

6-12 Academic Language Course Companion

Literacy Academy on Demand

The Course Companion is designed to allow participants to capture notes, reflections and action steps as they work through a course. Additionally, the Course Companion contains a list of all extra resources listed in the course. Each section of the Course Companion is linked to a corresponding section of the course.

Consider this Scenario:

Eighth grade math teacher Mr. Ramirez noticed that students were struggling to discuss the concepts in his geometry unit because they did not have a firm hold on the terms and vocabulary for the lessons. Students also struggled to comprehend the story problems and tasks they were assigned. In conversations with other teachers on the 8th grade team, Mr. Ramirez realized that this was not an issue unique to math class. The students were having difficulty with understanding new discipline-specific concepts, words and texts in all subject-area classes.

Q: Can you relate to the above scenario? In what ways are your challenges in literacy instruction similar or different?

What is Academic Language?

“Academic language is the specialized language, both oral and written, or academic settings that facilitates communication and thinking about disciplinary content” (Nagy & Townsend, 2012, p. 92).

Informal Language	Academic Language
Repetition of words	Variety of words, more sophisticated vocabulary
Sentences starting with “and” or “but”	Sentences start with transition words
Use of slang such as “dude”, “whatever”, and “like”	Replaces slang with accurate descriptors
Appropriate for use in casual, social settings	Appropriate for use in all academic and workplace settings
Can vary greatly by ethnicity, region, gender and age	Common language register for all

Dr. Diana Townsend Video: Academic Language

Notes:

Resources:

Review the Reading Rockets article by Flynt and Brozo, [Developing Academic Language: Got Words?](#), for more information on academic language in the classroom.

Article notes:

What practical advice from this article can you incorporate into your practice?

Course Reflection:

On your own or with colleagues, review a small set of central texts, problems, videos, or other classroom documents for a content area. Identify common connectives within the texts. A list of common connectives is provided in this [viewing guide](#). Take a few minutes to consider some instructional routines you can implement, such as those presented in the video, that will allow for students' meaningful practice with those connectives.

The following resources are listed in the course:

- View a [video example](#) of teacher Lili Velo as she explains the value of academic language and uses a tool to support the use of transitions in writing for history in her sheltered instruction environment classroom for English learners.
- E. Sutton Flynt and William G. Brozo highlight the importance of academic language and some strategies for developing it in [Developing Academic Language: Got Words?](#)
- Dr. Dianna Townsend researches the best practices in incorporating vocabulary instruction in the content areas: [Who's Using the Language? Supporting Middle School Students with Content Area Academic Language](#).
- Learn from [Dr. Paulo Uccelli](#) as she compares academic language with everyday language.