



Glossary of Terms Used in TELPAS Holistic Rating Training

Academic Achievement vs. English Language Proficiency

“Academic achievement” refers to the learning of the grade-level content-area knowledge and skills in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) curriculum. Tests such as the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) measure academic achievement in core content areas.

“English language proficiency” refers to the learning of English as a second language. To use English as an effective means of communicating and learning in U.S. schools, emergent bilingual (EB) students must develop both informal (social) and formal (academic) language proficiency in English.

- Acquiring informal (social) language proficiency in English means acquiring the English necessary for everyday basic communication.
- Acquiring formal (academic) language proficiency in English means acquiring the English necessary for engaging in grade-appropriate subject-matter instruction in English with little to no need for scaffolded instruction and linguistic support.

Having the highest level of English language proficiency means no longer having a language barrier that is significant enough to obstruct the learning of grade-level knowledge and skills. It does not mean having the English fluency of a native English speaker, nor does it mean that an EB student has a particular level of academic achievement. Academic achievement tests such as STAAR are used to assess academic knowledge and skills.

Connecting Words

“Connection words” (including transition words) are one type of cohesive device students use to link ideas within and across sentences. Cohesive devices support clarity and elaboration of meaning and increase in range and effectiveness across proficiency levels.

Grammatical Structures

“Grammatical structures” refer to how students use elements of English grammar to construct and convey meaning. In the ELPS and PLDs, grammar is evaluated based on effectiveness and clarity of communication, not on strict correctness.

Examples of grammatical structures include:

- Subject–verb agreement
 - *She writes. / They write.*
- Use of verb tense and aspect to express time and sequence
 - *is analyzing, have completed, explained*
- Possessive forms
 - *the student’s response*
- Pronoun use with clear referents
 - *The experiment was repeated. It produced similar results.*
- Expansion of meaning through phrases, including:

- noun phrases (*a complex scientific process*)
- verb phrases (*has been developing over time*)
- prepositional phrases (*in response to the increase in temperature*)
- Use of conjunctions to connect ideas
 - *and, but, because, although, when*

As proficiency increases, students use these grammatical structures with greater consistency, precision, and flexibility across academic contexts.

High-Frequency Words

In terms of second language acquisition, “high-frequency words” are words that EB students who know very little English encounter very frequently and can be made to understand through context, gestures, and pictures. Initially, high-frequency words and phrases typically acquired may include, for example, greetings, colors, words for family members, objects referred to every day in the classroom and around the school, names of classmates, and “high need” formulaic instructions (e.g., get out your book, write your name at the top of the paper, etc.).

Internalized Language

“Internalized language” in the context of second language acquisition means language that is part of an EB student’s permanent rather than temporary bank of learned English. Language is internalized through ongoing practice and use in meaningful contexts. Internalized language may be contrasted with recently practiced or memorized language that an EB student may forget later.

Language Structures (Social and Academic)

“Language structures” are the grammatical structures and sentence forms that students use to express meaning in English across listening, speaking, reading, and writing. As English language proficiency increases, students demonstrate greater complexity, range, and control in their use of these structures.

Language structures describe how language is used to communicate meaning, not strict adherence to rules of correctness or writing mechanics.

Literal and Abstract Comprehension

“Literal and abstract comprehension” refers to an EB student’s ability to understand both:

- Literal comprehension: the meaning that is explicitly stated in oral or written language (e.g., key details, who/what/when/where, directly stated main idea).
- Abstract comprehension: meaning that is not fully stated on the surface and requires more complex language understanding—such as implied ideas, relationships, concepts, generalizations, themes, and interpreting figurative/academic language (i.e., going beyond concrete facts).

Receptive and Expressive Language

For EB students, “receptive and expressive language” describes two complementary sides of language proficiency—what students can understand versus what they can produce in English.

- Receptive language: The ability to take in and understand language—primarily through listening and reading.
- Expressive language: The ability to communicate or produce ideas—primarily through speaking and writing.

Scaffolded Instruction and Linguistic Support

The phrase “scaffolded instruction and linguistic support” in the TELPAS 2024 PLDs refers to the

special language assistance EB students need as they learn English. In content-area classes, it refers to the assistance with the English language that EB students need as they are taught mathematics, science, social studies, and language arts. The phrase does not refer to the type of assistance that any student (whether an EB or not) might need when learning academic content. It is specific to the language support that EB students need.

Writing Conventions

“Writing conventions” are the surface features of written English. While they support clarity and meaning, they are not considered language structures in the ELPS or PLDs.

Writing conventions include:

- Punctuation (e.g., periods, commas, apostrophes)
- Capitalization
- Abbreviations

Sentence boundaries and punctuation are important for clarity of meaning and are considered in writing evaluation; however, they are addressed as conventions, not as grammatical patterns or sentence forms.