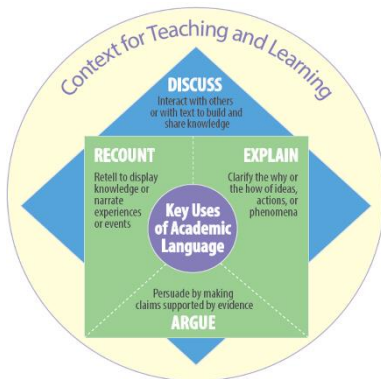




## Can Do Descriptors, Key Uses Edition, K–12 Frequently Asked Questions

The *Can Do Descriptors, Key Uses Edition* can help educators see what English language learners (ELLs) can do with language in different situations, and in different content areas, throughout their journey toward English language proficiency. It provides examples of content language use by students in Kindergarten through Grade 12, in the domains of Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing, at each level of proficiency, from Level 1, Entering, through Level 6, Reaching.



The example descriptors are arranged by Key Use. The Key Uses represent four overarching communicative purposes- Recount, Explain, Argue, and Discuss (shown on left). Researchers have identified these purposes as integral to academic success.

### 1. Why did WIDA develop the Can Do Descriptors, Key Uses Edition?

WIDA developed the Key Uses Edition of the Can Do Descriptors in response to challenging state college and career readiness standards and the subsequent greater language demands placed on curriculum, such as those from International Baccalaureate. The edition also addresses the growing recognition of academic language use in content learning. This edition represents a broad range of what language learners can do with language to meaningfully engage in and achieve challenging content standards.

The Key Uses themselves emerged from an analysis of content standards, language development standards, instructional materials, and a review of the literature in various fields of linguistics and language education.

### 2. What is the rationale for the Can Do Descriptors, Key Uses Edition?

The *Can Do Descriptors, Key Uses Edition* has been built from linguistic theory coupled with language education practices. Three of the Key Uses—Recount, Explain, and Argue—are critical genres tied to success in school that have roots in systemic functional linguistics. The fourth Key Use, Discuss, is directly tied to challenging state college and career readiness standards and language practices that recognize the importance of academic conversations and student interaction as integral to the process of language learning.

### 3. How might you compare the features of the Can Do Descriptors, Key Uses Edition with the Can Do Descriptors, Original Edition?

Both editions of Can Do Descriptors exemplify the WIDA Can Do Philosophy, which accentuates the rich assets language learners bring to our classrooms. However, as illustrated in the table below, there are some differences in the features of the two editions of the Can Do Descriptors.

| Feature | Original Edition   | Key Uses Edition   |
|---------|--|--|
| Purpose | Provides examples of what language learners can do in Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing at | Provides examples of what language learners can do with language tied to four specific purposes of academic language use (Recount, Explain, Argue, |

| Feature                        | Original Edition  | Key Uses Edition  |
|--------------------------------|---|---|
|                                | each of five levels of language proficiency across the five language development standards. | and Discuss) in Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing at each of six levels of language proficiency across the five language development standards. |
| Grade level Clusters           | PreK–K, 1–2, 3–5, 6–8, 9–12   | K, 1, 2–3, 4–5, 6–8, 9–12   |
| Language Domains               | Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing   | Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing   |
| Levels of Language Proficiency | 1 (Entering)–5 (Bridging)   | 1 (Entering)–6 (Reaching)   |
| Communicative Purposes         | Not stated  | Recount, Explain, Argue, Discuss  |

#### 4. What are some examples of the Key Uses?

The Key Uses—Recount, Explain, Argue, and Discuss—are overarching communicative purposes that are associated with language and content learning. Here are the definitions and examples of each Key Use.

| Key Use Definition   | Examples   |
|--|--|
| <b>Recount</b> —To display knowledge or narrate experiences or events.             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State the steps to make something</li> <li>• Describe experiences</li> <li>• Order steps to get the answer</li> <li>• Produce information reports</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Explain</b> —To clarify the “why” or the “how” of ideas, actions, or phenomena. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examine relationships among content-related ideas and concepts</li> <li>• Show relationships between cause and effect</li> <li>• State consequences of behaviors</li> <li>• Describe factors that contribute to events</li> </ul> |
| <b>Argue</b> —To persuade by making claims supported by evidence.                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State preferences or opinions</li> <li>• Present claims supported by evidence</li> <li>• Critique the reasoning of others</li> <li>• Give reasons for a stance</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Discuss</b> —To interact with others to build meaning and share knowledge.      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contribute ideas to a conversation</li> <li>• Extend knowledge with a mentor</li> <li>• Elaborate ideas with peers</li> <li>• Question and critique ideas in small groups</li> </ul>  |

#### 5. How did WIDA develop the Can Do Descriptors, Key Uses Edition?

The *Can Do Descriptors, Key Uses Edition* represents a consortium-wide effort that involved a variety of stakeholders in the development process. Initially, nominees were selected to participate in the Can Do kick-off event in November 2014. Representatives from 14 WIDA states convened over multiple days to develop initial ideas. Multiple WIDA departments provided input, as did the Center for Applied Linguistics. The WIDA Standards team refined the descriptors prior to external review. About 5,000 K–12 ESL, bilingual and content teachers, school leaders, administrators, and teacher educators provided comments via an online survey in spring 2015. After an analysis of the survey data, the set of *Can Do Descriptors, Key Uses Edition* was refined and formatted.

#### 6. How might the Can Do Descriptors, Key Uses Edition be used?

Here are some potential uses for the *Can Do Descriptors, Key Uses Edition*:

**The Can Do Descriptors, Key Uses Edition, encourages educators to...**

- Collaborate and engage in conversations about academic language use as students move along the continuum of language development
- Advocate for equitable access for language learners to grade-level content based on their level of language proficiency
- Attend to students’ academic language use in content classrooms
- Differentiate instruction and classroom assessment based on language learners’ levels of language proficiency
- Support the WIDA Can Do philosophy

**7. Why are the Key Uses important?**

The Key Uses represent families of genres that students encounter in every content area classroom. As such, the Key Uses are central to curriculum for all students; everyone is accountable for the language expectations that are embedded in content. At the same time, the Key Uses can be broken down into different language functions for classroom assessment and instruction. In that way, ELLs can receive differentiated support according to their level of language proficiency. As the Key Uses illustrate language development for a variety of purposes, they hold the potential of helping to lead students to academic success.



**8. How do the Can Do Descriptors, Key Uses Edition support the WIDA Performance Definitions?**

The Can Do Descriptors support the Performance Definitions, another component of the WIDA Standards Framework (shown left), by illustrating how the criteria for each level of language proficiency might be applied to specific communicative purposes. That is, the general criteria in the Performance Definitions are applied to the four Key Uses in the *Can Do Descriptors, Key Uses Edition* to exemplify the language for processing and producing recounts, explanations, arguments, and discussions. The table below illustrates how the Performance Definitions and the Can Do Descriptors complement each other.

| <b>Performance Definitions</b>  | <b>Can Do Descriptors, Key Uses</b>   |
|---|---|
| Provide general criteria of what ELLs can do with language  | Apply the criteria of the Performance Definitions to specific language of the Key Uses                    |
| Form a developmental progression with the scaffolding of language from one language proficiency level to the next | Represent the processing and production of the language at each level of language proficiency             |
| Include receptive (Listening and Reading) and productive (Speaking and Writing) language                          | Break down receptive and productive language into the four language domains and oral language for Discuss |
| Serve as the grounding for the WIDA Speaking and Writing Interpretative Rubrics                                   | Do not lend themselves to language development rubrics  |

**9. How are the Can Do Descriptors different from Model Performance Indicators?**

In the WIDA Standards Framework, the Can Do Descriptors connect the Performance Definitions with the language development standards’ representative strands of Model Performance Indicators (MPIs). The strands of MPIs and the *Can Do Descriptors, Key Uses Edition* share the fact that they are *only*

illustrative samples and should never be considered a definitive list. The following table highlights some distinctions between the two.

| Strands of Model Performance Indicators (MPis)   | Can Do Descriptors, Key Uses Edition  |
|--|---|
| Represent each of the five WIDA language development standards   | Relates to all the WIDA language development standards but are not to be substituted for them                                 |
| Offer detailed criteria of what ELLs can do with language, consisting of a language function, content topic, and instructional support, that scaffold from one level of language proficiency to the next | Connects to the content-related tasks at a particular level of language proficiency through the Key Uses of academic language |
| Provide instructional supports through Language Proficiency Level 4, unless it is developmentally appropriate to have support throughout all levels  | Provides occasional supports to remind teachers of their importance for instruction and assessment for ELLs                   |
| May be used to design differentiated classroom assessment and instruction  | May be used to interpret common assessment and classroom assessment that are geared around the Key Uses                       |

### 10. How might you begin to implement the Can Do Descriptors, Key Uses Edition?

The first tip we offer is this: Do not discard the Original Edition, as it is full of content-related tasks that have broad applicability across the content areas.

We also suggest that language educators have opportunities to pair with content teachers to form a collaborative partnership using the Key Uses Edition. Together the team might begin examining this edition by analyzing a unit of learning for a content area to determine when and where to insert the Key Uses alongside grade-level concepts. In that way, there is always a context for academic language use and it is more fully integrated with content learning. Later, this analysis can proceed more systematically for a school’s or district’s curriculum, content area by content area.

### 11. What is the relationship between Can Do Descriptors, Key Uses and language objectives?

The Key Uses—Recount, Explain, Argue, and Discuss—are global, high leverage purposes for communicating content in school. As they are overarching expressions of what students can do with language, it is advisable to embed the Key Uses into curriculum design.

The Can Do Descriptors, on the other hand, introduce salient language functions associated with a series of interdisciplinary content tasks; they may serve as a starting point for crafting content-specific language objectives that include scaffolding across levels of language proficiency.

### 12. Will WIDA provide additional professional development on how to use the Can Do Descriptors, Key Uses Edition?

Professional Learning at WIDA will integrate the *Can Do Descriptors, Key Uses Edition* into the workshop "Differentiation for Linguistically Diverse Students" and others, as applicable. There will not be a specific workshop on the *Can Do Descriptors, Key Uses Edition*.