

Teaching Your Secondary English Language Learners

the Academic Language of Tests

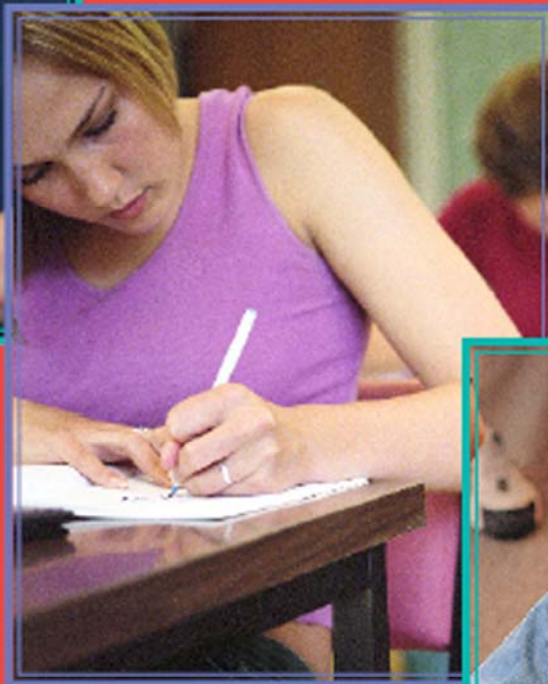


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***These lesson plans can also be adapted for use in social studies and mathematics classrooms.**

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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 Learner the Academic Language of Tests came about after hearing many teachers make remarks similar to the one above. The purpose of this book is to provide evidence-based, teacher-friendly lesson plans that will help English language learners deal with unfamiliar language features in the questions on standardized tests and to support content-area teachers in providing instruction for content specific language skills. This book is geared toward secondary students in grades 6–12 and contains the content areas of Math, Science, and Social Studies. Teaching English language learners the academic language of tests for the English Language Arts can be found in *Vocabulary Instruction for Intermediate English Language Learners*, a book developed by Region 4.

Since the most common unfamiliar item in test questions is vocabulary, there is a list of academic language vocabulary for each of the three tested content areas. These vocabulary words were compiled from three sources: *The Academic Word List* from the School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies, *Building Academic Vocabulary* by Robert J. Marzano, and questions from the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills—Math, Science, and Social Studies. These words do not represent content vocabulary that is already being taught, rather they represent an academic vocabulary that is necessary to understand the questions being asked. 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).

Each lesson plan provides background information for the teacher, implications for high-stakes testing, a goal, a list of materials, activities, and in many cases, graphic organizers. Some of the lesson plans support learning the language needed to gain content knowledge necessary to prepare for high-stakes tests. Other lessons deal specifically with test language and support instruction on test items. The teaching strategies included in this book are varied and differentiated in order to meet the needs of English language learners. The word lists are divided by content area and grade level, with separate lists for middle and high school students. Included with the word lists are teaching ideas for using the lists in the classroom.

This book 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. Region 4 presents this book in the hope that it will support and assist teachers as they work to instruct the English language learners in their classrooms.

The Language of Math

Reversals

Background Information for the Teacher

In English mathematics, word problems frequently contain reversals such as “The number a is five less than b .” Though the correct equation is $a = b - 5$, English language learners frequently interpret the wording as $a = 5 - b$. Students must understand the structure of the sentence in order to understand the computations required.

Implications for High-Stakes Testing

In order to successfully solve problems on standardized math tests, students must be able to negotiate the meaning of words and phrases that indicate specific calculations.

Goal

The student will recognize reversals in math word problems and will be able to solve equations correctly.

Materials

- “TV Guide” Chart, copied on a transparency

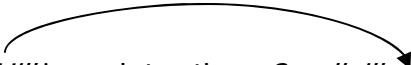
Activities

1. Using the overhead, show students the blank “TV Guide” chart, and ask them to help fill in the times based on the information written on the board.
2. Review correct order of television programs.

7:00	8:00	9:00	10:00
<i>Smallville</i>	<i>One Tree Hill</i>	<i>Veronica Mars</i>	<i>That 70's Show</i>

3. Ask students why *Smallville* is listed before *One Tree Hill* on the chart even though *One Tree Hill* is listed first on the board. Students should be able to point out that the phrase “...is on later than...” signals that the shows are reversed. Explain to the students that this is called a reversal. The teacher might draw arrows from the program listed first in the sentence to behind the second program to visually make this point.

One Tree Hill is on later than *Smallville*.



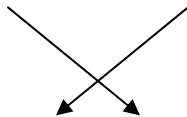
4. Continue through with all examples listed on the board.
5. Explain to students that math word problems sometimes contain reversals, too. The reversal phrase that is found in math problems that is most similar to “later than” used in the TV Guide example is “less than.” The phrase signals that

numbers will be in a different order in a number sentence than they are in the word problem. Give the following example:

The number 90 is 10 less than 100.

6. Write the number sentence for the problem above, using arrows to show how the numbers are reversed. Stress the phrase "less than" and how it changes the order of the number sentence in comparison to the word problem.

The number 90 is 10 less than 100.



90 = 100 - 10

7. Give students several examples of similar problems, asking them to show the number sentence for each problem.

"TV Guide" Chart

One Tree Hill is on later than *Smallville*.

Veronica Mars is on later than *One Tree Hill*.

That 70's Show is on later than *Veronica Mars*.

7:00	8:00	9:00	10:00

The Language of Science

Explaining a Process

Background Information for the Teacher

In order to be successful in science class, a student must be able to negotiate meaning and produce language in various activities, including explaining processes. Without specific skills in this area, English language learners may lose fundamental conceptual understanding.

Implications for High-Stakes Testing

When English language learners are able to recognize and understand key terms used to explain processes, they will understand and complete high-stakes test questions successfully.

Goal

The student will understand the steps in explaining a process and will learn common "signal" words.

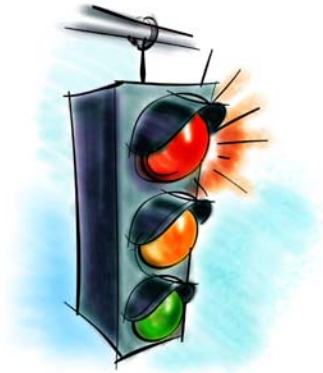
Materials

- Paper footprints
- Sentence strips
- Note cards
- Markers
- Tape
- Sample Signal Words, one per student

Activities

1. Before class begins, cut out paper footprints. (They may be laminated so they will last longer.) Place them in a line beginning at the door of the room, going throughout the room, and going back out the room. At various points along the trail of the footprints, create a scene that represents havoc (e.g., draw on the board, pull books out of the bookshelf, tip over a trashcan, etc.). The premise is that an intruder has been in the class, and they will be the Crime Scene Investigators sent to investigate.
2. Once students enter the class, have them determine what has happened in the room. Most will have watched television programs such as *CSI*, so ask them to "reconstruct" the crime. Guide them by asking questions such as what happened first, what happened next, etc. Write each of their statements on sentence strips, and tape them to the wall. Remind them that their statements must be factual and accurate. Post the statements in the order they are made, but have the students make corrections if they notice events are out of order.
3. Once all events are decided upon by the students and recorded on the sentence strips, have the class make sure they are in order. Explain the importance of having clear sentences that are in order. Ask what would happen if they weren't in order or they weren't clear?

4. Tell students that it is now time to clean up the crime scene, but future investigators will need to understand what happened. If the sentence strips are taken down, how will they know what happened first, second, etc.? Ask what words can be used to “signal” when events happened. Have students generate a list, putting each word (or phrase) on a note card. Tape these note cards to the sentence strips to show how they signal the order in which the events occurred. Explain that signal words also help us explain the steps in scientific processes. Ask students to come up with examples from previous class lessons or experiments.
5. Once the activity is complete, use the note cards to form a word wall. Give students a copy of the Sample Signal Words handout. Have students write a paragraph describing the crime scene and the events that happened using the signal words from the note cards or those found on the Sample Signal Words handout.

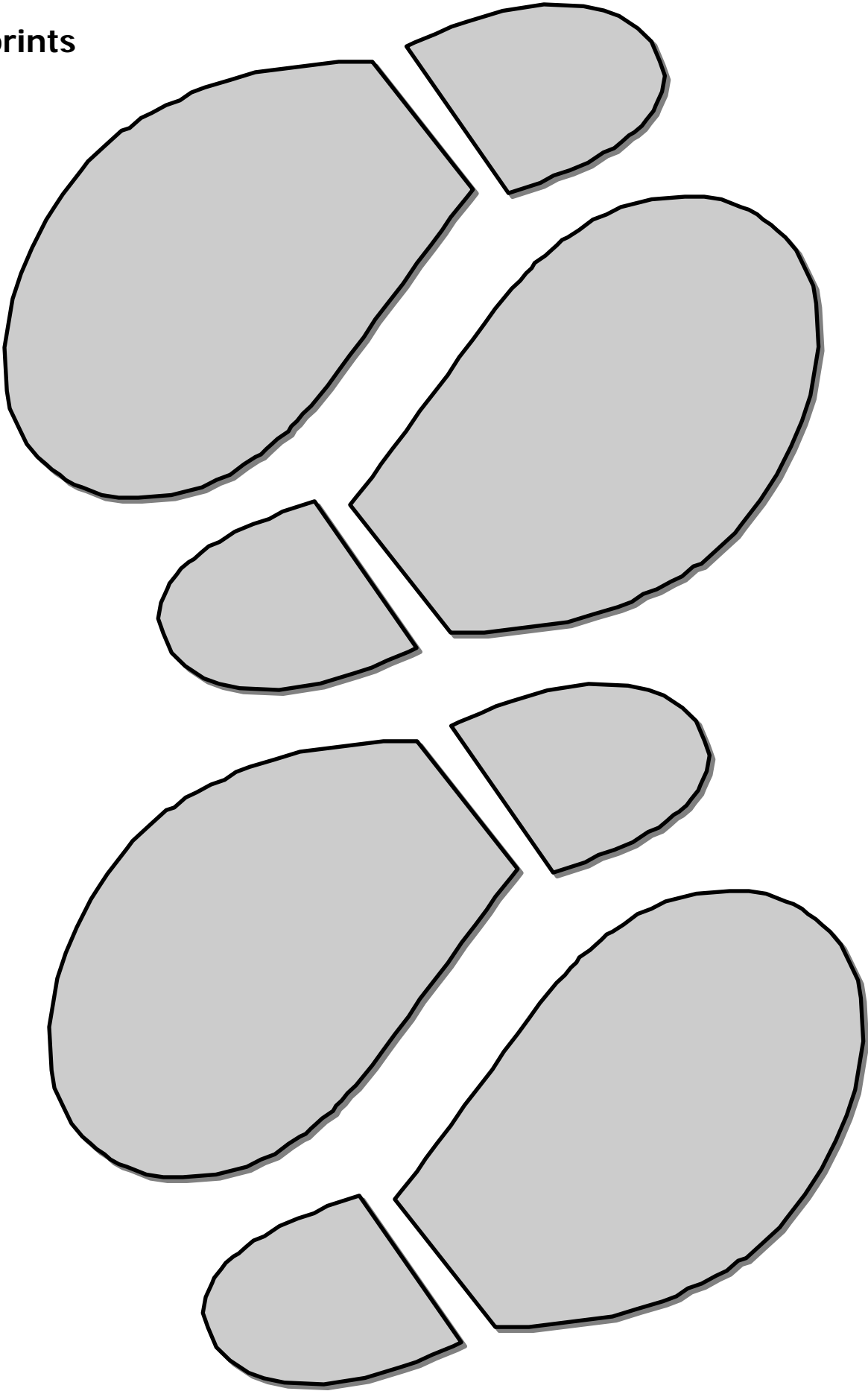


Sample Signal Words

accordingly
after
afterward
as a result of
as soon as
because
before
begins with
consequently
during
finally
first
following
for this reason
if...then
immediately
in order to
initially
is/was caused by
last
later
leads/led to

may be due to
meanwhile
next
not long after
now
on (date)
preceding
prior
second
so that
soon
steps involved
then
therefore
third
thus
today
when
while
until
yesterday

Footprints



The Language of Social Studies

Cause and Effect

Background Information for the Teacher

Because social studies texts are often written in expository mode, varied sentence structure makes it difficult for English language learners (ELLs) to determine cause and effect. Though cause and effect statements are common, ELLs often look at the event first in the sentence as occurring first, and the event second in the sentence occurring later. They fail to recognize key transitions necessary to determine cause and effect.

Implications for High-Stakes Testing

Understanding cause and effect and the sentence structures used to express cause and effect are essential for understanding the texts used on high-stakes tests.

Goal

The students will understand cause and effect and the patterns and transitions used to express cause and effect.

Materials

- *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* by Laura Joffe Numeroff
- Markers, one per group
- Sentence strips, two per group
- Social studies textbook, one per student
- Social studies questions from a state assessment, one per group
- Cause and Effect T-Chart handout, one per group

Activities

1. Read *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* by Laura Joffe Numeroff (or any other children's book with cause and effect features) to the students. Start by reading the first few pages, and then stop and ask students if they are noticing a pattern. Continue reading the story, and have students make predictions as to what is going to happen next.
2. Explain that in sentences such as "If you eat all your dinner, then you can get dessert," the first part of the sentence tells something that might happen. This is called the "cause." It is something that makes something else happen. Out of two events, it is the event that happens first. The second part of the sentence tells what will happen if the first thing happens. This is called the "effect." The effect is what happens because of the cause. Of the two events, it is the one that happens last.
3. Ask students to think back to the story to determine cause and effect events in the story. Discuss this as a whole group.
Examples:

Cause**Effect**

If you give a mouse a cookie

he's going to ask for a glass of milk

When you give him the milk

he'll probably ask you for a straw

When he's finished

he'll ask for a napkin

As examples are discussed, be sure the students understand the cause is responsible for creating the effect.

4. Then, ask students to form groups of two and think of everyday examples of cause and effect (e.g., I didn't study for my test, so I didn't make a good grade). Using the Cause and Effect T-chart handout, have students put their "cause" statements on one side, and their "effect" statements on the other. Have students share their statements with the whole group.
5. Tell the students that when determining cause and effect, order is very important. Write the following sentences on the board and ask students to look at them:

If I want a good grade, then I need to study hard.

I want a good grade, so I need to study hard.

I need to study hard because I want a good grade.

6. Ask students to identify the cause and effect in each sentence. Though the order is inverted in the last sentence, the cause and effect remain the same. When we speak and explain cause and effect, we generally use the "if...then" transition pattern or the "...so..." transition pattern. However, other words/phrases can be used to express cause and effect transition. These transition words include:

as a result

contributed to

lead to

because

due to

resulted from

because of

effects of

since

by

for

so

cause of

for this reason

so that

consequently

if...then

therefore

7. Write these words on the board for students to see and copy into their notes. Explain that transition words are critical to understanding the cause and the effect in text. With the students, brainstorm examples of sentences using each of the transition words listed. Write the sentences on the board.

8. Have students go back to their groups and the Cause and Effect T-Charts they created in Step 4. Using the examples from the story, show students how to write each cause and effect sentence in the inverted form. Write the reverse order sentence on the board.

Examples:

Original sentence:

If you give a mouse a cookie, he's probably going to ask for a glass of milk.

When you give him the milk, he'll probably ask you for a straw.

When he's finished, he'll ask for a napkin.

Inverted sentence:

A mouse will probably ask for a glass of milk if you give him a cookie.

He'll probably ask you for a straw because you gave him the milk.

He'll ask for a napkin since he's finished.

Now have the students select an example sentence from their T-charts and write the sentence on a sentence strip. On a second sentence strip, have the students write the reverse order sentence. Have students share their second, inverted sentences with the whole group and let the class determine the cause and the effect.

9. Instruct students to look in their social studies textbooks and at sample social studies questions from a state assessment for examples of cause and effect using the patterns and transitions above.

Cause and Effect T-Chart

