

A Quick Toolkit for Enhancing Academic Language in Physical Education

Academic Language?



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Purpose

The purpose of this toolkit is to define what academic language in physical education is, why it's important, and how it can be implemented. The toolkit provides clarifications and examples of language components such as the discipline-specific **vocabulary**, language **function**, **syntax** and **discourse**. A sequential example of how an academic language objective would look in a physical education learning segment, how the teacher can promote this academic language objective and how it can be assessed is provided. Moreover, we propose strategies, tools and tips that can enhance the development of all language components for academic language proficiency.

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What is Academic Language?

Academic language is defined as the language of academia. It differs significantly from informal spoken language used outside the classroom, as it is more formal, complex and sophisticated. Each discipline has its own specialized vocabulary and language function. Syntax, discourse and other general academic vocabulary that cuts across all disciplines are also important parts of academic language.

Students must acquire sufficient knowledge of general academic language to decipher the meanings of a word and how it is used in various settings and disciplines.

For example, the word "court" has a different meaning when used in a physical education context than when used in the discipline of law. Similarly, the word "flexibility" has a different meaning when it is used in physical education rather than in a business setting.

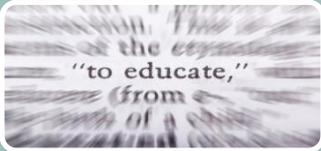
Why is Academic Language Important?

Academic language is pivotal for academic and professional success. It is used in writing, testing, classroom instruction and associated professional settings. It is the means of communicating complex concepts and conveying knowledge in each particular discipline.



Language Components

Vocabulary, Language Function, Syntax, and Discourse are the components of academic language. All four components must be equally developed and individually addressed. Each language component is defined below



Vocabulary

- Specialized words associated with the discipline



Language Function

- Contrast, describe, signal, evaluate, sequence, etc.



Syntax

- Sentence structure (compound, complex), sentence length, transitions, verb tenses, active vs passive voice, etc.



Discourse

- Speaking and Writing - instructing, describing, explaining, questioning, analyzing, evaluating, speculating, hypothesizing, socializing, etc.

It's More Than Just Vocabulary

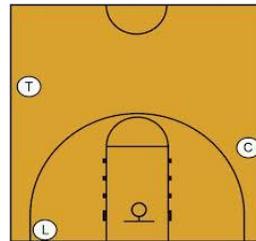
Discipline-specific language includes more than just vocabulary. It includes symbols, key phrases, and signals used in the discipline to construct and communicate knowledge within the discipline. Here is how it applies in physical education.

Vocabulary

- Motor Skill
- Sport & Games
- Body

Symbols

- Lesson plans
- Activity diagrams
- Games strategy diagrams



Key Phrases

- V-cut
- Player-to- player defense
- Zone-defense
- Pass and move
- Indirect free kick
- Throw-in
- Offside

Signals



Vocabulary

This is a discipline specific vocabulary for physical education. This is not a complete list but rather some examples.

Motor Skills

- **Motor Skills:** Gallop, skip, jump, slide, hop, catch, throw, etc.
- **Movement Concepts:** space awareness, personal space, etc.
- **Perceptual-Motor Skills:** Eye-hand coordination, eye-foot coordination, etc.

Sport & Games

- **Volleyball:** overhead pass, underhand pass, serve, spike, etc.
- **Basketball:** lay-up, chest pass, bounce pass, free throw, player-to-player defense, zone defense, etc.
- **Soccer:** goalie, center, defense, offensive player, striker, long pass, short pass, dribble, corner kick, offside ,etc.

Fitness & Conditioning

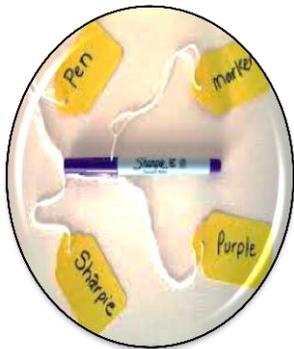
- **Health-related Fitness:** Flexibility, muscular strength and endurance, body composition
- **Skill-related Fitness:** agility, power, reaction time
- **Exercise terms:** anaerobic exercise, aerobic exercise, flex, fit, stretch, reps, set, etc.

Body

- **Bones:** scapula, clavical, sternum, radius , ulna, etc.
- **Muscles:** biceps, brachialis, brachilradialis, deltoid, etc
- **Tendon:** Achilles tendon, etc.
- **Joints:** elbow joint, wrist joint, hip joints, knee joints ,etc.

Language Function

Language function is the component of the language that renders the purpose of using the language. For example, language is used in physical education for the purpose of describing a game strategy or interpreting a referee signal. The cue words listed underneath each language function (Describe, Analyze, Interpret, Contrast, Sequence, and Signal) can be used to further guide understanding of the specific language function.



Describe

- In other words
- That is to say
- According to
- Specifically
- What
- Who
- Why
- How



Analyze

- Dissect
- Investigate
- Determine
- Scrutinize
- Examine
- Break down



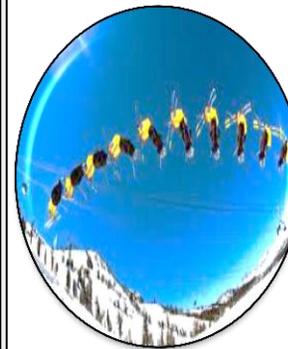
Interpret

- Estimate
- Believe
- Due to
- Since
- In light of
- Conclude that
- Guess
- Speculate



Contrast

- On the other hand
- Despite
- Nevertheless
- Rather
- Still
- On the contrary
- Likewise
- However
- Contrary to

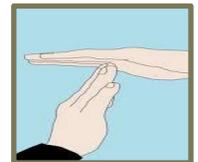


Sequence

- Simultaneously
- Subsequently
- At which point
- At this time



Signal

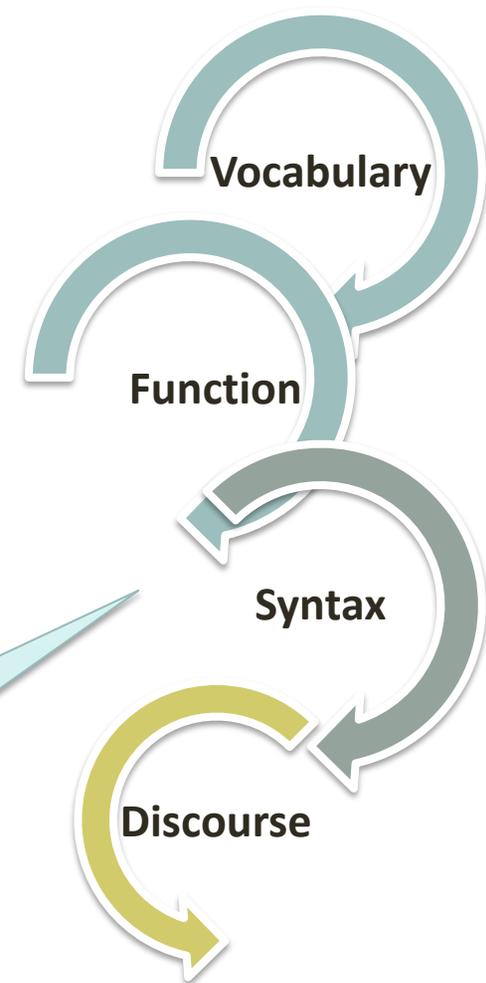


Syntax & Discourse

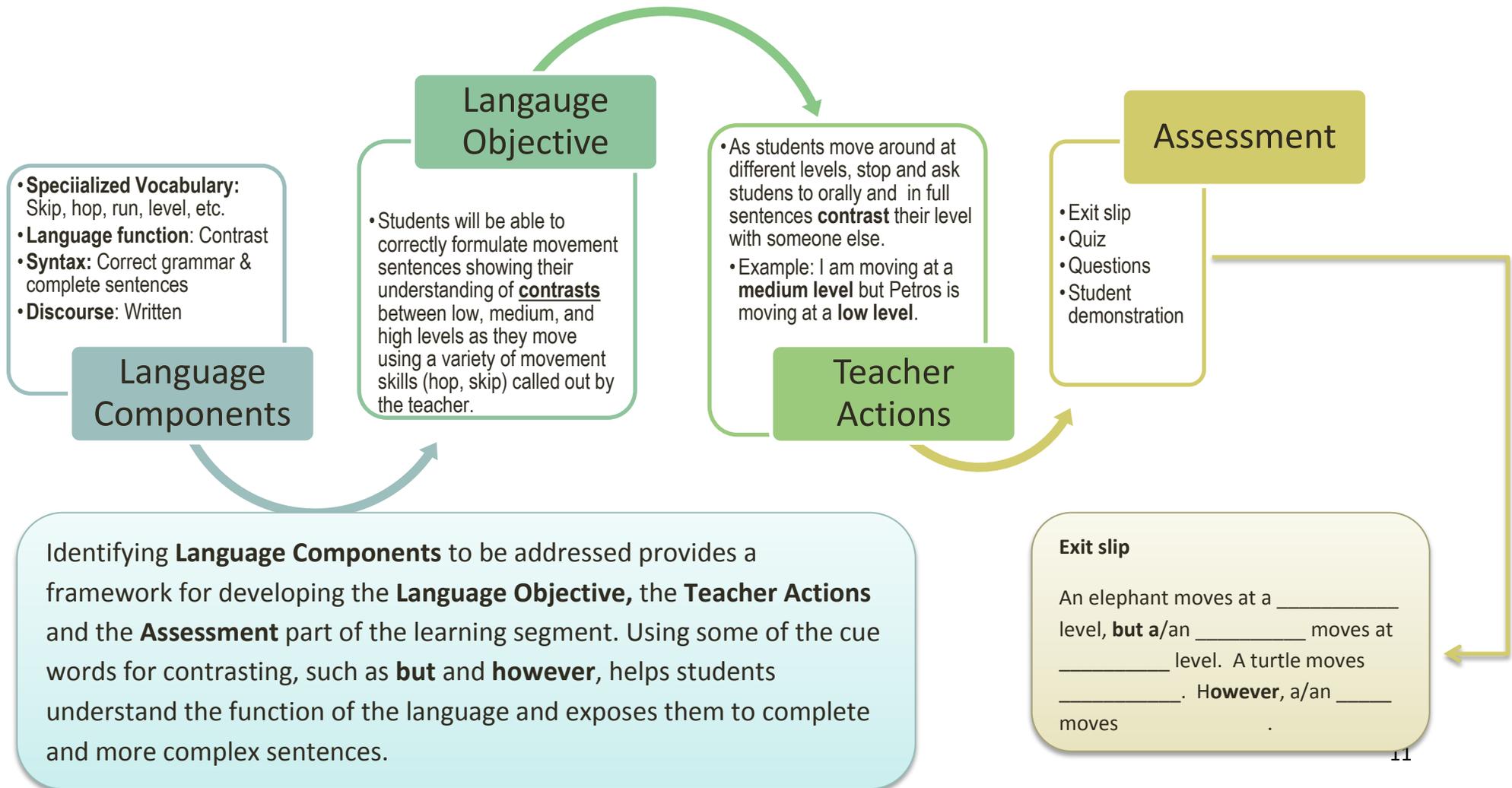
Syntax focuses on the technical part of the language, including grammar, punctuation, verb tenses, use of the passive or active voice, and transition words.

Discourse involves the mode of communication, whether it is verbal or nonverbal, oral or written.

All of these language components
must come together seamlessly



Academic Language Objective and Its Implementation



Connecting the Steps

Students will be able to correctly formulate movement **sentences** showing their understanding of **contrasts** between low, medium, and high **levels** as they move using a variety of movement skills (**skip, hop**) called out by the teacher.

Language Components

Language function: **Contrast** (Cue words: **but, however**)

Syntax: **Correct grammar & complete Sentences**

Discourse: **Written exit slip**

Specialized vocabulary: **skip, hop, run, level, etc.**

Assessment – Written Exit Slip

An elephant moves at a _____ level, **but** a/an _____ moves at **-a** _____ level. A turtle moves _____. **However**, a/an _____ moves _____.

This shows how the language components are reflected in the objective and tied into the assessment.

Tools and Opportunities for Promoting Academic Language

Graphic organizers and other **tools** can greatly assist the teacher in incorporating academic language into physical education. Other opportunities can be presented during **homework**, **end of the class** period, and during **assessment** time. Examples of various tools are presented on the next few pages.

Tools

- Graphic organizers
- Venn diagram
- Word quilt
- Word walls
- Bulletin boards

Assessment

- Exit slips
- Test
- Quizzes
- Write/discuss activity/game strategies

Homework

- Research projects
- Reflective journals
- Compare and contrast activities/sports

End of class

- Discussion
- Summaries



Venn Diagram Tool

Here is an example of a graphic organizer that can be used to help students understand the purpose of language function when contrasting. Other types of graphic organizers might be more appropriate for the purpose of sequencing or describing.



Tennis

- Court is larger
- Ball
- Racket head larger
- Loses a stroke, opponent receives a point
- Wrist action – firm
- Etc.

Commonalities

- Played indoors and outdoors
- An object is hit
- Begins with service
- Serves diagonally
- Etc.

Badminton

- Court is smaller
- Birdie
- Racket handle longer
- Loses a stroke, service passes to opponent
- Wrist action – snap
- Etc.

Word Quilt Tool

The word quilt tool can be used to promote Syntax and Vocabulary. Post it on the gymnasium wall and have students contribute to it. They can **translate**, **define** a vocabulary word, or use the vocabulary word in a **sentence**.

List the
vocabulary
being taught



Translate the
vocabulary into
a different
language



Define using a
picture or in
writing



Use the word
in a **sentence**

Pass



περασμα
(Greek)



To move the ball/object
from one person to
another

Petros passed
me the ball and I
was able to
score.

Strategies for Promoting Academic Language at the Elementary Level

Teacher's Strategies



Add an academic language objective, e.g., say it, post it on the wall , reinforce it

Add specialized vocabulary , e.g., gallop, slide, jump, level, personal space, pathway, etc.

Spell the warm-up activities, e.g., g-a-l-l-o-p and then have the students figure out the word and perform it

Adapt a concept or a general academic word for the day, e.g., heavier or lighter

Adapt a language function for the day, e.g., contrast or describe. "Describe the pathway you took across the gym."

Students' Response



To be aware of the academic language focus and recognize its use during class

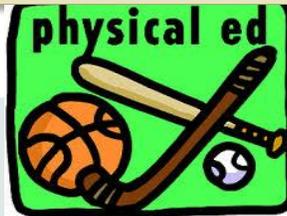
Repeat and say out loud the words of the day and move around correctly

Understand /figure out the word, attempt to perform it - after figuring out "gallop" the students gallop

Say the words, use them in a sentence, e.g., a "A nerf ball is lighter than the basketball."

" I moved in a zig-zag pathway across the gym."

Strategies for Promoting Academic Language at the Middle and Secondary Levels



Teacher's Strategies

Be explicit about discipline specific vocabulary --e.g., lay-up/corner kick

Model the use general academic vocabulary --e.g., progress/ advantage-- and encourage students to do the same when communicating with peers

Provide opportunities for language function -- e.g., sequence / analyze. Incorporate problem-solving situations for students to use language skills

Use/ provide cue words sequencing --e.g., Simultaneously/ Subsequently-- to guide the process

Adapt a language function for the day, e.g., contrast. "Contrast the strategies used in badminton with those used in tennis to move an opponent around the court."

Students' Responses

Write/communicate using discipline specific language in whole sentences

Work with partners, share ideas individually /small groups/whole class using the focus vocabulary in complete sentences

Work individually or cooperatively to solve problems or develop game strategies

Use the cue words during oral or written assessment

" In badminton I _____ whereas in tennis I _____ to move an opponent around the court."

Tips for Promoting Academic Language

Use academic language yourself

Expect / hold students accountable for using academic language

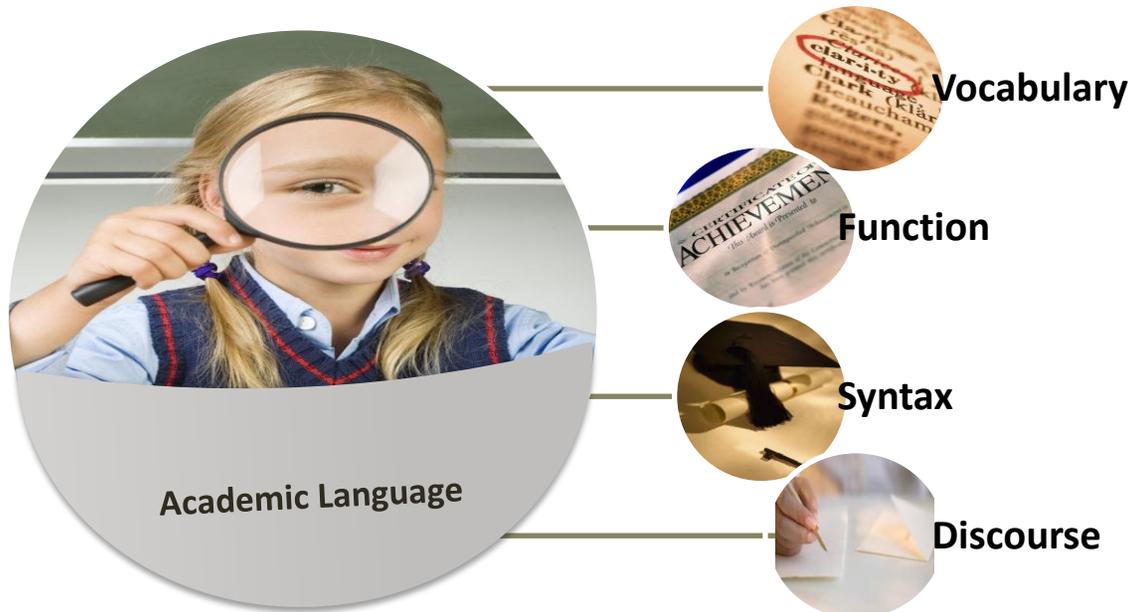
Check for understanding

Use technology and visual aids

Be positive & embrace academic language



Final Thoughts



Incorporating academic language in physical education may seem challenging at first. In many cases, these challenges can be met by making what we are already doing more transparent to students. Having an explicit academic language objective planned into the teaching segment informs and guides teacher's as well as students' actions. Graphic organizers, word quilts and other visual aids can make this task easier for the teacher and enjoyable for the students. Simple strategies, such as integrating vocal spelling and specialized vocabulary in the warm-up activities, can greatly enrich the learning experience for all students.

Dedicating a few minutes for written or oral assessment gives students an opportunity to practice academic language skills, and helps teachers identify areas for improvement. We, as physical educators, need to embrace academic language and help students acquire the discipline-specific academic language that will contribute to their academic and professional success.

References and Resources

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Other Resources

Cool Tools for 21st Century Learners. Ideas for efficient and Effective Teach integration, created by Susan Oxnevad:

<http://d97cooltools.blogspot.com/2012/09/commoncoreunpackingacademicvocabulary.html#.UrRu5dJDuSp>

Padlet: <http://blog.padlet.com/2013/02/a-new-beginning.html>

Vocabulary Tools to support Common Core <http://www.mentormob.com/learn/i/vocabular-tools-to-support-the-common-core/instagrok-2>

YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DgFjDdM4djl>