

This document provides a summary of Recommendation 1 from the REL Southeast guide *A Kindergarten Teacher’s Guide to Supporting Family Involvement in Foundational Reading Skills*, a companion to 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



Academic language includes 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.

The companion guide on which this summary document is based assists teachers in informing and supporting families to help children develop academic language.

<i>How to carry out the recommendation</i>	<i>Potential roadblocks</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">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.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Families don’t attend family literacy nights or parent–teacher conferences.2. Families might not feel comfortable attending a school function.3. Families lack time to engage in the activities with their children.4. Families may not have internet access or may have a hard time accessing the internet.

Reference: Kosanovich, M., Lee, L. & Foorman, B. (2020). *A kindergarten teacher’s guide to supporting family involvement in foundational reading skills* (REL 2020-016). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Southeast. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/project.asp?projectID=5674>

Teacher scaffolds for steps in *How to carry out the recommendation*

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

Explain to parents or caregivers why it is important to engage a child in conversation about a book while reading together—it helps to build the child’s vocabulary and understanding of the content. Guide parents to read the whole book to the child first and then go back and read one page at a time, asking questions as they go. For a young child, it may be better to begin the conversation after one page or every other page. Encourage families to use *Prompt, Evaluate, Expand, and Repeat* (PEER; see below). With this tool, they first ask a question to prompt their child to talk about a page, then evaluate through feedback, expand by adding to their response, and repeat the original question to see if the child can incorporate their addition.

The PEER tool for engaging a child in conversation about what they have read

<p>Prompt your child to say something about the book.</p> <p>Evaluate your child’s response.</p> <p>Expand your child’s response by rephrasing and adding information to it.</p> <p>Repeat the prompt to make sure your child has learned from the expansion.</p>

Note: Adapted from page K/1/4 of the guide referenced on the first page of this document.

2. Explicitly engage students in developing narrative language skills.

As above, explain to families how to use PEER for stories as well as informational text. *Wh*-questions (*who, what, where, when, why, and how*) that call attention to narrative structure include “where does the story take place?” and “what do you see in this picture?”

PEER example

Informational Text	Narrative Text
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prompt: What did the plant need to grow? (response: rain) • Evaluate: Yes, that’s right. • Expand: The plant needed water from the rain to grow. • Repeat: What did the plant need? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prompt: Why did the character cry? (response: sad) • Evaluate: Yes, that’s right. • Expand: The character was feeling sad so she cried. • Repeat: Why did the character cry?

Videos to support Steps 1 and 2 above

Video Title (Book Title in Parentheses)	Link
1.1 Talking While You Read (<i>Bear Says Thanks</i>)	https://youtu.be/OEz4Z7w85Tw
1.1 Talking While You Read (<i>Llama Llama and the Bully Goat</i>)	https://youtu.be/HtVdIHBpjyM

Note: Adapted from page K/i/6 of the guide referenced on the first page of this document.

Printable family resources to accompany Steps 1 and 2 are available on pages K|1|5–K|1|7 of the guide referenced on the first page of this document. Additionally, sample text messages with tips teachers can send to families are available in Appendix 1 on page K|1|12.

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

Academic vocabulary includes words commonly used in written text across subject areas, such as instructions for assignment. Teachers can help families support children in developing vocabulary through their oral language. Parents and caregivers should be encouraged to talk with their children while going through daily activities, asking questions to which children need to respond with more than just yes or no.

Teachers can show families the difference between yes/no and open-ended questions that lead to vocabulary development. For example, parents and caregivers can ask, “What was something fun you did at school today?” instead of asking, “Did you have fun at school?” They should be encouraged to speak in complete, detailed sentences. If a child points and says, “Ball!” a parent can rephrase and expand: “Yes, I see a ball with red and blue stripes rolling across the playground.”

Tell families that it is okay to use more challenging or unfamiliar words as long as they provide children with context and definitions and use the words multiple times. For example, they can explain that *rapid* means very fast and then use it: “We are going to run so that we get to the park rapidly!” or “The red car is more rapid than the the blue one. It got there first!”

Videos to support Step 3

Video Title	Link
1.3 Cooking Conversations	https://youtu.be/y2uEltfyfM
1.3 Dinner Table Talk	https://youtu.be/dt1151JiXzk

Note: Adapted from page K|i|6 of the guide referenced on the first page of this document.

Printable family resources to accompany Step 3 are available on pages K|1|9–K|1|11 of the guide referenced on the first page of this document. Additionally, sample text messages with tips teachers can send to families are available in Appendix 1 on page K|1|12.

After selecting appropriate family resources to support this recommendation, please see page K|i|7 of the guide referenced on the first page of this document for overall guidance to help maximize the effectiveness in supporting families.

Supporting family engagement: Teach students academic language skills, including the use of inferential and narrative language, and vocabulary knowledge

Common Challenges and Approaches to Overcome Them

Common Challenge	Approaches to Overcome Challenge
<i>Families don't attend family literacy nights or parent-teacher conferences.</i>	Work with your school to provide support (for example, refreshments, childcare) at the event. Be sure to offer a range of time options (for example, before school, during the day, in the evening) for parent-teacher conferences.
<i>Families might not feel comfortable attending a school function.</i>	Communicate in advance what to expect at the event. Be welcoming when families arrive in your classroom, and provide an orientation to the layout and function of the room. Have refreshments available. Involve community entities that might have rapport with your families.
<i>Families lack time to engage in the activities with their children.</i>	Send home all the materials needed for any suggested activity, including copies of any books. Let families know that there are many possible times for the activities, such as weekends or during meal preparation. Also let them know that it is okay if an older sibling or other relative engages in the activities with the child.
<i>Families may not have internet access or may have a hard time accessing the internet.</i>	Videos can be shared at school events (for example, parent-teacher conferences or family literacy nights). Show families how to find and view the videos, if possible, on a computer, tablet, or smartphone, or even via the school or public library.

Note: Adapted from page K/i/8 of the guide referenced on the first page of this document.



The companion guide from which the information in this document is summarized is designed to support the use of the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) practice guide *Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade* (NCEE 2016-4008), by B. Foorman et al., 2016, U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/21>).