Language Functions and Forms

A language function refers to **what students do with language** as they engage with content and interact with others. Functions represent the active use of language for a specific purpose. Students use language functions in order to express ideas, communicate with others, and show understanding of content in an academic or professional setting. Examples of language functions are:

- giving instructions
- making requests
- defending an argument
- describing processes
- comparing or contrasting things or ideas
- classifying objects or ideas

There is a lot of overlap between language functions and analytical skills, but here we are focusing on the **language needed** (the words and phrases) to make those thoughts visible (e.g. comparing and contrasting ideas: “There are far more ____ than ____”).

**Language forms** are the language structures and vocabulary that **are used to support those functions**:

- Grammar, syntax, and morphology
- Words that hold language together at the word, phrase, and sentence levels
- Academic vocabulary used across different subject areas or Tier 2 vocabulary, for example:
  - verbs (e.g. hypothesize, analyze),
  - transition words, (e,g. in contrast to, as well as), and
  - nouns (e.g. comparison, conclusion, analysis)

Language learners need to acquire both the functions (uses/purposes) and the forms (structures + cross-disciplinary vocabulary) up the English language in order to reach higher levels of proficiency. Teachers also need to understand the language demands as they relate to both function and form in order to best support students’ language development.
### Examples of Language Functions

- Analyzing
- Asking clarifying questions
- Asking Informational questions
- Comparing and contrasting
- Comprehending text or speech
- Defending
- Defining
- Describing actions
- Describing cause and effect
- Describing people, places, and things
- Describing spatial and temporal relations
- Drawing conclusions
- Evaluating
- Explaining
- Expressing and supporting opinions
- Generalizing
- Hypothesizing and speculating
- Interpreting
- Making claims
- Making predictions
- Persuading
- Retelling/relating past events
- Sequencing
- Summarizing

### Examples of Language Forms

- Adjectives (comparative, descriptive, participial)
- Adverbs (manner, time, location)
- Correlative conjunctions (*both . . . and; either . . . or*)
- Indirect/direct object
- Modal verbs (will, would, can, could, may, might) and with compound verb tense (could have been)
- Nouns (common, collective and abstract; count/non-count; pronouns; nominalizations)
- Prepositional phrases
- Questions formation (wh-; do-support)
- Relative clauses, subordinate conjunctions
- Verb tense (past, present, future); verb aspect (simple, progressive, perfect); subject/verb agreement

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