



# Why academic language instruction should be a high priority in your classroom

It's well-documented in the academic literature that English learners must develop academic language to succeed in school and to prepare for success in their life pursuits. In recognition of this reality, the Common Core State Standards and most state standards have called for dramatically increased academic language across the curriculum. Research also has settled the question of the best way to develop academic language—teachers must deliver this instruction explicitly. This article focuses on three issues: 1) what constitutes academic language; 2) what resources are available to teach academic language; and 3) what are some concrete ways to deliver this instruction explicitly.

## DESCRIBING ACADEMIC LANGUAGE

Simply stated, academic language is the language used in formal settings such as school classrooms and in the workplace. Academic language is used in textbooks, academic discussions, writing assignments, and class presentations as well as in business correspondence, meetings, and presentations. Some researchers refer to the academic language students need using the analogy of bricks and mortar. The bricks are content-area vocabulary; the mortar refers to the general academic vocabulary, including idioms, connecting phrases, and test-specific terms.

- **Content-area vocabulary.** These are content-specific words students need to know to access the core curriculum (e.g., *cycle, culture, drama, civil*).
- **General academic vocabulary.** This includes words used across the disciplines (e.g., *construct, generate, approximate*), common idioms (e.g., *off the charts*), phrases that connect ideas (e.g., *whereas, notwithstanding, subsequent*), and terms used in testing contexts (e.g., *characterize, determine, evaluate*).

## IDENTIFYING ACADEMIC LANGUAGE

Content-Area Vocabulary. To identify the target vocabulary for Grammar Gallery®, the authors reviewed published lists of frequently used words, Bloom's taxonomy of verbs, a broad array of academic vocabulary lists, and a cross-section of state and national standards, including the Common Core State Standards. Levels 1-2 of Grammar Gallery generally integrate K-6 academic vocabulary. Levels 3-5 integrate grades 2-12 academic vocabulary. The program also includes more than 150 common idioms and over 20 terms used in testing contexts.

General Academic Vocabulary. The **Academic Vocabulary Series**, a new feature added to Grammar Gallery in 2019, now offers teachers 550+ **general academic vocabulary** words. The authors selected these vocabulary terms and phrases after a careful review of published lists of academic vocabulary, including the Coxhead academic word list.

# TEACHING ACADEMIC LANGUAGE

There are many techniques and approaches to academic language instruction, but they all have in common the following three assumptions:

1. Academic language must be explicitly taught.
2. Students must be engaged in instruction and practice activities that enable them to see the words used in multiple contexts.
3. Students must have multiple opportunities to use the words and phrases.

**Content-Area Vocabulary.** The Grammar Gallery program provides both the exposure to and practice with content-area vocabulary, as well as connecting phrases, idioms, and testing terms. Every lesson follows the same a four-part lesson plan that follows the gradual release model, an approach for transitioning instruction from teacher-centered, whole-class delivery to student-centered collaboration and independent practice. This approach is sometimes called “I do it, we do it, you do it” or “Cue-Do-Review” and involves demonstration, prompt, and practice.


**General Academic Vocabulary.** The new **Academic Vocabulary Series** offers more than 550 resources for teachers to use in helping students develop general academic vocabulary. Teachers can use these resources in a variety of ways:

- Integrating them into the existing lessons of an English language development program (such as Grammar Gallery)
- Using them for stand-alone mini-lessons
- Utilizing them for sponge activities
- Assigning them to early finishers
- Giving them as homework or for extra credit

**Sample Lesson Plan:** Here is a general lesson framework to use in delivering instruction using the **Academic Vocabulary Series** resources:

**Learning Objective:** Student will be able to pronounce, define, and use the target vocabulary word in writing and in an oral discussion.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY FOCUS: *display* GRAMMAR GALLERY



◀ Chinese New Year is a seven-day festival celebrated in China and other places around the world. This event usually takes place between January 20 and February 20. As part of the celebrations, people **display** red lanterns and colorful lights in the streets.

| Word    | Part of Speech | Meaning   | Word History   |
|---------|----------------|---|--|
| display | noun           | 1) a performance, show, or event, 2) an electronic device that shows images | from the Latin <i>dispicere</i> , meaning "to scatter" |
|         | verb           | to show or present  |  |

Choose one meaning of this word and draw/insert a picture of it.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name other words that have the opposite meaning.

**display**

Name other words that mean about the same thing.

\_\_\_\_\_


\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Write a sentence or question that includes this word.

**Figurative Language**

If something is **on display**, it is available for everyone to see. *The couple's love for each other was on display at the Valentine's Day party.* Think of a time when your love for something or someone was on display and share it with a partner.



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## Plan

1. Select an academic vocabulary term.
2. Project the resource associated with that term on the wall, give students a hard copy of it, or have students display the term on a tablet device.

## Model

3. Write the term on the board, pronounce it, and ask students to repeat after you.
4. Point out the picture and read the text associated with it.

## Engage

5. Talk about the picture/text and engage students in a discussion about them.
6. Point out the information in the chart under the picture and text, which identifies the part of speech, definition, word history, and other forms of the word. Call on volunteers to read the information, and ask questions about the information.
7. Review what students are to do in the center chart.

## Apply

8. Organize students in pairs, small groups, or have them work independently. Walk around the classroom to ensure that students know what they are to do.
9. When most students have completed the center chart, draw their attention to the feature at the bottom of the page. Read it or call on a volunteer to do so. Engage students in a discussion of the information or to respond to the question(s) posed. Encourage students to use the target term.

## Assess

10. Call on students to share their work. Affirm good work and provide corrective feedback as appropriate.

If students are working on a hard copy, have them file it in a personal vocabulary notebook for future reference. If they are working on a tablet or other electronic device, allow them to print a copy of their work and then file it. Add the target word to the class word wall and refer to it often in subsequent classroom work and discussions.

## Want to See More?

[Click here](#) for free samples of **Academic Vocabulary Series** resources.

[Click here](#) to review the Grammar Gallery® program, which includes the **Academic Vocabulary Series**.

## Tell Us What You Think

How do you teach academic language to your English learners? What do you think is the best way to develop academic language among English learners? What vocabulary terms do your students have the most trouble with? We'd love to hear your views on academic language and your perspectives on these new resources. Let us know if there is a word not on the list that you think we should add. Tell us what you think!

[Click here](#) to share your ideas! You will be entered into a drawing to win a \$25 Starbucks gift card and a copy of "This and That," a grammar resource e-book for teachers.

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