities to continue to acquire and develop the necessary language skills.

## CORE LANGUAGE AND VOCABULARY STRATEGIES

The strategies contained in this chapter follow the expectations of the six College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards (CCRAS) for Language. They are framed by the CCRAS strand-specific sets of *Conventions of Standard English*, *Knowledge and Application of Language*, and *Vocabulary Acquisition and Use*. Although language standards are placed at the very end of the CCSS document following reading and writing standards, for the sake of working with diverse learners, we positioned them to be the first chapter addressing CC strategies. Not only do we place special emphasis on language standards by putting them in a prominent place (Chapter 2), we will also present specific strategies to support the six language standards that address the needs of English learners as well as those who may come from bilingual or bidialectal homes or may not use Standard American English consistently.

### Box 2.1 College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Language

#### Conventions of Standard English

1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
2. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

#### Knowledge of Language (Begins in Grade 2)

3. Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

#### Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

4. Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.
5. Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances in word meanings.
6. Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

From each of the six CCRAS for Language, we derived and aligned a series of related *Anchor Performances*—skill sets that all students need to develop—and suggest strategies to help diverse students build these skills in order to meet the standards. Some strategies may be more appropriate than others depending upon the grade levels or language proficiency levels of the students. To that end, we also include suggestions on how to adapt strategies to meet the needs of diverse individual learners.

## Conventions of Standard English

### *Anchor Performance 1: Apply the Conventions of Grammar and Usage in Writing and Speaking*

What Goldenberg and Coleman (2010) stated in reference to English learners is likely to be beneficial for all students with diverse academic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds:

Effective second-language instruction provides a combination of (a) explicit teaching that helps students directly and efficiently learn features of the second language such as syntax, vocabulary, pronunciation, and norms of social usage and (b) ample opportunities to use the second language in meaningful and motivating situations. (p. 68)

Overall, we concur with Anderson (2005) that grammar instruction must be deliberate and well planned; to facilitate that process, we created a helpful tool presented in Table 2.1, which teachers may use for lesson planning or reflection.

**Table 2.1** Grammar Lesson Planning Checklist

<b>Will my lesson provide:</b>	✓
1. A simple explanation of the grammar point at issue?	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Students' immersion in correct models of grammar?	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. A demonstration of the particular pattern in a piece of writing (model texts)?	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Multiple meaningful activities for better understanding grammar point?	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Examples posted in the classroom?	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Ample student practice to apply new grammar knowledge?	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Time for students to edit their own writing?	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Essential Strategy to Support Anchor Performance 1:  
Grammar Connections**

Long gone are the days when sentences were diagrammed and grammar was taught as a stand-alone academic subject in the elementary classroom. Instead, grammar is embedded or organically linked to literacy and content-based instruction so as to demonstrate its connectedness to how language is used at the word, sentence, and text levels. The purpose of the next section is to present research-based strategies that connect grammar to subject-matter texts, to literature and mentor texts, and to students' authentic experiences with varied linguistic input.

**Sentence Dissection.** Though sentences are no longer diagrammed, sentence-level language analysis can be helpful for diverse learners. Jeff Anderson (2005) publicly identified himself as a *sentence stalker*—using a phrase he borrowed from Vicki Spandel (2005)—and noted that he is “always on the lookout for great mentor texts, sentences, paragraphs, essays, articles, advertisements, and novels” (p. 17). During a structured instructional conversation session of no longer than 15 to 20 minutes, offer students exposure to and guided exploration of a carefully selected, sufficiently complex sentence (or two). It is best if the excerpt comes from a text you are using for literacy or content-based instruction and is loaded with information as well as opportunities for discussing grammar and usage. See two examples—one from fiction and one from nonfiction—below: The first sentence dissected in Table 2.2 is excerpted from *Stellaluna* by Janell Cannon (1993), and the second one is from *National Geographic Kids* (<http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/kids/animals/creaturefeature/vampire-bat/>) analyzed in Table 2.3.

**Table 2.2** A Dissected Sentence From *Stellaluna*

<b>Sentence: Each night, Mother Bat would carry Stellaluna clutched to her breast as she flew out to search for food.</b>		
<b>Sentence Chunk</b>	<b>Possible Discussion Points</b>	<b>Linguistic Features</b>
<b><i>Each night</i></b>	How does the author say <i>every night</i> ? Which is more expressive: <i>each</i> or <i>every</i> ?	Time marker at sentence opening position
<b><i>Mother Bat would carry Stellaluna</i></b>	How does the author express that Mother Bat did something regularly?	Habitual past expressed with the auxiliary <i>would</i>
<b><i>clutched to her breast</i></b>	Why does the author choose <i>clutch</i> and not <i>hold onto</i> ? Who clutched to whom?	The rich meaning of <i>clutch</i> ; Past participle form of the verb

<b><i>as she flew out</i></b>	Who flew out? Who does the author mean by <i>she</i> ? Why does the author say <i>flew</i> out? Out of what? Why didn't the author say <i>flew away</i> ?	Temporal clause; Reference use of the personal pronoun <i>she</i> to refer to Mother bat The adverb <i>out</i> indicating direction
<b><i>to search for food.</i></b>	Why did Mother Bat fly out? What are some synonyms for <i>search for</i> ?	The infinitive used to express purpose Phrasal verb: <i>search for</i>

**Table 2.3** A Dissected Sentence From *National Geographic*

<b>Sentence: Rather than sucking blood, vampire bats make a small cut with their teeth and lap up the flowing blood with their tongues.</b>		
<b>Sentence Chunk</b>	<b>Possible Discussion Points</b>	<b>Linguistic Features</b>
<b><i>Rather than sucking blood,</i></b>	What does <i>rather than</i> mean in this sentence? Who is this part of the sentence talking about?	Comparative adverbial clause with a present participle
<b><i>vampire bats make a small cut</i></b>	What kind of bats? What kind of a cut?	Noun phrases
<b><i>with their teeth</i></b>	How do bats make a small cut? What instrument do they use? In other words, with what do they make a cut?	Prepositional phrase
<b><i>and then lap up the flowing blood</i></b>	What do vampire bats do first to get to the blood? What do they do next? What does <i>lap up</i> look like, sound like?	Compound sentence; Present participle used as an adjective
<b><i>with their tongues.</i></b>	How do bats drink the blood? What instrument do they use? In other words, with what do they lap up the flowing blood?	Prepositional phrase

Some successful ways to conduct this activity are using sentence strips, a chart paper, or the interactive whiteboard and color-coding the language chunks. Sentence dissection can be performed on all text types at all grade levels. It is especially important to apply this strategy to content-based, academic text so students could gradually become independent readers of textbooks and other informational texts. Introducing ELLs to one “juicy sentence” a day based on a shared text is a similar strategy promoted by Lilly Wong Fillmore (2009).

**Patterned Writing, Patterned Speech.** Among others, Oczkus (2007) also recognized the importance of borrowing from authors: “When students study the textual patterns in fiction and nonfiction, first analyzing and then borrowing another author’s organizational pattern or word choice, their writing improves” (p. xiv). Not only does using patterned writing and speech help students improve their writing, but it also allows diverse students to become familiar with the way words are strung together to make meaning, the way verb tenses are used appropriately, the way parts of speech fit together, and the way simple, compound, and complex sentences are formed.

In Norma Simon’s (1954/1997) classic *Wet World*, a recurring sentence pattern—*A \_\_\_\_\_ waited when I \_\_\_\_\_*.—can be found on every page; then a variation on this sentence pattern is introduced at the end of the book. Using this pattern, invite students to create their own compound sentences while learning about using (a) the simple past tense, (b) time adverbial clauses, and (c) prepositional phrases appropriately and authentically. Offer a sentence frame, model your use of the sentence pattern, and encourage your more confident language users to share their examples first. See student examples in Box 2.2.

### Box 2.2 Patterned Sentences Based on Norma Simon’s (1997) *Wet World*

*A wet world waited when I looked out of my window this morning.*

*A warm breakfast waited when I went into the dining room.*

*A warm lunch waited when we went to the cafeteria after Math.*

As Butt, Fahey, Feez, Spinks, and Yallop (2003) also pointed out, “the challenge to language educators is to develop ways of incorporating ‘reflection, enquiry, and analysis’ into teaching about the structural patterns of texts” (p. 250), or in other words, to invite students to carefully examine how the words are put together to form a patterned sentence or longer units of discourse and not merely echo samples provided by the teacher.

**Real Grammar, Real Life.** The elementary school is a place for exciting events that support learning in their own unique ways: going on field trips, browsing books at book fairs, taking care of class pets, or celebrating crazy hat (or crazy hair) day are some of our favorites. As a much better alternative to *drill and kill* practice books, why not take these authentic



experiences and turn them into meaningful opportunities to teach about and practice grammar as it applies to real situations? Our colleague, Jackie Nenchin, shared with us her *Crazy Hat Activity*, which is a way to make learning relative clauses fun. For a successful activity, the teacher should have a collection of fun hats and other head coverings, such as scarves and shawls. Alternatively, the teacher can ask students to create their own hats with construction paper, ribbons, felt, glue, and other materials. It is important for each hat to have a distinct look. With their hats on, students should sit in a circle and observe all of their classmates' hats. The students should be provided with a sentence starter that includes one or more relative pronouns (*who, which, whose, whom, that*) as follows:

- *I spy someone **who** is wearing a (adjective) hat.*
- *I spy someone **who** is wearing a (adjective) hat **that** has/is (more information about the hat).*

For example:

- *I spy someone who is wearing a striped hat that has orange and purple fuzzy balls attached to it.*

To begin the activity, the first player describes one of the students' hats, and the student to raise his hand first and guess correctly *who* is wearing it becomes the next one to describe a hat. When everyone has had a turn, the game is over; if more practice is needed, the guessing can continue with other items of clothing. To extend this activity into a content area or for upper grades, change the purpose of the guessing game to identify historical figures, scientific discoveries, and important events. For example, in a unit on inventions, have students write complex statements in the following fashion:

- *I am thinking of a person who invented a tool that helped automate the production of cotton.*
- *I am thinking of a scientist who invented a communication device that helped people talk to each other across the country.*

### ***Anchor Performance 2: Apply the Conventions of Capitalization, Punctuation, and Spelling When Writing***

As students move from kindergarten through fifth grade, the expectations for knowing how to spell words and how to use capitalization and punctuation conventions of English become incrementally more challenging. Spelling instruction and spelling tests are still commonly practiced even though decades of research indicate that spelling is best learned

through meaningful, active engagement with the target words through reading, writing, and other contextualized activities (Weaver, 1998). The following strategies support such meaningful activities for acquiring and practicing the conventions of writing.

***Essential Strategy to Support Anchor Performance 2:  
Hands-on Work With Words Using Reference Materials,  
Authentic Literary and Informational Texts, and Manipulatives***

Rather than rote memorization or drill and kill exercises, students must participate in meaningful, age-appropriate, engaging activities of increasing complexity. Authentic materials, reference books and online resources, as well as teacher and student-created hands-on materials will contribute to such learning opportunities.

**Resourcing.** In order to assist students with their spelling, provide them with explicit instruction to access and use available print resources; create regular opportunities to develop their skills to be efficient and successful with reference materials, such as monolingual and bilingual print and online dictionaries, glossaries, and other reference books. Some suggestions for becoming familiar with dictionary use include (a) examining the letter distribution in a dictionary, (b) locating guide words (the first and the last words on the page), (c) practicing scanning a dictionary page through game-like activities such as scavenger hunts, and (d) exploring long entries and multiple meanings given for a word. *Guide Word Wonders* is one activity that gives students practice with reference materials. Using print dictionaries and teams of three or four students, the teacher displays a set of guide words for one of the pages in the dictionary. Students must use their dictionaries to find the page on which the guide words are located and identify the page number. First team to find the guide word page wins the round. Play continues in like manner until students have had ample practice finding dictionary guide words.

**Personal Dictionaries or Word-Study Books.** Turn a blank marble notebook into either an alphabetized personal dictionary or a subject-matter word study book by inserting appropriate tabs. Have students collect their own words and develop ownership of the spelling and meaning of the words by writing the words, putting them into personally meaningful sentences, and illustrating them.

**Authentic Literature and Mentor Texts.** Authentic literature and mentor texts may be aligned to a range of core standards and anchor performances (also see Chapter 6 on writing). When students are asked to examine a mentor text for use of writing mechanics such as punctuation, they see an authentic example of how and where the author chose to insert a colon as opposed to a semicolon, or a period versus an exclamation point. When grammar and mechanics are taught in the context of authentic reading and writing, students

learn how authors use language effectively to achieve their goals, and they, too, aspire to do so. An engaging way to use authentic literature is to select one of the books in Box 2.3 that more explicitly lends itself to examining capitalization, punctuation, and spelling as well as offer teaching opportunities about a range of grammar points and conventions of English.

### Box 2.3 Teaching Punctuation, Spelling, and Other Grammatical Conventions

Author	Books
Brian P. Cleary	Words Are CATegorical® series, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Dearly, Nearly, Insincerely: What is an Adverb?</i></li> <li>• <i>Hairy, Scary, Ordinary: What is an Adjective?</i></li> <li>• <i>I and You and Don't Forget Who: What is a Pronoun?</i></li> </ul>
Ruth Heller	A World of Language series, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>A Cache of Jewels and Other Collective Nouns</i></li> <li>• <i>Up, Up and Away: A Book of Adverbs</i></li> <li>• <i>Mine, All Mine: A Book about Pronouns</i></li> <li>• <i>Many Luscious Lollipops: A Book about Adjectives</i></li> </ul>
Robin Pulver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Nouns and Verbs Have a Field Day</i></li> <li>• <i>Punctuation Takes a Vacation</i></li> <li>• <i>Silent Letters Loud and Clear</i></li> <li>• <i>Happy Endings: A Story About Suffixes</i></li> </ul>
Marcie Aboff (and others)	Word Fun series, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>If You Were a Prefix</i></li> <li>• <i>If You Were a Suffix</i></li> </ul>
Rick Walton	Language Adventures series, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Around the House, the Fox Chased the Mouse: Adventures in Prepositions</i></li> <li>• <i>Bullfrog Pops: Adventures in Verbs and Objects</i></li> <li>• <i>Herd of Cows, Flock of Sheep: Adventures in Collective Nouns</i></li> <li>• <i>Just Me and 6,000 Rats: Adventures in Conjunctions</i></li> <li>• <i>Once There Was a Bull . . . (Frog): Adventures in Compound Words</i></li> </ul>

**Interactive Word Walls.** One method of teaching the spelling of high-frequency or sight words is through building a Word Wall, a strategy promoted by Patricia Cunningham, Dorothy Hall, and Cheryl Sigmon (1999). High-frequency words—ones that beginning readers and writers need to know “by heart,” and that do not always have predictable spelling patterns—account for about half of the words we read and write; thus, building a word wall with these words would be highly beneficial for struggling learners. You can add frequently misspelled words and make sure the major spelling patterns are represented on the Word Wall. Each week, select four or five words and add them to the designated bulletin board or wall in the room. Have sections for each letter of the alphabet and check to see that the words are visible and accessible to all students. Include at least one daily activity when students read, write, chant, clap, find, or play interactive games with the Word Wall words.

## **Knowledge and Application of Language**

The grade-specific standard for knowledge and application of language does not begin until second grade, indicating that the metacognitive or metalinguistic awareness that is necessary to think abstractly about the language is developmentally more appropriate for students in Grade 2 and up.

### ***Anchor Performance 3: Understand How Language is Used in Different Contexts***

Students need exposure to language used in a variety of ways and in a variety of contexts—formally and informally, in written and spoken formats, and in varied genres and situations. If students internalize the knowledge they have about how language functions in different contexts, they are likely to comprehend more fully when reading and listening or make more effective choices when speaking and writing.

### ***Essential Strategy to Support Anchor Performance 3: Integrate all Four Language Skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing) Meaningfully, Purposefully (and Playfully Whenever Possible)***

Students’ knowledge and understanding of how language is used in various contexts will begin by listening to and reading texts in a variety of styles; at the same time, such understanding must be transferred to actual opportunities for students to produce language by making not only the grammatically correct word-, sentence-, and text-level choices but also the most appropriate and powerful choices for words and sentence structures when speaking and writing.

**Skits and Role-plays.** To have students understand the difference between formal and informal language use, explore a range of scenarios in which language is used to various degrees of formality. Start with simple one- or two-line role-plays and move on to longer skits. Some possible scenarios include speaking to a teacher, a police officer, an elder, or the principal versus speaking to a younger sibling, an older brother, a cousin, a friend from the neighborhood, or a classmate. Have students read short skits representing formal versus informal language use, and compare language choice and sentence complexity. When the students are ready to apply what they have learned about language variety, invite them to generate and perform their own skits.

**Read It and Speak It (and Write It, too).** Students need to understand that how we use language in writing and language in speech will differ. To practice identifying the differences between written and spoken English, direct students' attention to grade-appropriate language patterns frequently found in written texts, but rarely in everyday, spoken language. Create a T-chart comparing two versions of the same sentence: See how the same idea is expressed in two different ways and how the sentence published in a *Kids Discover* issue titled "Great Wall of China" (DuBose, 2008) compares to the sentence that is more likely to be used in spoken English (Figure 2.1).

**Figure 2.1** Read It and Speak It Comparison Chart

Written in a Book (Great Wall of China)	Spoken in Everyday Situations
1. One of the most magnificent structures on earth arose in the East Asia nation of China many centuries ago. (p. 2)	1. They built a very famous and beautiful wall in China a long time ago.
2. Like earlier walls that were built in China, the purpose of the Great Wall was to keep out invaders who wandered the arid grasslands north of China's borders. (p. 2)	2. They built the Great Wall to keep out strangers who lived in the north. They built other walls before the Great Wall of China.

One extension that this strategy lends itself to is using the sample sentences as mentor text and encouraging students to write original sentences that parallel their sentence structure. This activity reinforces for students that careful examination of what they read can help improve their writing. Another extension of this activity is exposing students to longer texts and spoken discourse about the same topic. Students can compare a news report on TV with a news article online, or a newspaper or magazine article with a podcast about the same current event.

**Theme Reading, Theme Listening Across Genres.** Supporting several other Common Core Standards, this strategy shows students how writing style changes when they read or listen to a range of literary resources about an essential grade-appropriate topic represented by various genres. To address this Common Core language standard, the goal is to compare how authors chose to write about a shared theme and used words and sentences as well as text-level organization while operating within the framework of their chosen genres. In Box 2.4, see a collection of our favorites on the topic of community for the second-grade classroom.

### Box 2.4 Theme Reading/Listening Collection on Neighborhood Communities

<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>
<b>Poems:</b>	
"Tempest Avenue"	Ian McMillan
<i>Wake Up, House: Rooms Full of Poems!</i>	Dee Lillegard
<i>My House is Singing</i>	Betsy Rosenthal
"Childhood Tracks"	James Berry
<b>Nonfiction</b>	
<i>Homes in Many Cultures</i>	Heather Adamson
<i>Wonderful Houses Around the World</i>	Yoshio Komatsu
<i>Homes Around the World</i>	Max Moore
<i>At My House: A Lift-the-Flap Shadow Book</i>	Roger Priddy
<i>The ABC Book of American Homes</i>	Michael Shoulders
<i>Houses and Homes</i>	Ann Morris
<b>Fiction</b>	
<i>In These Walls and Floors (What's Lurking in This House?)</i>	Nancy Harris
<i>The Little House</i>	Virginia Lee Burton
<i>The Biggest House in the World</i>	Leo Lionni
<i>Ira Sleeps Over</i>	Bernard Wab

**Songs, Rhymes, Fairy Tales, Riddles**

"This is the House that Jack Built"

"Home on the Range"

*The Three Little Pigs*

*Goldilocks and the Three Bears*

**Anthologies with Various Genres**

*Home: A Collaboration of Thirty Authors & Illustrators*

Michael J. Rosen,  
Editor

**Bilingual Books**

*The House is Made of Mud*

Ken Buchanan

*My House/Mi Casa*

Gladys Rosa-Mendoza

*My Very Own Room/Mi Propio Cuartito*

Amada Irma Perez

**Jeopardy Game for Style Shifting.** Style shifts in authentic situations often occur automatically: confident and experienced speakers of the language naturally change the level of formality they use based on the situation, the context, the audience, or the topic. To practice identifying the difference between formal and informal English, consider playing an adapted version of the game "Jeopardy," the goal of which is for students to switch from the informal or slang version of a phrase or sentence to the formal one. Featured on *Do you Speak American?* (<http://www.pbs.org/speak/>), Daniel Russell, an elementary school teacher used "Jeopardy" to validate his students' knowledge of their dialect—also known as African American Vernacular English (AAVE)—when he asked them to provide the standard English equivalents of various common phrases in AAVE. For example, students can easily recognize and relate to the sentence "I didn't do nothing." The task is to be able to produce the same sentence in standard American English. The Jeopardy board will contain a selection of commonly used, similar, nonstandard English expressions and the challenge for the students is to come up with the standard phrase. One possible way to make this an effective activity is to include authentic student-generated linguistics examples so learners could recognize their own informal speech patterns. To get started, see a jeopardy template on one of these websites: <http://www.superteachertools.com/jeopardy/> or <http://www.techteachers.com/jeopardytemplates.htm>.

## Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

### ***Anchor Performance 4: Determine or Clarify the Meaning of Unknown and Multiple-Meaning Words and Phrases***

Successful vocabulary learning and accurate vocabulary use in all content areas are two strong predictors of academic success. Determining or clarifying the meaning of unknown words, deciphering multiple word meaning, using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials are some of the most challenging tasks that ELLs and at-risk students face on a daily basis. For over a decade, Isabel Beck, Margaret McKeown, and Linda Kucan’s (2002) work has been frequently cited to provide a rationale for and to create a manageable framework for robust vocabulary instruction. Some of the strategies presented below build upon their suggestions, whereas others represent additional researchers’ and practitioners’ recommendations.

Learning new words and figuring out word meaning often present an added challenge for struggling learners. If they are less-than-fluent speakers or competent readers in English, context clues and contextual understanding may not be as effective as they are for more proficient speakers and readers. Thus, scaffolding vocabulary acquisition and creating multiple meaningful opportunities to encounter and to actively use robust vocabulary should be a primary goal.

### ***Essential Strategy to Support Anchor Performance 4: Offer Visual and Contextual Support***

Pictures ranging from ad hoc line drawings to magnificent photographs, from quick sketches to intricate illustrations found in picture books may all offer an appropriate context and much needed visual support for new and difficult words. Showing brief video clips and bringing in realia (the real object you are teaching about) may further enhance students’ understanding of complex word meanings. Additionally, providing a variety of authentic contexts in which the target words are used will lead to the type of rich instruction that gives students numerous meaningful experiences with the words.

**Picture It.** Robert Marzano and Debra Pickering (2005) suggested that “when you ask students to construct a picture, symbol, or graphic representation of a term, they are forced to think of the term in a totally different way” (p. 21). When students are learning about various land features (plateau, peninsula, mountain range, delta), have them generate their own illustrations, where the expectation is that the drawings will look similar. At the same time, when exploring big concepts such as respect, natural disasters, freedom, each student’s conceptualization may vary considerably.



These drawings will also spark rich conversations and lend themselves to opportunities to use academic language in discourse. Student-created illustrations (with appropriate guidance and scaffolding) will contribute to internalizing word meaning while engaging learners in a multimodal task.

**Student-Friendly Definitions and Concept Maps.** The definition of *outrageous* as “exceeding the limits of what is usual” or “not conventional or matter-of-fact” as found in an online dictionary is *outrageously* difficult for struggling learners. Why? These dictionary definitions use sentence fragments and synonyms that would need to be defined and explained so they are just as difficult as the target word. Stahl and Nagy (2006) claimed that “having children restate definitions may be the only way a teacher can find out whether the children actually understand them” (p. 65). A precursor to that recommendation should be presenting definitions to students written in an accessible, student-friendly way; then, letting students use their own words to define new concepts is expected to lead to greater access and greater retention. So what would be a child-friendly definition of *outrageous*? Let’s try this:

*When something is outrageous, it shocks you. You can hardly believe it has happened. For example, if someone had broken into the school and vandalized the main office, that would be outrageous.*

When child-friendly definitions are augmented with visual or graphic support such as a concept map, students also understand the connections and associations that go with the target word.

**Look Inside and Outside of the Word.** We are inspired by Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher’s (2009) framework for learning words “inside and out.” To look *inside* a word, students are directed to identify root words, prefixes, suffixes, or word parts of compound words they recognize. Invite them to also look *outside* the word and try to figure out the meaning from the sentence or paragraph where they came across the word or look for any illustrations or other visuals that could help. Another take on the inside-outside strategy is to examine how the word is used inside the context of the subject matter or literacy task as opposed to outside in the students’ own experiences if applicable.

### ***Anchor Performance 5: Recognize Word Relationships, Figurative Language, and Nuances in Word Meanings***

Knowledge of vocabulary and application thereof gets increasingly complicated when complex word relationships are introduced, figurative language is used, or nuances in word meanings need to be recognized or defined.

***Essential Strategy to Support Anchor Performance 5: Active Engagement With Challenging Language Segments Presented in Context***

Although ELLs and at-risk students need support and scaffolding, and although they highly benefit when difficult academic content is made accessible, teachers should not shy away from exposing them to the complexity of the English language. Diverse learners cannot afford to be exposed to less-than-robust language learning opportunities. Instead, they need engaging explorations of meaningful language segments as well as exposure to the complexity of carefully chosen whole text selections

**Word Sorts.** Depending on the objective of the lesson, frequently engage students in sorting activities, in which they need to match single words or phrases to preestablished categories. Similar to a word sort, Doug Fisher, Nancy Frey, and Carol Rothenberg (2008) suggested expanding task to concept sorting and have students sort larger language chunks or even sentences into categories that relate to the concept they are studying. Using interactive whiteboard technology gives a hi-tech twist to tactile learning, although sorting words that are written on index cards or placed in a T-chart will also do. Older students may contribute to a shared wiki page to document the outcomes of their word or concept sorts. Since word relationships may range from synonyms and antonyms to whole and part, from parts of speech to idioms, these relationships may lend themselves to sorting activities across the curriculum.

**Act It Out:** Language nuances are hard for diverse learners to understand unless they are made tangible and visible for ELLs and other at-risk students. Demonstrating word meanings by acting out subtle differences, playing charades, pantomiming, and participating in other kinesthetic activities will make the shades of meaning more explicit and memorable for students. Box 2.5 illustrates a range of synonyms for three verbs with more or less subtle differences in meaning.

**Box 2.5 Shades of Meaning for *Walk, Cry, and Eat***

*Walk, strut, stroll, wander, march, roam, swagger, tiptoe*

*Cry, weep, wail, sob, whimper*

*Eat, devour, wolf down, nibble, chew, gobble up, munch, pig out, dine*

Create a pantomime activity for students by preparing cards with *Shades of Meaning* words. Have teams of students take turns selecting a word card, discussing what it means, and having one team member act it out. Have the other teams try to guess the word being pantomimed.

**Idioms From Around the World.** In multilingual classrooms, an exciting and highly motivating activity is to compare how students' native languages work in contrast to English. Choose age- and grade-appropriate common idioms and proverbs and invite students (with parental input) to provide versions of the same idiom or proverb in their home languages. Such an exercise in comparative linguistics in the elementary classroom not only enhances students' understanding of figurative language in English, but it will also help develop cross-cultural understanding as the class discusses what information is revealed about different cultures and people through these idioms and proverbs. Box 2.6 has some of our favorites.

### Box 2.6 Proverbs Compared Across Languages

Example 1:

**English:** *Two heads are better than one.*

Chinese: 一人計短, 二人計長. ("One person's plans are short, but those made by two people are long.")

Hungarian: Több szem többet lát. ("More eyes see more.")

Japanese: 三人寄れば文珠の知恵 ("Three people together have the wisdom of a Buddha.")

Spanish: Cuatro ojos ven más que dos ("Four eyes see more than two eyes.")

Example 2:

**English:** *Out of the frying pan and into the fire.*

Hungarian: Csöbörből vödörbe. ("Out of the cup into the pail.")

Russian: От волка бежал, да на медведя попал. ("He ran from the wolf, but ran into a bear.")

Spanish: Saliste de Guatemala y te metiste en Guatapeor ("You left Guatemala and you ended up in Guate-worse." A play on the words Guatemala, mala and peor.)

Turkish: Yağmurdan kaçarken doluya tutulmak. ("Out of the rain into the hail.")

**Story Connections to Teach Figurative Language.** Exposing students to authentic literature in which figurative language is used in a meaningful context remains to be a much favored strategy. In Box 2.7, there is a collection of our favorite K–5 children’s books to use when teaching figurative language. An important challenge to keep in mind is that many linguistically and academically diverse learners tend to interpret figurative language literally or are puzzled by it. One best way to approach it is to dissect the target expression, discuss the literal and connotative meaning, and engage students in rich conversations about the language chunk you are analyzing.

### Box 2.7 Children’s Literature for Teaching Figurative Language

<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>
<b>Similes</b>	
<i>My Dog is as Smelly as Dirty Socks: And Other Funny Family Portraits</i>	Hanoch Piven
<i>My Best Friend Is As Sharp As a Pencil: And Other Funny Classroom Portraits</i>	Hanoch Piven
<i>Crazy Like a Fox: A Simile Story</i>	Loreen Leedy
<i>Stubborn as a Mule and Other Silly Similes</i>	Nancy Jean Loewen
<b>Metaphors</b>	
<i>Skin Like Milk, Hair of Silk: What Are Similes and Metaphors?</i>	Brian P. Cleary
<i>Tulip Sees America</i>	Cynthia Rylant
<b>Idioms</b>	
<i>In a Pickle: And Other Funny Idioms</i>	Marvin Terban
<b>Figurative versus Literal Meaning</b>	
<i>Parts</i>	Tedd Arnold
<i>More Parts</i>	Tedd Arnold
<i>Even More Parts</i>	Tedd Arnold
<i>Owl Moon</i>	Jane Yolen

***Anchor Performance 6: Acquire and Use Accurately a Range of General Academic and Domain-Specific Words and Phrases***

To be on the path to college and career readiness, students in all grades need to build and accurately use a range of general academic and content-based words and phrases.

***Essential Strategy to Support Anchor Performance 6: Deconstructing and Reconstructing Academic Language***

In-depth understanding is needed of not only word-level but also sentence- and text-level complexities that characterize general academic language use as well as content-specific language use. Diverse students need explicit guidance in examining language as it works in the various content areas, taking language apart to see how the micro- and macro-level pieces fit together, and then also have the opportunity to use the language in appropriate contexts.

**Vocabulary Self-Assessment.** Start by raising awareness about word knowledge, which is a complex task but can be made accessible to all learners. You can start by sharing and regularly using the Vocabulary Self-Assessment Tool in Figure 2.2, which is a simplified version of a classic by Isabel Beck and colleagues (2008).

**Figure 2.2** Vocabulary Self-Assessment Tool

Vocabulary	My Knowledge of Key Words			
	I have never heard of it	I have heard of it, I think I know what it means	I know it very well	I can tell or write a sentence with it

**Tiered Vocabulary Instruction.** Since Isabel Beck and colleagues' (2002, 2008) work, a fairly well-known conceptualization of vocabulary is the following three-tier model:

Tier 1: Basic words that are often recognized and used with ease by most native speakers of English (e.g., book, girl, happy, he). ELLs face a special challenge and need vocabulary instruction also targeting these words.

Tier 2: General academic words that tend to be more complex and polysemous (having multiple meanings). Some of these words travel across content areas (e.g., origin, system, table) and have different meanings; whereas others perform similar textual or discourse level functions regardless of the content (e.g., therefore, for instance, nevertheless).

Tier 3: Domain-specific words and less commonly used words that are critical for understanding the subject matter of the instruction (e.g., photosynthesis, circumference, expedition). New content can only be acquired if these Tier 3 words are clearly understood and internalized by the students.

The ultimate purpose of this type of categorization goes beyond merely identifying the level of complexity or challenge certain words will pose. Instead, teachers can make important instructional decisions based on this categorization and commit to building students' Tier 2 vocabulary across the content areas to offer the most access to critical words that afford students to comprehend a wide range of texts.

**Simon Says, Science Says.** A simple yet effective game to play is a modified version of Simon Says, renamed as Simon Says, Science Says by Virginia Rojas (personal communication, July 10, 2012). The purpose of the game is to showcase and practice how conversational vocabulary and everyday language use differ from the precision of academic, domain-specific words. For example: Simon says, "The water dries up"; Science says, "The water evaporates." Or, Simon says, "It is getting cold"; Science says, "The temperature is decreasing." It can be played in a teacher-led, whole class setting or in small groups or pairs.

**Chunk It!** Teaching and practicing language chunks rather than isolated words help students see how collocations are formed in English (i.e., how certain words go together to create a larger unit of meaning). When teaching the word *according*, it makes much more sense for diverse learners to see language chunks such as "according to the author," "according to the first paragraph," "according to the title," for example. Phrasal verbs (e.g., get in, get over, get back, get ahead) pose a challenge for linguistically diverse students, so special attention to contextualizing and offering a sentence chunk where and how these words are used can be especially helpful. Consider keeping a *Chunk It!* chart displayed in class that keeps a record of language chunks discussed in class and is available for students to add language chunks that they find in their reading.

**Songs, Chants, and Other Mnemonic Devices.** When words are set to music, when rhythm accompanies them as in chants, or when hard to learn

information is turned into a song, remembering facts, recalling concepts, and following procedures—once a daunting task—may become easier for all students. English language learners face the added challenges of acquiring a new language while also committing new and difficult information to memory. Basic mnemonic devices are among the most frequently used memory-enhancing learning tools that teachers and students alike find beneficial (Honigsfeld & Barnick-Eonidis, 2009). Teachers we work with use all sorts of mnemonic devices to remind their students to edit their work:

*SCOPE: Spelling, Capitalization, Order of words, Punctuation, Express complete thought*

*GPS: Grammar Punctuation Spelling*

*GAS CAP: Grammar And Spelling, Capitalization And Punctuation*

Gray (1997) argued that certain mnemonic devices are highly relevant to English learners. He particularly recommended the use of mnemonic devices that encourage visualization and use of imagery. Brain-based learning proponents emphasize the power of music and rhythm to create an environment that optimally stimulates the brain (See, for example, Ashcraft & Radvansky, 2009; Jensen, 2008; Sousa, 2008; Willis, 2006). In a different approach, Schumaker, Denton, and Deshler (1984) introduced RAP, which is a paraphrasing strategy to remind students with learning disabilities of the three steps they need to take to understand what they have just read:

1. *Read a paragraph.*
2. *Ask yourself, “What were the main idea and details in this paragraph?”*
3. *Put the main idea and details into your own words.*

## ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

When diverse learners are exposed to complex language and are engaged in tasks that expect them to use such language, and when these expectations are well supported with instructional scaffolds, diverse learners are anticipated to have their vocabulary acquisition accelerated. Further, if students are given the tools to manage challenging academic texts as well as provided with ample opportunities to practice these skills, they learn to tolerate ambiguity and will handle more complex texts with less frustration and more success.

We believe that teaching and learning academic vocabulary and language is critical to student success in all content areas. Complex language permeates students' ability to make progress in all four skill areas—reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Without fluency and facility with academic language, students will not be able to meet the CCSS.

## INSTRUCTIONAL CHALLENGES

As Halliday (1996) so aptly stated, “Language is powered by grammatical energy” (p. 4). Learners whose language use—whether in writing or speech—lacks the necessary grammatical structures or *grammatical energy* will not be able to go far, with their speech halting or writing faltering. Thus, when teaching the conventions of English grammar and language use, we need to move beyond incidental learning, in which grammar is left for students to pick up on their own. Rather, teachers must offer all students daily opportunities to use standard American English in varied contexts and through a variety of authentic experiences. To be able to do so, we urge all teachers to commit to developing their own knowledge of the grade-appropriate grammar points to be taught. Through collaborative planning sessions, consider discussing the following questions:

- What grammar points should be targeted?
- Why should these points be targeted?
- Do I understand the grammar point?
- Have I based my explanation on reliable sources?
- Do I have grammar resources on hand at home and in the classroom?
- What do I want my students to do with the target form/structure?

Even if there is a strong individual teacher commitment to implementing a variety of successful, research-based strategies for vocabulary instruction that are aligned to the Common Core standards, schools need a schoolwide approach to vocabulary instruction that is comprehensive and integrated. We concur with Camille Blachowitz, Peter Fisher, Donna Ogle, and Susan Watts-Taffe (2006), who stated that vocabulary must be a “core consideration in all grades across the school and in all subject areas across the school day” (pp. 527–528). Additionally, for most effective vocabulary instruction in a school or district it must be based on a common philosophy and shared practices among teachers to ensure greater continuity and instructional intensity. At the same time, we must recognize that students come to school with a vast range of prior knowledge, background experiences, active and passive vocabulary, and language skills, thus differentiated instruction must also be considered.



## PROMISING CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Louanne Johnson, a fourth-grade teacher, recognized that vocabulary instruction and academic language development could not be left to chance. It needed to permeate every school day. She organized her vocabulary and language instruction by selecting a word or idiom of the day, words of wisdom (proverbs) on a weekly basis, and other carefully selected phrases or academically challenging expressions that were derived from text that students were reading or had read. She displayed these words and expressions in the classroom, integrated them into instruction, and constantly referred to as well as reviewed them.

After much success with her own class, Louanne proposed the word of the day become a shared school practice; in this way, all students had the opportunity for sustained, focused exposure to Tier 2 words in multiple contexts on a daily basis through both central office morning announcements and prepared activities developed by a committee of interdisciplinary teachers and specialists. For example, if *compare* was selected for a particular day, students, in accordance with their grade-level curriculum, compared measurements or numbers in mathematics, reading selections in English language arts, daily weather patterns during morning circle meetings, and how significant ideas, beliefs, communities, and societies have changed over time. It was found in Louanne's building that this type of systematic, school-wide effort can pave the way for additional collaborative conversations to connect and streamline grade-level curriculum with a focus for building strategies to develop academic language to help all students have multiple opportunities and exposure to critical language learning.

## COMMON CORE LANGUAGE STANDARDS— (UN)COMMON REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How can all teachers' knowledge-based and skill sets regarding grammar instruction be enhanced?
2. How could English Language Development (ELD) standards be meaningfully connected to the CCSS?
3. How do the Common Core language standards translate into successful instruction for beginner English learners? How about students with language disorders?
4. Which of the ideas presented in this chapter will be the first one(s) you try in your classroom and why? What improvements/growth do you hope to see in your students by engaging in these activities?

## KEY RESOURCES

### ***Professional Books***

- Casagrande, J. (2006). *Grammar snobs are great big meanies: A guide to language for fun and spite*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- Hale, C. (2001). *Sin and syntax: How to craft wickedly effective prose*. New York, NY: Broadway Books.
- Lederer, R., & Shore, J. (2005). *Comma sense: A fundamental guide to punctuation*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.
- Lukeman, N. (2006). *A dash of style: The art and mastery of punctuation*. New York, NY: Norton.
- Noden, H. R. (1999). *Image grammar: Using grammatical structures to teach writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Truss, L. (2004). *Eats, shoots & leaves: The zero tolerance approach to punctuation*. New York, NY: Gotham Books.

### ***A Specialized Resource to Help Develop the Grammarian in Every Teacher***

- Anderson, J. (2005). *Mechanically inclined: Building grammar, usage, and style into writer's workshop*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

### ***Online Resources***

- Office of English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement for Limited English Proficient Students (OELA)  
<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/index.html>
- Teaching Diverse Learners  
<http://www.alliance.brown.edu/tdl>
- US Department of Education's National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition  
<http://www.ncela.gwu.edu>
- Vocabulary and Style  
<http://www.vocabulary.com/>  
<http://grammar.yourdictionary.com/slang.dictionary>
- Vocabulary Development Using Digital Tools  
<http://techteachers.com/vocabulary.htm>  
<http://www.wordsmyth.net/>  
<http://www.wordsift.com>  
<http://www.visualthesaurus.com/>
- Grammar Practice  
<http://grammaropolis.com/games.php>  
<http://www.roadtogrammar.com/>
- Grammar Blast  
[http://www.eduplace.com/kids/hme/k\\_5/quizzes/?x=100&y=19](http://www.eduplace.com/kids/hme/k_5/quizzes/?x=100&y=19)