WiDA™

Can Do Descriptors

Early Years

The WIDA Early Years Can Do Descriptors

The *Early Years Can Do Descriptors* provide examples of what dual language learners (DLLs) **can do** at various stages of language development. They can help educators interpret results from WIDA language development assessments and identify ways to design opportunities for DLLs' meaningful participation in learning environments where the language of interaction is English.
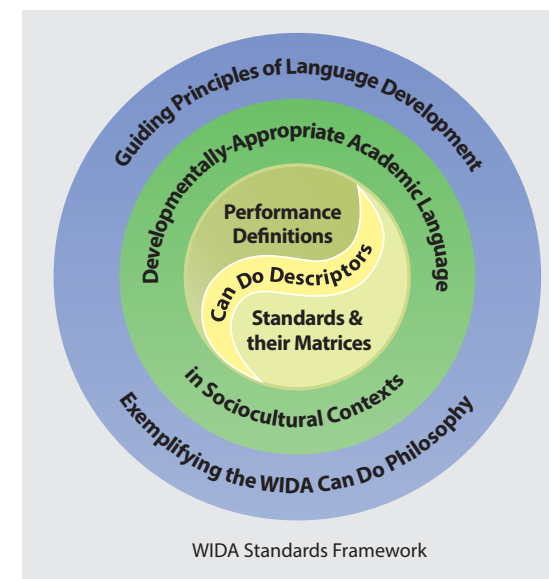
The *Early Years Can Do Descriptors* is one of the components of the WIDA Standards Framework (shown at right). All the components in the framework work together to support DLLs and their educators in supporting DLLs' language development. Therefore, we encourage practitioners and educators to use the *Early Years Can Do Descriptors* in conjunction with the other components of the framework For more information on the WIDA Standards Framework, visit www.wida.us.

WIDA Standards Framework

Organization of the Early Years Can Do Descriptors

The Can Do Descriptors are organized by age clusters, 2.5–3.5, 3.5–4.5, and 4.5–5.5, that correspond to those in the WIDA Early English Language Development Standards. Within each age cluster, there are example descriptors across WIDA's three levels of English language development in Early Years (Entering, Developing, and Bridging). In each language level, there are sample descriptors for receptive and expressive language domains.

The *Early Years Can Do Descriptors* provides examples of language use for three specific purposes: **Express Self, Recount,** and **Inquire.** These purposes are referred to as **Key Uses** and were identified based on reviews of literature, empirical research on language use in preschool settings, and a language analysis of early childhood standards.

The table below defines each Key Use and provides examples of activities in which children may use this language.

Key Uses of Language	Purposes	Example Activities
Express Self	Sharing feelings, needs and wants, choices and preferences Sharing about self and child's own individuality Planning activities with others and assigning roles Negotiating with others, including or inviting others to join in activities	Daily routines Conflict resolution Interactive games Persuading others
Recount	Sharing past events and experiences Retelling stories Sharing discoveries Describing things, routines, pictures, or events	Storytelling Read aloud Show and tell
Inquire	Asking and answering questions Stating predictions and hypotheses Explaining observations, events, or phenomena Discussing topics with others	Science experiments Problem-solving Directions and instructions Presentations

When working with Key Uses, it is important to keep in mind the following:

1. The Key Uses of language used in the *Early Years Can Do Descriptors* and the example activities described above are not exhaustive; they are just examples of the way children process and express language.

2. Children may engage in the Key Uses or activities described in the table during imaginative play, self-talk, and interactions with others.

3. The three Key Uses are distinct, but they work in tandem and often overlap. For example, when children are engaged in resolving a conflict with another child (Key Use: Express Self), they may need to recount what happened first (Key Use: Recount). Likewise, when children wonder about the world (Key Use: Inquire) to explore how things are made or why things happen, they also may share their discoveries and describe objects or observations (Key Use: Recount).

4. The purpose for separating the Key Uses is to draw attention to the various purposes for which a child may use language and not to privilege one purpose over the other. Language use should be modeled in intentional ways and across a variety of language uses.

5. While the Key Uses focus on what DLLs can do in English at the various levels of English language development, it is important to recognize that DLLs draw on multiple languages to communicate. Therefore, the Key Uses may be achieved through the use of all languages that are part of the linguistic repertoire of DLLs.

6. The Key Uses in Early Years serve as precursors to Key Uses of academic language in K–12: Recount, Explain, Argue, and Discuss. As children acquire more complex language and use it to negotiate more complex content, the Early Years Key Uses (Express Self, Recount, and Inquire) serve as the building blocks of the K–12 Key Uses (Recount, Explain, Argue and Discuss). Their relation is not one to one, but each Key Use in Early Years supports the development of all of the K–12 Key Uses.

The table below describes the various audiences and potential uses of the Early Years Can Do Descriptors.

Audiences	Potential Uses
Adults who work with dual language learners in early care and education centers *(e.g., practitioners, teachers, teacher assistants, and other specialists)*	• Interpret results from WIDA English language development observations and assessments • Collaborate and engage in conversations about ways to support the language development of young DLLs • Support the meaningful participation of young DLLs in English learning environments
Early Childhood Program Administrators *(e.g., community agency administrators and ECE setting administrators)*	• Support communication with practitioners, families, and other stakeholders • Inform the planning, design and development of systems that support the language development of DLLs • Advocate for appropriate language support for DLLs

Stakeholders are encouraged to use the Early Years Can Do Descriptors beyond the audiences and purposes identified above to advocate for equitable learning experiences for dual language learners.

Age: 2.5-3.5 Years

Towards the end of the given language development level, dual language learners can:

		ELP Level 1 Entering	ELP Level 3 Developing	ELP Level 5 Bridging
KEY USE OF EXPRESS SELF	**RECEPTIVE**	**Process language of Self-Expression by** • Responding nonverbally and/or with gestures to simple prompts • Finding familiar objects named orally • Responding to yes/no questions about familiar choices	**Process language of Self-Expression by** • Following brief oral directions to meet routine social expectations • Responding nonverbally to familiar choice questions about likes and dislikes • Pointing to familiar pictures or objects based on oral descriptions	**Process language of Self-Expression by** • Role playing in response to familiar songs, stories, and poems • Following oral directions related to imaginative play • Matching personal choices to those of others based on oral prompts
	EXPRESSIVE	**Express Self by** • Responding to greetings in home language or isolated English words • Repeating familiar words in songs and stories • Stating preferences through words and gestures	**Express Self by** • Repeating words or everyday expressions related to familiar activities • Describing objects in imaginative play using short phrases *(e.g., trucks go beep beep)* • Sharing feelings using familiar language	**Express Self by** • Singing favorite short songs or rhymes to self • Inviting others to join in activities using familiar language • Interacting with others using short phrases related to objects of play

Age: 2.5-3.5 Years

Towards the end of the given language development level, dual language learners can:

	ELP Level 1 Entering	ELP Level 3 Developing	ELP Level 5 Bridging
RECEPTIVE	**Process language of Recount by** • Indicating preferences based on words and simple questions *(e.g., by nodding yes or no)* • Pointing to pictures and objects based on simple prompts • Finding objects in familiar routines based on adult requests	**Process language of Recount by** • Following familiar directions to recreate patterns or designs • Sorting objects or pictures from familiar events based on oral prompts • Identifying pictures or events described in simple sentences *(e.g., "Where's the tree?")*	**Process language of Recount by** • Identifying characteristics of objects or familiar events based on a series of simple sentences. • Sequencing pictures or illustrations from familiar stories • Organizing objects in response to one-step oral directions
EXPRESSIVE	**Express Recount by** • Repeating words in familiar routines • Naming needs and wants using words and short formulaic phrases • Sharing discoveries using gestures, nonverbal communication, and words in home language and English	**Express Recount by** • Retelling situations using familiar language • Stating preferences using familiar words and phrases • Responding to yes/no questions about personal information	**Express Recount by** • Describing familiar pictures of events using phrases and short sentences • Sharing personal information with others to make connections using familiar phrases • Relating familiar activities or actions using short sentences

KEY USE OF RECOUNT

Age: 2.5-3.5 Years

Towards the end of the given language development level, dual language learners can:

	ELP Level 1 Entering	ELP Level 3 Developing	ELP Level 5 Bridging
RECEPTIVE	**Process language of Inquiry by** • Responding to familiar oral prompts about new discoveries • Finding familiar objects of their interest based on prompts and yes/no questions • Choosing familiar activities from adult prompts	**Process language of Inquiry by** • Following inquiry prompts to make observations of the world around them • Identifying new discoveries based on inquiry prompts • Responding nonverbally to questions about new events	**Process language of Inquiry by** • Identifying characteristics of objects to engage in problem solving based on adult prompts • Identifying objects or persons of choice based on teacher descriptions • Acting out what they know about the world based on adult prompts
EXPRESSIVE	**Express Inquiry by** • Showing curiosity about new objects using sounds, nonverbal communication, and gestures • Inviting others to participate in imaginative play using a combination of home language, gestures, and/or single English words • Naming familiar objects in the environment using single words	**Express Inquiry by** • Sharing observations during experiments based on adult modeling • Repeating names and properties of things children are curious about • Asking simple questions to engage in problem solving based on adult modeling	**Express Inquiry by** • Asking questions in different situations based on adult modeling • Predicting consequences or actions during social interactions based on adult modeling • Sharing observations during play using familiar language

KEY USE OF INQUIRE

Age: 3.5-4.5 Years

Towards the end of the given language development level, dual language learners can:

	ELP Level 1 Entering	ELP Level 3 Developing	ELP Level 5 Bridging
RECEPTIVE	**Process language of Self-Expression by** • Pointing to objects and people based on adult modeling • Acting out basic emotions from short statements • Indicating preferences in response to adults' yes/no questions	**Process language of Self-Expression by** • Responding nonverbally to short prompts to help others *(e.g., "Take Lisa with you.")* • Following directions to express an awareness of rules and routines • Responding to peers or adult directions to resolve conflict	**Process language of Self-Expression by** • Participating in creative activities or movement based on two- step directions. • Arranging objects in response to questions from adults or peers • Cooperating with others based on oral requests and directions
EXPRESSIVE	**Express Self by** • Responding to yes/no questions about personal preferences • Indicating choices using non-verbal communication *(e.g., pointing, physical movement)* • Repeating directions during familiar routines	**Express Self by** • Asking for help or offering help using a combination of formulaic phrases and some new phrases • Sharing feelings, needs, and wants using short sentences • Asking permission to participate in activities using short sentences *(e.g., "Can I play?")*	**Express Self by** • Co-creating rules and brief scenarios to play cooperatively using original sentences • Stating likes or dislikes and giving reasons based on adult models • Persuading others to participate in activities based on adult models

KEY USE OF EXPRESS SELF

Age: 3.5-4.5 Years

Towards the end of the given language development level, dual language learners can:

	ELP Level 1 Entering	ELP Level 3 Developing	ELP Level 5 Bridging
RECEPTIVE	**Process language of Recount by** • Pointing to pictures based on prompts • Following simple directions using non-verbal responses in an adult-led activities or during play with peers • Identifying familiar people in pictures based on simple statements	**Process language of Recount by** • Acting out short parts of familiar stories read by adults • Sequencing familiar activities or events based on oral statements • Responding to oral descriptions embedded in familiar activities or routines	**Process language of Recount by** • Following oral directions from peers or adults • Making patterns based on oral detailed descriptions • Distinguishing between personal events based on extended oral statements and/or questions
EXPRESSIVE	**Express Recount by** • Naming family members and self from yes/no questions using home language and/or English • Orally labeling familiar objects used in activities or events • Identifying basic emotions using one-to-two words	**Express Recount by** • Describing familiar events using short sentences • Retelling personal experiences using a combination of formulaic phrases and some new phrases • Explaining to peers where to put things during clean up time using familiar language	**Express Recount by** • Sharing details about recent events using a variety of original sentences • Describing activities associated with science investigation based on adult models • Retelling steps to games or planned activities to peers based on adult models

KEY USE OF RECOUNT

Age: 3.5-4.5 Years

Towards the end of the given language development level, dual language learners can:

	ELP Level 1 Entering	ELP Level 3 Developing	ELP Level 5 Bridging
RECEPTIVE	**Process language of Inquiry by** • Responding to commands that invite choice *(e.g., "Show me your favorite color.")* • Following one-to-two step oral instructions in experiments • Sorting objects by size, color, and/or shapes based on descriptions	**Process language of Inquiry by** • Following simple statements to participate in discussions on topics of interest • Drawing pictures in response to oral instructions • Finding pictures that match oral descriptions of observations	**Process language of Inquiry by** • Identifying groups of objects for experiments or projects of interest based on detailed oral descriptions • Distinguishing among natural phenomena based on detailed descriptions • Following multiple oral instructions to engage in problem solving
EXPRESSIVE	**Express Inquiry by** • Repeating names and properties of things children are curious about • Identifying senses to explore objects using words and sounds • Responding to yes/no questions related to safety	**Express Inquiry by** • Relating ideas of interest using short sentences • Sharing observations or questions about their wonderings using familiar language • Stating facts from observations based on adult modeling	**Express Inquiry by** • Asking familiar questions about features in the environment • Describing characteristics of objects found in the natural world *(e.g., "Sharks live in salty water. They don't live in this water because it's not salty, it's fresh.")* • Retelling observations or experiments using a variety of original sentences

KEY USE OF INQUIRE

Age: 4.5-5.5 Years

Towards the end of the given language development level, dual language learners can:

KEY USE OF EXPRESS SELF

	ELP Level 1 Entering	ELP Level 3 Developing	ELP Level 5 Bridging
RECEPTIVE	**Process language of Self-Expression by** • Responding nonverbally to invitations to play from others • Finding objects or people from language related to self and others • Following one-step directions related to routines (*e.g., "Get in line."*)	**Process language of Self-Expression by** • Responding to requests from others (*e.g., "Give me your paper."*) • Identifying information about self, others and home routines based on extended sentences • Responding nonverbally to choice questions	**Process language of Self-Expression by** • Following multiple two-to-three step directions related to routines • Responding nonverbally to detailed questions about self • Indicating preferences of others from their descriptions (*e.g., by pointing*)
EXPRESSIVE	**Express Self by** • Indicating feelings using words and familiar phrases • Repeating familiar language of routines • Using nonverbal communication and words and short phrases in English and/or home language to play and work with others	**Express Self by** • Stating needs or wants using short and some extended sentences • Sharing information about self using sentences that combine familiar phrases with new words • Assigning roles to self and others using familiar language	**Express Self by** • Stating likes/dislikes and giving reasons using adult models • Offering personal opinions using related sentences • Rephrasing roles and routines using a variety of sentences

Age: 4.5-5.5 Years

Towards the end of the given language development level, dual language learners can:

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KEY USE OF RECOUNT

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		ELP Level 1 Entering	ELP Level 3 Developing	ELP Level 5 Bridging
RECEPTIVE		**Process language of Recount by** • Finding familiar people and places named orally • Pointing to pictures from familiar events based on simple statements • Matching oral language to classroom and everyday objects	**Process language of Recount by** • Responding to familiar songs and poems through gestures and physical movement • Identifying familiar sequence of events described or shared orally • Sorting pictures or objects according to oral instructions	**Process language of Recount by** • Acting out stories told by others • Role playing familiar events described by others • Finding objects from detailed oral directions
EXPRESSIVE		**Express Recount by** • Naming characters or places in familiar stories using words and formulaic phrases • Repeating patterns orally during familiar activities • Describing classroom and everyday objects using familiar words and expressions	**Express Recount by** • Retelling familiar stories using short and some expanded sentences • Asking and answering questions about familiar routines or events • Describing situations or events using familiar language	**Express Recount by** • Telling original stories using related sentences • Describing past events based on adult models • Offering personal opinions using a variety of short and expanded sentences

Age: 4.5-5.5 Years

Towards the end of the given language development level, dual language learners can:

KEY USE OF INQUIRE

	ELP Level 1 Entering	ELP Level 3 Developing	ELP Level 5 Bridging
RECEPTIVE	**Process language of Inquiry by** • Finding objects from oral statements to explore the natural world • Identifying groups of objects for experiments or projects of interest based on simple questions or statements • Following along as adults describe natural phenomena by pointing to real objects	**Process language of Inquiry by** • Following statements to participate in discussions on topics of interest • Making patterns from real objects or pictures based on oral descriptions • Sorting pictures or objects to respond to hypothesis statements	**Process language of Inquiry by** • Creating representations of their understanding of ideas read aloud or discussed • Sequencing pictures to experiments based on oral statements • Responding to inquiry questions about observations
EXPRESSIVE	**Express Inquiry by** • Using nonverbal communication, words, and short phrases in English and/or home language to inquire about their environment • Repeating names and properties of things they are curious about • Answering yes/no questions to engage in problem solving	**Express Inquiry by** • Sharing observations or questions about their wonderings using related statements. • Explaining cause and effect relationships to engage in problem solving using short and some expanded sentences • Describing natural phenomena in the environment based on adult models	**Express Inquiry by** • Asking questions about natural phenomena in the environment • Making predictions about what will happen in experiments based on adult models • Documenting characteristics of things found in the natural world using a variety of short and expanded sentences (*e.g., "I see a red flower."*)

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