

Understanding Academic Language in edTPA: Supporting Learning Language Development

Academic language (AL) is the oral and written language used for academic purposes. AL is the "language of the discipline" used to engage students in learning and includes the means by which students develop and express content understandings.

When completing their edTPA, candidates must consider the AL (i.e., **language demands**) present throughout the learning segment in order to support student learning and language development. The language demands in Physical Education include **function, vocabulary, discourse, and syntax**.

As stated in the edTPA handbook:

- Candidates identify a key *language function* and one essential learning task within their learning segment lesson plans that allows students to practice the function (Planning Task 1, Prompts 4a/b).
- Candidates are then asked to identify *vocabulary and one additional language demand* related to the language function and learning task (Planning Task 1, Prompt 4c).
- Finally, candidates must identify and describe the *instructional and/or language supports* they have planned to address the language demands (Planning Task 1, Prompt 4d). *Language supports* are scaffolds, representations, and instructional strategies that teachers intentionally provide to help learners understand and use the language they need to learn within disciplines.

This AL handout provides definitions and a few examples of language demands and supports to help teacher candidates and educator preparation programs understand edTPA Rubrics 4 and 14. See the edTPA Physical Education Assessment Handbook glossary and the Understanding Rubric Level Progressions for Physical Education for additional examples.

A Few Notes about Discourse and Syntax

It is important to realize that not all learning tasks focus on **both** discourse and syntax. As candidates decide which additional language demands (i.e., syntax and/or discourse) are relevant to their identified function, they should examine the language understandings and use that are **most relevant** to the learning task they have chosen. Then, teacher candidates should plan to provide appropriate and targeted language supports for students to learn and practice the language demands within the chosen learning task.

Language Demands

I. Functions

Definition	Examples (bolded and underlined within learning objectives)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purposes for which language is used • Content and language focus of learning tasks often represented by the active verbs within the learning outcomes 	<p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will be able to <u>compare</u> a forehand and backhand shot in tennis. • Students will be able to <u>explain</u> when a penalty kick in soccer takes place. • Students will be able to <u>describe</u> the steps in throwing a ball. • Students will be able to <u>evaluate</u> the accuracy of the body position during yoga movements.

II. Vocabulary—Includes words, phrases, and symbols used within disciplines

Definition	Examples
Words and phrases with subject-specific meanings that differ from meanings used in everyday life	opposition, force, balance
General academic vocabulary used across disciplines	compare, analyze, evaluate
Subject-specific words and/or symbols defined for use in the discipline	locomotor skills, axial skills, manipulative skills, affective domain

III. Discourse

Definition	Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How members of the discipline talk, write, and participate in knowledge construction, using the structures of written and oral language • Discipline-specific discourse has distinctive features or ways of structuring oral or written language (text structures) or representing knowledge visually. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluating the performance of a sport or dance for particular skills, elements, or structures (e.g., volleyball, basketball, square dancing, tennis, yoga) • Interpreting graphic representations (e.g., graphs, diagrams) • Describing or summarizing informative texts (visual/performative and/or written)

IV. Syntax

Definition	Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The rules for organizing words or symbols together into phrases, clauses, sentences, or visual representations One of the main functions of syntax is to organize language in order to convey meaning. 	<p>Phrases using symbols</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Xs, Os, and arrows to indicate play positions and movement <p>Sets of repetitions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 X 15 meaning 3 sets of repetitions of an exercise 15 times <p>Cues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sequence of phrases serving as cues to guide proper performance of a movement

Example of Planned Language Supports

To help programs and candidates begin to develop their understanding of language supports, **start by examining a key standard or learning objective.**

The chart below identifies sample language demands with related examples of supports based on one selected learning objective in physical education.

Example learning objective: Students will *explain* an offensive strategy using a diagram of a play with *player positions* and movement represented by Xs, Os, and arrows.

Identified Language Demands	Planned Language Supports
Explain (Function)	Model an explanation of the strategy, pointing out key elements of the explanation
Player positions (Vocabulary)	Review a handout with the names, positions, and roles of players to prepare students to understand their function within a game play
Diagram of a play (Syntax)	Model how to diagram a play with Xs, Os, and arrows