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# Strategies for Connecting Content ← and → Language for English Language Learners

## Language Arts

A child said, What is the grass? fetching it to me with full hands;  
How could I answer the child? . . . I do not know what it  
is any more than he.  
I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful  
green stuff woven.

Or I guess it is the handkerchiefs  
of the sky, which are designedly dropped,

**Eugenia Mora-Flores and Angelica Machado**  
Foreword by Laura Keisler

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# Connecting Content and Language

## What Is Academic Language?

Academic language includes the vocabulary, functions and forms of language, and the fluency to demonstrate thinking and learning across the curriculum. “(It) refers to the specialized vocabulary, grammar, discourse/textual, and functional skills associated with academic instruction and mastery of academic material and tasks” (Saunders, Goldenberg, and Marcelletti 2010, 49–50). Academic language has been used in educational conversations as a vehicle for supporting academic achievement. We hear educators say academic language is important across the curriculum; students need to develop academic language to be successful; every lesson should include academic language; *all* students need academic language. We can talk about it at a conceptual level as something that holds great importance in pedagogy and curricula and though true, these statements do not provide the guidance teachers need to plan with and facilitate academic language development. How can we understand it in a concrete way to operationalize what is meant by academic language development? In its simplest form, we can begin the conversation by helping teachers understand that academic language is about connecting content to language. It is selecting what we are going to teach (processing content) and the vehicle through which students can access the information (acquiring language) and share what they have learned (producing language). Processing and producing language to learn content and discuss what you’ve learned develops academic language.

This resource helps teachers engage in the conversation of the *what* and the *how* of academic language. It looks at language from a holistic perspective—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—that is integrated in complex ways as students access information and share their thinking. Academic language makes learning possible. It opens lines of communication as students engage in discussions and dialogue around their thinking and learning. It takes the ability to *listen* to a spoken message and decipher meaning from multiple perspectives and alternating points of view. It involves the ability to decode and process written language in its many representations to access information when *reading*. It allows students to create *written* examples of their thinking and *articulate* (speak) their ideas to many audiences and for a variety of purposes.

Throughout the school day, students listen to messages, read information, create written texts, and share their thinking. Whether in science, social studies, art, music, physical education, language arts, or math, students are constantly using their listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities. The work of supporting students to do just that—use language across the curriculum—is the work of academic language development.

## Connecting Content and Language *(cont.)*

Academic language development is the process by which students learn how to learn and express their thinking. Teachers of academic language development must find opportunities to explicitly and implicitly support students with this goal throughout the day. The strategies presented in this resource are intended to support teachers in developing students' academic language. Though the strategies are presented effectively in developing particular domains of academic language development—academic vocabulary, comprehensible input, comprehensible output, listening and reading comprehension, and academic writing—no single set of strategies works in isolation. Language is complex and incorporates multiple domains at a time; however, the strategies have been organized into categories to demonstrate the strength of the strategy for a particular element of academic language development.

Academic language development and academic language are not synonymous. Academic language can be defined as the *what* in academic language development. It includes the function, forms, academic and content vocabulary, and fluency necessary to access and share ideas. Academic language development is the process through which students learn academic language. It is a complex process that includes identifying academic language, comprehensible input, comprehensible output, listening and reading comprehension, and academic writing. These elements can support students in developing academic language as they connect content and language throughout the day.

### Forms and Functions of Language

The Common Core speaking and listening standards state, “To build a foundation for college and career readiness, students must have ample opportunities to take part in a variety of rich, structured conversations—as part of a whole class, in small groups, and with a partner” (2010, 22). For students to successfully engage in these rigorous academic discussions, they need to develop academic language. Teachers will need to explicitly model language used for a variety of purposes for students to acquire language through successful “listening” opportunities, as outlined in the standards. For example, anchor standards ask students to be able to interpret information presented orally and through other media, engage in conversations with diverse partners, and orally share their thinking demonstrating command of formal English (SL.2, SL.1, SL.6). To support students, teachers will need to have a clear understanding of the language demands of academic tasks.

## Connecting Content and Language *(cont.)*

Defining academic language in concrete terms includes understanding what the purpose is for using language in any given exchange and the forms needed to meet those purposes. “The context for any piece of language is characterized by three features: what is being discussed (or written) about; the relationship between the speaker and listener (or writer and reader); and whether the language is spoken or written” (Halliday and Hansan 1985, as cited in Gibbons 2009, 47). Here we focus on identifying what is being discussed or written about as it relates to the context in which it is being shared.

Language *functions* can be defined as the purpose for using language. Why are we using language? Is it to compare, describe, justify, or persuade? When students are asked to produce language they are given a task—a purpose for using language. They are asked to think in particular ways that set this purpose. For example, if students were asked to interpret the meaning of a text orally, the function, or purpose for using language in this case is interpretation. Identifying the thinking involved in a task helps determine the language function students will need to share their thinking.

Functions of language are directly connected to language *forms*. The forms of language, also referred to as frames of language, are the structures used to fulfill a function. For example, the language function may be interpretation. Forms may include:

- I think this means \_\_\_\_\_.
- I understand this to mean \_\_\_\_\_.
- I infer that \_\_\_\_\_.
- Based on \_\_\_\_\_, I deduce \_\_\_\_\_.
- If I read between the lines, I think \_\_\_\_\_.

As thinking skills become more complex, so do the functions of language needed to express one’s thinking (Beltran, Mora-Flores, and Sarmiento 2013). We start to see a combination of simple functions of language to achieve more complex thinking. For example, interpreting is a higher-level thinking skill. It requires students to be able to comprehend and process the details of a text, think about multiple perspectives, deduce meaning, and ultimately provide their own interpretation of the information. The language function is just as complex. Students will need to use forms of language that describe, question, deduce, and infer in order to articulate an interpretation. The use of forms and functions of language in content-area instruction is strong. All content areas require students to process the information in different ways. Connecting language and forms and functions to the thinking around the content will develop academic language.

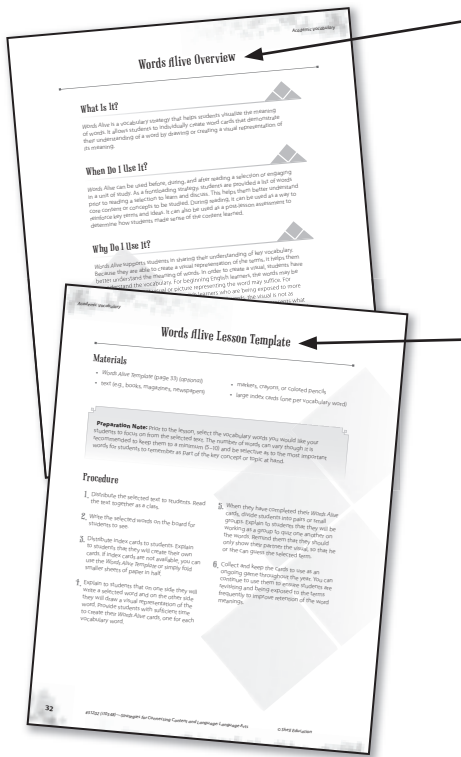
# How to Use This Book

The strategies in this resource were designed to support you as the content-area teacher to enhance language-development opportunities in your classroom. It provides strategies that support key elements for developing academic language across the curriculum, including academic vocabulary, comprehensible input, comprehensible output, listening and reading comprehension, and academic writing. Also included within each lesson are ideas for differentiation in your classroom. All students are academic-language learners. They continue to engage with and acquire language that supports their access to information and share their thinking of complex tasks and content.

The strategies were created to help you see how they can enhance your lessons in ways that make them language intentional and language rich. The purpose is to give you a range of ideas and strategies to use when delivering language arts content to students and for providing them with opportunities to share their thinking and learning. The strategies are a bridge connecting the language to the content, thus the strategies are full of oral- and written-language exchanges. Students will be talking, moving, and listening to one another, while capturing new ideas and language along the way. Approaching your language arts planning from a language perspective will help students access the information and develop academic language in preparation for meeting content standards. Students will learn content and develop language to enrich their overall learning experience.

This resource is one of a series of four that provides ideas for planning lessons across the four core content areas: English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Each notebook provides specific lessons that tailor the strategies to an intended grade range as well as a content-area standard and speaking and listening standard. Each strategy presented in this notebook uses language arts content to demonstrate how easily and effectively you can support students' academic language development.

# How to Use This Book (cont.)

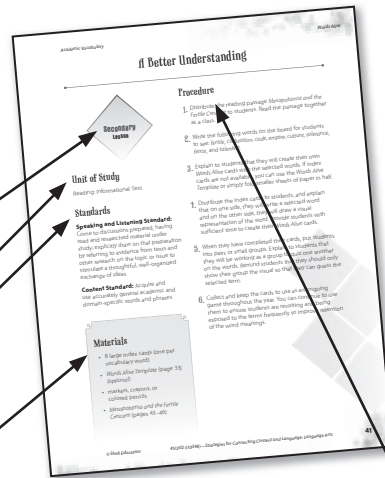


Each strategy begins with an **overview** page. This page explains the strategy and provides information about when and why to use it.

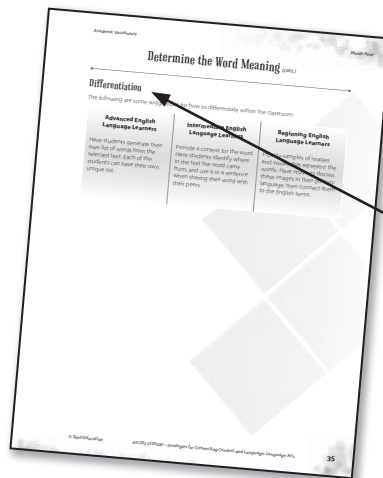
The **lesson template** provides a general outline of how to implement the strategy. This framework can be used to create lessons using other standards beyond what is provided in the model lessons.

For each strategy, a model lesson is provided for grades K-2, 3-5, and secondary. Each model lesson begins by identifying the intended **grade range**, suggested **unit of study**, and the appropriate **standards** addressed in the lesson. Each lesson includes both a speaking and listening standard, as well as a content standard.

The **materials** section lists the necessary supplies that should be gathered prior to delivering the lesson.



The **procedure** section provides a step-by-step plan to successfully conduct the lesson with students.



The **differentiation** section of the lesson provides suggestions for differentiating instruction based on students' language proficiency level.



# Comprehensible Input Strategies Overview

Academic language development happens every day, as students are constantly encountering language challenges. From one content area to the next, they are exposed to varied text filled with difficult vocabulary, unfamiliar concepts, and decontextualized language. We hear of the struggles English language learners face across the content areas as they feel overwhelmed with language and content. However, content instruction provides rich opportunities for English language learners to make connections and draw upon personal experiences to support their learning. It offers great opportunities to make instruction applicable and exciting.

Students need to understand the language to access content. This is thought of as *language input*—the messages “coming in.” To support students’ comprehension of language, we must bring content to life for English language learners. Too often we use language as the sole transmitter of information. We lecture at students and read to them. This provides students with a limited foundation from which to draw meaning. If they are at early stages of second-language acquisition, language alone may not be enough to support comprehension. Based on the work of Krashen and Terrell (1983), we understand that English language learners need comprehensible input for language acquisition to occur. The content presented

to students must be shared in a way that is meaningful. In addition, the input should be at a level slightly above students’ current level of proficiency ( $i + 1$ ). The  $i$  represents the language-development level students have reached; therefore, the input must be only slightly above that level in order to be understood, represented by the  $+ 1$ . Comprehensible input strategies help students comprehend content by presenting it through rich contexts that make the learning comprehensible. This implies that we are knowledgeable about where students are in their content knowledge and language acquisition in order to plan and implement lessons that are at an appropriate level.

The use of comprehensible input strategies supports us in our efforts to make language arts instruction comprehensible for English language learners. The common understanding among practitioners is that teaching content to English language learners is a challenge when they may not have the content vocabulary or prior knowledge to make meaning. Content instruction involves an ongoing meaning-making process, new information, and abstract concepts. Though it is a challenge, we must ensure that all students are provided access to all content instruction. Therefore, it is our job as teachers to make sure that students understand what it is that they are learning.

**Comprehensible input strategies help students comprehend content by presenting it through rich contexts that make the learning comprehensible.**

# Comprehensible Input Strategies Overview *(cont.)*

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The comprehensible input strategies in this section include:

- List-Group-Label
- Language Maps
- Challenge List
- Chunk and Chew
- 10–2 Lecture

# List-Group-Label Overview

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## What Is It?

*List-Group-Label* is a strategy that helps students classify and categorize their prior knowledge. Students are provided a topic or concept to think about and begin to generate prior knowledge about the given topic individually by *listing* what they already know. They then combine their ideas with their peers and begin to sort them in a way that makes sense to the group. This *pairing* of the ideas causes students to organize their thinking and engage in classifying and categorizing, by finally giving their sorted items a unifying *label*.

## When Do I Use It?

*List-Group-Label* is a great pre-assessment. Prior to beginning a unit of study, students can demonstrate what they already know about the content and how they have made sense of it through the sorting and categorizing of their ideas. As a mid-lesson strategy, teachers can assess what their students have learned to determine if reteaching will be needed or if students are ready to move on with more content within the unit. The strategy can also be used at the end of a unit of study to get a sense of what students recalled or retained from the unit.

## Why Do I Use It?

*List-Group-Label* helps students think through the content freely and the group pairing of ideas provides multiple perspectives and points of information. Students get to share their ideas with one another, then engage in an oral negotiation about how to best sort their ideas, and finally come to an agreement about what labels they will give their groups of ideas. This strategy provides students with rich oral discourse opportunities. The exchange of ideas and the act of negotiation involve complex academic language. In completing the strategy with peers, students feel safe trying out language and sharing their ideas.

# List-Group-Label Lesson Template

## Materials

- *List-Group-Label Template* (page 91)
- sticky notes (*optional*)
- informational text or image (*optional*)
- scissors (*optional*)

**Preparation Note:** Prior to the lesson/unit, select a broad key concept or topic for students to brainstorm. Broad topics are those that have a variety of subtopics or subcategories of information.

## Procedure

1. Distribute various sticky notes or the *List-Group-Label Template* to each student.
2. Share the key concept or topic with students. Have students write one idea or related fact on each sticky note or in each box of the *List-Group-Label Template*. If the template is being used, have students cut out each box that has an idea or fact written in it.
3. Divide students into groups of three or four. Have each group combine their ideas with their peers and begin to sort them in a way that makes sense to the group. Allow students sufficient time to organize their thinking and engage in classifying and categorizing their ideas.
4. Have students generate a label for each idea group they created.
5. Allow students time to share with another group to see how they organized their ideas.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## List-Group-Label Template

**Directions:** Write one idea or related fact in each box below. Then, cut out the boxes.

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

# Identifying Nouns

Grades  
K–2  
Lesson

## Unit of Study

Grammar (Parts of Speech)

## Standards

### Speaking and Listening Standard:

Build on others' talk in conversations by linking their comments to the remarks of others

**Content Standard:** Use adjectives and adverbs, and choose between them depending on what is to be modified

## Materials

- *List-Group-Label Template* (page 91)
- *Playground* (page 94)
- sticky notes (*optional*)
- scissors

## Procedure

1. Explain to students that an *adjective* is a word or phrase that names an attribute. In other words, adjectives are describing words. For example, *large*, *friendly*, and *grey* are all adjectives that could be used to describe a cat. Ask students to brainstorm any adjectives they can think of. Record student responses on the board.
2. Distribute the *List-Group-Label Template* (or a set of sticky notes if choosing not to use the template and *Playground* to each student. Tell students that they will write one adjective that describes the playground in each box on the activity sheet.
3. Have students cut out each box that has an idea written in it once they are finished brainstorming. Provide students sufficient time to examine the image and record their findings.
4. Divide students into groups of three or four. Have each group combine their ideas with their peers and begin to sort them in a way that makes sense to the group. Allow students sufficient time to organize their thinking and engage in classifying and categorizing their ideas.
5. Have students generate a label for each group they created. For example, *happy*, *friendly*, and *caring* could be ideas that can describe the people's *characteristics*.
6. Ask each group to share their results with the class.

# Identifying Nouns *(cont.)*

## Differentiation

The following are some suggestions for how to differentiate within the classroom:

### **Advanced English Language Learners**

Have students brainstorm more adjectives that may not be depicted in the image.

### **Intermediate English Language Learners**

Have students share their chart orally with a peer, explaining which ideas went within the different categories and why.

### **Beginning English Language Learners**

Have groups share their chart with the teacher or another group in their primary language before presenting to the class in order to reinforce the necessary vocabulary and allow students to practice.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Playground

**Directions:** Look at the picture. Think of as many adjectives as you can.





# What's the Main Idea?



## Secondary Lesson

## Unit of Study

Main Idea

## Standards

### Speaking and Listening Standard:

Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation

**Content Standard:** Determine a central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details

## Materials

- *List-Group-Label Template* (page 91)
- *Disease* (page 100)
- sticky notes (*optional*)
- scissors

## Procedure

1. Distribute the *Disease* passage to students. Read the passage together, and discuss any new findings. Record student responses on the board. Then, discuss what the main idea of the passage is.
2. Distribute the *List-Group-Label Template* (or a set of sticky notes if choosing not to use the template) to each student. Tell students to list as many facts from the passage that they can think of, one in each box of the template (or one per sticky note). For example, students may record the following: *Harmful microbes are called germs*. Provide students sufficient time to record their ideas.
3. Have students cut out each box that has an idea or fact written in it once they are finished brainstorming.
4. Divide students into groups of three or four. Have each group combine their ideas with their peers and begin to sort them in a way that makes sense to the group. Allow students sufficient time to organize their thinking and engage in classifying and categorizing their ideas, using their understanding of the main idea of the text to guide their thinking.
5. Have students generate a label for each group they created. For example, *harmful, can make you sick, and can enter body through nose or mouth* could be ideas that can describe the *characteristics of germs*.
6. Ask each group to share their results with the class.

# What's the Main Idea? *(cont.)*

## Differentiation

The following are some suggestions for how to differentiate within the classroom:

### **Advanced English Language Learners**

Have students individually brainstorm the two main ideas for the initial sort.

### **Intermediate English Language Learners**

Have students share their charts orally with a peer, explaining which ideas went within the different categories and why.

### **Beginning English Language Learners**

Have groups share their chart with the teacher or another group in their primary language before presenting to the class in order to reinforce the necessary vocabulary and allow students time to practice.

## Disease

We live in a world filled with microbes—microscopic creatures such as viruses, bacteria, and fungi. A spoonful of dirt contains billions of them. From your head to your toes, inside and out, you are home to trillions more of them. Most are harmless, and many are good—they help us digest our food, for example. However, some can make us sick. We call these harmful microbes germs.

### Lurking Germs

Germs enter our bodies through our noses, mouths, or other openings. They could also enter through a cut in our skin. A single sneeze can propel millions of germs into the air. Hands that cover a cough deposit germs on desks, doorknobs, and computer keyboards.

Diseases spread in many ways. We can become ill from germs in food that hasn't been handled or cooked properly. Water can be contaminated with germs—such as protozoa—especially in poor countries without sanitation facilities.

If germs surround us, why aren't we always sick? Most of the time, our bodies fight off germs. At times when you haven't been getting enough sleep or eating right, your resistance—your ability to fight off illness—decreases. Then it becomes easier for germs to mount a sneak attack.

### Germs Target Children

Kids, especially little kids, get sick more often than adults. One reason is that they don't keep their hands as clean as grownups do. Also, their bodies have not yet mastered the art of recognizing and fending off germs.

The human immune system has the job of fighting germs. As we grow older, this system improves in quickly recognizing and fighting infection. This helps us to become immune to many of the germs that made us sick as children.