

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

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)