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Strategies for Connecting Content ← and → Language for English Language Learners

Science



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Foreword by Gregory A. Denman

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Connecting Content and Language

What Is Academic Language?

Academic language includes the vocabulary, functions and forms of language, and the fluency to demonstrate thinking and learning across the curriculum. “(It) refers to the specialized vocabulary, grammar, discourse/textual, and functional skills associated with academic instruction and mastery of academic material and tasks” (Saunders, Goldenberg, and Marcelletti 2010, 49–50). Academic language has been used in educational conversations as a vehicle for supporting academic achievement. We hear educators say academic language is important across the curriculum; students need to develop academic language to be successful; every lesson should include academic language; *all* students need academic language. We can talk about it at a conceptual level as something that holds great importance in pedagogy and curricula and though true, these statements do not provide the guidance teachers need to plan with and facilitate academic language development. How can we understand it in a concrete way to operationalize what is meant by academic language development? In its simplest form, we can begin the conversation by helping teachers understand that academic language is about connecting content to language. It is selecting what we are going to teach (processing content) and the vehicle through which students can access the information (acquiring language) and share what they have learned (producing language). Processing and producing language to learn content and discuss what you’ve learned develops academic language.

This resource helps teachers engage in the conversation of the *what* and the *how* of academic language. It looks at language from a holistic perspective—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—that is integrated in complex ways as students access information and share their thinking. Academic language makes learning possible. It opens lines of communication as students engage in discussions and dialogue around their thinking and learning. It takes the ability to *listen* to a spoken message and decipher meaning from multiple perspectives and alternating points of view. It involves the ability to decode and process written language in its many representations to access information when *reading*. It allows students to create *written* examples of their thinking and *articulate* (speak) their ideas to many audiences and for a variety of purposes.

Throughout the school day, students will listen to messages, read information, create written texts, and share their thinking. Whether in science, social studies, art, music, physical education, language arts, or math, students are constantly using their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. The work of supporting students to do just that—use language across the curriculum—is the work of academic language development.

Connecting Content and Language *(cont.)*

Academic language development is the process by which students learn and express their thinking. Teachers of academic language development must find opportunities to explicitly and implicitly support students with this goal throughout the day. The strategies presented in this resource are intended to support teachers in developing students' academic language. Though the strategies are presented effectively in developing particular domains of academic language development—academic vocabulary, comprehensible input, comprehensible output, listening and reading comprehension, and academic writing—no single set of strategies works in isolation. Language is complex and incorporates multiple domains at a time; however, the strategies have been organized into categories to demonstrate their strength for a particular element of academic language development.

Academic language development and academic language are not synonymous. Academic language can be defined as the *what* in academic language development. It includes the function, forms, academic and content vocabulary, and fluency necessary to access and share ideas. Academic language development is the process through which students learn academic language. It is a complex process that includes identifying academic language, comprehensible input, comprehensible output, listening and reading comprehension, and academic writing. These elements can support students in developing academic language as they connect content and language throughout the day.

Forms and Functions of Language

The Common Core speaking and listening standards state, “To build a foundation for college and career readiness, students must have ample opportunities to take part in a variety of rich, structured conversations—as part of a whole class, in small groups, and with a partner” (2010, 22). For students to successfully engage in these rigorous academic discussions, they need to develop academic language. Teachers will need to explicitly model language used for a variety of purposes for students to acquire language through successful “listening” opportunities, as outlined in the standards. For example, anchor standards ask students to be able to interpret information presented orally and through other media, engage in conversations with diverse partners, and orally share their thinking demonstrating command of formal English (SL.2, SL.1, SL.6). To support students, teachers will need to have a clear understanding of the language demands of academic tasks.

Connecting Content and Language *(cont.)*

Defining academic language in concrete terms includes understanding what the purpose is for using language in any given exchange and the forms needed to meet those purposes. “The context for any piece of language is characterized by three features: what is being discussed (or written) about; the relationship between the speaker and listener (or writer and reader); and whether the language is spoken or written” (Halliday and Hansan 1985, as cited in Gibbons 2009, 47). Here we focus on identifying what is being discussed or written about as it relates to the context in which it is being shared.

Language *functions* can be defined as the purpose for using language. Why are we using language? Is it to compare, describe, justify, or persuade? When students are asked to produce language they are given a task—a purpose for using language. They are asked to think in particular ways that set this purpose. For example, if students were asked to interpret the meaning of a text orally, the function, or purpose for using language in this case is interpretation. Identifying the thinking involved in a task helps determine the language function students will need to share their thinking.

Functions of language are directly connected to language *forms*. The forms of language, also referred to as frames of language, are the structures used to fulfill a function. For example, the language function may be open interpretation. Forms may include:

- I think this means _____.
- I understand this to mean _____.
- I infer that _____.
- Based on _____, I deduce _____.
- If I read between the lines, I think _____.

As thinking skills become more complex, so do the functions of language needed to express one’s thinking (Beltran, Mora-Flores, and Sarmiento 2013). We start to see a combination of simple functions of language to achieve more complex thinking. For example, interpreting is a higher-level thinking skill. It requires students to be able to comprehend and process the details of a text, think about multiple perspectives, deduce meaning, and ultimately provide their own interpretation of the information. The language function is just as complex. Students will use forms of language that describe, question, deduce, and infer in order to articulate an interpretation. The use of forms and functions of language in content-area instruction is strong. All content areas require students to process the information in different ways. Connecting language and forms and functions to the thinking around the content will develop academic language.

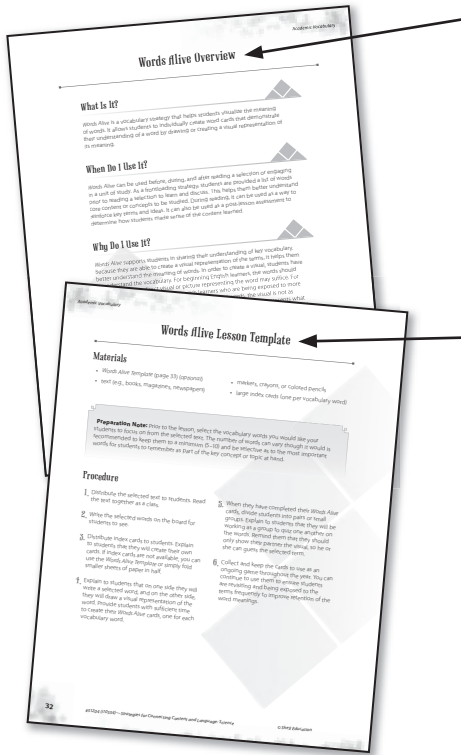
How to Use This Book

The strategies in this resource were designed to support you as the content-area teacher to enhance language-development opportunities in your classroom. It provides strategies that support key elements for developing academic language across the curriculum, including academic vocabulary, comprehensible input, comprehensible output, listening and reading comprehension, and academic writing. Also included within each lesson are ideas for differentiation in your classroom. All students are academic-language learners. They continue to engage with and acquire language that supports their access to information and share their thinking of complex tasks and content.

The strategies were created to help you see how they can enhance your lessons in ways that make them language intentional and language rich. The purpose is to give you a range of ideas and strategies to use when delivering language arts content to students and for providing them with opportunities to share their thinking and learning. The strategies are a bridge connecting the language to the content, thus the strategies are full of oral- and written-language exchanges. Students will be talking, moving, and listening to one another, while capturing new ideas and language along the way. Approaching your language arts planning from a language perspective will help students access the information and develop academic language in preparation for meeting content standards. Students will learn content and develop language to enrich their overall learning experience.

This resource is one of a series of four that provides ideas for planning lessons across the four core content areas: English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Each notebook provides specific lessons that tailor the strategies to an intended grade range as well as a content-area standard and speaking and listening standard. Each strategy presented in this notebook uses language arts content to demonstrate how easily and effectively you can support students' academic language development.

How to Use This Book (cont.)

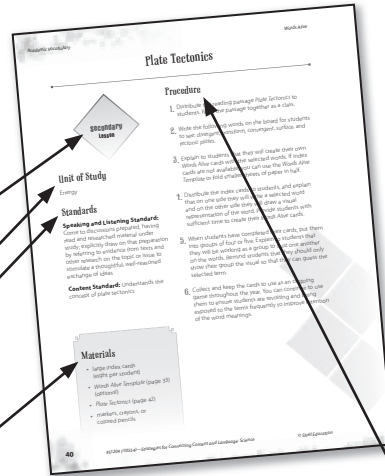


Each strategy begins with an **overview** page. This page explains the strategy and provides information about when and why to use it.

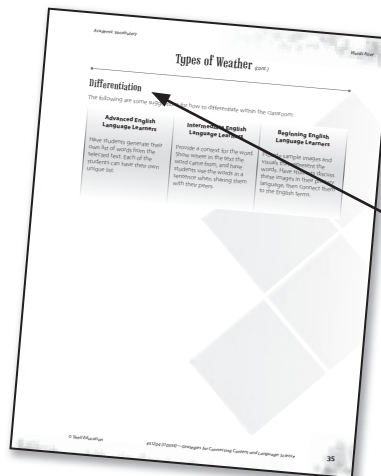
The **lesson template** provides a general outline of how to implement the strategy. This framework can be used to create lessons using other standards beyond what is provided in the model lessons.

For each strategy, a model lesson is provided for grades K–2, 3–5, and secondary. Each model lesson begins by identifying the intended **grade range**, suggested **unit of study**, and the appropriate **standards** addressed in the lesson. Each lesson includes both a speaking and listening standard, as well as a content standard.

The **materials** section lists the necessary supplies that should be gathered prior to delivering the lesson.



The **procedure** section provides a step-by-step plan to successfully conduct the lesson with students.



The **differentiation** section of the lesson provides suggestions for differentiating instruction based on students' language proficiency level.

Academic Vocabulary Strategies Overview

We often think about academic language solely as the content-specific vocabulary of a discipline. Though academic language does incorporate vocabulary, it also includes the forms and functions that cross disciplines and are more common in certain fields. It includes high-frequency vocabulary that is used across the curriculum to share student thinking and learning. It further includes building language fluency to be able to effectively communicate thinking to others both orally and in writing.

Academic language involves developing high-utility words that students can use across domains to develop an expressive and receptive vocabulary (Beck and McKeown 2002; Anderson and Nagy 1992; Lesaux and Kieffer 2010). It is imperative that students build their understanding of words and their use of these new words for retention. The goal of this strategy is to help students not only understand words, but also make them part of their personal lexicon. Students need time to practice using new words when they write or engage in conversations with others. They need opportunities to use high-utility words that are often used in academic settings and can transfer across the curriculum as well as content-specific words to guide their learning across the curriculum.

The forms of language, also referred to as the frames of language, are the structures of language used to fulfill a function. By listening carefully to students, we can provide them with opportunities to develop higher levels of language. It is important that we understand the need to provide students with explicit language instruction where the objectives focus on the English language itself and opportunities to practice using English for a variety of purposes.

Functions of language are directly connected to language forms. Language functions can be defined as the purpose for using language. Why is language used? Is it to compare, describe, or persuade? Students need opportunities to use language for a variety of purposes. Language instruction involves explicit modeling of selected language functions and opportunities for students to practice functions of language.

As students are provided multiple opportunities to hear, speak, read, and write vocabulary, and practice forms and functions of language, they will develop oral and written fluency.

As students are provided multiple opportunities to hear, speak, read, and write vocabulary, and practice forms and functions of language, they will develop oral and written fluency.

Academic Vocabulary Strategies Overview *(cont.)*



The academic vocabulary strategies in this section include:

- Words Alive
- Word Pyramid
- Secret Word
- Connect 3



Words Alive Overview

What Is It?

Words Alive is a vocabulary strategy that helps students visualize the meaning of words. It allows students to individually create word cards that demonstrate their understanding of a word by drawing or creating a visual representation of its meaning.

When Do I Use It?

Words Alive can be used before, during, and after reading a selection or engaging in a unit of study. As a frontloading strategy, students are provided a list of words prior to reading a selection to learn and discuss. This helps them better understand core content or concepts to be studied. During reading, it can be used as a way to reinforce key terms and ideas. It can also be used as a post-lesson assessment to determine how students made sense of the content learned.

Why Do I Use It?

Words Alive supports students in sharing their understanding of key vocabulary. Because they are able to create a visual representation of the terms, it helps them better understand the meaning of words. In order to create a visual, students have to understand the vocabulary. For beginning English learners, the words should be concrete and a direct visual or picture representing the word may suffice. For intermediate or more advanced English learners who are being exposed to more complex vocabulary, including abstract, conceptual words, the visual is not as simple as just drawing it. Students will have to create a visual that represents what the words mean. For example, if given the word *perseverance*, students would need to understand the meaning of the word in order to draw or create something that represents what it means. They might draw a picture of someone who wrote various drafts of a story with crumpled pieces of paper all around them and a final draft in hand. This would demonstrate the meaning of *perseverance*, to keep going and not give up. Creating a visual helps students remember the word and its meaning as they associate it with what they created on their *Words Alive* cards.

Words Alive Lesson Template

Materials

- *Words Alive Template* (page 33) (optional)
- text (e.g., books, magazines, newspapers)
- markers, crayons, or colored pencils
- large index cards (one per vocabulary word)

Preparation Note: Prior to the lesson, select the vocabulary words you would like your students to focus on from the selected text. The number of words can vary though it is recommended to keep them to a minimum (5–10) and be selective as to the most important words for students to remember as part of the key concept or topic at hand.

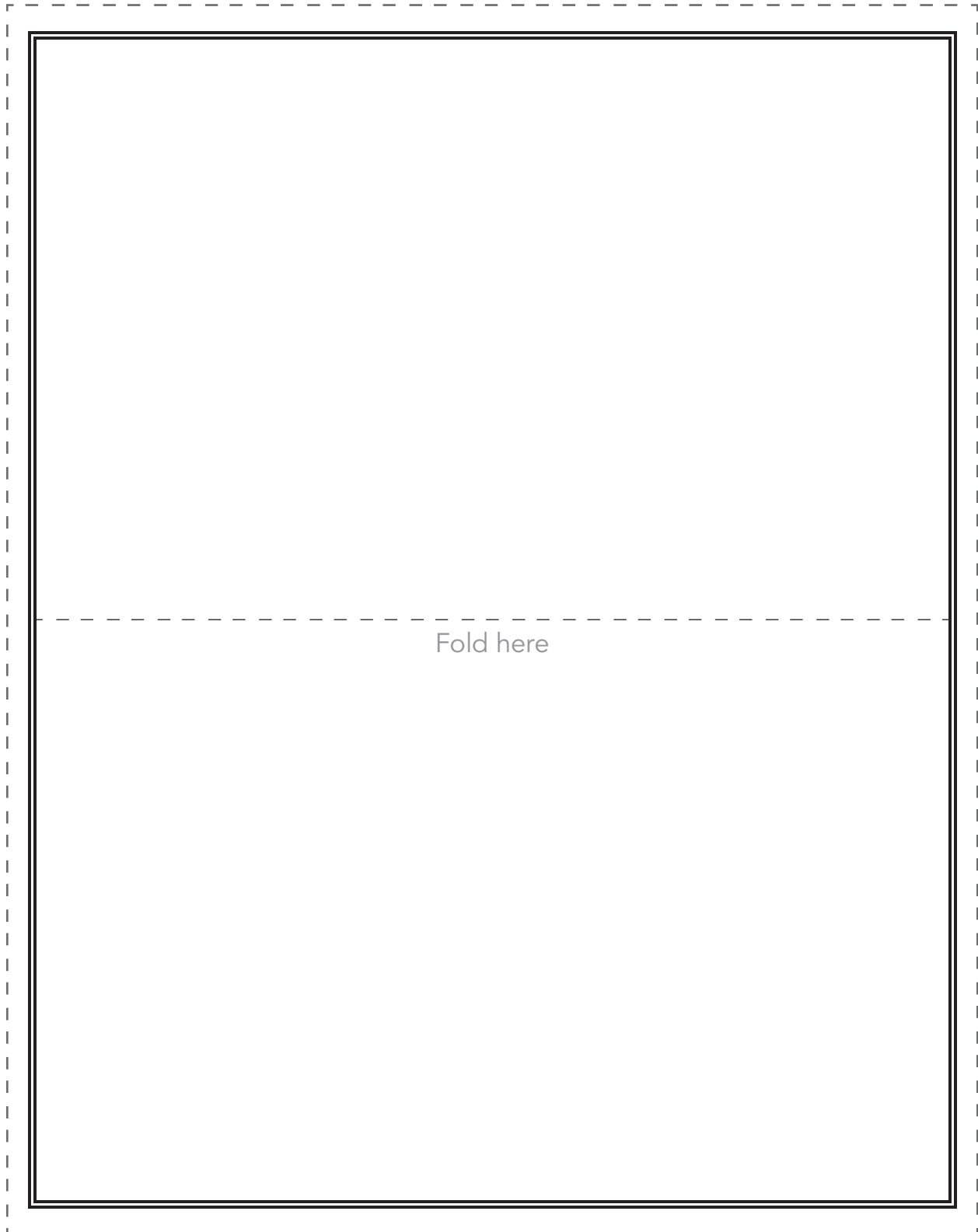
Procedure

1. Distribute the selected text to students. Read the text together as a class.
2. Write the selected words on the board for students to see.
3. Distribute index cards to students. Explain to students that they will create their own cards. If index cards are not available, you can use the *Words Alive Template* or simply fold smaller sheets of paper in half.
4. Explain to students that on one side they will write a selected word, and on the other side, they will draw a visual representation of the word. Provide students with sufficient time to create their *Words Alive* cards, one for each vocabulary word.
5. When they have completed their *Words Alive* cards, divide students into pairs or small groups. Explain to students that they will be working as a group to quiz one another on the words. Remind them that they should only show their partner the visual, so he or she can guess the selected term.
6. Collect and keep the cards to use as an ongoing game throughout the year. You can continue to use them to ensure students are revisiting and being exposed to the terms frequently to improve retention of the word meanings.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Words Alive Template

Directions: Cut out the template below.



Types of Weather

Grades
K–2
Lesson

Unit of Study

Weather

Standards

Speaking and Listening Standard:

Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion)

Content Standard: Knows that short-term weather conditions (e.g., temperature, rain, snow) can change daily, and weather patterns change over the seasons

Materials

- large index cards (five per student)
- *Words Alive Template* (page 33) (optional)
- markers, crayons, or colored pencils
- *The Weather* (page 36)

Procedure

1. Distribute the reading passage *The Weather* to students. Read the passage together as a class.
2. Write the following words on the board for students to see: *sun, warm, cold, rain, and wind*.
3. Explain to students that they will create their own *Words Alive* cards. If index cards are not available, you can use the *Words Alive Template* or fold smaller sheets of paper in half.
4. Distribute the index cards to students, and explain that on one side they will write a word from the board and on the other side they will draw a visual representation of the word. Provide students with sufficient time to create their *Words Alive* cards.
5. When students have completed their cards, divide them into groups of four or five. Explain to students that they will be working as a group to quiz one another on the words. Tell students that they should only show their group the visual so that they can guess the selected term.
6. Collect and keep the cards to use as an ongoing game throughout the year. You can continue to use them to ensure students are revisiting and being exposed to the terms frequently to improve retention of the word meanings.

Types of Weather *(cont.)*

Differentiation

The following are some suggestions for how to differentiate within the classroom:

Advanced English Language Learners

Have students generate their own list of words from the selected text. Each of the students can have their own unique list.

Intermediate English Language Learners

Provide a context for the word. Show where in the text the word came from, and have students use the words in a sentence when sharing them with their peers.

Beginning English Language Learners

Provide sample images and visuals that represent the words. Have students discuss these images in their primary language, then connect them to the English terms.

The Weather

The weather is all around us. The sun can shine. That is weather. The wind can blow. That is weather. You can walk in the rain. That is weather.

Sometimes the weather is good. It is a pretty day. It is a day to go outside and play.

Sometimes the weather is bad. It is cold or rainy. The wind is blowing very hard. It is not a good day to go out and play.

The weather may be good or bad. You will have to wait and see!



Plate Tectonics



Secondary Lesson

Unit of Study

Energy

Standards

Speaking and Listening Standard:

Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas

Content Standard: Understands the concept of plate tectonics

Procedure

1. Distribute the reading passage *Plate Tectonics* to students. Read the passage together as a class.
2. Write the following words on the board for students to see: *divergent, transform, convergent, surface, and tectonic plates*.
3. Explain to students that they will create their own *Words Alive* cards with the selected words. If index cards are not available, you can use the *Words Alive Template* or fold smaller sheets of paper in half.
4. Distribute the index cards to students, and explain that on one side they will write a selected word and on the other side they will draw a visual representation of the word. Provide students with sufficient time to create their *Words Alive* cards.
5. When students have completed their cards, put them into groups of four or five. Explain to students that they will be working as a group to quiz one another on the words. Remind students that they should only show their group the visual so that they can guess the selected term.
6. Collect and keep the cards to use as an ongoing game throughout the year. You can continue to use them to ensure students are revisiting and being exposed to the terms frequently to improve retention of the word meanings.

Materials

- large index cards (eight per student)
- *Words Alive Template* (page 33) (optional)
- *Plate Tectonics* (page 42)
- markers, crayons, or colored pencils

Plate Tectonics *(cont.)*

Differentiation

The following are some suggestions for how to differentiate within the classroom:

Advanced English Language Learners

Have students generate their own list of words from the selected text. Each student can have his or her unique list.

Intermediate English Language Learners

Provide a context for the word. Show where in the text the word came from, and have the students use the word in a sentence when sharing them with their peers.

Beginning English Language Learners

Have students create a collage for their words, finding a variety of pictures for each word to create their collage.

Plate Tectonics

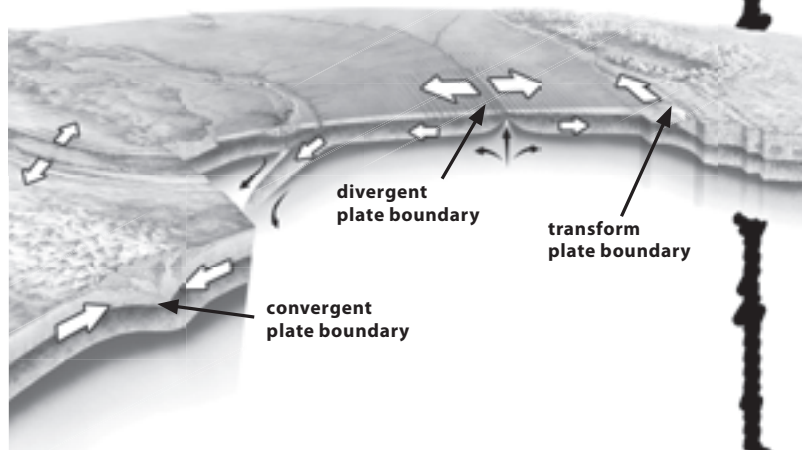
Earth's surface is made of pieces that fit together like a puzzle. However, unlike a puzzle, those pieces move. The pieces are called tectonic plates. Scientists know that plates have three main types of boundaries, or edges: divergent, transform, and convergent boundaries. Each one makes different land features.

Divergent Boundaries

The island of Iceland was made from the divergent boundary of the Mid-Ocean Ridge. Two plates are moving away from each other very slowly. They move at a rate of two to four centimeters per year (one inch per year). The movement of the plates causes magma to burst up through Earth's crust. This action forms volcanoes. The cooled material from the volcanic eruptions formed Iceland.

Transform Boundaries

Most transform boundaries are found in the ocean, but the San Andreas Fault is on land. The San Andreas Fault in California is a transform boundary. Two plates are sliding past each other instead of pulling away from each other. This sliding motion has caused major earthquakes all along the state's coastline.



Convergent Boundaries

Plates can form convergent boundaries in one of three ways. Each type of convergent boundary has its own results. An ocean-ocean collision happens between two ocean plates. Right now, the fast-moving Pacific Plate is crashing into the Filipino Plate. As the Pacific Plate dives into Earth's mantle, it is melted, causing earthquakes and volcanoes. The arc-shaped Mariana Islands are underwater volcanoes that have grown large enough to rise above the water line.

In a continent-continent collision, two plates collide and then one plate subducts (moves under the other). The Himalayas are the result of a collision that started about 50 million years ago. The Indian and Eurasian plates crashed together to form the mountain range.

An ocean-continental collision is happening in South America right now. An oceanic plate is being subducted under a continental plate. This is why earthquakes and volcanoes are very common in Peru and Chile.