

## Language and Language Learning

### The Nature and Importance of Language

Learning is a complex process of discovery, collaboration, and inquiry facilitated by language. Composed of interrelated and rule-governed symbol systems, language is a social and human means of representing, exploring, and communicating meaning. Language is a defining feature of culture and an unmistakable mark of personal identity. It is essential to thought and personal expression, to forming interpersonal relationships, and to functioning and contributing within a democratic society. Language is the primary instrument of thought and the primary basis of all communication.

### Language Acquisition and Development

Language learning is an active process that begins at birth and continues throughout life. An infant's first words are prompted by an enjoyment of sound and by an intrinsically human impulse to name objects or actions. This language, called "expressive language," is used not primarily to communicate, but to make meaning of experience and to construct a coherent and predictable view of the world. Expressive language is used throughout life, from the "running commentary" of toddlers to the interiorized soliloquy of older children and adults. It is the basis of most conversation, anecdotes, letters, and journals. Expressive language, which Vygotsky (1962) calls "the language of being and becoming," is the means by which people rehearse, shape, interpret, and recall what they perceive and feel.

Britton (1970) observes that language evolves in two directions from purely expressive language:

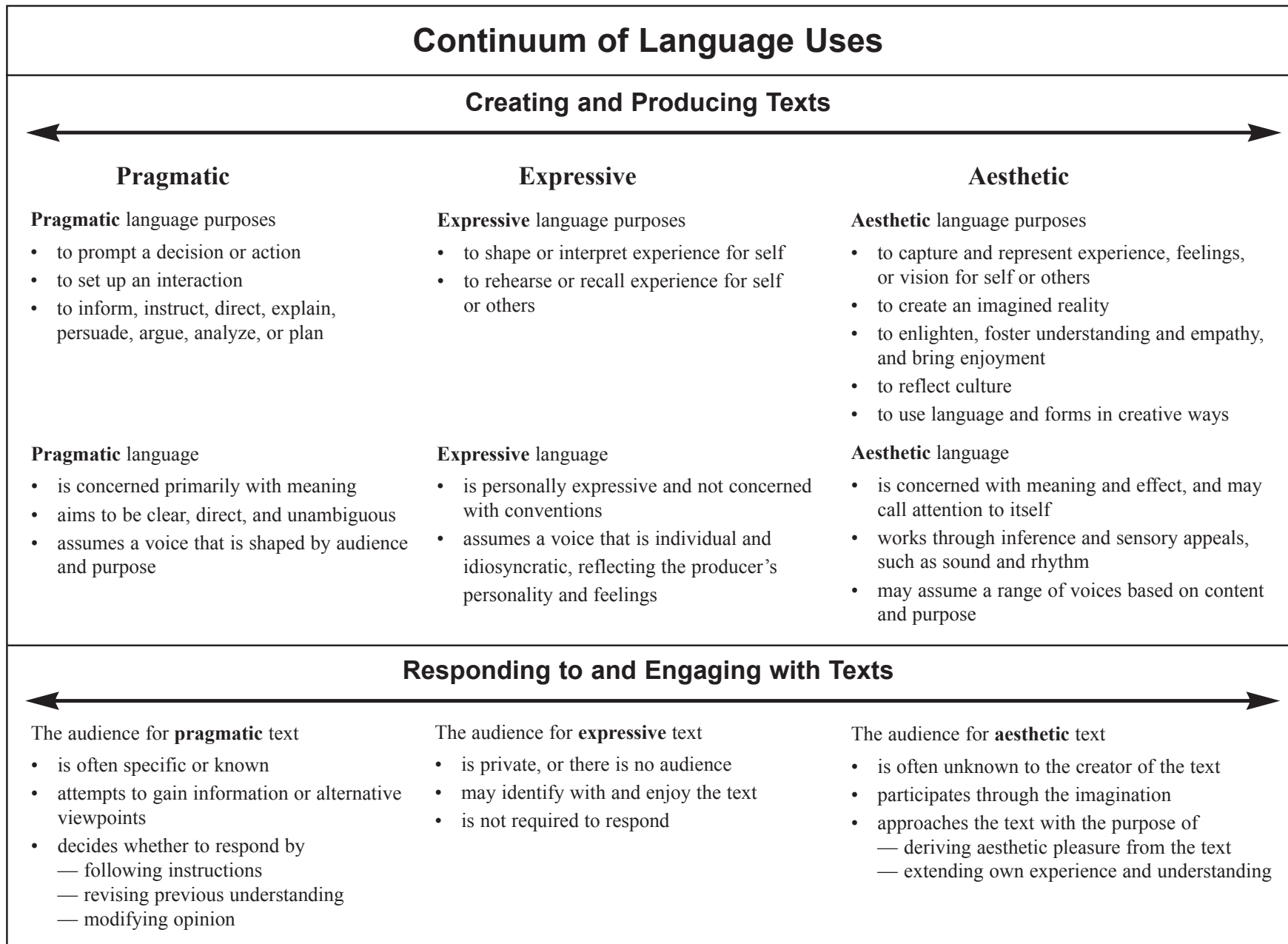
- *Transactional uses of language:* Very early, young children begin to use language to interact with their environment: to gain and exchange information and to make and receive demands

and requests. Britton calls this language use transactional language because it requires a response, and may set up a train of interaction. Others call it pragmatic language because it is "the language of getting things done"—language used to inform, to explain, to persuade, to argue, and to plan. Pragmatic or transactional language assumes both formal and informal forms and genres.

- *Aesthetic uses of language:* Aesthetic language is expressive language shaped and crafted to capture and represent experiences. It attempts to create and recreate experiences that the audience will enter through the imagination. Poets, filmmakers, illustrators, and playwrights, for example, exploit the meaning, the connotation, and the sensuous properties of language in order to engage the audience, express their vision, and bring aesthetic pleasure.

### Language Uses in ELA Learning

English language arts instruction is concerned with all language uses: expressive, pragmatic, and aesthetic. These language uses are not entirely separate; all discourse can be placed on a continuum between purely pragmatic and purely aesthetic language, as shown in the chart that appears on the following page. In one direction, language becomes increasingly pragmatic and increasingly concerned with and shaped by the response of its audience. In the other direction, it becomes increasingly aesthetic, finding ways to evoke or recreate rather than simply to describe experience. Pragmatic use of language in its absolute form (for example, instructions for administering cardiopulmonary resuscitation) aims to be transparent to the broadest audience. Aesthetic use of language in its absolute form (for example, experimental poetry) exploits qualities of language such as sound and pattern, but may invite a variety of different interpretations



and responses. Between these extremes, students encounter forms that use language with varying degrees of concern for clarity and for effect. These include texts such as business letters and magazine features produced for pragmatic purposes, and texts such as dramas and novels produced primarily for aesthetic purposes.

Although individual texts cannot be categorized definitively according to their place on the pragmatic-expressive-aesthetic continuum of language uses, the terms “aesthetic texts” and “pragmatic texts” denote texts that appear to be produced for aesthetic or pragmatic purposes. A text, however, may be read for a different purpose than that for which it was produced. A political speech (which has a pragmatic purpose) may be read for the pleasure the reader takes in its language and style, and a magazine advertisement may be examined for its use of poetic language. Similarly, a reader may approach an aesthetic text with a pragmatic purpose, for example, to gather information about the period in which it is set.

Distinguishing between pragmatic and aesthetic uses of language is a way of thinking about the purposes of a speaker, writer, or producer, or an audience, rather than a way of classifying texts. The purposes of the speaker, writer, or producer, as well as the purposes of the audience, contribute to the meaning derived from a text.

The continuum of language uses represented on the previous page describes

- the range of language purposes at play when texts are produced
- the range of language purposes with which audiences may listen to, read, or view texts

Note that an audience may use a text for purposes other than those for which it was produced, and that the audience’s purpose may change in the course of listening, viewing, and representing.

## **Language Learning in Senior 4 ELA**

Differentiating between pragmatic and aesthetic language uses in language arts learning is important for several reasons:

- Identifying the purpose of a text enables students to approach it with appropriate expectations as listeners, readers, or viewers (e.g., How does my knowledge of this form contribute to my understanding of the author’s/producer’s purpose? How may I use my understanding to comprehend this work? Is this narrative told to entertain me, to provide an analogy, or to persuade me of something?).
- Knowing various language uses enables students to focus their efforts appropriately to create the effects they intend as speakers, writers, and producers.

To enable students to explore their interest in a particular language use, the Senior 4 ELA Framework identifies three sets of specific student learning outcomes, one set for each curriculum: Comprehensive Focus, Literary Focus, and Transactional Focus. Each requires students to produce and read texts from the full range of the language continuum:

- **Senior 4 English Language Arts: Comprehensive Focus**  
These student learning outcomes identify the knowledge, skills and strategies, and attitudes students demonstrate in the Comprehensive Focus, which addresses pragmatic and aesthetic purposes and texts in approximate balance.
- **Senior 4 English Language Arts: Literary Focus**  
These student learning outcomes identify the knowledge, skills and strategies, and attitudes students demonstrate in the Literary Focus, which emphasizes aesthetic purposes and texts. Texts read and produced are approximately 70 percent aesthetic and 30 percent pragmatic in purpose.
- **Senior 4 English Language Arts: Transactional Focus**  
These student learning outcomes identify the knowledge, skills and strategies, and attitudes students demonstrate in the Transactional Focus, which emphasizes pragmatic purposes and texts. Texts read are approximately 70 percent pragmatic and 30 percent aesthetic in purpose. Texts produced are pragmatic in purpose.

**Please note** that while the same text can legitimately be studied from various perspectives, schools will attempt to avoid repetition in the content of each curriculum: Comprehensive Focus, Literary Focus, and Transactional Focus.

### **The Six English Language Arts**

The study of English language arts enables each student to understand and appreciate language and to use it competently and confidently in a variety of situations for communication, personal satisfaction, and learning. Students become competent and confident users of all six language arts through many opportunities to listen, speak, read, write, view, and represent in a variety of combinations and through a wide range of relevant texts.

Instruction in all six language arts equips students for effective participation in a technological society in which information, communication, arts, and entertainment are increasingly conveyed in language forms other than print. In the Senior 4 ELA Framework, the terms “text” and “reading” are used inclusively:

- *Text* refers to all language forms that can be experienced, discussed, and analyzed. These include print texts such as fiction and non-fiction books, essays, and reports, oral texts such as storytelling, dialogues, speeches, and conversations, and visual texts such as pictures, diagrams, tableaux, mime, and non-verbal communication.
- *Reading* refers to constructing meaning from texts of any kind.

Texts are affected and influenced by how they are transmitted, whether by computer, television, radio, print, or in person. Media texts and electronic texts such as videos, films, cartoons, and electronically distributed magazines frequently include oral, written, and visual components simultaneously. The language arts are clearly interrelated and interdependent. To compose, comprehend, and respond to texts, students need knowledge, skills, and strategies in all six language arts.

The student learning outcomes presented in the Senior 4 ELA Framework integrate the six language arts. In selecting learning resources and in planning instruction and assessment, teachers strive to achieve variety and balance in the use of the six language arts.

### ***Listening and Speaking***

Oral language is the foundation of literacy. Through listening and speaking, people communicate thoughts, feelings, experiences, information, and opinions, and learn to understand themselves and others. Oral language carries a community’s stories, values, beliefs, and traditions.

Listening and speaking enable students to explore ideas and concepts as well as to understand and organize their experiences and knowledge. They use oral language to learn, solve problems, and reach goals. To become discerning, lifelong learners, students at all grades need to develop fluency and confidence in their oral language knowledge and skills. They benefit from many opportunities to listen and speak both informally and formally for a variety of purposes.

### ***Reading and Writing***

Reading and writing are powerful means of communicating and learning. They enable students to extend their knowledge and use of language, increase their understanding of themselves and others, and experience enjoyment and personal satisfaction.

Reading provides students with a means of accessing the ideas, views, and experiences of others. By using effective reading skills and strategies, students construct meaning and develop thoughtful and critical interpretations of a variety of texts (such as both book-length fiction and non-fiction). Writing enables students to explore, shape, and clarify their thoughts, and to communicate them to others. By using effective writing strategies, students discover and refine ideas and compose and revise with increasing confidence and skill.

### Viewing and Representing

Viewing and representing are integral parts of contemporary life. They allow students to understand the ways in which visual language may be used to convey ideas, values, and beliefs.

Viewing is an active process of attending to and comprehending visual media such as television, advertising images, films, diagrams, symbols, photographs, videos, drama, drawings, sculpture, and paintings. Viewing enables students to acquire information and to appreciate the ideas and experiences of others. Many of the comprehension processes involved in reading print texts (such as previewing, predicting, and making inferences) may also be used in viewing.

In the process of constructing meaning, students represent their ideas through visual forms such as webs, sketches, and maps. Representing enables students to communicate information and ideas through a variety of media, including charts, graphs, diagrams, video presentations, brochures, multimedia technology, visual art, and the dramatic arts.

### The Nature of the Student Learning Outcomes

The general and specific student learning outcomes for Senior 4 English language arts curricula (Comprehensive Focus, Literary Focus, and Transactional Focus) are concise statements of the learning that students are expected to demonstrate by the end of Senior 4. This learning includes:

- *Knowledge:* Students need to know facts, concepts, principles, and generalizations. The knowledge taught in language arts includes the vocabulary of the language arts discipline, aesthetic and pragmatic devices, and the conventions of various forms and genres.
- *Skills and Strategies:* Students need to know and apply processes and strategies in developing skills. This procedural knowledge includes knowledge and skilled use of the six

language arts, as well as related processes, including processes of inquiry, interaction, revision and editing, reflection, and metacognition.

- *Attitudes:* This aspect of learning relates to how students are disposed to act. Attitudes and habits of mind fostered by language arts learning include thinking strategically in approaching a task, considering others' ideas, appreciating the clarity and artistry of language, reflecting on one's own performance, and setting goals.

### General Student Learning Outcomes

Five general student learning outcomes serve as the foundation for each Senior 4 English language arts curriculum: Comprehensive Focus, Literary Focus, and Transactional Focus. General learning outcomes are broad statements describing student learning. The general student learning outcomes are interrelated and interdependent. Each learning outcome is to be achieved through a variety of listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and representing experiences.

The general student learning outcomes and the icons used to represent them in the ELA Framework documents from Kindergarten through the Senior Years are:



#### General Learning Outcome 1

Students will listen, speak, read, write, view, and represent to explore thoughts, ideas, feelings, and experiences.



#### General Learning Outcome 2

Students will listen, speak, read, write, view, and represent to comprehend and respond personally and critically to oral, print, and other media texts.



#### General Learning Outcome 3

Students will listen, speak, read, write, view, and represent to manage ideas and information.



**General Learning Outcome 4**

Students will listen, speak, read, write, view, and represent to enhance the clarity and artistry of communication.



**General Learning Outcome 5**

Students will listen, speak, read, write, view, and represent to celebrate and build community.

**Specific Student Learning Outcomes**

In each Senior 4 English language arts curriculum (Comprehensive Focus, Literary Focus, and Transactional Focus), each general student learning outcome is elaborated through clusters of specific learning outcomes, which are categorized under headings. The specific learning outcomes are relevant for students in a variety of learning environments and are cumulative across the grades.

Students are expected to demonstrate the specific learning outcomes for their current grade while building on and maintaining the learning outcomes for previous grades. For this reason, the student learning outcomes for Grade 8, Senior 1, Senior 2, and Senior 3 are provided in this document along with the Senior 4 student learning outcomes.\*

Many specific student learning outcomes provide examples, enclosed within brackets:

- Bracketed examples prefaced by *such as* indicate the range and variety of examples teachers need to consider in planning.
- Bracketed terms prefaced by *including* indicate mandatory aspects of curricula.

**Integrating the Student Learning Outcomes and the Language Arts**

Effective language arts classrooms frequently address several student learning outcomes simultaneously. Many of the specific student learning outcomes are intended to be addressed at different times through one or a combination of the six language arts.

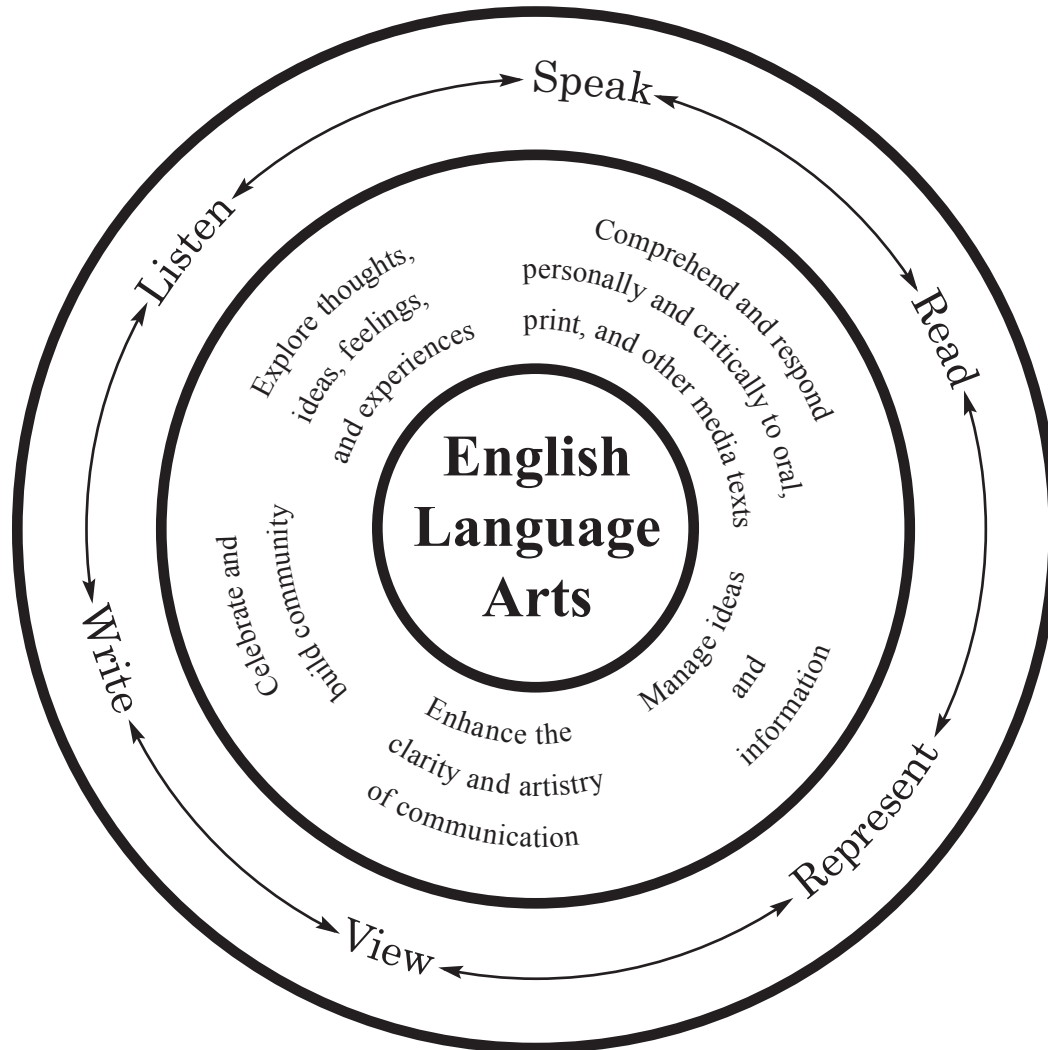
In the course of planning, teachers typically draw from several specific student learning outcomes, both within a general learning outcome and across all five general learning outcomes, and organize these outcomes into logical sequences for instructional experiences. Many aspects of language arts instruction are recursive and are revisited repeatedly, using a range of teaching, learning, and assessment strategies, as well as a variety of learning resources.

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\* The Grade 8 and Senior 1 student learning outcomes are identified in *The Common Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts, Kindergarten to Grade 12 (Grades 10–12 Draft)* (1996), and the Senior 2, 3, and 4 student learning outcomes are identified in *The Common Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts, Kindergarten to Grade 12* (1998). The order of presentation for all grades reflects the 1998 edition.

## An Organizational Framework

The study of the English language arts enables each student to understand and appreciate language and to use it confidently and competently in a variety of situations for communication, personal satisfaction, and learning. The following figure represents an organizational framework for integrating the five general student learning outcomes and the six language arts.



# Guide to Reading the Student Learning Outcomes

