**Key Language Uses** represent ways in which students use language for thinking, learning, and doing. Key Language Uses referenced in the Collaboration Tool align with the WIDA English Language Development Standards, 2020 edition and are defined below[[1]](#footnote-1):

* **NARRATE:** When students NARRATE, they use language to convey real or imaginary experiences through stories and histories. Narratives serve many purposes, including to instruct, entertain, teach, or support persuasion.
* **INFORM:** When students INFORM, they use language to provide facts and information. As students convey information, they define, describe, compare, contrast, organize, categorize, or classify concepts, ideas, or phenomena.
* **EXPLAIN:** When students EXPLAIN, they use language to clarify the “why” or the “how” of ideas, actions, or phenomena. EXPLAIN highlights language to give an account of *how* things work or *why* things happen. As students explain, they substantiate the inner workings of natural, man-made, and social phenomena. Some examples of how students use language when they are conducting explanations: examine relationships among content-related ideas and concepts, show relationships between cause and effect, state consequences of behaviors, describe factors that contribute to events.
* **ARGUE:** When students ARGUE, they use language to persuade by making claims supported by evidence.ARGUE highlights language to justify claims using evidence and reasoning. Argue can be used to advance or defend an idea or solution, change the audience’s point of view, bring about action, or accept a position or evaluation of an issue. As students argue, they clarify, challenge, generalize, and justify conclusions and reasoning. Some examples of how students use language when they are conducting an argument: state preferences or opinions, present claims supported by evidence, critique the reasoning of others, give reasons for a stance.

For more information on the Key Language Uses, see the WIDA ELD Standards, 2020 edition pages 26, 363 -368, and *Section 3: Grade Level Cluster Materials* (pages 39 and following).

**A Note on Discuss**

The original version of the Collaboration Tool articulated and defined four Key Uses of Language: Recount, Explain, Argue, and Discuss. The Key Uses of Language in the Collaboration Tool have been updated to align with the WIDA ELD Standards, 2020 edition Key Language Uses. According to the 2020 edition:

* Key Language Uses refer to the most high-leverage genre families across content standards. They are Narrate, Inform, Explain, and Argue.
* Genres are “multimodal types of texts (oral, written, visual) that recur frequently for specific purposes, with specific discourse organization and language features (e.g., biographies)” (WIDA, 2020, p. 27).
* Genre families represent groups of genres with similar characteristics (e.g., biographies, autobiographies, short stories 🡪 Narrate genre family).

This understanding of Key Language Uses does not include Discuss as a prominent language use because Discuss is not considered a genre family of its own like Explain, Argue, Inform, and Narrate. However, using language to discuss is threaded throughout all WIDA 2020 Key Language Uses and ELD Standard Statements. As presented in the 2020 edition, students use language to interpret and express their ideas for the purpose of arguing, explaining, informing, and narrating orally across content areas. Moreover, students use language to orally express and interpret others throughout the school day for social and instructional purposes (ELD Standard 1). Finally, developing students’ oral language proficiency supports literacy, language development, and content area learning.

Therefore, when developing ESL units, educators should carefully consider ways to cultivate oral language development and the interactive component of all academic practices. For example, educators can include opportunities for students to interact with others orally to build meaning and share knowledge, contribute ideas to a conversation, extend knowledge with a mentor, elaborate ideas with peers, and question and critique ideas in small groups.

**References**

WIDA. (2020). WIDA English language development standards framework, 2020 edition: Kindergarten–grade 12.

Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System.

1. Definitions adapted from the WIDA English Language Development Standards Framework, 2020 edition [↑](#footnote-ref-1)