

# Building Academic Language

through **Content-Area Text**

**Authors**

*Erica R. Bowers, Ed.D.*

*Laura E. Keisler, Ed.D.*

**Contributing Author**

*Shanan Fitts, Ph.D.*



**SHELL EDUCATION**

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# Research

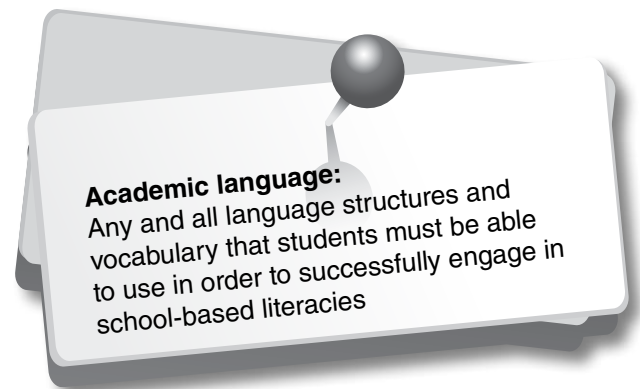
Academic language has become one of the hot topics in education over the past few years. When considering the tremendous increase in the number of English language learners in our classrooms, the role of academic language takes on even greater importance. The future of successfully educating English language learners will require teachers to support language acquisition every day in every classroom and during every lesson. By looking through the lens of academic language, we can design instruction that considers the language demands placed on English language learners and develop strategies that support language development in every area of learning, especially in the content areas. The goal of this book is to share those strategies and give you a road map for how to put them into action in your classroom.

## What Is Academic Language?

Finding a clear, concise, common definition of the term *academic language* can prove elusive. Below are sample definitions found in literature:

- Academic language is “a variety or a register of English used in professional books and characterized by the specific linguistic features associated with academic disciplines” (Scarcella 2003, 19).
- “The difference between the ‘everyday’ and the ‘specialist’ lexis [words] is a major way that language of academic texts differs from the ordinary interactional language of daily life” (Schleppegrell 2004, 52).
- Academic language is language used to “access and engage with the school curriculum” (Bailey and Heritage 2008).

After spending much time researching, talking with educators, and seeing teachers use academic language strategies in the classroom, we have created the following definition:



Academic language includes:

- both general and specific syntax and sentence structures.
- both general vocabulary and vocabulary specific to content areas.

By *success in school-based literacies*, we refer to:

- student literacy as it relates to specific content areas (e.g., mathematics, social studies, science).
- student literacy as it relates to literacy as a social construct (e.g., how well a student can negotiate the nuances of the cultures and values underlying the dominant language of school, in this case English).

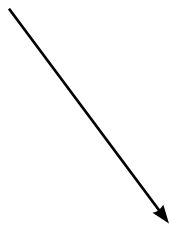
# How to Use This Book

*Building Academic Language through Content-Area Text: Strategies to Support English Language Learners* shows teachers how to plan content-area lessons in order to support the development of academic language.

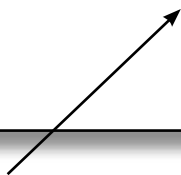
This book is designed around a practical planning template that will help teachers plan effective content-area lessons that support academic language. There are four main sections: Planning for Explicit Teaching, Schema and Vocabulary Building, Comprehensible Input, and Opportunities for Practice.

## Planning for Explicit Teaching

This section guides teachers in analyzing any content-area text for key vocabulary and unfamiliar language.



Planning for Explicit Teaching			
Vocabulary			Language
Specialized Content:	General Academic:	Everyday:	Features:  Functions:
Strategies			
Schema and Vocabulary Building:	Comprehensible Input:	Opportunities for Practice:	



## Schema and Vocabulary Building

This section provides teachers with the strategies they need to help increase students' understanding and retention of content by connecting the new content to pre-existing or prior knowledge.



## Comprehensible Input

This section offers strategies for breaking down the delivery of input (information) in smaller, more manageable chunks for students to be able to easily understand the content.



## Opportunities for Practice

This section features several active participation strategies that will help guide students in practicing the language skills they are learning.

# How to Use This Book *(cont.)*

Each of the four main sections (Planning for Explicit Teaching, Schema and Vocabulary Building, Comprehensible Input, and Opportunities for Practice) includes strategies that implement the latest research in effective

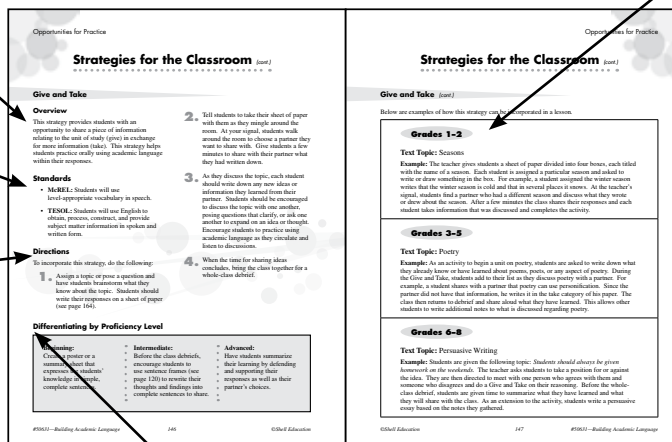
academic language instruction along with examples specific to language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies that represent real classroom applications.

The **Overview** gives a quick summary of the strategy.

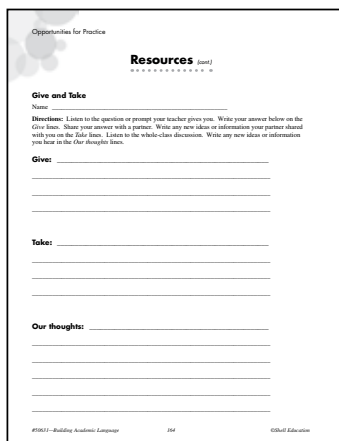
**McREL and TESOL Standards** are listed for each strategy.

**Directions** are provided for each activity to let you know exactly how the strategy should flow.

Each strategy has three grade span examples that show how the strategy can be integrated into a content-area lesson to build both content knowledge and academic language.



Each strategy includes a **Differentiating by Proficiency Level** section that provides suggestions for meeting the needs of students at the beginning, intermediate, and advanced language proficiency levels. Additionally, see pages 12–13 for proficiency levels at a quick glance.



Some strategies have reproducible pages that can be found in the resource section of the indicated section. They are also provided on the Teacher Resource CD.

# Strategies for the Classroom *(cont.)*

## Clock Appointments

### Overview

This strategy is an impromptu activity that allows students to set appointments and share answers to questions or prompts the teacher presents to them. Effective use of this strategy allows students the opportunity to use academic language with various classmates.

### Standards

- **McREL:** Students will use level-appropriate vocabulary in speech.
- **TESOL:** Students will use English to obtain, process, construct, and provide subject matter information in spoken and written form.

### Directions

To incorporate this strategy, do the following:

1. Prior to the lesson, make copies of page 165 for each student.

2. Distribute copies of the clock to students and explain that the numbers 12, 3, 6, and 9 designate the four appointments students will have to set.

3. Allow students five minutes to mingle. While students mingle, they must make four appointments. Each appointment must be recorded on the clock next to the agreed-upon time. It is very important that each student making an appointment record it on his or her clock to avoid “double-booking.”

4. Once each student has set all four appointments, ask them to return to their desks. At various points throughout the lesson or throughout the day, tell students to meet with one of their appointments to discuss a prompt or question.

## Differentiating by Proficiency Level

### Beginning:

Have students schedule the first two appointments with the teacher. During these appointments, practice the questions or prompts with students. Front-loading students with questions offers students the opportunity to practice the language.

### Intermediate:

- Give students the questions ahead of time and give them a few moments to jot down some of their thoughts for each question. When it is time for students to partner with peers, students will already have had some time to think about how they are going to respond.

### Advanced:

- Provide students with sentence frames (see page 120) appropriate to the prompts they will discuss in order to help them practice their use of academic language.

# Resources (cont.)

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## Clock Appointments

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Find four classmates and put their names on the lines below. Listen to your teacher to find out when to meet with your appointments.

