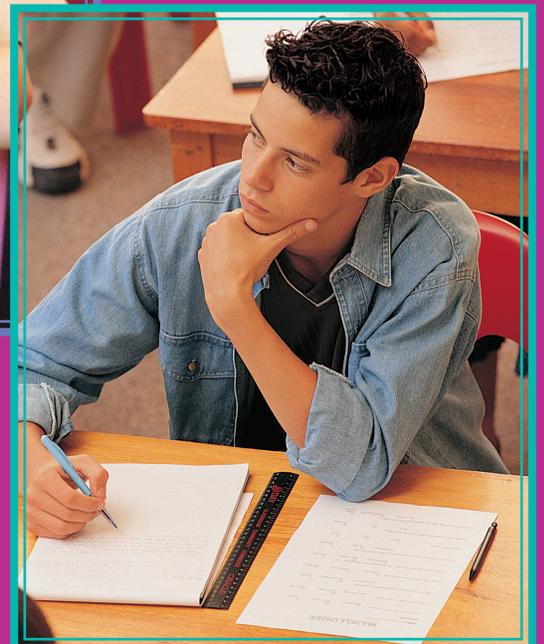
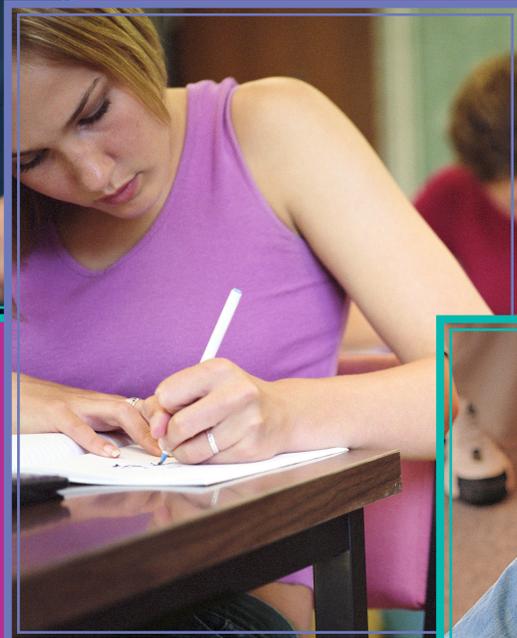


# Teaching Your Secondary English Language Learners The Academic Language of Tests



**Focusing on  
English Language Arts**



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*"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 the one above. 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. Strategies for basic vocabulary development for English language learners can be found in *Vocabulary Instruction for Intermediate English Language Learners*, also developed by Region 4.

Section VI contains a list of academic language vocabulary. These vocabulary words were compiled from the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills student expectations for grades 9 through 11 and from questions from the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills—English Language Arts. 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).

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 necessary to prepare students 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.

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

### Multiple-Meaning Words

**Background Information for the Teacher**

One of the most difficult aspects of the English language is that it contains many words that can have multiple meanings and can also be used as different parts of speech. Often, these words appear in multiple contexts. Students must be able to determine meaning in order to successfully negotiate the understanding of concepts in various contexts.

**Implications for High-Stakes Testing**

To fully understand the concepts being assessed, students must have strategies to determine the contextually appropriate meaning for multiple-meaning words.

**Materials**

- Blank paper, two sheets per student
- Markers, one set per student
- Stapler
- Multiple-Meaning Words Chart handout, one per student

**Academic Vocabulary**

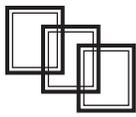
Note: Understanding the meaning of the terms below is critical to a student's success in this lesson. It will not be possible—or practical—to teach all of the words on this list at once, nor is this an exhaustive list of vocabulary that is necessary to know for this lesson. Keep in mind, also, that many students will already be familiar with many of these words.

appropriate	flap	represent
bottom	flip book	section
context	meaning	sentence
definition	multiple	
edge	part of speech	

**Activities**

1. Write the following statements on the board. Ask students to do a think-pair-share to discuss how the meaning of the word *cool* differs in each sentence.
  - The fan will cool me off.
  - The new football stadium is cool!
2. Explain that words in English can have multiple meanings and can also be used as different parts of speech when used in different contexts. It is important to consider the context of a word before deciding on a meaning.
3. Give students two sheets of blank paper. Have them place their top sheet of paper one inch above the bottom edge of the second sheet (see Figure 1).
4. Fold the set of papers so that the top sheet is one inch above its bottom edge (see Figure 2). This will create a flip book. Staple the book along the fold.
5. On the top flap, ask students to write the word *Table* (see Figure 3). Explain that table is a word in English that has multiple meanings.

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# Writing Teen Advice Columns Using *Could*, *Should*, and *Would*

## Background Information for the Teacher

The words *could*, *should*, and *would* are English words that are spelled using the same pattern but have vastly different meanings. They are part of a text structure common in test questions and also the conversational language of native English speakers. However, they may not be well-known to English language learners because they represent more advanced verb types and tenses that students may not have been taught. *Should* is a modal verb, and *could* and *would* are most often used in test questions as the conditional tense of the verb *to be*.

## Implications for High-Stakes Testing

Many questions on standardized English language arts tests, especially on the revising and editing portions, contain the words *could*, *should*, and *would*, which must be understood in order for students to choose the correct answer. Students unfamiliar with this question structure may be unable to determine the meaning of the question or the response containing the word.

## Materials

- ▣ Advice columns, such as *Dear Abby*, from teen magazines or newspapers
- ▣ Teenage Problems handout, one per group
- ▣ Advice Columns handout, one per group
- ▣ Copies of English Language Arts portion from a standardized test, one per group
- ▣ Highlighters, one per group

## Academic Vocabulary

Note: Understanding the meaning of the terms below is critical to a student's success in this lesson. It will not be possible—or practical—to teach all of the words on this list at once, nor is this an exhaustive list of vocabulary that is necessary to know for this lesson. Keep in mind, also, that many students will already be familiar with many of these words.

advice	magazine	should
column	newspaper	teen
could	possibly	teenager
definitely	problem	would

## Activities

Note: Using authentic literature, such as newspapers and magazines, is a good way to incorporate realia into a lesson. The school newspaper may even have an advice column.

1. Ask students if they have ever read the advice columns in magazines or newspapers. Show them examples of some advice columns and explain what they are if students are not familiar with the genre.
2. Discuss what types of problems teenagers might have that would prompt them to write to a columnist for advice. Ask the students if they have ever written for advice, or what they would ask about if they did.
3. Read one of the problems, such as the following example, to the students, allowing them to discuss the problem as a class and give their ideas for advice.

Dear Advice Column,

My family has money problems. They need me to get a job and help pay for things. I want to get a job and make some money and I do want to help my family, but my dad wants me to give him all the money that I make. I don't think that is fair. I think I should get to keep some of the money since I will be doing the work. I want to save up for a car and some other things for myself like new clothes so that my dad won't have to pay for them. My dad has a bad temper, though, and I am afraid of making him mad. How can I get him to understand that I want to give him some of my money and keep some of it, too?

Sincerely,

Tommy, 16

4. Write the following questions across the top of the board, underlining the words *should*, *would*, and *could*:
  - What should the person (definitely) do?
  - What would happen if the person were to do that?
  - What else could the person (possibly) do?
5. Explain the definitions of *should*, *would*, and *could* in simple English as follows:
  - Should* is used when giving advice about definitely doing something.
  - Would* is used when talking about something expected to happen. (In the case of giving advice, it is what will happen after the person takes the advice.)
  - Could* is used to suggest possibly doing something.
6. Ask the class the first question and allow many students to respond. Have them discuss all the different advice and the possible outcomes. On the board, under the first question, write the students' advice to the person in the example problem. Typical responses might be:
  - He should get a job.
  - He should tell his father that he got a job.
  - He should talk to his father and explain that he is trying to save him money by paying for his own things.
  - He should write down all the reasons why it is fair for him to keep some of the money he makes and give the list to his father.
  - He should ask his mother to talk to his father for him.
7. Next, ask the students what they expect to happen if Tommy takes the advice they have given. Show them the second question, "What would happen if the person were to do that?" Allow students to discuss the possibilities and record their answers on the board under the second question.

Typical responses might be:

He would make enough money to help his family and also to save some.

His mom would be able to help him talk to his father, so his father would understand.

The list would explain things to his father without his father getting mad.

8. Finally, ask students the third question, “What else *could* the person do?” Let students brainstorm about other possibilities that might be different from the advice they would get from a professional advice columnist. Record their answers on the board under the third question.

Typical responses might be:

He could get a job and not tell his father.

He could get two jobs and keep the money from one of them.

He could move and live with somebody else.

9. Place students in four small groups and give each group copies of the Teen Problems handout and the Advice Columns handout. Explain to students that they will be assigned one of the teen problems from the handout and their group is to read through the problem, discuss it, and fill in their answers on the Advice Columns handout. Ask students to use the words *should*, *would*, or *could* in their answers and to use complete sentences. A reporter from each group can use the handout to report the group’s responses back to the class.
10. After students have become familiar with the meanings of the words *should*, *would*, and *could*, pair or group them and give each set of students a copy of the English Language Arts portion from a standardized test and highlighters. Have students search through the questions and responses and find and highlight the words *should*, *would*, and *could*.
10. As a class, read through the selections in the test and work together to answer a few of the questions containing the highlighted words. Then allow the pairs or groups to work together to answer the rest. When all students have finished, share answers and discuss.

**Suggestion:**

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- ☐ To reinforce learning, ask students to write about a problem they have had. Students should not write any names, including their own, on their problem descriptions. Specify that length should be from one paragraph to one-half page long only. After previewing the problem descriptions and checking for appropriateness, distribute the problems to other students. Have students answer the questions about the problem on an Advice Columns handout. Ask students to share their responses with the class, or have students exchange and share with a partner.

# Teen Problems

Read through your problem with your group and then answer the following questions on the answer sheet:

What *should* the person (definitely) do?

What *would* happen if the person were to do that?

What else *could* the person (possibly) do?

Share your advice with the rest of the class.

## Problem #1

### Should I Marry Him?

I have been with my boyfriend for four years now, ever since I was in 8th grade. He wants to get married next year, but there are a couple of problems I have. One is the fact that I will still be in high school. He graduates this year, but I will be in 12th grade next year. I want to graduate, but he wants to have a baby right away. Another problem is that he doesn't have a job because he got hurt on his last job and can't work right now. I have a good job working at my uncle's restaurant, and I make very good money. If I quit school and quit my job to get married and have a baby, I don't know how we would support ourselves. The last problem is that we would have to live with his family at first because we don't have enough money to get our own house. I love my boyfriend very much. He is very good to me. He is telling me that if I don't marry him now I might lose him. I don't want to lose him. What should I do?

Sincerely,

Lara, 16

## Problem #2

### Should I Tell Her I Love Her?

I have a problem with my best friend. You see, I am a guy, and she is a girl and what she doesn't know is that I'm in love with her. I have had a crush on other girls before, but this is really different. We are very close, and I know that she likes me very much. We've known each other for about three years, and our friendship has constantly become better. We fight sometimes, but we always make up. We meet almost every day and talk every day. We tell each other everything, so I know she is having problems with her boyfriend (who I think is no good for her). My problem is that I want to tell her I love her, but I don't want to ruin our friendship. We always have very much fun together. I'm afraid if I tell her I love her, she will not return the feelings and then our friendship will be ruined. On the other hand, I feel sometimes like my heart will break if I don't tell her. What if she feels the same way and is afraid to tell me? What should I do?

Sincerely,

Manny, 15

# Teen Problems

## Problem #3

### Please Help Me and My Family

My family doesn't get along. It's like we all hate each other. My mom, me, my two brothers, and a sister all live together. I am the oldest. We each have different problems. My mom wants to quit smoking, so she is really stressed out. I am really selfish (I just can't help it). One of my brothers is too bossy. He thinks that he is better than the rest of us and that he is the only one who helps my mom. My other brother is kind of depressed. He always starts fights, and he's really spoiled (my mom doesn't yell at him for doing things wrong because he's so sad all the time, but when she does, he laughs at her). My sister (who's 7) makes messes and doesn't clean them up. I really want to help because I don't like being upset all the time and having everyone hate everyone else. Even when we start to get along, someone will say something to upset someone else. Please help me and my family.

Sincerely,

Yolanda, 15

## Problem #4

### Hates School

I hate school. I hate it so much I skip school almost every day. Luckily, I am smart, and I'm in all of the advanced classes so I don't have a reputation as a "bad kid." Only the people who really know me know about my strange feelings. My parents don't care. They don't even mention it if I don't go to school. What I end up doing is sleeping all day and then staying up all night talking to my boyfriend. I get behind in my homework, but when I try to go back to school, all my teachers and friends get mad at me, so it makes me mad that I went back. I just get so depressed when I think about it. I am thinking about dropping out of school because I am 18 now, but I really don't want to do that because I realize it would ruin my life. I don't want to go back, but I also don't want it to ruin my life. I am so confused, and I have really tried to go back and just can't take it. What should I do? Please help.

Sincerely,

Luis, 18

# Advice Columns

Read through your teen problem with your group and then answer the following questions in the space provided. Share your answers with the rest of the class.

What should the person (definitely) do?	What would happen if the person were to do that?	What else could the person (possibly) do?