

This document provides a summary of Recommendation 4 from the WWC practice guide *Effective Literacy and English Language Instruction for English Learners in the Elementary Grades*. Full reference at the bottom of this page.



Develop academic English



Beginning in the primary grades, the development of academic English should be a main instructional goal for English learners. To support this goal, teachers need access to curricula resources in addition to relevant training and professional development opportunities.

How to carry out the recommendation	Potential roadblocks
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Adopt a plan that focuses on ways and means to help teachers understand that instruction to English learners must include time devoted to development of academic English. Daily academic English instruction should also be integrated into the core curriculum.2. Teach academic English in the earliest grades.3. Provide teachers with appropriate professional development to help them learn how to teach academic English.4. Consider asking teachers to devote a specific block (or blocks) of time each day to building English learners' academic English.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Some educators may want to cushion their English learners, believing that academic English is too hard for them to develop or that the expectations are too demanding.2. There may not be enough time in the instructional day to provide English learners with sufficient instruction on the features of academic English.3. Many teachers fail to link vocabulary instruction to instruction on proper language usage.



Reference: Gersten, R., Baker, S. K., Shanahan, T., Linan-Thompson, S., Collins, P., & Scarcella, R. (2007). *Effective literacy and English language instruction for English learners in the elementary grades* (NCEE 2007-4011). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/6>



How to carry out the recommendation

- 1. Adopt a plan that focuses on ways and means to help teachers understand that instruction to English learners must include time devoted to development of academic English. Daily academic English instruction should also be integrated into the core curriculum.**

Academic English refers to content-specific vocabulary or common words or phrases that take on a different meaning within a content area. Academic English development is most effective when provided early, consistently, and across all curriculums. Students do not need to master conversational English before they learn academic English. Unfortunately, there are no effective resources to support academic English instruction, which is why teachers need intensive professional development to teach academic English effectively.

- 2. Teach academic English in the earliest grades.**

Students do not need to read and write in English effectively before learning academic English. Instead, students should be exposed to text that uses academic language, and teachers should take the time to review and discuss the new words in structured ways. This instruction should occur in the context of both oral and written communication. Additionally, students need to practice applying language effectively to meet various needs, which might include describing events, summarizing content, and questioning intentions.

- 3. Provide teachers with appropriate professional development to help them learn how to teach academic English.**

Professional development should be ongoing and address basic features of English, such as morphology, discourse, and syntax. Professional development should happen gradually, so teachers do not become overwhelmed. It should also include practical activities and provide teachers with the opportunity to practice teaching academic language with feedback.

- 4. Consider asking teachers to devote a specific block (or blocks) of time each day to building English learners' academic English.**

Research shows that English learners require daily instruction targeted around learning academic English. However, teachers easily overlook teaching academic English when communicating with students through less formal means. Therefore, in addition to integrating the teaching of academic English in the context of specific content areas, teachers should also schedule specific blocks of times daily for English learners to focus on learning academic English.

Potential roadblocks and how to address them

Roadblock	Suggested Approach
<i>Some educators may want to cushion their English learners, believing that academic English is too hard for them to develop or that the expectations are too demanding.</i>	Academic writing often contains unfamiliar facts and content. While informal or narrative texts tend to be familiar, they do not necessarily increase an English learner’s proficiency in academic English. Academic writing is often packed with facts and the content unfamiliar. Teachers can help develop academic English after a challenging text has been read and discussed so that the meaning of each word is clear. It is important that students have the opportunity to learn how to navigate complex text with support before they do so independently.
<i>There may not be enough time in the instructional day to provide English learners with sufficient instruction on the features of academic English.</i>	It is an effective use of instructional time for teachers to include daily academic English instruction as part of the core reading instruction for all students, including English learners and native English speakers.
<i>Many teachers fail to link vocabulary instruction to instruction on proper language usage.</i>	Teachers should model appropriate syntax, word order, and tense agreement with their students when learning new vocabulary words. Simultaneously focusing on vocabulary development and proper usage ensures students learn both the meaning of the word and how to use it appropriately.



For more information on the research evidence and references to support this recommendation, or for more detailed explanation from the What Works Clearinghouse committee who developed this recommendation, please refer to the practice guide cited at the bottom of the first page of this document.