Understanding Academic Language in edTPA:
Supporting Learning and 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 *Visual Arts* include: **function, vocabulary/key phrases, 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 (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 (Task 1 – Prompt 4c).
- Finally, candidates must identify and describe the *instructional and/or language supports* they have planned to address the language demands (Task 1 - 4d). *Language supports* are scaffolds, representations, and instructional strategies 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 Handbook glossary and the Understanding Rubric Level Progressions for Visual Arts 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)**
- Purposes for which language is used. - Content and language focus of learning tasks often represented by the **active verbs within the learning outcomes**.	- Learning Objective: - Students will be able to **compare** two works of art from a similar genre. - Students will be able to **explain** the context for a work of art/design. - Students will be able to **evaluate** the extent to which elements work together to create an impact or convey an intended message.

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	elements, value, shade
General academic vocabulary used across disciplines	compare, analyze, evaluate, describe
Subject-specific words and/or symbols defined for use in the discipline	sculpture, texture, artist statement, creative expression

III. Discourse	
Definition	**Examples**
- 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.	- Writing artist statements - Developing critiques of works of art - Selecting and arranging artwork for group display - Creating works of art using techniques/style of artistic genres as a means of expression

IV. Syntax	
Definition	**Examples**
- 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.	**Comparative responses:** - Ex: The illustrations in The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle are _____ but the illustrations in Busy Town by Richard Scarry are _____. **Essay and Critique Writing** - Thesis statements - Topic sentence - Claims - Citations

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 visual arts.

Example learning objective: Students will *interpret the work of two artists from related genres to compare and contrast their intent and meaning in painting landscapes.*

Identified Language Demands	Planned Language Supports
Interpret (Function)	Modeling how to interpret the two works of art by using a Venn Diagram
Compare, Contrast, Line, Color, Shape, Pattern (Vocabulary)	Review vocabulary and word chart
Art Genres (Discourse)	Discuss and list elements of each artist's genre