
Introduction

If only they understood the question, they could answer it. They know the content; they just don't know enough English.

Teaching Your Secondary English Language Learners the Academic Language of Tests was written in response to remarks such as this one. The purpose of this manual is twofold: to provide evidence-based, teacher-friendly lesson plans that will help English language learners deal with unfamiliar language features on standardized test questions, and to support English language arts teachers in providing instruction for content-specific language skills. This manual is geared toward secondary students in grades 6–12.

Each lesson plan provides background information for the teacher, implications for high-stakes testing, a list of materials, academic vocabulary, activities, and in many cases, graphic organizers. Some of the lesson plans support learning the language needed to gain the content knowledge for high-stakes tests. Other lessons deal specifically with the language of the test and support targeted instruction on test items. The teaching strategies included in this book are varied and differentiated in order to meet the different needs of English language learners.

The appendix contains a list of academic language vocabulary compiled from a review of grades 9–11 assessments. These words are the academic English of literature, reading, writing, viewing, and representing, and the process/function vocabulary of test questions. The term *academic English* is based on Jim Cummins's theory of language proficiency, which states that there is a distinction between conversational and academic language (Cummins, 1983).

This manual draws from what the U.S. Department of Education calls professional wisdom: “the judgment that individuals acquire through experience” (Whitehurst, 2002). The foundation of solid professional wisdom can provide valuable insights into effective practice. We present this manual in the hope that it will support and assist teachers as they work to instruct the English language learners in their classrooms.

Chapter 1

Teaching the Language of the Reading-Objective Questions

Comparatives and Superlatives

The use of superlatives, especially irregular superlatives such as the word *best*, may be a source of confusion for English language learners. It is important to teach superlatives by first introducing the concept of comparatives. Using role-playing and board games when introducing comparatives and superlatives motivates students to learn and encourages them to practice the skill orally, which aids retention.

Implications for High-Stakes Testing

The grammatical structure of objective questions on the reading portion of standardized tests often includes the use of the irregular superlative word *best*. The test questions require students to determine the best answer to the question. If they do not understand the concept of superlatives, students are unable to choose the correct response.

Lesson Plan for Teaching Comparatives and Superlatives

Materials

- Transparency of “Best” Reading Questions handout (page 23)
- Blank paper, one sheet per student
- Copies of reading portion from a standardized test, one per pair or group
- Highlighters, one per pair or group

Most Common Word Parts in Printed School English

Root	Meaning	Origin	Examples
aud	hear	Latin	audiophile, auditorium, audition
astro	star	Greek	astrology, astronaut, astronomy
bio	life	Greek	biography, biology
dict	speak, tell	Latin	dictate, predict, dictator
geo	earth	Greek	geology, geography
meter	measure	Greek	thermometer, barometer
min	little, small	Latin	minimum, minimal
mit, mis	send	Latin	mission, transmit, remit, missile
ped	foot	Latin	pedestrian, pedal, pedestal
phon	sound	Greek	phonograph, microphone, phoneme
port	carry	Latin	transport, portable, import
scrib, script	write	Latin	scribble, manuscript, inscription
spect	see	Latin	inspect, spectator, respect
struct	build, form	Latin	construction, destruction, instruct

Word Parts Activity

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Why is a *microscope* called a microscope?
2. How does a *microscope* differ from a *telescope*?
3. How does a *telephone* differ from a *telegram*?
4. What is the purpose of *antifreeze* in an automobile engine?
5. What happens if something *malfunctions*?
6. What is the difference between a *postdated* check and an *antedated* check?
7. If *a-* means without, what does *apolitical* mean?
8. If *biology* is the study of life, what is *anthropology*?
9. What is *astrology*?
10. What is a *philanthropist*?
11. What word means the study of animals?
12. If *geo-* means earth, what does *geology* mean?
13. If you have an *auditory* problem, what kind of problem do you have?
14. What do the word parts in *democracy* mean?
15. If you *contradict* someone's hypothesis, what are you doing?
16. Would you like to be called a *bibliophile*? Why or why not?
17. If you did not know what *manufacture* means, how could you figure it out?
18. If *credible* means believable, what does *incredible* mean?
19. What root do *pedal* and *pedestrian* have in common, and what does it mean?
20. When you give *credence* to someone's story, what are you doing?
21. If *tri-* means three, what is a *tripod*?

Reading Question Stem Cards (continued)

Figurative Language and Symbols

- Which of the following lines uses metaphor to create a _____ effect?
- The _____ in paragraph ____ is a metaphor for _____.
- When the author says _____, he/she suggests that _____.
- In paragraph ____, the author uses the simile “_____” to _____.
- In paragraph ____, the author uses figurative language to describe _____.
- In paragraph ____, the author uses sensory images to describe _____.
- The _____ in paragraph ____ symbolizes _____.
- What does _____ symbolize?
- Why does [character] respond with figurative language in paragraph _____?
- In paragraph _____, why does (or doesn't) the author show _____ finishing his/her sentence?
- Why does the author use exclamation points in paragraphs ____ through _____?
- In paragraph ____, why does (or doesn't) the author show _____?
- Why does the author respond with figurative language in paragraph _____?

Inferential Thinking

- Paragraph ____ allows the reader to infer that _____.
- Paragraph ____ supports the inference that _____.
- What conclusion can be drawn from paragraph _____?
- Which quotation from paragraph ____ best supports the generalization that ____?
- In paragraph ____, [character] most likely feels insulted because _____.
- What kind of generalizations can be made about _____?
- What may have been the author's reason for writing this selection?
- By the end of the selection, [character] becomes a stronger person because of ____.
- What is the significance of _____?
- From the tone in the first paragraph, the reader can tell that _____.
- The reader can conclude that a primary purpose of the title of selection is to ____.
- What tone does the author establish in paragraph ____?
- The tone of paragraph ____ is _____.
- The reader can conclude _____.

continued