

# Teach Students Academic Language Skills, Including the Use of Inferential and Narrative Language, and Vocabulary Knowledge

## Purpose

This document provides educators with information about a high-leverage, evidence-based practice recommended in the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) practice guide, [Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade](#).<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

**Teaching students academic language skills, including the use of inferential and narrative language, and vocabulary knowledge** is an evidence-based practice to help educators increase student achievement in critical foundational skills for early readers. Page 6 the practice guide states:

**Academic language skills** include the following abilities: articulating ideas beyond the immediate context (inferential language); clearly relating a series of events, both fictional and nonfictional (narrative language); [and] comprehending and using a wide range of academic vocabulary and grammatical structures, such as pronoun references. Students who enter kindergarten with limited academic language skills typically lag behind their peers in reading. Academic language skills enable students to understand the formal structures and words found in books and school. Academic language includes words and structures that are common across subjects and unique to individual subjects. While students typically develop social language skills naturally – those used to communicate informally with family and friends – academic language skills usually require instruction. By guiding students to develop their academic language skills, teachers can mitigate some of the challenges that students encounter when learning to comprehend text.

For more information about this practice guide, see the [AOE's Annotated Guide](#), as well as [Resources for Educators](#) on the WWC (including videos and instructional rubrics).

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<sup>1</sup> [What Works Clearinghouse/IES Practice Guides](#) provide recommendations for educators of evidence-based practices to improve student outcomes. WWC/IES Practice Guides were developed by a panel of literacy experts based on reviews of research, practitioner experiences, and expert opinions.

## Contact Information:

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## ESSA Level of Evidence

ESSA levels of evidence are the result of a synthesis of current evidence-based research. Below is the level of evidence for this recommendation:

- **Tier 4 – Has Rationale (Minimal Evidence)**

See the [full practice guide](#) for more information about specific studies and the [summary guide](#) for a high-level overview of the evidence for this recommendation. For more information about levels of evidence, see the REL document [ESSA Tiers of Evidence: What You Need to Know](#).

## How to Carry Out the Recommendation

Listed below are ways to [teach students academic language skills, including the use of inferential and narrative language, and vocabulary knowledge](#). See the pages of the guide referenced next to each instructional practice to find more specific implementation strategies.

- Engage students in conversations that support the use and comprehension of inferential language (8-9).
- Explicitly engage students in developing narrative language skills (9-11).
- Teach academic vocabulary in the context of other reading activities (11-12).

## Connections to Literacy Essential Practices

[Literacy Essentials](#) provide evidence- and research-based approaches educators can use to support early literacy. This resource was introduced to Vermont through work done with [Dr. Nell Duke](#) and includes classroom practices teachers can use daily to implement the recommendations in the WWC practice guides. See the page number referenced next to each Essential Practice to find more specific implementation strategies.

### [Literacy Essential Practices for Prekindergarten](#)

- **Essential Practice #2:** Read aloud with reference to print (3)
- **Essential Practice #3:** Interactive read-alouds with a comprehension and vocabulary focus (4)
- **Essential Practice #7:** Extended conversation (6)
- **Essential Practice #9:** Ongoing observation and other forms of assessment of children’s language and literacy development that informs their education (7)

### [Literacy Essential Practices for Grades K-3](#)

- **Essential Practice #2:** Read-alouds of age-appropriate books and other materials, print or digital, including culturally relevant texts (3)
- **Essential Practice #7:** Intentional and ambitious efforts to build vocabulary and knowledge, including content and other cultural knowledge, throughout the day (6)
- **Essential Practice #9:** Ongoing observation and other forms of assessment of children’s language and literacy development that informs their education (7)