This document provides a summary of Recommendation 1 from the WWC practice guide *Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade*. Full reference at the bottom of this page.

Teach students academic language skills, including the use of inferential and narrative language, and vocabulary knowledge

Reading

K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Academic language skills include three skills: (1) use of inferential language (communicating about ideas across contexts); (2) use of narrative language (clearly describing a series of events); and (3) understanding a range of academic vocabulary and grammatical structures. These skills help students better comprehend academic texts both across subjects and within individual subjects. Unlike social language skills that develop naturally in communication with family and friends, academic language skills more often need to be taught.

How to carry out the recommendation

1. Engage students in conversations that support the use and comprehension of inferential language.
2. Explicitly engage students in developing narrative language skills.
3. Teach academic vocabulary in the context of other reading activities.

Potential roadblocks

1. Student academic language skills can vary across a spectrum of ability, and some students may not be ready to engage in this level of skill-development activities.
2. It is hard to find adequate time to devote to language instruction.

Reference: Foorman, B., Beyler, N., Borradaile, K., Coyne, M., Denton, C. A., Dimino, J., . . . Wissel, S. (2016). *Foundational skills to support reading for understanding in kindergarten through 3rd grade* (NCEE 2016-4008). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. Retrieved from https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/21

Minimal

How to carry out the recommendation

1. *Engage students in conversations that support the use and comprehension of inferential language.*

Multiple strategies can be used during conversations about the texts students are reading to support the development of students' inferential language. These include asking students to make predictions, engage in problem-solving, make hypotheses, and compare and contrast concepts. Teachers can use open-ended questions to encourage students to reflect on how the texts apply to their lives and their world. These questions can be asked before, during, or after read-aloud activities to encourage higher-level thinking. Teachers should model how to answer such questions by providing their own complete and well-reasoned answers. Teachers can also use follow-up questions such as "Why do you think that?" to prompt students to provide additional detail to their own answers.

Inferential language discussion questions

Informational Text	*Narrative Text*
• How can we help plants grow? • Why do we recycle? • What would happen if no one recycled?	• Why did the character act in that way? • Is there any other way the character could have acted? • How would you have acted if it were you?

2. *Explicitly engage students in developing narrative language skills.*

Narrative language is the ability to understand or create a fictional or real interpretation of an experience. Skills needed for narrative language include logically organizing information and using grammatical structures to connect the information. Teachers should teach students about complex grammatical structures and elements of narrative language, such as compound sentences, subordinate clauses, adverbial clauses, prepositional phrases, connectives, noun phrases, verb phrases, and pronoun references. These can be taught during whole-class or small-group lessons. Teachers can model grammatical structures, prompt students to use these structures (e.g., while summarizing a story or predicting what will happen next), and scaffold student responses.

Teachers should also provide instruction on components of story grammar, including characters, setting, and plot. Students can engage with these components when summarizing stories. Teachers can prompt students to include all of the components of story grammar in their own summaries of stories.

3. *Teach academic vocabulary in the context of other reading activities.*

Academic vocabulary are words commonly used in written text across subject areas, such as assignment instructions. Academic vocabulary can also include grammatical rules that are less common in speech. Ideally, schools or grade-level teams develop a common set of academic vocabulary that will appear frequently throughout the school year and across subjects. Teachers could explicitly teach students a few words each week from this common set of academic vocabulary. Instruction should provide clear definitions and meaningful example sentences that include the word. Teachers can help students develop a deeper understanding of the words by constructing activities that allow students to use or talk about

the words they have learned. Teachers should also review the new words regularly and provide opportunities for students to encounter the words in different contexts throughout the year.

Academic vocabulary instruction

Before reading, a 2nd-grade teacher selects academic vocabulary, including the word *investigate*, from a biography of Marie Curie that will be read aloud to students. The teacher develops a student-friendly definition.

Investigate: to try to find out the truth about something

The teacher reads, "Marie Curie decided to investigate the energy that came from a certain kind of rock called uranium."

The teacher then follows up by saying, "*Investigate* means 'to try to find out the truth about something.' So, Marie Curie decided to find out the truth about the energy that came from a certain kind of rock called uranium. She wanted to *investigate* this energy. Is there anything that you would like to *investigate*?"

After reading the text, the teacher talks about other things that scientists investigate and then asks students to relate the word to their own experiences by recording what they would like to investigate. Student responses are recorded in a graphic organizer titled "Things We Want to Investigate." The teacher encourages the students to use the word *investigate* in their answers.

Throughout the year, the teacher makes a point to continue using the word *investigate* in different contexts, for example, "Today in math we are going to *investigate* how to share things so that everyone has the same amount." The teacher also supports students in using the word *investigate*, for example, "It sounds like you are interested in finding out about dinosaurs. Can you use our new word *investigate* to talk about that?" The teacher corrects any incorrect uses of the word.

Note. Taken from page 12 of the practice guide referenced on the first page of this document.

Potential roadblocks and how to address them

Roadblock	Suggested Approach
Student academic language skills can vary across a spectrum of ability, and some students may not be ready to engage in this level of skill-development activities.	Differentiate instruction to support the language development of each student. For example, small-group reading instruction will allow teachers to better meet each student's needs.
It is hard to find adequate time to devote to language instruction.	Integrate language instruction into already-planned content areas. For example, use science or social studies texts to foster rich inferential discussion. Language instruction can also be integrated into already-scheduled read-aloud time.

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For more information on the research evidence and references to support this recommendation, or for more detailed explanation from the What Works Clearinghouse committee who developed this recommendation, please refer to the practice guide cited at the bottom of the first page of this document.