Use Academic Language

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

• Learn to use academic language in a research report.
• Practice using academic language in informational writing.
• Discuss how they can apply this strategy to their independent writing.

Preparation

Materials Needed

• Chart paper and markers
• Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the modeling text and practice text onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson. If necessary, copy the sentence frames from “Strategies to Support ELs” onto chart paper.

1. Focus

Explain Using Academic Language

Say: When I write a research report, I include accurate information and details about my topic. Sometimes, I have to use challenging words that relate specifically to my subject matter. This is a form of academic language, which is sometimes called content-area language. For example, if I am writing a report about the American Revolution, I might need to use words such as citizen, declaration, independence, loyalist, and patriot. These words might be unfamiliar to people who have not studied the topic, but they would hopefully be clear enough to understand. They show that the report writer has sophisticated knowledge of the topic and can use words that are specific to it. Today I will show you how to use academic language in your research reports.

Model How Writers Use Academic Language

Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Ask students to listen for academic language as you read aloud the passage from “A Highway for the Ages.”

Ivory, metalwork, horses, and more came from Europe and the Middle East. Tea, paper, and ceramics came from the East. Spices, furs, jade, gold, and silver came from both directions to be traded. By far the most important commodity was silk. It was so precious that it became the main form of currency.

Modeling Text

Say: The report describes the history of the trading route known as the Silk Road. In this paragraph, the writer lists many things that were traded along the route. Words such as horses and spices are very familiar, but there are other words, such as ivory, metalwork, ceramics, and jade, that may require slightly more knowledge about objects that are typically traded. The writer also includes words such as commodity (which refers to items that are frequently traded) and currency (which refers to forms of money) that are important to the topic of trade in general. The writer could have just summed up this paragraph by saying that people “traded many things along the Silk Road,” but instead she has chosen to use academic language to be more precise and sophisticated in her discussion of the topic. This shows me that the report writer has done her research and can provide me with rich detail about the topic.
2. Rehearse

**Practice Using Academic Language**

Display the practice text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Explain that it is a sentence that might appear in a report about history education. Say that it could be improved through the addition of academic language.

Students in American schools study history.

**Practice Text**

Ask students to work with partners to add to the sentence using academic language. Remind students that academic language refers to words or terms specific to the topic. Encourage students to brainstorm words related to the topic of history before they add sentences. If necessary, ask students what different topics they have studied themselves in history and which words appear often when people write about history. Partners should write down their sentences and be prepared to read them to the class. They should be ready to explain the academic language they used.

**Share Practice Sentences**

Bring students together and invite partners to read aloud their sentences and explain their word choices. Record students’ sentences and post these as models for students to use as they write or revise their research reports.

---

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

**Say:** We learned that report writers use academic language to tell about a topic with sophistication and details. A good research report includes accurate information and precise facts. As you write your research reports, remember to use academic language to discuss your topic.

Ask students to look for opportunities in their report where they should be using academic language to discuss their topic. During conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

**4. Share**

Bring the class together. Invite two or three students to read aloud a section of their reports in which they used academic language to explain a topic with sophistication and detail.

---

**Strategies to Support ELs**

**Beginning**

Work with small groups of students to talk and write sentences about topics they studied in school. Model sentences using the following sentence frames, then encourage students to create their own sentences from them:

- We study ______.
- We learn about ______.

**Intermediate and Advanced**

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner activity. Supply the following sentence frames to help them add to the practice text using academic language:

- These students study ______ and ______.
- They learn about events in history such as ______.
- They study important people from history, including ______.

**All Levels**

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: **academic/académico(a)**; **language/el lenguaje**; **specific/específico(a)**.