Pennsylvania
Department of Education

Reclassification Language Use Inventories

These rubrics must be used to evaluate a student's use of language as part of the reclassification process. They are not designed as a diagnostic tool for measuring the full range of language proficiency. They are meant only to evaluate if a student has exceeded a proficiency threshold for reclassification eligibility.

The evaluation must consist of multiple observations of students' language use over time toward the end of the school year, although only one inventory should be completed by each teacher. It is recommended that the teacher who will complete the inventory be well-trained in the use of the rubrics and begin to make notes of the students' language use in enough time to develop a firm evaluation before completing this inventory.

For more information about the reclassification process, please review the reclassification guidance.

These rubrics were developed using and are aligned to the WIDA Language Charts, WIDA Proficiency Level Descriptors, and the PA academic standards.

Technical terms throughout the rubrics are linked to definitions with examples in the glossary. In most versions of MSWord, you will need to hold down the *ctrl* key to click the link. When you click on a linked term to review the glossary description, you can click "*Alt*+ ←" to return to your place in the rubric.

IMPORTANT NOTE: These rubrics and the evaluation of student performance are designed to measure English language proficiency only. Academic content knowledge or skills, work habits, and overall academic success must **not** be considered when using these rubrics to determine whether a student no longer requires language support to access academic content.

Speaking and Writing

Expressive language skills (speaking and writing) can be observed and measured directly as students produce language in real time or in written form.

Listening and Reading

Interpretive language skills cannot be observed directly. Educators must gather evidence that the student comprehends what they hear or read and then evaluate that evidence using the criteria in the rubrics. In other words, measurement of interpretive language relies on observable responses that reflect comprehension. For example, comprehension can be inferred when a student:

- follows multi-step directions tied to text, audio, or verbal instructions
- selects accurate responses from options based on what they heard or read
- retells key details or main ideas in their own words
- asks clarifying questions that show awareness of meaning
- completes tasks (sequencing, matching, summarizing) that require understanding of the input

Scoring

The scoring sheet, which is downloadable from the reclassification guidance page in either Word or Excel format, can be used by raters to record scores from the rubrics. Each rater must complete their own scoring sheet. The sheet contains fillable fields and dropdown selections to enter demographic information and scores. Scores must be maintained in students' permanent records either electronically or in paper form. These forms are not required. The district is free to develop its own means of recording and collecting scores.

Reclassification Language Use Inventory: Kindergarten (K)

Note: Examples are illustrative, not prescriptive. Look for patterns and functions of language, not specific words or phrases.

Listening

INITIAL (0)	TRANSITIONAL (.5)	INDEPENDENT (1)
• Understands single words/commands and memorized chunks of language • Recognizes isolated ideas or familiar words in short, supported speech (e.g., identifying people, objects, or actions mentioned by the speaker) • Relies on visuals, gestures, and contextual clues frequently for comprehensive understanding	• Follows simple sentences and repeated patterns (e.g., "**He likes** baseball.", "**He likes** games.") • Recognizes some basic transitions (e.g., "first," "then," "because") and descriptive noun groups (e.g., "the red ball," "the tall, quiet boy") that help connect ideas and add detail in short, familiar speech • Tracks emerging links among ideas (e.g., understanding that "because it's raining, we need umbrellas"; recognizing simple cause or time relationships such as one event leading to another)	• Understands multiple-meanings and simple academic/content-area vocabulary in familiar topics (e.g., recognizing that "bat" can mean an animal or a baseball bat, and that "sphere" or "triangle" are math words). • Follows simple sentences with early clause cues (e.g., "when it rains," "because it's cold") • Tracks sequences and basic organization in oral language (e.g., understanding the order of events in a short story or directions that include "first," "next," and "last") • Recognizes how descriptive noun groups add precision and help distinguish between similar ideas (e.g., "the red ball" vs. "the big ball"; "the storybook" vs. "the picture book")

Reading

INITIAL (0)	TRANSITIONAL (.5)	INDEPENDENT (1)
• Processes words/phrases and repeated chunks of language (e.g., "I like ___," "This is ___") • Recognizes loosely related ideas with strong picture/text support (e.g., matching simple text to illustrations)	• Follows simple sentences and basic patterns (e.g., "The red ball bounced," "I like pizza") • Recognizes conjunctions (e.g., the ball **and** the truck) and adjectives (e.g., "the **big red** ball and the **blue** truck") • Begins tracking how noun groups add meaning (e.g., noticing that "big" changes "ball")	• Follows simple organization (e.g., beginning–middle–end) • Recognizes clause cues (e.g., "**because** it's sunny," "**when** it rains") • Understands multiple-meaning/academic content-area words in familiar texts (e.g., "watch" — something you wear vs. to look, "weather (science)"

Speaking

INITIAL (0)	TRANSITIONAL (.5)	INDEPENDENT (1)
• Communicates with high-frequency vocabulary (e.g., “dog,” “play,” “mom”) • Produces isolated words/formulaic phrases/memorized chunks of language (e.g., “My name is ___,” “I want ___,” “This is a ___”)	• Uses simple sentences with some fragments (e.g., “I like pizza,” “Went home”) • Demonstrates emerging subject-verb agreement (e.g., “He run” → “He runs”) • Incorporates simple transitions (e.g., “and then,” “after that”) • Occasional reliance on repeated phrases when speaking (e.g., “**I like** games. **I like** pizza. **I like** school.”). • Communicates effectively with peers to participate in activities or games	• Mixes simple with early dependent clauses (e.g., “We stayed inside **because it was raining**,” “I ran faster **when it was my turn**”) • Uses multiple-meaning/academic content-area words as needed (e.g., “bat” — animal vs. baseball bat, “triangle”) • Uses sequencing (e.g., “first,” “then,” “after,” “once”) and transitions (e.g., “We stayed in **because** it rained.”) in simple sentences with some variation in structure • Communicates with peers on a variety of topics and texts, building on others’ ideas and expressing ideas clearly

Writing

INITIAL (0)	TRANSITIONAL (.5)	INDEPENDENT (1)
• Uses familiar, high-frequency words (e.g., “play,” “school,” “mom”) • Labels objects (e.g., “dog,” “ball”) • Copies memorized chunks of language (e.g., “I like ___,” “This is a ___”) • Writes phrases (e.g., “my dog,” “big ball”)	• Emerging morphology/word-building (e.g., “jump” → “jumping,” “play” → “played”, “cat→ “cats”) • Uses basic transitions (e.g., “and then,” “after”) • Produces simple sentences (some fragments) (e.g., “I like ice cream,” “We played”)	• Uses some multiple-meaning words (e.g., “duck” — an animal vs. to lower your head; “ring” — jewelry vs. the sound of a bell) • Selects some precise/academic content-area vocabulary for the purpose (e.g., “triangle,” “caterpillar”) • Sequences ideas (e.g., “First I went to the park, then I saw a dog”) • Uses some simple and occasional early dependent clauses (e.g., “because it was sunny,” “when we got there”)

Reclassification Language Use Inventory: Grade 1

Note: Examples are illustrative, not prescriptive. Look for patterns and functions of language, not specific words or phrases.

Listening

INITIAL (0)	TRANSITIONAL (.5)	INDEPENDENT (1)
• Recognizes frequent nouns/commands and memorized chunks of language (e.g., "Sit down," "Open your book," "I want ___") with some recognition of sentence patterns (e.g., "I like ___") • Derives meaning via repetition/routines (e.g., daily classroom directions) • Relies on visuals, gestures, and contextual clues frequently for comprehensive understanding	• Follows simple sentences with basic transitions/sequencing (e.g., "First we line up, and then we go outside") • Recognizes patterns across ideas (e.g., repeated sentence frames in stories — "I went to the market and I bought…," "Brown Bear, Brown Bear, what do you see?") • Understands noun groups with adjectives and conjunctions (e.g., "the big red ball and the blue car")	• Tracks organization and clause relationships in simple/compound sentences (e.g., "Take out the blue paper, and put your name on it.") including those with extended modifiers (e.g., "the tall red building on the corner") • Understands academic/content-area vocabulary in context (e.g., "triangle," "habitat") and multiple-meaning words (e.g., "ring" — jewelry vs. the sound a bell makes) • Follows references made with demonstratives (e.g., "these crayons," "those crayons")

Reading

INITIAL (0)	TRANSITIONAL (.5)	INDEPENDENT (1)
• Comprehends high-frequency words, phrases, and repeated sentence patterns in predictable text (e.g., "I like ___," "This is a ___") • Recognizes loosely related ideas with support from visuals and text features (e.g., following along with pictures and repeated frames in early readers)	• Follows simple sentences and basic syntactic variation (e.g., "The red ball bounced," "The big dog ran fast") • Comprehends how noun groups with adjectives refine meaning (e.g., "the big red car," "the tall tree") • Distinguishes some multiple-meaning words (e.g., "light" — illumination vs. not heavy)	• Interprets familiar and some less familiar words and phrases in varied sentence structures including with dependent clauses (e.g., "She was happy because she won the race.") • Tracks related ideas (e.g., following "this" or "they" across sentences - "My friends are coming to the party tomorrow. They will bring pizza.") • Recognizes how verb phrases support meaning (e.g., "is eating," "has eaten," "will eat")

Speaking

INITIAL (0)	TRANSITIONAL (.5)	INDEPENDENT (1)
• Integrates formulaic phrases/words (e.g., “My name is ___,” “I want ___,” “This is a ___”) • Produces high-frequency vocabulary related to personal experience (e.g., “dog,” “mom,” “play”) • Uses sentence fragments and some full sentences (e.g., “Go home,” “I like pizza”)	• Produces simple sentences with developing subject/verb agreement (e.g., “He run” → “He runs”) • Uses transitions and sequencing (e.g., “and then,” “after that”) • Applies word-formation strategies (e.g., “run” → “running”) and correctly uses some multiple-meaning words (e.g., “light” — not heavy vs. illumination) • Communicates effectively with peers to participate in activities or games	• Uses basic organization with emerging dependent clauses (e.g., “I stayed home because I was sick”) • Incorporates academic/content-area vocabulary (e.g., “globe” (social studies), “title” (ELA), and common collocations (e.g., “make a plan”) • Connects ideas using demonstratives (e.g., “this book,” “that book”) and conjunctions (e.g., “and,” “but”) • Communicates with peers on a variety of topics and texts, building on others’ ideas and expressing ideas clearly

Writing

INITIAL (0)	TRANSITIONAL (.5)	INDEPENDENT (1)
• Uses mostly familiar, high-frequency words (e.g., “play,” “school,” “mom”) • Produces words/phrases and short, repetitive sentence patterns (e.g., “I like ___,” “This is ___”) using high-frequency vocabulary (e.g., “dog,” “school,” “play”)	• Uses some multiple-meaning words (e.g., “bat” — animal vs. baseball bat) • Produces simple sentences (some fragments) (e.g., “I went home,” “Played outside”) • Incorporates some transitions and sequencing (e.g., “and then,” “after that”)	• Makes appropriate academic/content-area vocabulary choices (e.g., “root (science), “vote” (social studies), “author” (ELA)) and collocational choices “make a list,” “figure out,” “make friends”) • Constructs organized short texts (e.g., a few connected sentences in a logical order) • Incorporates dependent clauses (e.g., “because it was sunny,” “when we got there”)

Reclassification Language Use Inventory: Grades 2–3

Note: Examples are illustrative, not prescriptive. Look for patterns and functions of language, not specific words or phrases.

Listening

INITIAL (0)	TRANSITIONAL (.5)	INDEPENDENT (1)
• Understands word-formation clues (e.g., "run" → "running") • Follows conjunctions (e.g., "and," "but") • Comprehends frequently used and situation-specific words/sentence fragments/simple sentences with support (e.g., "Go," "I like pizza") • Relies on visuals, gestures, and contextual clues frequently for comprehensive understanding	• Recognizes some academic vocabulary in context (e.g., "rectangle," "evaporation") • Comprehends multiple-meanings (e.g., "bat" — animal vs. baseball bat, "point" – the tip of a pencil vs. the main idea or purpose) • Follows simple sentences and some dependent clauses (e.g., "because it's sunny") • Processes some compound sentences (e.g., "I played outside, and it was fun") • Distinguishes basic organization (e.g., beginning–middle–end, step-by-step instructions)	• Understands collocations (e.g., "come up with an idea"), academic vocabulary ("place value"), and common idiomatic expressions (e.g., "in a hurry," "out of time") • Follows compound/complex sentences (e.g., "Although it rained, we went outside because it was warm") • Recognizes cohesion and variation across ideas (e.g., tracking "this" or "they" back to earlier references)

Reading

INITIAL (0)	TRANSITIONAL (.5)	INDEPENDENT (1)
• Tracks-sequencing words that show the order of events (e.g., "first," "then," "after that," "finally") • Recognizes how noun groups with conjunctions connect meaning (e.g., "the dog and the cat") • Comprehends sentence fragments/simple sentences (e.g., "I like pizza," "Went home") • Interprets early organization (e.g., beginning–middle–end)	• Recognizes some academic vocabulary (e.g., "habitat," "fraction") • Tracks sequences refined by noun groups with adjectives (e.g., "first the tall boy with glasses opened the door," "then the small brown dog ran outside") • Interprets simple sentences with basic syntactic variation (e.g., "The red ball bounced," "The big dog ran fast") and dependent clauses (e.g., "When it rains, we stay inside.")	• Recognizes academic vocabulary (e.g., "habitat," "fraction") • Comprehends collocations (e.g., "take a turn," "have a snack,") and idioms (e.g., "hold your horses," "catch a cold") • Tracks-simple, compound, and emerging complex sentences (e.g., "Although it rained, we went outside") • Interprets noun groups with clauses (e.g., "the girl who won the race") and recognizes how added contextual details (e.g., time, place, description) make meaning more specific (e.g., "the girl who won the race **on field day**")

Speaking

INITIAL (0)	TRANSITIONAL (.5)	INDEPENDENT (1)
• Uses some word-formation strategies (e.g., "jump" → "jumping," "play" → "played," "cat" → "cats") • Produces fragments with occasional simple sentences (e.g., "Go home," "I like my teacher") • Incorporates simple transitions (e.g., "and then," "after that")	• Demonstrates some precision in word choice (e.g., "big" → "enormous," "mad" → "angry") • Forms simple sentences with dependent clauses (e.g., "I stayed home because it rained") • Uses sequencing and repetition for flow (e.g., sequencing: "first," "then," "next"; repetition: repeating phrases like "**and then** I woke up, **and then** I came to school, **and then**…") • Communicates effectively with peers to participate in activities or games	• Employs some idiomatic expressions (e.g., "makes sense") and collocations (e.g., "make the bed") • Forms simple and compound sentences (e.g., "My friend came over, and we played outside.") • Uses logical connections within common organization (e.g., "I think recess is the best part of school because we can run and play. Also, it's when I see my friends. That's why I like it the most." — opinion/simple argument) • Incorporates some abstract nouns (e.g., "rules," "happiness," "choices") and adverbials to show time or manner (e.g., "slowly," "in the morning") naturally in connected speech • Communicates with peers on a variety of topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing ideas clearly

Writing

INITIAL (0)	TRANSITIONAL (.5)	INDEPENDENT (1)
• Employs developing word-building skills (e.g., "help" → "helping" → "helped") • Produces fragments and some simple sentences (e.g., "I went home," "We played") • Expands writing with simple transitions (e.g., "and then," "after that") • Produces text with emerging control of subject-verb agreement (e.g., "He run fast" → "He runs fast")	• Uses multiple-meaning and some academic vocabulary (e.g., table" — *a piece of furniture* vs. *a way to organize information*, "triangle") • Produces simple sentences with early dependent clauses (e.g., "I stayed home because it rained") • Integrates sequencing words (e.g., "first," "then," "finally") to connect ideas	• Integrates some abstract nouns (e.g., "freedom," "happiness") and adverbials (e.g., "luckily," "yesterday," "in the morning") for clarity • Elaborates with a variety of adjectives (e.g., "the big red car," "the tall old tree") • Produces simple, some compound (e.g., "I did my homework, and then I went outside"), and a few complex sentences (e.g., "The cat jumps on the table so he can get away from the dog") • Constructs text with generic organization (intro, body, conclusion)

Reclassification Language Use Inventory: Grades 4–5

Note: Examples are illustrative, not prescriptive. Look for patterns and functions of language, not specific words or phrases.

Listening

INITIAL (0)	TRANSITIONAL (.5)	INDEPENDENT (1)
• Follows fragments and simple sentences (e.g., "Go," "I want pizza") • Recognizes transitions (e.g., "because," "however") and sequencing (e.g., "first," "then," "finally") • Understands multi-meaning words (e.g., "light" — not heavy vs. illumination) • Relies on visuals, gestures, and contextual clues frequently for comprehensive understanding	• Follows simple and compound sentences (e.g., "I finished my work, and then I went outside") • Recognizes clause relationships in simple sentences (e.g., "I stayed home **because it rained**") • Interprets academic content-area terms in context and some idiomatic expressions (e.g., "photosynthesis," "break the ice")	• Follows compound/complex sentences (e.g., "Although it was late, we finished the project") • Interprets abstract nouns (e.g., "freedom," "fairness"), adverbials (e.g., "fortunately," "in the morning"), and modal/hedging nuance (e.g., "might," "probably," "I think") • Uses contextual details to understand meaning (e.g., understanding "the tall building with the red roof" as the library because of descriptive and situational clues)

Reading

INITIAL (0)	TRANSITIONAL (.5)	INDEPENDENT (1)
• Identifies sequences of ideas (e.g., "first," "then," "finally") • Comprehends fragments/occasional simple sentences (e.g., "I like pizza," "Went home") • Understands transitions (e.g., "after that," "next") • Understands multiple-meaning words (e.g., "scale" — *the outer covering of a fish* vs. *a system for measuring or comparing*)	• Recognizes how dependent clauses enhance logic (e.g., "I stayed inside because it rained") • Processes simple and some compound sentences reliably (e.g., "I finished my homework, and I played outside") • Understands academic content-area terms in context (e.g., science: "evaporation"; math: "multiplication"; social studies: "constitution")	• Recognizes cohesion/organization within text (e.g., understanding that "this problem" refers to the character's earlier challenge, or recognizing that repeated nouns such as "the storm" signal connections across paragraphs) • Follows compound/complex sentences (e.g., "Although it rained, we went outside because it was warm") • Understands abstract nouns (e.g., "freedom,") and adverbials (e.g., "fortunately," "yesterday") • Interprets idioms (e.g., "break the ice," "under the weather") and collocations (e.g., "make a list," "take a turn")

Speaking

INITIAL (0)	TRANSITIONAL (.5)	INDEPENDENT (1)
• Employs simple transitions and sequencing (e.g., “and then,” “after that”) • Forms fragments + occasional simple sentences (e.g., “Go home,” “I like pizza”) • Uses word-formation strategies (e.g., “jump” → “jumping”) • Uses some multiple-meaning words (e.g., “watch” — to look vs. something you wear; “park” — a place vs. to park a car)	• Organizes ideas effectively (e.g., short explanations/narratives in logical order) • Uses mostly simple with some compound sentences (e.g., “I finished my work, and then I went outside”) • Adds dependent clauses (e.g., “because it was sunny”) • Uses multiple-meaning words (e.g., “point” — *a dot or tip* vs. *a reason or idea*) • Communicates effectively with peers to participate in activities or games	• Integrates cohesive ideas within organizational patterns (e.g., narrative with clear and logical sequence) • Forms compound/complex sentences with clause variation (e.g., “Although it rained, we played outside because it was warm”) • Uses modal verbs to express possibility or uncertainty (e.g., “might,” “could”); hedging language to soften statements (e.g., “I think,” “it seems”); and evaluative words or phrases to convey opinion or judgment (e.g., “maybe,” “clearly”) • Uses collocations (e.g., “make a list,” “take a turn”) and idiomatic expressions (e.g., “under the weather,” “hang on”) • Communicates with peers on a variety of topics and texts, building on others’ ideas and expressing ideas clearly

Writing

INITIAL (0)	TRANSITIONAL (.5)	INDEPENDENT (1)
• Uses simple transitions (e.g., “and then,” “after that”) • Writes fragments + simple sentences (e.g., “I went home,” “We played outside”) • Demonstrates emerging agreement (e.g., “He run fast,” “They goes to school” — errors present but meaning clear) • Integrates word-building (e.g., “help” → “helping” → “helped”)	• Produces simple and compound sentences with some variation (e.g., “I finished my work, and then I went to the park”) • Uses dependent clauses (e.g., “We went outside because it was sunny,” “We ate lunch when we got there”) • Collocations/idioms begin to surface (e.g., “make a plan,” “break the ice”)	• Employs paragraph-level cohesion through given/new connections (e.g., “The experiment worked. [*given*] **This** result surprised the class [*new*]”), whole-to-part organization (e.g., moving from main idea to supporting details), and cohesive devices (e.g., ellipsis and substitution: “I like pizza, and she does too [*like pizza*]”) • Integrates deliberate compound/complex sentence variety (e.g., “Although it rained, we still finished the project because we worked together”) • Uses modal language (e.g., “might,” “could”), hedging language (e.g., “I think,” “maybe”), and evaluative language (e.g., “clearly,” “of course,” “definitely”) to express stance

Reclassification Language Use Inventory: Grades 6–8

Note: Examples are illustrative, not prescriptive. Look for patterns and functions of language, not specific words or phrases.

Listening

INITIAL (0)	TRANSITIONAL (.5)	INDEPENDENT (1)
• Understands some academic language and/or key vocabulary including some extended modifiers with support (e.g., "solar energy," "the tall red building") • Recognizes dependent clauses (e.g., "We stayed inside *because it was raining*") • Follows simple sentences (e.g., "The bus is late") and organization (e.g., beginning–middle–end, sequence of events) • Relies on visuals, gestures, and contextual clues frequently for comprehensive understanding	• Begins to routinely recognize common idioms (e.g., "break the ice," "in hot water") and collocations (e.g., "make a decision," "take a break") • Recognizes clause combinations (e.g., "I'll go if you go") • Understands simple and compound sentences (e.g., "It rained, and we stayed inside") • Tracks cohesion across discourse (e.g., follows how "this," "that," or repeated nouns connect ideas)	• Interprets shades of meaning including hedging and evaluative expressions (e.g., "might," "it seems," "probably," "it's likely") • Understands figurative language (e.g., "time flew," "a lightbulb moment") • Follows logical relations in complex/compound sentences (e.g., "Although it was late, we kept working because we had a deadline") • Follows organization and sentence types (e.g., tracking cause–effect in "Because the temperature dropped, the pipes froze, and the school had to close" • Understands compare–contrast relationships (e.g., "Unlike cats, dogs need to be taken outside every day.")

Reading

INITIAL (0)	TRANSITIONAL (.5)	INDEPENDENT (1)
• Comprehends some academic language and/or key vocabulary (e.g., "evaporation," "division") • Understands simple sentences with clause cues (e.g., "I left because it was late.", "Since it was snowing, I wore a heavy coat.") • Distinguishes basic organization (e.g., beginning–middle–end, sequence of events)	• Understands some common abstract nouns/adverbials (e.g., "freedom," "fortunately," "in the meantime") • Processes compound/complex sentences (e.g., "Although it rained, we stayed inside") • Tracks connections and/or cohesion of topics and/or texts (e.g., tracking how "this problem" or "these animals" connects to ideas introduced earlier, or how repeated key terms link sections of the text)	• Recognizes modal verbs (e.g., "might," "could"), hedging language (e.g., "seems," "I think"), and figurative language (e.g., "time flew by," "his backpack weighed a ton"), as well as precise or nuanced language choices (e.g., "significantly," "approximately") • Comprehends varied sentence types including complex/compound sentences indicating logical relationships (e.g., "Although the storm was strong, the team finished the project because they had prepared.") • Follows how organization links ideas (e.g., a character forgetting homework causes a misunderstanding; A shortage of resources leads a community to create new trade agreements.)

Speaking

INITIAL (0)	TRANSITIONAL (.5)	INDEPENDENT (1)
• Uses academic language and/or key vocabulary in familiar contexts (e.g., “photosynthesis,” “fractions”) • Incorporates dependent clauses (e.g., “I stayed home because it rained,” “I went outside even though it was raining.”) • Speech is organized at a basic level (e.g., short, direct statements) with simple sentences (e.g., “I like pizza”)	• Uses idioms routinely (e.g., “break the ice,” “a piece of cake”) and collocations (e.g., “make a plan,” “set a goal”) • Uses logical connections and sequencing (e.g., “so,” “because,” “first,” “then,” “finally”) • Incorporates additional or varied clauses (e.g., “If it rains, we’ll stay inside”) • Produces simple + compound sentences (e.g., “I was late, but I still made it”) • Communicates effectively with peers to participate in activities or projects	• Incorporates modals, hedging, and/or evaluative words/phrases to express possibility and/or necessity (e.g., “might,” “probably,” “must,” “I believe”) • Uses precise academic vocabulary (e.g., content-specific terms) • Uses language with figurative/shaded meaning (e.g., “time flies,” “that was a breeze”) • Employs varied sentence types (e.g., simple, compound, complex) • Engages in coherent, purposeful language patterns, including whole/part relationships (e.g., “One part of the project was difficult. Another part was not.” within extended discourse (e.g., “When I got to the park, I saw everyone playing soccer. Then I joined in, and after that, we got ice cream.”) • Communicates with peers on a variety of topics and texts, building on others’ ideas and expressing ideas clearly

Writing

INITIAL (0)	TRANSITIONAL (.5)	INDEPENDENT (1)
• Uses some academic language and/or key vocabulary in familiar tasks (e.g., “condensation,” “perimeter”) • Forms simple sentences (e.g., “I went to the park.”) • Incorporates some conjunctions and/or prepositional phrases to connect ideas (e.g., “I went to the park, and it was sunny.”) • Organizes writing into basic patterns (e.g., simple sentences or lists of statements)	• Uses idioms routinely (e.g., “a piece of cake,” “hang on”) and collocations (e.g., “get ready,” “take a break”) • Demonstrates some clause control (e.g., “If it rains, we’ll stay in.”) • Employs logical flow (e.g., use of transitions like “first,” “then,” “finally,” “so,” “because”) • Writes simple and compound sentences (e.g., “I did my homework, and then I played outside.”)	• Uses precise language (e.g., “a turning point,” “significant”), figurative language (e.g., “time flew by,” “his backpack weighed a ton”), and evaluative language (e.g., “it seems,” “clearly,” “of course”) to convey meaning • Applies substitution (i.e., using a word or phrase to avoid repetition, e.g., “The experiment was difficult, but this challenge made it exciting.”) • Employs complex/compound sentence structure with variety (e.g., “Although the project was hard, we finished it because we worked together.”) • Demonstrates cohesion (e.g., given/new connections like “The experiment worked [given]. This result surprised the class [new].”) • Uses parallelism to clarify relationships and emphasize key ideas (e.g., “**to** read, **to** write, and **to** learn”)

Reclassification Language Use Inventory: Grades 9–12

Note: Examples are illustrative, not prescriptive. Look for patterns and functions of language, not specific words or phrases.

Listening

INITIAL (0)	TRANSITIONAL (.5)	INDEPENDENT (1)
• Understands some academic content-area language with support • Follows simple sentences (e.g., "The law changed.") • Recognizes how dependent clauses signal relationships (e.g., "because it rained," "when it's hot") • Comprehends basic organization (e.g., recognizing a descriptive pattern in "The classroom is big, with tall windows and blue walls.") • Relies on visuals, gestures, and contextual clues frequently for comprehensive understanding	• Interprets modal language (e.g., "might," "could"), hedging language (e.g., "it seems," "I think"), and evaluative language (e.g., "clearly," "definitely") • Comprehends a variety of sentences (compound/complex) with connectors that show relationships between ideas (e.g., "because," "although," "when," as in "Although it was raining, the game continued") • Recognizes cohesion (e.g., following how the speaker repeats and restates key ideas, such as "global warming" and later "this issue," to connect ideas)	• Comprehends nominalization (i.e., turning verbs or adjectives into nouns to express ideas more abstractly, e.g., "the decision to intervene was unexpected") • Understands strategic and precise language (e.g., recognizing how a speaker uses words like "clearly" to emphasize a point, "must" to signal obligation, or "allegedly" to express uncertainty) • Recognizes embedded structures (e.g., "the book ***that I read*** was informative,") and parallel structures; (e.g., "**to** question, **to** investigate, and **to** conclude") • Processes extended speech containing compound and complex sentences with clear clause relationships (e.g., "Although the results supported the hypothesis, the researchers recommended further testing") • Follows complex organization (including nominalization) (e.g., tracking how the speaker moves from describing events ("scientists discovered") to discussing abstract concepts ("the discovery") as part of a problem–solution structure)

Reading

INITIAL (0)	TRANSITIONAL (.5)	INDEPENDENT (1)
• Understands academic content-area terms in context (e.g., “evaporation,” “amendment”) • Recognizes simple organization and noun groups with basic modifiers (e.g., “the gray cloud moved over the ocean”; “the tall stone is in front of the school”) • Interprets clause relationships in simple sentences (e.g., “I went home because it was late”)	• Follows cohesion (e.g., tracking how “this” or “these” refer to earlier ideas) • Recognizes modal, hedging, and evaluative language (e.g., “might,” “seems,” “appears likely”) in context (e.g., recognizing that *“The results might indicate a trend”* shows uncertainty, or that *“It seems the author favors renewable energy”* signals interpretation rather than fact) • Processes compound/complex sentences with varied clause combinations (e.g., “Although it rained, the team won because they practiced”)	• Follows embedded structures (e.g., “The student *who won the prize* gave a speech.” and parallel structures (e.g., “**the student who** won the prize and **the teacher who** nominated them”) • Understands strategic and precise language choices that shape argument and clarity (e.g., shifts in tone or stance, such as recognizing how an author moves from objective description to persuasive language to strengthen a claim, or how a speech uses formal tone to build credibility) • Recognizes complex organization (e.g., analyzing how a writer introduces a claim, supports it with evidence, and concludes with a call to action; identifying how cause–effect or compare–contrast structures clarify relationships between ideas; for example, recognizing that an editorial builds its argument by contrasting two policies before presenting evidence for one)

Speaking

INITIAL (0)	TRANSITIONAL (.5)	INDEPENDENT (1)
• Uses academic content-area vocabulary in specialized contexts (e.g., “photosynthesis,” “legislature”) • Appropriate use of some idiomatic expressions (e.g., “hit the books,” “a piece of cake”) • Produces simple sentences with occasional dependent clauses (e.g., “I went to the game because my friend was playing”) • Applies basic organization (e.g., “first I wake up, then I eat breakfast, finally I go to school”; “Our school library is large. It has many books and computers.”)	• Employs abstract nouns and adverbials (e.g., “freedom,” “fortunately,” “as a result”) in connected speech (e.g., “Freedom is an important idea in history class”; “As a result of the experiment, we learned more about evaporation”) • Integrates modal/hedging/evaluative language (e.g., “might,” “seems,” “I believe”) in connected speech (e.g., “The answer might be correct”; “It seems like the character is nervous”; “I believe this is the best solution”) • Uses a variety (a mix of) of simple, compound, and complex sentences • Engages in deliberate clause variation (e.g., “Although it rained, the game continued”; “If it rains again, the game will stop.”) • Expresses ideas using effective organization (e.g., “Photosynthesis is how plants make food. They use sunlight and water. That’s why plants grow better outside.”) • Communicates effectively with peers to participate in activities or projects	• Employs strategic, precise choices of language to refine arguments and points (e.g., “What I mean is that renewable energy could reduce emissions by half”; “The best evidence comes from the 2022 report”; “While this solution isn’t perfect, it’s the best option available right now”) • Uses figurative language (e.g., ““The stack of homework was a mile high,” “A sea of faces”) • Demonstrates control of a complex variety of language devices and organizational patterns including parallel structures (“**the student who** studied hardest and **the teacher who** guided them”), embedded structures (“the athlete *who won the match* graduated this year”), and ellipsis (e.g., “Some students preferred the group presentation; others did not.”) • Engages in well-developed, audience-aware discourse (e.g., “Today I’ll explain how social media influences teens. First, I’ll discuss how algorithms shape what we see, then I’ll explain how that affects behavior, and finally I’ll talk about ways students can manage their online time.”) • Communicates with peers on a variety of topics and texts, building on others’ ideas and expressing ideas clearly

Writing

INITIAL (0)	TRANSITIONAL (.5)	INDEPENDENT (1)
• Uses academic content-area terms appropriate to discipline (e.g., “metamorphosis,” “constitutional rights”) • Incorporates simple + early dependent clauses (e.g., “I stayed inside because it rained”) • Uses synonyms, pronouns, conjunctions, adjectives, demonstratives (e.g., “this book,” “that locker”), and parallel structures (e.g., “I like **to** read, **to** write, and **to** learn”) • Produces organized simple texts (e.g., short text sections with clear beginning and end)	• Incorporates abstract nouns/adverbials (e.g., “freedom,” “unfortunately,” “as a result”) • Uses modals/hedging/evaluative expressions (e.g., modals: “might,” “could”; hedging: “it seems,” “possibly”; evaluative: “likely,” “important”) • Forms compound/complex sentences with deliberate variation (e.g., “Although the data were incomplete, the results were consistent”) • Produces coherently structured paragraphs with a clear topic sentence and supporting details (e.g., a paragraph that introduces a claim such as “School uniforms improve focus,” supports it with examples or explanations, and concludes with a summarizing or linking sentence)	• Produces extended, well-structured texts using a variety of sentence types with strong logic and audience awareness (e.g., essays, reports, and/or arguments) • Uses figurative language purposefully to enhance meaning or tone (e.g., “The data formed a bridge between theory and practice”; “The silence was a heavy curtain over the room”) • Incorporates parallel structures (e.g., “**the student who** researched the topic and **the teacher who** guided them”) • Integrates embedded structures in complex sentences (e.g., “The study ***that analyzed climate data from three continents*** revealed consistent patterns”; “Students *researching cost-saving strategies* presented original solutions”) • Makes use of strategic precision to refine claims and eliminate ambiguity (e.g., “Some argue that school uniforms limit individuality; however, they can create a stronger sense of community”; “Although homework can reinforce learning, excessive assignments may reduce student engagement.”)

Glossary of Linguistic Terms

The following glossary defines the technical/linguistic terms used throughout the rubrics.

Tables

Examples are provided for each grade band in tables after the definition. The examples align most naturally with what one would expect to see at the *Independent* level of the rubrics for that grade band. These examples do not represent "perfect language," but rather natural, age-appropriate usage.

- **Kindergarten:** Basic, functional language (e.g., *"the red car"*).
- **Grade 1:** Simple descriptive language with early modifier use (e.g., *"the big car"*).
- **Grades 2–3:** More descriptive and connected (e.g., *"the big red car"*).
- **Grades 4–5:** Early academic precision starts to emerge (e.g., *"the shiny new red car"*).
- **Grades 6–8:** More complexity and variety (e.g., *"the small old yellow house"*).
- **Grades 9–12:** Fully developed, sophisticated usage (e.g., *"the newly constructed historic brick courthouse downtown"*).

Additional points

The bullet points following each table describe how the use of each linguistic feature typically develops along a continuum of English language proficiency, not age or grade level. While language growth often overlaps with developmental stages, students at different grades may demonstrate similar language patterns depending on proficiency levels aligned to their English learning trajectories.

This progression moves from:

- Initial – Limited, concrete, or formulaic use of language
- Transitional – Expanding use with increasing flexibility and control
- Independent – Strategic, precise, and conceptually sophisticated use typical of academic discourse

These stages reflect how students use language to express more complex ideas and relationships, regardless of chronological age or grade placement.

Abstract Nouns

Definition: Nouns that name ideas or concepts rather than physical objects. Students' use of abstract nouns often signals increasing ability to express opinions, emotions, and academic ideas.

Examples: *freedom, courage, honesty, responsibility, democracy*

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	Context
K	"I like fun."	Simple, early abstraction
1	"I feel happy."	*Emotion-based abstract noun*
2–3	"We learned about friendship."	Familiar concept tied to SEL
4–5	"We talked about fairness in class."	Early academic abstraction
6–8	"Responsibility means doing your work."	Definition and reasoning
9–12	"Democracy depends on civic engagement."	Abstract concept in academic register

- Initial: Students use a small set of familiar abstract nouns (e.g., *fun, love*), often tied to personal experience or emotion. These are typically memorized lexical items rather than flexible conceptual vocabulary.
- Transitional: Students begin to recognize and use abstract nouns connected to social and classroom contexts (e.g., *friendship, fairness, respect*). Their understanding is still closely linked to concrete experiences or shared cultural references.
- Independent: Students use abstract nouns strategically to express opinions, reasoning, and academic ideas (e.g., *justice, democracy, responsibility*). Their language reflects increasing conceptual control and is often paired with more complex sentence structures and disciplinary discourse.
- Growth in the use of abstract nouns signals increasing ability to engage with conceptual and academic language, a hallmark of advanced proficiency.

See also: *Nominalization*, *Modifiers*, *Evaluative Expressions* — abstract nouns are often created through nominalization and can be expanded with modifiers or used to express stance.

Adverbials

Definition: Words or phrases that modify verbs, adjectives, or entire sentences to express when, where, how, or why something happens. They make communication clearer and more precise.

Examples: *quickly, yesterday, on the other hand, fortunately, in the classroom*

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	Context
K	"We go home now."	Time adverbial
1	"We walk to school."	Place/direction adverbial (prepositional phrase)
2–3	"She runs very fast."	Manner adverbial
4–5	"After lunch, we go to recess."	Fronted time phrase
6–8	"In the morning, they arrived early."	Flexible positioning
9–12	"On the other hand, the data suggest otherwise."	Discourse connector

- Initial: Students use simple, common adverbs or time phrases (e.g., *now, today, outside*) in predictable positions, usually at the end of sentences. These adverbials tend to signal time or place and are closely tied to immediate, familiar contexts.
- Transitional: Students begin to expand their adverbial use to include manner adverbials (*very fast*) and time phrases that may appear in different sentence positions (*After lunch, we go to recess*). Their use shows growing flexibility and syntactic control.
- Independent: Students use a wide range of adverbials to modify verbs, adjectives, and entire clauses or sentences. They demonstrate control over fronted adverbials (*In the morning, they arrived early*) and discourse-level connectors (*On the other hand, therefore, fortunately*), which signal relationships between ideas and enhance cohesion.
- Growth in adverbial use reflects students' increasing ability to clarify meaning, organize information, and manage textual flow, particularly in academic writing and formal speech.

See also: Transitions, Cohesion — *adverbials often function as connectors that signal logical relationships between ideas.*

Clause / Dependent Clause

Definition: A *clause* contains a subject and verb. A *dependent clause* relies on a main clause to form a complete thought. More complex clauses indicate higher language control.

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	Feature
K	"I run."	Simple clause
1	"I run fast."	*Expanded simple clause*
2–3	"I run because I like it."	Basic dependent clause
4–5	"When it rains, we stay inside."	Temporal clause
6–8	"Although it was raining, we played outside."	Complex clause structure
9–12	"While technological advances accelerate, society must adapt."	Embedded, academic clause

- Initial: Students primarily produce simple clauses with a clear subject–verb structure (*I run*). These clauses usually stand alone and are tied to immediate, concrete actions or states. Clause structure at this stage is linear and minimal.
- Transitional: Students begin to produce dependent clauses to explain cause, time, or condition (*I run because I like it*). Their use reflects early control of subordination and the ability to connect ideas within a sentence rather than stringing together separate sentences.
- Independent: Students use a variety of dependent clause types (temporal, causal, conditional, concessive) and demonstrate increasing flexibility in clause placement (*Although it was raining, we played outside*). Clauses may appear at the beginning, middle, or end of sentences, often adding nuance or complexity.
- Students at higher grades and language proficiencies should be able to employ embedded clauses and complex syntactic structures to express abstract ideas and logical relationships typical of academic language (*While technological advances accelerate, society must adapt*).
- Growth in clause complexity reflects increasing syntactic control, conceptual precision, and the ability to manage hierarchical sentence structures—a hallmark of advanced language proficiency.

Clause cue: A word or short phrase (e.g., *when, because, if, although*) that signals the start of a dependent clause and shows its relationship to the main clause (e.g., cause, time, condition). In language development, early use of clause cues often signals students are beginning to combine ideas rather than relying only on simple sentences.

See also: Embedded Structures, Syntactic Variation, Sentence Variety — dependent clauses are frequently embedded in sentences to add detail and contribute to more complex syntax.

Cohesion

Definition: Cohesion refers to the ways sentences and ideas are connected within a text to make it flow logically and clearly. It's created through linguistic signals—words, phrases, and structures that link one idea to another so the reader or listener can follow the thread of meaning.

Cohesion can be achieved through:

- Reference words (e.g., *this, it, they*)
- Connectors and transitions (e.g., *because, however, then*)
- Repetition or substitution of key words (e.g., *students… they*)
- Ellipsis (omitting repeated information)
- Parallelism (repeating structures to connect ideas)
- Given/new relationships (linking what is known with what is added)

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	Cohesive Feature	Explanation
K	"I see a dog. It is big."	Reference	*It* connects the second sentence to the first
1	"I like apples, and I like bananas."	Connector	*and* joins two related ideas
2–3	"I like apples. They are sweet."	Substitution	*They* replaces "apples"
4–5	"I like apples because they are sweet."	Connector + reference	Adds a causal link with *because*
6–8	"Some students will read; others, write."	Ellipsis	*will* is omitted but understood
9–12	"This evidence supports the claim. However, more research is needed."	Transition	*However* signals contrast between ideas

- At early levels, cohesion is simple and often relies on repeated words or basic connectors (*and, but, then*).
- As language proficiency develops, students begin to use a wider range of cohesive devices—transitions, reference chains, ellipsis, and structural parallelism.
- Cohesion is not about fancy words; it's about how ideas hang together.
- Advanced students can analyze and use cohesion deliberately, adjusting their language to clarify relationships among ideas.

See also: Transitions, Given / New, Ellipsis (as a cohesive device) — cohesion involves connecting ideas across text, often through transitions, reference chains, and ellipsis.

Conjunctions

Definition: Conjunctions are words or phrases that connect other words, phrases, or clauses to show relationships between ideas. They help build more complex and coherent sentences.

There are three main types of conjunctions:

- **Coordinating conjunctions** (e.g., *and, but, or, so*) — join words or independent clauses.
- **Subordinating conjunctions** (e.g., *because, when, although*) — link dependent clauses to independent ones.
- **Correlative conjunctions** (e.g., *either…or, both…and*) — work in pairs to connect balanced elements.

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	Conjunction	Function
K	"I like apples **and** bananas."	and	Coordination of nouns
1	**"I like apples, and I like bananas."**	and	Coordination of simple clauses
2–3	"I want to play, **but** I'm tired."	but	Coordination of clauses (contrast)
4–5	"We stayed inside **because** it rained."	because	Subordination (cause and effect)
6–8	"**Although** it was late, we kept working."	although	Complex sentence with contrast
9–12	"We will **either** finish today **or** continue tomorrow."	either…or	Correlative conjunction showing options

- Initial: Students use simple coordinating conjunctions like *and* and *but* to link words or basic clauses (*I like apples and bananas*). Conjunction use at this stage reflects linear idea connection and simple sentence structure.
- Transitional: Students begin using subordinating conjunctions (*because, when, if*) to link dependent and independent clauses (*We stayed inside because it rained*). Their language shows growing ability to express cause-effect, time, and conditional relationships.
- Independent: Students expand to a wider range of subordinators (*although, whereas, unless*) and correlative conjunctions (*either…or, both…and*), using them to build complex, varied sentence structures that express contrast, concession, condition, and other logical relationships (*Although it was late, we kept working*). Their use reflects increasing syntactic control and cohesion in both spoken and written language.
- Conjunction use plays a central role in sentence expansion and clause integration, marking an important shift from simple additive structures to hierarchically organized syntax.
- Growth in this area reflects not just grammatical accuracy but the ability to express logical and rhetorical relationships between ideas—an essential foundation for academic language.

See also: Transitions, Clause / Dependent Clause — conjunctions link clauses or phrases and are key tools for building more complex sentence structures.

Collocations

Definition: Natural word pairings that native speakers use instinctively (e.g., *make a decision* rather than *do a decision*). These signal growing naturalness and fluency.

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	Example aligned to the "Independent" level	Context
K	"Take a nap."	Daily routine
1	"Clean up your desk."	Classroom routine
2–3	"Do homework."	Basic academic collocation
4–5	"Make a plan for the trip."	Common classroom task
6–8	"Set a goal for next week."	Academic language
9–12	"Draw a conclusion from the evidence."	Content-area collocation

- Initial: Students begin using very common collocations connected to everyday routines (*take a nap, get up, go home*). These are typically learned as memorized chunks without conscious awareness of the word pairing itself.
- Transitional: Students expand their use to school-related and familiar academic collocations (*do homework, make a plan*). At this stage, collocations still rely heavily on exposure and modeled language, but they begin to sound more natural in classroom interactions.
- Independent: Students use collocations flexibly and purposefully, including those tied to academic tasks and disciplinary language (*set a goal, draw a conclusion, reach a decision*). Their language increasingly mirrors native-like patterns and sounds more fluent and less formulaic.
- Collocational growth reflects students' increasing lexical control and ability to use language in ways that align with native speaker norms, which supports both comprehension and production.
- Many collocations are not easily deducible from individual word meanings, so their presence signals deeper lexical and syntactic competence rather than just vocabulary breadth.

See also: Idioms, Word/Phrase Level, Modal Language — collocations often overlap with idiomatic and modal expressions in fluent language use.

Demonstratives

Definition: Demonstratives are words that point to specific people, objects, or ideas in relation to the speaker's position in time or space. In English, these are typically this, that, these, and those.
They help make language more precise by showing whether something is near or far, singular or plural.

- this – singular, near
- that – singular, far
- these – plural, near
- those – plural, far

Why it matters: Demonstratives are often among the earliest function words learned, but their accurate use with increasing complexity—including abstract and discourse-level reference—reflects language growth over time.

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	Context	Feature
K	"This is my toy."	Immediate, concrete object	Basic demonstrative use
1	"That is my book."	Referring to a visible object slightly removed from the speaker	Singular demonstrative showing distance
2–3	"I like those shoes."	Object within shared visual field	Number + distance
4–5	"I will bring these books for the project."	Refers to multiple specific items	Expanded noun reference
6–8	"That was the best part of the movie."	Refers back to a shared experience	Abstract reference
9–12	"This demonstrates the importance of preparation."	Refers to prior statement or idea	Discourse-level reference

- Initial: Students use basic demonstratives (*this, that*) to refer to concrete, visible objects or people in their immediate environment. Their use is typically supported by gestures or pointing, reflecting reliance on shared physical context for meaning. (*This is my toy.*)
- Transitional: Students begin to differentiate number and distance (*this/that* vs. *these/those*) and can reference objects or events not immediately at hand but still tangible or familiar (*Those are my shoes over there.*). Their language shows growing precision in reference and spatial awareness.
- Independent: Students use demonstratives to reference ideas, events, or textual elements rather than only physical objects (*This proves the point.*). This reflects a shift from deictic (pointing) use to conceptual reference, marking greater linguistic abstraction and control.
- High academic proficiency: Students use demonstratives strategically to create cohesion across extended discourse, referencing earlier statements, arguments, or textual elements (*These findings support the hypothesis.*). Their use reflects command of textual organization and logical flow, not just vocabulary knowledge.
- Growth in demonstrative use mirrors the broader development from concrete to abstract language and plays a crucial role in cohesion, referencing, and academic discourse framing.

See also: Cohesion, Given / New, Noun Groups — demonstratives create links between sentences and help maintain reference chains.

Discourse

Definition: How language is organized across sentences—transitions, sequencing, cohesion, and logical relationships among ideas.

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	Example aligned to the "Independent" level	Feature
K	"I eat. I sleep. I play."	Additive structure
1	"I eat, and I play."	Early sentence connection using a conjunction
2–3	"I eat and then I play."	Basic sequencing
4–5	"I eat lunch, and after that, I play outside."	More explicit cohesion
6–8	"First we tested the water, then we recorded the data."	Logical progression
9–12	"In contrast to previous findings, our results suggest…"	Academic discourse framing

- Initial: Students produce language in short, additive statements (*I eat. I sleep. I play.*). Ideas are expressed sequentially or in isolation, with little or no explicit connection between sentences. Discourse structure at this stage reflects minimal cohesion and limited use of transitions.
- Transitional: Students begin to use basic sequencing and simple connectors (*and then, after that*) to express temporal and additive relationships between ideas (*I eat and then I play*). Discourse structure becomes more linear and organized, reflecting growing control over how sentences relate to one another.
- Independent: Students produce extended, cohesive discourse with logical progression and clear signaling of relationships between ideas (*First we tested the water, then we recorded the data*). They use transitions more purposefully and can structure their language for specific purposes such as recounting, explaining, or summarizing.
- High academic proficiency: Students demonstrate discourse framing, using advanced transitions and connectors to signal contrast, cause-effect, qualification, and stance (*In contrast to previous findings, our results suggest…*). Their language reflects control over organization at the text level, not just the sentence level.
- Growth in discourse control reflects increasing ability to structure ideas coherently, manage logical relationships, and signal rhetorical intent—hallmarks of academic language proficiency.

See also: Cohesion, Transitions, Organization — discourse structure is shaped by cohesive ties, transitions, and how ideas are sequenced and organized.

Ellipsis (*as a cohesive device*)

Definition: Ellipsis is when part of a sentence is intentionally left out because it's already understood from the context. It's a way speakers and writers avoid repeating information and make language more natural, efficient, and cohesive.

This isn't the "dot-dot-dot" punctuation (…) — in WIDA and academic language contexts, *ellipsis refers to omitted words that the reader or listener can easily infer*.

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	What's Omitted	Explanation
K	*Not yet used intentionally as a cohesive device.*		
1	*Not yet used intentionally as a cohesive device.*		
2–3	"I like pizza." "I do too."	*like pizza*	Repeats idea without restating it
4–5	"He can play the guitar, and she can too."	*play the guitar*	Omits repeated verb phrase
6–8	"Some students will read; others, write."	*will* before *write*	Omits auxiliary verb for cohesion
9–12	"Maria finished early. James didn't."	*finish early*	Omits verb phrase entirely, relies on context

- Initial: Students typically rely on fully stated sentences with little or no omission of repeated information (*I went to the store. I bought milk.*). Their language reflects a developing ability to track reference and context, so they repeat elements to maintain clarity.
- Transitional: Students begin to omit information that is recoverable from context, especially in familiar, conversational settings (*I went to the store and [I] bought milk.*). Ellipsis appears in predictable places but remains tied to simple structures.
- Independent: Students use ellipsis strategically to create cohesion across sentences and clauses without unnecessary repetition (*I went to the store, bought milk, and [I] left.*). Their language becomes more concise and fluent, reflecting growing control over implicit reference and context.
- Ellipsis supports cohesion by linking ideas smoothly and efficiently, signaling a shift from explicit repetition to economical, connected language.
- Recognizing ellipsis in student work helps reviewers distinguish between intentional omission for cohesion and incomplete or fragmented language, a key distinction at higher proficiency levels.

See also: Cohesion, Given / New, Transitions — ellipsis contributes to cohesion by avoiding repetition when meaning is recoverable from context.

Evaluative Expressions

Definition: Evaluative expressions are words or phrases that communicate the speaker's or writer's attitude, judgment, or opinion about a person, thing, event, or idea. Unlike simple descriptive language, evaluative expressions show how the writer feels or what they believe about the information they're presenting.

They often express:

- Approval or disapproval (*good, bad, unfair, wonderful*)
- Importance or value (*essential, important, unnecessary*)
- Degree of certainty (*obvious, likely, doubtful*)
- Quality or strength (*excellent, weak, effective, harmful*)

These expressions help convey stance, which is an advanced language function tied to academic reasoning, argumentation, and persuasive writing.

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	Evaluative Expression	Function
K	"That's good."	*good*	Expressing simple approval
1	"That was a bad idea."	*bad*	Expressing disapproval
2–3	"I think it's better to wait."	*better*	Expressing preference
4–5	"This is an important rule."	*important*	Expressing value or priority
6–8	"It's likely the team will win."	*likely*	Expressing probability
9–12	"The evidence strongly supports this claim."	*strongly supports*	Expressing evaluative stance with precision.

- Initial: Students use basic evaluative adjectives (*good, bad, fun, nice*) tied to personal reaction.
- Transitional: Students begin using evaluative language to make simple judgments and express preferences.
- Independent: Evaluative expressions become more academic and precise—used to evaluate claims, evidence, processes, and ideas.
- This language often occurs alongside modal verbs (*might, should, must*) and hedging devices (*I think, it seems, maybe*) to soften or strengthen stance.
- Recognizing evaluative expressions helps reviewers identify how students express opinions and levels of certainty, which is key to academic argumentation.

See also: Modal Language, Abstract Nouns, Hedging — evaluative language conveys stance and often overlaps with modal and hedging expressions.

Embedded Structures

Definition: Embedded structures are phrases or clauses placed inside a larger sentence to add detail, clarify meaning, or provide additional information. They allow students to pack more meaning into a single sentence, increasing syntactic complexity without losing cohesion.

These structures can appear:

- Inside a noun phrase (*the boy with the red hat waved*),
- As relative clauses (*the student who finished early went outside*), or
- As interrupting phrases (*The teacher, tired from the meeting, sat down*).

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	Embedded Element	Function
K	"I see a dog with a ball."	*with a ball* (prepositional phrase)	Early, simple noun phrase expansion
1	"The girl who sings is my friend."	*who sings* (relative clause)	Adds identifying detail
2–3	"My brother, who is six, likes pizza."	*who is six* (nonessential clause)	Extra information within the sentence
4–5	"The book on the table is mine."	*on the table* (prepositional phrase)	Embedded phrase to specify the noun
6–8	"The students, excited by the news, cheered loudly."	*excited by the news* (participial phrase)	Adds descriptive nuance
9–12	"The policy, which had been debated for months, finally passed."	*which had been debated for months* (relative clause)	Complex embedded structure conveying background information

- Initial: Embedded structures usually appear as simple prepositional phrases that modify nouns (e.g., *the ball on the floor*).
- Transitional: Students begin to use relative clauses and participial phrases to add more precise information.
- Independent: Students use multiple embedded elements within a sentence, layering meaning and achieving concise, sophisticated expression.
- Embedded structures are a hallmark of academic language, often found in textbooks, formal writing, and high-level student responses.

See also: Clause / Dependent Clause, Noun Groups, Parallelism — embedded structures insert clauses or phrases inside larger units, increasing complexity and precision.

Figurative Language

Definition: Language that goes beyond literal meaning (e.g., idioms, metaphors, similes). Indicates more abstract language use.

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	Type
K	"I'm a superhero!"	Imaginative play
1	"I'm so hungry, I'm a bear."	Simple metaphor for intensity
2–3	"The sun is like a ball of fire."	Basic simile
4–5	"The classroom was a zoo."	Simple metaphor
6–8	"She had a heart of stone."	Figurative comparison
9–12	"Time is a thief that steals our youth."	Extended metaphor

- Initial: Students use figurative language in imaginative or playful contexts (*I'm a superhero!*). At this stage, figurative expressions are typically tied to personal identity or pretend play, and students may not yet distinguish between literal and non-literal meaning.
- Transitional: Students begin to recognize and use simple similes and familiar metaphors (*The sun is like a ball of fire*). Figurative expressions are often highly conventional or concrete, and understanding still depends heavily on context and shared experience.
- Independent: Students use figurative language more flexibly and deliberately, including metaphors, personification, and hyperbole (*She had a heart of stone*). They can interpret these expressions even when meanings are not immediately obvious, showing greater semantic flexibility.
- Figurative language use reflects a shift from literal, concrete expression to abstract and conceptual language, supporting nuanced communication and stylistic variety.
- Growth in this area signals students' increasing ability to recognize implied meaning, understand tone and stance, and engage with academic texts where figurative language often conveys key ideas indirectly.

See also: Idioms, Collocations, Evaluative Expressions — figurative language often relies on idiomatic or evaluative phrasing to convey nuanced meaning.

Frames (Memorized Frames)

Definition: Memorized frames, or simply “frames”, are fixed or partially fixed sentence structures that students learn, store, and repeat without needing to generate the grammar themselves. These are often early language constructions used for functional communication before students have full control of syntax or morphology.

Examples of common memorized frames in early English development:

- “I want ___.”, “Can I have ___?”, “My name is ___.” “This is a ___.” “I like ___.” “I don’t know.”

These frames allow students to participate in classroom routines and express basic needs or ideas even if they don’t yet understand how to build those sentences from scratch.

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the “Independent” level*	Feature	Function
K	“I want cookie.”	Fixed frame with word swap	Requesting
1	“Can I have pencil?”	Memorized structure + content word	Functional classroom language
2–3	“I don’t like broccoli.”	Frame plus negation element	Expressing opinion
4–5	“I think it’s…”	Partially fixed frame introducing opinion	Emerging complexity
6–8	“I agree with you because…”	Functional academic frame	Early argumentation
9–12	“In my opinion, I believe that…”	Set academic discourse pattern	Structured response

- Initial: Students rely heavily on fully memorized frames like *I want* ___ or *This is a* ___ to communicate basic needs and participate in routines. These structures allow for meaningful communication without requiring control over grammar or morphology.
- Transitional: Students begin to adapt frames by substituting or extending elements, using them for more functions (*I don’t like* ___, *Can I have* ___*?*). Their language shows emerging flexibility but remains anchored in patterned expressions.
- Independent: Students use partially fixed frames strategically in academic discourse, often to signal stance, introduce claims, or structure argumentation (*I agree with you because…*, *In my opinion, I believe that…*). At this stage, frames are integrated with other language structures rather than relied upon exclusively.
- Frames provide linguistic scaffolding, giving students early access to functional communication and structured participation even before full language control develops.
- Recognizing frames helps educators distinguish between rote reproduction (a sign of early stage language use) and adaptive, strategic use (a marker of more advanced proficiency).

See also: Sentence Variety, Clause / Dependent Clause — memorized frames are early sentence structures that students adapt as their syntax grows.

Given / New

Definition: *Given/new* refers to how speakers and writers organize information in sentences and paragraphs by linking what the reader or listener already knows (given) with new information that advances the idea. This connection helps the text flow smoothly and makes meaning easier to follow.

Given information may have been:

- Stated earlier in the text or conversation.
- Obvious from context.
- Part of common, shared knowledge.

New information adds details, explanations, or further development to the given idea.

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	Given	New
K	*Typically not used intentionally across sentences at this stage.*		
1	*Typically not used intentionally across sentences at this stage.*		
2–3	"The dog is big. It likes to run."	*The dog is big*	*It likes to run*
4–5	"Rain falls from clouds. This water fills the rivers."	*Rain falls from clouds*	*This water fills the rivers*
6–8	"Photosynthesis produces energy. This process is essential for plant survival."	*Photosynthesis produces energy*	*This process is essential for plant survival*
9–12	"The Civil Rights Movement transformed American society. This transformation reshaped politics, culture, and law."	*The Civil Rights Movement transformed American society*	*This transformation reshaped politics, culture, and law*

- Initial: Students often produce sentences as isolated statements without clear links to what came before (*The dog is big. The ball is red.*). There's little or no referencing, and each sentence introduces information as if it were new.
- Transitional: Students begin to use basic referencing words (*it, this, they*) to connect ideas across sentences (*The dog is big. It likes to run.*). This marks the emergence of given-new organization, creating a more cohesive flow.
- Independent: Students strategically use referencing and cohesive devices to build extended chains of information across sentences and paragraphs (*Photosynthesis produces energy. This process is essential for plant survival.*). They control how information is introduced, elaborated, and connected, supporting academic clarity and precision.
- Effective use of given/new organization is a key driver of cohesion, allowing texts to feel connected rather than fragmented.
- Mastery of this pattern is closely tied to academic discourse, where ideas are layered, referenced, and built upon systematically.

See also: Cohesion, Demonstratives, Noun Groups — given/new structures shape how ideas are linked and introduced in discourse.

Hedging

Definition: Language that softens claims, showing uncertainty or caution. Common in persuasive and academic contexts.

Examples: *might, could, seems, possibly, likely*. Common hedging language includes:

- Modal verbs: might, could, may
- Adverbs and adverbial phrases: probably, possibly, in some cases
- Verbs of uncertainty: seem, appear, suggest
- Phrases: it's likely that…, it seems that…, there's a chance that…

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	Hedge	Function
K	"I think it's a dog."	*I think*	Tentative claim using simple phrase
1	"Maybe it's under the table."	*Maybe*	Early hedging with basic adverbs
2–3	"It could be in the box."	*could*	Modal hedge indicating possibility.
4–5	"It seems like it's going to rain."	*seems like*	Softer, less direct assertion
6–8	"This is probably the best solution."	*probably*	Shows caution while expressing opinion
9–12	"The data suggest that the hypothesis may be valid."	*suggest, may*	Strategic hedging for precision and stance in academic argumentation

- Initial: Students may use simple hedging phrases like *I think* or *maybe* as they learn to express uncertainty.
- Transitional: Hedging expands to include modal verbs and common adverbs, allowing students to temper their claims in more structured ways.
- Independent: Hedging is used deliberately to position arguments, acknowledge complexity, and engage in academic discourse with nuance.
- Hedging is especially common in science, social studies, and persuasive writing, where overstatement can undermine credibility.

See also: Modal Language, Evaluative Expressions — hedging uses modal and evaluative language to signal uncertainty or nuance.

Idioms

Definition: Fixed expressions with meanings that aren't literal. Control of idioms shows advanced comprehension and fluency.

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	Example aligned to the "Independent" level	Meaning
K	"It's raining cats and dogs."	Heavy rain (comprehension)
1	"All done."	Finished / completed
2–3	"I have butterflies in my stomach."	Nervous
4–5	"Hit the road after lunch."	Leave/go
6–8	"Hit the books before the test."	Study hard
9–12	"They were on the same page."	In agreement

- Initial: Students may understand or use a few highly familiar idioms tied to everyday contexts (e.g., *time to go*, *let's go*, *good job*), often learned as chunks of language without fully analyzing their meaning.
- Transitional: Students begin to recognize common idioms in classroom speech and texts, especially those with concrete, predictable meanings (e.g., *break a leg*, *hit the books*). Their use may still be literal or awkward at times.
- Independent: Students interpret and use idioms flexibly and strategically, recognizing context, tone, and cultural nuance. They can distinguish when idiomatic language is appropriate (informal vs. formal settings) and sometimes substitute or paraphrase idioms to clarify meaning.
- Idioms are culturally embedded and context-dependent, which means instruction should focus on both meaning and appropriate usage — not just memorization.
- In academic settings, idioms can be a hidden comprehension barrier, especially when content teachers use them casually (*"Let's hit the ground running"*). Making idioms explicit and teachable supports comprehension without diluting rigor.

See also: Collocations, Figurative Language, Modal Language — idioms are fixed expressions that often overlap with collocations and figurative speech.

Modal Language

Definition: Words/phrases showing possibility, certainty, obligation, or permission. A key marker of nuance and stance in academic writing.

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	Modal Language	Function
K	"I can run."	*can* (ability/permission)	Very basic modal use tied to personal action
1	"We will go to the park."	*will* (intention)	Expressing a future plan
2–3	"We might go outside."	*might* (possibility)	Beginning to show uncertainty.
4–5	"We should finish our work before recess."	*should* (obligation)	Expressing expectation
6–8	"That could be the answer."	*could* (tentative stance)	Hedging or softening claims
9–12	"This policy must be reconsidered." / "It might indicate a larger trend."	*must*, *might* (certainty and possibility)	Using modals strategically to shape argumentation and nuance

- Initial: Students use a very limited set of modals (often *can* and *will*) tied to immediate, personal actions (e.g., *I can run*). Their use is concrete — ability or intention — and usually not tied to abstract ideas.
- Transitional: Students begin to broaden their modal repertoire to include expressions of obligation (*should*), possibility (*might*), and necessity (*must*). Modals are used in more structured ways, though often still in familiar contexts.
- Independent: Students use modals strategically to signal stance, soften claims, express degrees of certainty, and indicate nuance in arguments or explanations (e.g., *may suggest*, *could indicate*, *must address*). Their use reflects academic reasoning and discourse conventions.
- Modal language plays a critical role in argumentative and informational writing, as well as in scientific and social studies discourse, where students need to distinguish between fact, inference, and possibility.
- Overuse of a single modal (*can* for everything, for example) often reflects earlier proficiency levels, while varied, precise use signals linguistic maturity and control.

See also: Hedging, Evaluative Expressions, Collocations — modals and related phrases are common vehicles for hedging and expressing stance.

Modifiers

Definition: Modifiers are words, phrases, or clauses that provide additional information about another part of a sentence. They make language more specific and detailed, helping students describe, qualify, or refine meaning.

Modifiers can:

- Describe nouns (*the red ball*),
- Describe verbs (*ran quickly*), or
- Provide detail about whole clauses (*Surprisingly, they won the game*).

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	Modifier	Function
K	"the big dog"	*big* (adjective)	Adds a simple detail to a noun
1	"She runs fast."	*fast* (adverb)	Describes how she runs
2–3	"the big brown dog"	*big brown* (adjective phrase)	Expands description
4–5	"She runs very fast."	*very* (adverb)	Intensifies another modifier.
6–8	"The boy with the red hat waved."	*with the red hat* (prepositional phrase)	Adds detail to the noun
9–12	"The team, exhausted from practice, celebrated anyway."	*exhausted from practice* (participial phrase)	Complex modifier adding nuance

- Initial: Students use basic adjectives and adverbs to add simple details (e.g., *big, red, fast*).
- Transitional: Students begin to use phrases to add more precise information (e.g., *with the red hat*, *very quickly*).
- Independent: Students use embedded phrases and clauses as modifiers to layer information and pack more meaning into sentences.
- Modifiers are essential for descriptive, narrative, and academic writing, allowing students to be more precise and sophisticated in how they express ideas.

See also: Noun Groups, Word-Building, Abstract Nouns — modifiers expand or refine meaning in noun groups and often combine with abstract or derived forms.

Morphology

Definition: Morphology is the study of how words are formed from the smallest units of meaning, called morphemes. Morphemes include base words (*run*), prefixes (*un-, pre-*), suffixes *(-ing, -ed, -s*), and roots that carry meaning (*bio* in *biology*). As students progress linguistically, their use of morphology shows in their ability to create, interpret, and manipulate words—not just memorize them.

- *Inflectional morphology* changes a word's form to show tense, number, or agreement *(run → runs*).
- *Derivational morphology* changes a word's meaning or part of speech (*happy → happiness*).
- Morphological knowledge helps students decode unfamiliar words, especially academic vocabulary.
- For multilingual learners, morphology often develops later than basic vocabulary and is a key indicator of more advanced language proficiency.

Examples of morphemes: *play, plays, played, replay, happiness, misunderstood*

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	Feature	Explanation
K	"dogs"	Inflectional	Adds -s to mark plural
1	"running"	*Inflectional*	Adds *-ing* to show ongoing action
2–3	"jumped"	Inflectional	Adds -ed to mark past tense
4–5	"careless"	Derivational	Adds -less to change meaning (without care)
6–8	"unbelievable"	Derivational	Uses prefix un- + base + suffix -able to create a complex word
9–12	"photosynthesis" / "biodegradable"	Root + affixes	Academic vocabulary built from Greek/Latin roots

- Initial: Students begin using inflectional morphology in predictable, high-frequency contexts (*dog → dogs*, *run → runs*). These morphemes typically mark number, tense, or agreement and are often acquired as unanalyzed chunks rather than consciously applied rules.
- Transitional: Students start to generalize and manipulate inflectional patterns (*jump → jumped*) and begin to use common derivational morphemes (*care → careless*). Their language shows early awareness of how adding parts to words can change meaning or grammatical role.
- Independent: Students flexibly use derivational morphology and root-based word formation, including Greek and Latin roots (*photo → photosynthesis*), prefixes (*un-*, *pre-*), and suffixes (*-able*, *-tion*). This reflects growing control over academic vocabulary and the ability to decode and construct complex words.
- Inflectional morphology signals developing control over grammar and agreement, while derivational morphology signals growing lexical sophistication and conceptual depth.
- Morphological knowledge is a key bridge to academic language, allowing students to interpret and produce discipline-specific vocabulary with greater independence.

See also: Word-Building, Modifiers, Nominalization — morphology underlies how words are constructed and expanded for grammatical and lexical functions.

Multiple-Meaning Words

Definition: Words that have more than one meaning depending on the context in which they are used. These may share the same spelling and pronunciation but carry different meanings in different settings. A multiple-meaning word is a single lexical form whose meaning changes based on **context**, not subject area. The listener or reader must use semantic, syntactic, or discourse cues to select the intended meaning. Understanding and using multiple-meaning words effectively reflects growing language flexibility and comprehension.

Examples of common multiple-meaning words: *bat, light, play, point, bark, ring, table, wave.*

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	Context	Meaning
K	"The bat is flying."	Talking about animals	A flying mammal
K	"I hit the ball with the bat."	Play/PE context	A piece of sports equipment
1	"We play outside."	Recess / everyday activity	To engage in a game or activity
1	"The play was funny."	School performance / story	A short performance or story acted out
2–3	"Turn on the light."	Everyday context	Illumination
2–3	"That box is very light."	Describing weight	Not heavy
4–5	"The dog's bark is loud."	Everyday context	The sound a dog makes
4–5	"The tree has rough bark."	Science context	Outer covering of a tree
6–8	"We wave goodbye."	Everyday gesture	Move hand to signal
6–8	"A wave hit the shore."	Science or narrative	Movement of water
9–12	"The point of the story is clear."	Abstract use	Main idea or purpose
9–12	"The pencil has a sharp point."	Concrete use	Tip of an object

- Initial: Students typically understand and use the most common, concrete meaning of a word (*bat → animal*, *light → illumination*). Their interpretations are context-bound and heavily reliant on immediate experiences and visual referents.
- Transitional: Students begin to recognize familiar alternate meanings in everyday contexts (*bat → sports equipment*, *light → not heavy*). Their ability to shift meaning is emerging but usually tied to highly familiar, tangible concepts.
- Independent: Students comprehend and produce abstract and figurative uses of multiple-meaning words (*point → idea vs. tip; play → performance vs. action; table → a way to organize information vs. furniture*), often in disciplinary or metaphorical language. Their ability to navigate these meanings reflects lexical depth, conceptual understanding, and strong context sensitivity.
- Growth in handling multiple-meaning words shows increasing semantic flexibility, which supports reading comprehension, writing precision, and academic discourse across subject areas.

See also: Modifiers, Cohesion — multiple-meaning words rely on context and cohesive ties for correct interpretation.

Nominalization

Definition: Nominalization is when a verb or adjective is turned into a noun or noun phrase. This allows writers and speakers to pack more information into a single idea, create more abstract or formal language, and build complex sentence structures.

Nominalization is common in academic texts because it shifts the focus from actions to concepts, making language denser and more structured. It's often a marker of advanced English proficiency.

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	Base Form	Nominalized Form	Function
K–1	"She runs fast." *(no nominalization yet — not typical at this level)*	—	—	Nominalization rarely occurs
2–3	"He decided to help." *(still action-focused)*	decide	—	Early stages—nominalization uncommon
4–5	"His decision helped everyone."	decide	decision	Noun form encapsulates the action
6–8	"Their discovery changed everything."	discover	discovery	Makes the idea of discovering the topic of the sentence
9–12	"The implementation of the policy improved outcomes."	implement	implementation	Adds abstraction and density to the sentence

- Initial: Students use action-focused language almost exclusively (*She runs fast.*). Nominalization is not typical at this stage; verbs carry the main weight of meaning. Sentences are simple and concrete.
- Transitional: Students begin to encounter and occasionally use simple nominalizations (*His decision helped everyone*). These often come from familiar, high-frequency verbs (*decide* → *decision*). Their language begins to reflect a shift from action to concept, though use remains limited.
- Independent: Students comprehend and produce nominalizations across content areas (*The implementation of the policy improved outcomes*). Nominalized forms allow them to build denser, more abstract sentences and refer to complex processes as compact nouns. This supports formal, academic discourse.
- Nominalization shifts language from dynamic events to static concepts, enabling more sophisticated reasoning, explanation, and argumentation.
- Recognizing nominalization in student work is key to understanding how learners manage information packaging, abstraction, and clause structure, which are hallmarks of academic English.

See also: Abstract Nouns, Morphology, Embedded Structures — nominalization turns verbs or adjectives into nouns, increasing syntactic density.

Noun Groups

Definition: A noun plus modifiers. Modifiers usually follow a rough sequence:

Determiner → Quantity → Opinion → Size → Age → Shape → Color → Origin → Material → Noun.

The proper sequence of modifiers is a clear, observable marker of linguistic maturity.

Example: *"The three beautiful big old round red Spanish wooden chairs", NOT "The wooden Spanish red round old big beautiful three chairs"*

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	Noun Group	Feature
K	*the dog*	determiner + noun	Simple, concrete
1	*the big dog*	determiner + adjective + noun	Early modifiers appear
2–3	*the big brown dog*	determiner + stacked adjectives + noun	More detailed description
4–5	*the big brown dog with a blue collar*	determiner + adjectives + noun + prepositional phrase	Expansion through prepositional phrase
6–8	*the big brown dog with a blue collar that glows in the dark*	determiner + adjectives + noun + prepositional phrase + relative clause	Embedding begins
9–12	*the big brown dog with a blue collar that glows in the dark and belongs to my neighbor across the street*	determiner + adjectives + noun + prepositional phrase + relative clause + additional phrases	Fully elaborated, embedded noun group

- Initial: Noun groups are simple — often just a determiner and a noun (*the car*).
- Transitional: Students begin to stack adjectives and add short phrases (*the shiny red car*).
- Independent: Noun groups can include multiple modifiers and embedded clauses, which carry a lot of information in fewer words. This is especially common in academic language and informational texts.
- Recognizing and producing complex noun groups is a strong indicator of growing syntactic maturity and interpretive skill.

See also: Modifiers, Embedded Structures, Demonstratives — noun groups anchor much of the meaning in sentences and grow more complex with modifiers and embedded clauses.

Organization

Definition: Organization refers to the overall structure used to arrange ideas in a text so that information is presented logically and coherently. These patterns help the reader or listener understand how ideas are connected at the discourse level — across multiple sentences, paragraphs, or sections.

Common organizational patterns include:

- Chronological / Sequential – events or steps in order (*first, then, after, finally*).
- Cause and Effect – showing how or why something happens (*because, therefore*).
- Compare and Contrast – highlighting similarities and differences (*however, on the other hand*).
- Problem and Solution – presenting an issue and its resolution (*the problem is… the solution is…*).
- Description / Enumeration – listing or describing characteristics (*e.g., such as*).
- Claim and Evidence – stating a position and supporting it with reasoning or proof (*this shows that… because…*).

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	Pattern	Explanation
K	"First we line up. Then we go outside."	Sequential	Simple step-by-step organization
1	"I like dogs because they are fun."	Cause and effect	Simple reasoning
2–3	"Cats are quiet. Dogs are loud."	Compare/contrast	Basic comparison
4–5	"The problem is the water is dirty. The solution is to clean it."	Problem/solution	Organized structure across sentences
6–8	"Plants need sunlight to grow; therefore, they lean toward the sun."	Cause and effect	More complex logical organization
9–12	"Climate change impacts agriculture through rising temperatures, shifting rainfall, and increased pests."	Claim/evidence + enumeration	Advanced academic structure

- Initial: Students may use a single, simple organizational pattern (often sequential) and rely on obvious time words or repetition.
- Transitional: They begin to use other patterns, often mixing cause/effect, comparison, or problem/solution to structure ideas.
- Independent: Students use multiple, layered organizational patterns strategically across paragraphs or entire texts (e.g., blending claim/evidence with problem/solution).
- Recognizing organizational patterns helps reviewers identify how coherently and intentionally students structure their language, not just what vocabulary or grammar they use.

See also: Discourse, Sequencing, Cohesion — organization shape the larger structure of texts and how cohesive ties operate.

Parallelism

Definition: Parallelism is the use of consistent grammatical structures to express related ideas in a sentence or across sentences. It makes language clearer, more rhythmic, and easier to process, and it develops gradually as students gain control over syntax.

In early grades, parallelism often appears in repetitive patterns or memorized frames (e.g., patterned sentences in emergent reading). In later grades, students use parallelism more deliberately to build cohesion and emphasis.

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	Explanation
K	"I see a dog. I see a cat. I see a bird."	Simple repeated frame (*I see a* ___), showing early structural parallelism
1	"I like to run, to jump, and to play."	Repetition of *to + verb* pattern in a list
2–3	"I like to run, to jump, and to swim."	Consistent verb phrase structure creates a clear, rhythmic list
4–5	"She enjoys reading stories, writing poems, and drawing pictures."	Consistent *-ing* verb phrases
6–8	"We need to study carefully, to plan wisely, and to act decisively."	Repetition of *to + adverb + verb* structure for emphasis
9–12	"They demanded equality in education, in housing, and in employment."	Repetition of prepositional phrase structure to create a cohesive, formal tone

- Initial: Students demonstrate parallelism through patterned or repeated language often tied to memorized frames (*I see a dog. I see a cat. I see a bird.*). This early parallel structure reflects emerging control over syntax and rhythm but is not yet deliberate.
- Transitional: Students begin to use parallel structures in simple sentences and lists (*I like to run, to jump, and to swim.*). This stage shows growing syntactic consistency, often produced unconsciously as part of familiar patterns.
- Independent: Students use parallelism deliberately to create cohesion, emphasis, and rhetorical effect (*They demanded equality in education, in housing, and in employment.*). This reflects mature control of grammar and structure at the sentence and discourse level.
- Parallelism supports clarity, rhythm, and processing ease, allowing ideas to be presented as balanced and logically related.
- Growth in parallelism marks increased syntactic fluency, helping students produce language that sounds both more natural and more academically polished.

See also: Embedded Structures, Sentence Variety, Syntactic Variation — parallelism uses repeated structures to create rhythm, emphasis, and clarity.

Pronoun–Noun Agreement

Definition: Pronoun–noun agreement means that a pronoun must match the noun it replaces in number (singular or plural) and person (first, second, third). It's one of the basic ways sentences stay clear and cohesive. When agreement is off, the sentence can sound confusing or ambiguous.

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	Error / Correct	Explanation
K	"The dog wagged *their* tail." → "The dog wagged *its* tail."	Error → Correct	*Their* doesn't match the singular noun *dog*.
1	"The girls said she liked it." → "The girls said *they* liked it."	Error → Correct	Pronoun must agree with plural subject *girls*.
2–3	"Maria forgot their book." → "Maria forgot *her* book."	Error → Correct	Pronoun must match singular, third-person subject.
4–5	"Each student must bring *their* pencil." (in formal writing) → "Each student must bring *his or her* pencil."	Variation	"Each" is singular, so traditionally *his or her* is correct, but *their* is increasingly accepted in informal or inclusive language.
6–8	"The team won its game."	Correct	Collective noun takes singular pronoun *its*.
9–12	"All students must submit *their* projects."	Correct	Plural subject *students* matches plural pronoun *their*.

- Initial: Students often overgeneralize with common pronouns (e.g., using *they* for everything), or omit them entirely.
- Transitional: Pronoun use becomes more consistent, especially in simple sentences. Errors may still appear in complex noun phrases or collective nouns.
- Independent: Students maintain agreement even in complex structures and demonstrate control over formal vs. informal uses (e.g., singular *they* in inclusive contexts).
- Pronoun–noun agreement is a key marker of grammatical control, but errors here are typically developmental, not a sign of lack of understanding.

See also: Cohesion, Demonstratives, Noun Groups — agreement maintains clarity and cohesion in reference chains.

Sentence Variety

Definition: Using simple, compound, and complex sentence types for clarity and sophistication.

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	Example aligned to the "Independent" level	Type
K	"I like pizza."	Simple
1	"I like pizza a lot."	Expanded simple sentence
2–3	"I like pizza and ice cream."	Compound
4–5	"When I'm hungry, I eat pizza."	Simple complex
6–8	"Although I prefer ice cream, I'll take pizza."	Complex with subordination
9–12	"Although I prefer ice cream, I'll take pizza if that's all there is."	Multi-clause structure

- Initial: Students use simple sentence structures to convey basic ideas (*I like pizza.*). Sentences tend to follow predictable subject–verb–object patterns, with limited use of conjunctions or modifiers.
- Transitional: Students begin to produce compound and early complex sentences (*I like pizza and ice cream.* / *When I'm hungry, I eat pizza.*). Their language shows emerging ability to combine ideas and vary structure, even if patterns are repetitive or formulaic.
- Independent: Students flexibly and deliberately vary sentence structures, combining multiple clauses, subordination, and coordination (*Although I prefer ice cream, I'll take pizza if that's all there is.*). This reflects control over syntax, rhythm, and emphasis in both spoken and written language.
- Growth in sentence variety reflects increasing syntactic sophistication, enabling students to express more nuanced relationships between ideas and avoid overly repetitive patterns.
- Sentence variety is closely linked to cohesion, clarity, and rhetorical control, making it a strong indicator of advanced academic language use.

See also: Clause / Dependent Clause, Syntactic Variation, Frames (Memorized Frames) — sentence variety grows as students expand beyond early frames and incorporate more complex syntax.

Subject–Verb Agreement

Definition: Subject–verb agreement is when the verb in a sentence matches the subject in number (singular/plural) and person (I/you/he/she/they). In English, this usually means that singular subjects take singular verb forms and plural subjects take plural verb forms, especially in the present tense.

For example:

- *He runs fast – not – He run fast*
- *They run fast – not – They runs fast*

As students' language proficiency develops, their control over subject–verb agreement becomes more consistent, though temporary errors are common even at advanced levels when sentence structures get more complex.

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	Explanation
K	"He run."	Common early-stage error; shows developing control
1	"He runs."	Basic subject–verb agreement begins to appear
2–3	"She likes apples."	Consistent use with singular subjects
4–5	"They like apples."	Consistent use with plural subjects
6–8	"The students in the class *were* excited."	More complex subject phrases, but agreement maintained
9–12	"Each of the students *was* ready."	Mastery of agreement with more advanced structures (e.g., "each of," "neither/nor")

- Initial: Learners often omit inflection (*he run*) or overgeneralize (*they runs*).
- Transitional: Agreement becomes more consistent, especially in simple sentences.
- Independent: Students maintain agreement even in complex sentences with compound subjects, prepositional phrases, or embedded clauses.
- Errors at this stage are typically occasional slips, not patterns.
- Content teachers should note: inconsistent subject–verb agreement is developmental, not simply "carelessness." It reflects where a student is along the English development continuum.

See also: Pronoun–Noun Agreement, Clause / Dependent Clause — agreement reflects grammatical control at the sentence level.

Sequencing

Definition: Sequencing refers to the organization of ideas or events in a logical order so the listener or reader can follow what's happening. In academic language development, sequencing involves using time words, phrases, or structural patterns to signal the order of events, steps, or ideas.

Students show growing proficiency in sequencing when they move from simple chronological telling (*first–then–last*) to more complex and varied organizational patterns (*first–meanwhile–finally; before/after; cause–effect sequences*).

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	Sequencing Feature	Explanation
K	"First we eat. Then we play."	Simple time words	Basic chronological order
1	"First I got up, then I brushed my teeth, and finally I went to school."	Clear time sequence	Expanding sequence
2–3	"Before we left, we packed our bags. After that, we went on the trip."	Before/after structure	More precise ordering
4–5	"While the cake was baking, we cleaned the kitchen."	Overlapping time	Increased sophistication
6–8	"After the war ended, the country rebuilt its infrastructure."	Embedded time clause	Cohesive historical or procedural narration
9–12	"Once the results were analyzed, conclusions were drawn, and recommendations were made."	Abstract sequencing	High-level academic organization

- Initial: Students rely on basic chronological sequencing using simple time markers (*First we eat. Then we play.*). Sequences are short, linear, and event-based, often reflecting familiar routines.
- Transitional: Students begin using a wider range of sequencing words and phrases (*before, after, finally*) and start embedding sequences into longer sentences (*Before we left, we packed our bags. After that, we went on the trip.*). Their sequencing begins to show clearer logical relationships and more precision in timing.
- Independent: Students flexibly structure and embed sequences within more complex sentences and discourse (*Once the results were analyzed, conclusions were drawn, and recommendations were made.*). Sequencing moves beyond simple storytelling into procedural, historical, and analytical organization.
- Sequencing is a foundational organizational skill, supporting comprehension and production across narrative, expository, and procedural texts.
- Growth in sequencing reflects increasing control over text structure, logical relationships, and temporal reference, making it a key indicator of advanced academic language development.

See also: Transitions, Organization — sequencing provides the backbone for cohesive and logical discourse.

Syntactic Variation

Definition: Syntactic variation refers to a student's ability to use a range of sentence structures to express ideas. As language develops, students move from using a few simple, repetitive patterns to producing different kinds of sentences—simple, compound, and complex—that vary in structure and purpose.

Syntactic variation isn't about writing long sentences; it's about having options for how to express meaning.

Common types of syntactic variation:

- Simple sentences – One idea: "*I like pizza*."
- Compound sentences – Two ideas joined with a conjunction: "*I like pizza, and I like pasta*."
- Complex sentences – Main idea plus a dependent clause: "*I like pizza because it's delicious*."

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	Feature	Function
K	"I see a dog."	Simple sentence	Basic subject–verb–object structure
1	"I see a big dog."	Expanded simple sentence	Adding descriptive detail within a single clause
2–3	"I see a dog, and it is big."	Simple + compound	Joining two related ideas
4–5	"I see a dog that is big."	Complex sentence with relative clause	Adding descriptive detail
6–8	"I see a dog that is big because it eats a lot."	Multiple clauses	Expressing cause/effect and description
9–12	"I see a dog that is much bigger than the others, which suggests it's the oldest."	Embedded and subordinate clauses	Sophisticated, layered expression

- Initial: Students rely on simple, repetitive sentence patterns (*I see a dog.*). These structures are predictable and reflect a limited range of syntactic choices. Sentences tend to be short and direct, often mirroring spoken routines or memorized patterns.
- Transitional: Students begin to combine and extend sentences using basic conjunctions (*I see a dog, and it is big.*) and early embedded clauses (*I see a dog that is big.*). Their language shows growing flexibility in how ideas are linked and an emerging ability to modify meaning through structure.
- Independent: Students employ a variety of sentence structures strategically, embedding and layering clauses to express complex relationships (*I see a dog that is much bigger than the others, which suggests it's the oldest.*). They control both syntax and rhetorical flow, producing language that is cohesive, precise, and well-organized.
- Syntactic variation reflects linguistic maturity and control over grammar, not just sentence length.
- Growth in this area allows students to express nuance, emphasize relationships between ideas, and engage effectively with academic discourse.

See also: Clause / Dependent Clause, Sentence Variety, Parallelism — syntactic variation reflects the range of sentence types and structures students can use.

Transitions

Definition: Words or phrases that connect ideas, showing relationships like sequence, contrast, or cause-effect.

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	Function
K	"and then"	Sequence
1	"but then"	Simple contrast or sequence shift
2–3	"because"	Cause-effect
4–5	"for example"	Illustration
6–8	"however"	Contrast
9–12	"in light of this"	Logical reasoning

- Initial: Students use a very small set of basic connectors, typically additive (*and*) or sequential (*and then*). These transitions often appear in predictable positions and serve simple narrative functions, reflecting linear idea connection rather than complex logic.
- Transitional: Students begin to use causal and illustrative transitions (*because, for example*) to express relationships between ideas beyond simple sequencing. Their control over placement and variety is still limited, but their language shows clearer internal organization.
- Independent: Students use a wider range of transitional phrases (*however, although, therefore*) to express contrast, consequence, or clarification. Their language demonstrates stronger cohesion across sentences and clauses, supporting more complex reasoning.
- High academic proficiency: Students use precise and nuanced transitions (*in light of this, consequently, on the other hand*) to manage logical and rhetorical relationships between ideas. These transitions allow them to construct coherent arguments and signal stance in academic discourse.
- Growth in transition use reflects increasing ability to organize information, clarify relationships between ideas, and structure discourse at **the text level**—a hallmark of advanced proficiency in both oral and written language.

See also: Cohesion, Adverbials, Conjunctions, Sequencing — transitions signal relationships between ideas and help knit sentences into coherent text.

Verb Phrases

Definition: A verb phrase is the main verb in a sentence plus any helping (auxiliary) verbs and modifiers that go with it. Verb phrases express tense, aspect, and sometimes voice, and they play a key role in conveying who is doing what, when, and how.

In the rubric, *"recognizing how verb phrases contribute to meaning"* refers to students' ability to understand how tense, aspect, and auxiliaries add nuance to what's happening in a text (e.g., *"She is running"* vs. *"She has run"* vs. *"She will run"*).

Students' ability to interpret and use verb phrases grows as their language develops — from recognizing simple actions to understanding and producing expanded, complex verb structures.

Examples of common verb phrases:

- *is running*
- *has eaten*
- *will go*
- *was being watched*
- *should have been studying*

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	Feature	Function
K	"The dog runs."	Single verb	Basic action
1	"The dog is going."	Auxiliary + high-frequency verb present	Expands action beyond simple
2–3	"The dog is running."	Main + auxiliary	Present progressive
4–5	"The dog has run away."	Perfect tense	Expresses completed action
6–8	"The dog has been running all morning."	Perfect progressive	Describes duration and aspect
9–12	"The dog should have been found by now."	Modal + auxiliaries	Sophisticated verb phrase structure

- Initial: Students use single, simple verbs to describe basic actions (*The dog runs.*). Tense is typically limited to the present, with little or no auxiliary use. These early verb phrases often appear as unanalyzed chunks rather than consciously controlled structures.
- Transitional: Students begin using auxiliary (helping) verbs to form progressive and perfect tenses (*The dog is running.* / *The dog has run away.*). Their language reflects growing ability to mark time, duration, or completion of actions more precisely.
- Independent: Students produce and interpret expanded verb phrases with modals and multiple auxiliaries (*The dog should have been found by now.*). This reflects increasing control over tense, aspect, and voice, allowing for nuanced expression of time, stance, and perspective.
- Mastery of verb phrases is central to expressing complex time relationships and modal meanings, both of which are common in academic language.
- Growth in this area signals increasing grammatical sophistication, enabling students to express not just *what happened* but *when, how, and with what implication*.

See also: Clause / Dependent Clause, Modifiers — verb phrases express tense, aspect, and modality, anchoring the action in sentences.

Word/Phrase Level

Definition: How words and short expressions are chosen and combined — including vocabulary range, collocations, idioms, and precision.

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	Feature
K	"big dog"	High-frequency vocabulary
1	"big brown dog"	Expanded noun phrase with basic adjective sequencing
2–3	"huge brown dog"	More specific adjectives
4–5	"big fluffy brown dog"	Expanded descriptive precision
6–8	"enormous, shaggy brown dog"	Advanced modifiers
9–12	"an enormous, long-haired hunting dog bred for cold climates"	Technical and domain-specific vocabulary

- Initial: Students rely on high-frequency, everyday vocabulary (*big dog*), often using single modifiers or short, familiar expressions. Their word choices are concrete and closely tied to immediate experiences and contexts.
- Transitional: Students begin to expand vocabulary and use multiple modifiers (*huge brown dog*), showing more descriptive precision. Word choice reflects increasing control over adjective stacking and basic phrase building.
- Independent: Students use more complex, specific, and varied vocabulary (*enormous, shaggy brown dog*) and begin to incorporate collocations and less common word choices. They demonstrate flexibility in how words and short expressions combine to express nuance.
- High academic proficiency: Students use technical, domain-specific, and precise vocabulary (*an enormous, long-haired hunting dog bred for cold climates*) to convey detailed, context-rich meaning. Their language choices reflect both breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge, as well as control over how words and phrases work together for effect.
- Growth at the word/phrase level reflects increasing lexical sophistication, grammatical control within noun groups, and linguistic precision, laying the foundation for more complex discourse.

See also: Collocations, Idioms, Word-Building — word- and phrase-level features are building blocks of larger grammatical and discourse structures.

Word-Building

Definition: Word-building refers to how students create and modify words using parts of language such as roots, prefixes, and suffixes. This reflects their morphological awareness — their understanding of how words are formed and how meaning changes when those parts are added, removed, or combined.

This skill develops over time, moving from using familiar, memorized whole words to constructing and understanding more complex, derived words.

Examples by Grade Band

Grade	*Example aligned to the "Independent" level*	Word-Building Feature	Explanation
K	"play"	Root word	Simple, familiar vocabulary
1	"playing"	Inflectional suffix (*-ing*)	Early modification of base words
2–3	"played" / "player"	Inflectional & derivational suffixes	Building new forms for tense and roles
4–5	"unhappy"	Prefix + root	Understanding how prefixes change meaning
6–8	"reusable"	Prefix + root + suffix	Layering multiple word parts
9–12	"misinterpretation"	Complex derivation	Using academic, morphologically complex vocabulary

- Initial: Students mostly use memorized whole words and simple inflections (*-s, -ing, -ed*).
- Transitional: Students begin to combine and manipulate morphemes to express more specific meanings (*help → helper; happy → unhappy*).
- Independent: Students can decode and produce complex, academic vocabulary through multiple affixes (*misinterpretation, redevelopment*).
- Word-building is a key bridge between vocabulary growth and academic language proficiency, giving students tools to understand unfamiliar words and create more precise expressions.

See also: Morphology, Modifiers, Word/Phrase Level — word-building reflects students' ability to manipulate morphological elements to expand meaning.