

## Language Functions and Forms: A Brief Summary

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 setting.

**In oral language** some common functions may include:

- giving instructions
- making requests
- defending an argument

**In academic writing** we use a range of specific functions in order to communicate ideas clearly. These include:

- describing processes
- comparing or contrasting things or ideas
- classifying objects or ideas

Language **forms** deal with the internal grammatical structure of words and phrases as well as the word themselves. When one compares *boy* and *boys*, for example, or *man* and *men*, he or she is considering the relationship between different language **forms** or structures.

Language **forms** also include cross-curricular academic vocabulary - words or phrases frequently used across different content-areas. Cross-curricular academic vocabulary words typically describe or are related to academic *processes* and may include:

- verbs (e.g. *hypothesize, analyze*),
- complex prepositions, (e.g. *in contrast to, as well as*), and
- nouns (e.g. *comparison, conclusion, analysis*)

**While functions address what we do with language, forms are the language structures and vocabulary that are used to support those functions.**

Language learners need to acquire both the **functions** (uses/purposes) and the **forms** (structures + cross-curricular vocabulary) that make up the English language in order to reach higher levels of proficiency. Teachers also need to understand the language demands of a task as they relate to both **function** and **form** in order to best support students' language development.

## Examples of Language Functions and Forms

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### Language Functions

- Expressing needs and likes
- Describing people, places, and things
- Describing spatial and temporal relations
- Describing actions
- Comprehending text or speech
- Retelling/relating past events
- Making claims
- Making predictions
- Asking Informational Questions
- Asking Clarifying Questions
- Expressing and Supporting Opinions
- Comparing
- Contrasting
- Summarizing
- Persuading
- Defending
- Analyzing
- Describing Cause and Effect
- Drawing Conclusions
- Defining
- Explaining
- Generalizing
- Evaluating
- Interpreting
- Sequencing
- Hypothesizing and speculating
- Summarizing

### Language Forms

- Indirect/ direct object, subject/ verb agreement, pronouns
- Nouns, pronouns, adjectives
- Prepositional phrases
- Present progressive tense adverbs
- Past tense verbs, perfect aspect (present and past)
- Verbs: future tense, conditional mode
- Verbs and verb phrases in questions
- Questions with increasing specificity
- Sentence structure, modals (will, can, may, shall)
- Adjectives and conjunctions, comparatives, superlatives, adverbs
- Comparative adjectives
- Descriptive adjectives
- Increasingly complex sentences with increasingly specific academic vocabulary
- Verb phrases
- Sentence structure, specific vocabulary
- Verb forms
- Nouns, abstract nouns, pronouns, and adjectives
- Verb forms, indicative verb, declarative sentences, complex sentences, adverbs of manner
- Common, collective and abstract nouns, verb forms, nominalizations
- Complex sentences; increasing specificity of nouns, verbs, and adjectives; correlative conjunctions
- Language of propaganda, complex sentences, nominalizations
- Adverbs of time, relative clauses, subordinate conjunctions
- Modals (would, could, might), compound tenses (would have been)