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California English Language Development Standards

Glossary of Key Terms

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This glossary provides definitions of key terms used in the California English Language Development Standards and/or in related appendices. Many of these terms derive from traditional grammar and from linguistics, and some have evolved in their meaning or have different meanings that vary by linguistic tradition. The definitions provided here are intended to be teacher-friendly and are specific to their use within the CA ELD Standards and related appendices.

The national Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (CCSS-ELA) Appendix A¹ also provides extensive and detailed explanations of several other key terms used throughout the CCSS-ELA and referenced where relevant in the CA ELD Standards. Given their centrality to the CCSS-ELA and their elaboration, these terms are not summarized here. These key terms are listed below, with references to CCSS-ELA Appendix A page numbers:

- Text Complexity (pp. 2–16)
- Reading Foundational Skills (pp. 17–22)
- Text types (argument, informative/explanatory writing, and narrative) (pp. 23–25)
- Oral Language Development (pp. 26–27)
- Conventions and Knowledge of Language (pp. 28–31)
- Vocabulary (pp. 32–35)

Adverbs: Adverbs add detail to (or modify) verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs about when, where, why, or under what conditions something happens or happened. For example (the adverbs are underlined, and the modified word is italicized):

Sentence with adverb	Word modified
He <i>ate</i> his dinner <u>slowly</u> .	Verb
It was a <u>very</u> <i>graceful</i> gesture.	Adjective
She moved <u>extremely</u> <i>quickly</i> across the room.	Adverb

Adjectives and Adjective Phrases: Adjectives provide details about (or modify) nouns or pronouns. Adjectives like appalling, obnoxious, desperate, alluring, and pleasant, for example, allow speakers and writers to add nuance and precision to a description of a person or thing. An adjective can be made even more precise by adding pre- or post-modifiers. For example:

¹ See: http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_A.pdf

	Adjective phrase		
	Pre-modifier	Head adjective	Post-modifiers
She was	quite	distraught.	
	even more	distraught	than yesterday.
	so	distraught	that she couldn't eat.

Clause: A clause is a unit of meaning that expresses a message. A clause always contains a verb (e.g., *Go!*) and is usually accompanied by a subject noun or noun phrase (e.g., *She went.*). A clause can be independent or dependent.

Independent Clause: An independent clause (also known as the *main clause*) contains a complete idea and can stand alone (independently) as a complete sentence. For example:

The bees swarmed in the attic.

I couldn't hear anything.

Two independent clauses can be combined to form a compound sentence by using a **coordinating conjunction** (*and, but, for, nor, or, so, yet*). For example:

The bees swarmed in the attic, but I couldn't hear anything.

Dependent Clause: A dependent clause (also known as a *subordinate clause*) is a clause that is *dependent upon* the meaning of the **independent** (or main) clause for its meaning and can therefore not stand alone as a complete sentence. Dependent clauses are formed in several different ways. Two examples are provided below.

- **Using a subordinating conjunction:** A subordinating conjunction (e.g., *because, although, if*) introduces a dependent (or subordinate) clause. Different kinds of subordinating conjunctions create different types of relationships between the clauses. In the first example below, the relationship is one of cause. In the second example, the relationship is one of concession. The dependent clauses are italicized, and the subordinating conjunctions are underlined.

Because *they were hungry*, the horses ate all the hay.

Although *she loves to swim*, she decided not to go to the pool today.

- **Using a relative pronoun:** A relative pronoun (e.g., *that, who, whom, which, whose*) introduces a relative clause (a type of *embedded clause* also called an *adjective clause*). Sometimes, the relative pronoun is omitted. In the following examples, the dependent clause is italicized, and the relative pronoun is underlined. Words that can be omitted are in brackets.

Butterflies are winged insects that *undergo complete metamorphosis*.

He's the teacher who *changed my life*.

Serotonin is a natural neurotransmitter [that is] *produced in the human body*.

Cohesion: Cohesion refers to how information is connected and flows in a text. A cohesive text is created through a variety of cohesive devices that facilitate understanding across the text or discourse. One device is to refer back to people, ideas, or things with pronouns or synonyms throughout a text so as not to be repetitive (e.g., replacing *the first settlers* with *they*). Another is to link clauses, sentences, and larger chunks of text with conjunctions, such as transition words (e.g., *in contrast, consequently, next*).

Connecting Words: Connecting words and phrases signal how different parts of a text are linked. In narratives and other text types organized by time or sequences of events, temporal connectives (e.g., *first, next, after awhile, the next day*) are often used. In text types organized around ideas, such as arguments and explanations, connectives may be used in various ways, such as: to show relationships between ideas (e.g., *on the contrary, for example*); to organize events or sequence ideas (e.g., *previously, until that time, first of all, to conclude*); or to add information (e.g., *in addition, furthermore*).

Context: Context refers to the environment in which language is used, including disciplinary area, topic, audience, text type, and mode of communication.

Modality: Modality refers to the degree of ability, necessity, obligation, prohibition, certainty, or possibility of an action or situation. Understanding of modality allows speakers and writers to temper statements, give information about the degree of obligation or certainty of a situation or idea, or express the degree to which we are willing to entertain other possibilities.

Modal Adverb: High modality adverbs include *definitely, absolutely, and certainly*. Medium modality adverbs include *probably* and *apparently*. Low modality adverbs include *possibly, perhaps, and maybe*.

Modal Auxiliary: High modality auxiliaries include *must* and *will*. Medium modality auxiliaries include *should* and *need to*. Low modality auxiliaries include *could* and *might*.

Nominalization: Nominalization is the process of creating a noun or noun phrase from another part of speech or condensing large amounts of information (e.g., an event or concept) into a noun or noun phrase. Often, a verb or verb phrase is nominalized (e.g., They *destroyed* the rainforest. → The *destruction* of the rainforest), though adjectives are nominalized as well (e.g., strong → strength, different → difference). Nominalization can also collapse a clause or even multiple clauses at once. For example, in conversational language, a student might say, “The ranchers came to the rain forest, and they cut down all the trees. The next year, the rain flooded many areas of the rainforest.” With nominalization, these three clauses can be collapsed into one clause: “The *arrival* of the ranchers and *the clearing* of the rainforest led to *widespread flooding*.”

Nouns and Noun Phrases: Nouns and noun phrases represent people, places, things or ideas. A noun phrase includes a noun (e.g., *ball*) plus its modifiers, including articles (e.g., *the ball*) and adjectives (e.g., *the blue ball*).

Expanding Noun Phrases: More detail can be added to nouns by expanding the noun phrase with pre- and post-modifiers (words that come before and after the head noun). In the following example, the head noun is boldfaced, and modifiers are added incrementally:

frog → That **frog** → That green **frog** → That fat green **frog** → That very fat green **frog** → That very fat green **frog** on the rock

Prepositions and Prepositional Phrases: A preposition (e.g., *to, of, with, at, in, over, through*) combines with a noun or noun phrase to form a prepositional phrase. Prepositional phrases provide more information or specific details about people, things, ideas, activities, or events in a sentence. Specifically, they enable a writer or speaker to add detail about where things are, why things occur, or how things are in comparison to other things. Prepositional phrases can be used to locate something in space or time (e.g., *under the table, on the moon*); to show reason (e.g., *due to the rain*), purpose (e.g., *for tomorrow*), or comparison (e.g., *like a dog*); or to specify which thing is referenced (e.g., the lady *with the blue hat*).

Register: Register refers to variation in the vocabulary, grammar, and discourse of a language to meet the expectations of a particular context. A context can be defined by numerous elements, such as audience, task, purpose, setting, social relationship, and mode of communication (written versus spoken). Specific examples of contextual variables are: the nature of the communicative activity (e.g., talking with someone about a movie, persuading someone in a debate, or writing a science report); the nature of the relationship between the language users in the activity (e.g., friend-to-friend, expert-to-learner); the subject matter and topic (e.g., photosynthesis in science, the Civil War in history); and the medium through which a message is conveyed (e.g., a text message versus an essay).

Scaffolding:² Scaffolding is temporary guidance or assistance provided to a student by a teacher, another adult, or a more capable peer, enabling the student to perform a task he or she otherwise would not be able to do alone, with the goal of fostering the student’s capacity to perform the task on his or her own later on.* (*Though Vygotsky himself does not use the term *scaffolding*, the educational meaning of the term relates closely to his concept of the zone of proximal development. See L. S. Vygotsky (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.)

See Appendix C: Theoretical Foundations and Research Base for the California English Language Development Standards, for further explanation of scaffolding for English learners.

Sentences: There are four types of sentences: simple, compound, complex, and compound complex.

Simple Sentences consist of a single independent clause. For example (the independent clause is underlined, and the verb is bolded):

Earthworms **are** invertebrates.

One interesting thing about earthworms **is** their regeneration ability.

Compound Sentences consist of two or more independent clauses connected with coordinating conjunctions (e.g., *and, but, or, so*). For example (the independent clauses are underlined, and the verbs are bolded):

Earthworms **don’t have** any legs, but they **do have** five hearts.

² Definition—including asterisked comment—is drawn directly from CCSS-ELA Appendix A, p.43.

Complex Sentences consist of one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses connected with a subordinating conjunction (e.g., *because, when, although*). For example (the independent clauses are underlined, and the dependent clauses are italicized):

If you want to graduate, you need to pass your classes.

*Her first film was a huge success, *although she'd never made a movie before.**

Compound-Complex Sentences consist of at least two independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses. For example (the independent clauses are underlined, and the dependent clause is italicized):

Although I'd love to go to the soccer game, I haven't finished my homework yet, and I also need to wash the dishes.

Shades of Meaning: Shades of meaning can be created using various language resources, including vocabulary, figurative language, phrasing, using dependent clauses to begin sentences in order to emphasize something, etc. For example, vocabulary can be used to evaluate (e.g., Misty was a *stubborn* horse) or express degree or intensity (e.g., It's *very likely* that..., It was an *extremely* gloomy room). In addition, phrases and clauses can be used to create nuances or precision and to shape how the message will be interpreted by readers/listeners. This often occurs at the beginning of sentences (e.g., *In my opinion...*, *Bizarrely,* she interrupted...). As English learners progress through the grades, they learn to create shades of meaning in increasingly sophisticated and subtle ways in order to cause a certain reaction in the reader (e.g., to build suspense or characterize a historical figure) or to persuade readers to believe something or to take action.

Verbs and Verb Phrases: Verbs are used to express happenings, doings, and states of being. A verb phrase can consist of a single verb (e.g., She **ran**) or a number of words (auxiliary verbs and other infinitive or participle constructions) around the verb (e.g., She **might have been running**).

Verb Types: There are different types of verbs that create precision in texts. The CA ELD Standards refer to four types of verbs:

- Doing/action verbs (e.g., *go, take, gather, abandon*)
- Saying verbs (e.g., *ask, say, suggest, explain, promise*)
- Being/having verbs (e.g., *am/is/are, appear, symbolize, have, include*)
- Thinking/feeling verbs (e.g., *know, decide, dislike, smell*)

Verb Tenses: Verb tenses (present, past, future) and aspects (simple, progressive, perfect) help to convey time relationships, status of completion, or habitualness of an activity or state denoted by the verb (e.g., she **ran** yesterday; she **runs** every day; she **will run** tomorrow; she **has been running** since she was in college).

Voice (Active and Passive): In addition to verb types and tenses, sentences can be structured in the active voice (*He told the children to do their best*) or the passive voice (*The children were told to do their best*).

There are a number of reasons to choose the passive over the active voice. One reason often seen in academic texts is to suppress the human agents in an event, discovery, etc., either because it is the event/discovery that is important or because the speaker/writer does not wish to reveal who is responsible for certain acts. For example:

The discovery that “junk DNA” actually plays critical roles in controlling cell, tissue, and organ behavior was first made last year.

(Here, the scientists aren’t really as important as the discovery.)

Mistakes were made.

(Here, there is a conscious effort to mask the people who made the mistakes.)

Mood: There are a variety of ways to structure messages into statements, questions, commands, etc., depending on the relationship between the speakers/listeners or writers/readers. Examples of some of the main sentence types identified by mood follow.

- Declarative (statements):
 - Bats are mammals.
 - Once upon a time, there was a little girl who loved books.
 - You’re impossible to live with.
- Interrogative (questions):
 - How do you solve this problem?
 - What’s your name?
 - Why are you here?
- Imperative (commands):
 - Don’t you ever do that again!
 - Put that over there, please.
- Subjunctive (expressing wishes, desires, or suggestions):
 - I wish I were younger.
 - If I were you, I wouldn’t boast so loudly.
 - It is imperative that I be allowed to participate in this event.

Vocabulary: The CA ELD Standards and the Common Core State Standards for ELA define three categories of vocabulary.

- **Domain-Specific Vocabulary:** Vocabulary that is specific to a particular discipline (field of study, or domain). Domain-specific words and phrases carry content meaning (e.g., *lava*, *hypotenuse*, *chromosome*, *democratic*, *stanza*).
- **General Academic Vocabulary:** Vocabulary that is found across text types, particularly in written texts, that provides more nuanced or sophisticated ways of expressing meaning than everyday language (e.g., *devastation*, *reluctance*, *significantly*, *misfortune*, *specificity*).
- **Conversational Vocabulary** is the vocabulary of everyday interaction (e.g., *run*, *table*, *friend*). This is also referred to as **frequently-occurring, or everyday vocabulary**.