G11–12 Playlist: Using Precise Language, Domain-Specific Vocabulary, and Literary Techniques

Aligns with CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.D:

- Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic.

Welcome

Writing informational texts provides an opportunity to explain a complex subject or topic. Writers can use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and literary technique to explain a complex subject or topic with clarity and conciseness. Using common or vague terms is not as effective for managing the complexity of a topic. Writers' use of precise language allows readers to gain a deeper understanding of the text, draw connections, and develop their own ideas about the subject matter.

Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- understand how precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and literary techniques help to manage the complexity of a topic.

- use effective word choice to explain a complex subject or topic.

Review

Key Terms

- **Precise language** consists of clear and direct words and phrases with specific meanings.

- **Domain-specific vocabulary** consists of the words and phrases used to explain concepts that are directly related to a particular subject or topic.

- **General academic vocabulary** consists of words and phrases that are common in educational materials across academic disciplines, such as *analyze*.

- **Synonyms** are words that have the same or similar meanings.

Using precise language and domain-specific vocabulary is an important and challenging skill to develop. The best way for writers to learn how to incorporate such language and vocabulary into explanatory or informative texts is to think critically as readers:

- Read texts and identify the precise language and domain-specific vocabulary.

- Analyze what makes the selected words and phrases precise and/or domain-specific.

  ◦ In order to assess whether a word or phrase is precise, a reader can ask a couple of questions: Does this word or phrase have other meanings? Is this word or phrase used to convey something literal or figurative?

  ◦ In order to assess whether a word or phrase is domain-specific, a reader can ask a couple of questions: Is this word or phrase specific to the subject? Is it likely to be used outside this content area?

Exploring the Standard

Most words have several meanings, so readers can interpret the meaning of the words differently and, therefore, interpret the meaning of the text differently. As a result, writers work to make sure that each word, phrase, sentence and paragraph serves a clear purpose and has one clear meaning. Using precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and literary techniques helps to effectively convey thoughts and ideas. Precise language makes sure that the information described has only one meaning. Domain-specific vocabulary helps to explain the content-specific ideas. Literary techniques help to explain complex subject matter by emphasizing the meaning.

A Closer Look: Precise Language

The purpose of precise language is to convey ideas as clearly and quickly as possible, leaving no room for doubt. Precise language includes specific verbs, adjectives, nouns, and other parts of speech with clear meanings. Consider the examples in the chart below:

General Word or Phrase	Precise Word or Phrase
to be possible/able to do	potential, feasible, achievable, viable, to attain, plausible, conceivable
really important	critical, crucial, significant, paramount, vital, essential, imperative
to see (something)	observe, examine, discern, recognize, identify, witness, glimpse, peer

Although these words are synonyms, a reader can notice the more formal tone and the level of specificity that the precise words express. For example, even though *ample* is a synonym for *enough,* it actually means "more than enough." These word choices are what make a text clearer, more specific, and therefore more understandable to the text's audience.

A Closer Look: Domain-Specific Vocabulary

For even more specificity and clarity, writers pair their precise language with domain-specific vocabulary to achieve the optimal level of understanding. New readers may not immediately know the definition or meanings of these words, but they can use context clues from the text to determine their meanings.