

Desert Academy Language Policy

The language of instruction at Desert Academy is English, and the goal is that students work successfully within the English medium.

Introduction:

At Desert Academy, we believe that the development of language and literacy skills is the foundation of success in all academic and career areas. In addition, communication skills are essential for understanding other perspectives, considering the reasons for and implications of differences, and finding commonalities. The purpose of the language policy is to:

- Ensure the effective delivery of the Desert Academy curriculum
- Require that language skills are developed and practiced across the curriculum
- Affirm the importance of learning a second language
- Ensure that all Desert Academy students have the opportunity to learn a second language

Admission:

- All students entering Desert Academy must demonstrate proficiency in English.
- Students whose first language is not English may be required to take formal testing such as the TOEFL or provide proof that they have studied English for a minimum of 5 years prior to being considered for admission.

Language Learning

Philosophy

Language is the basic tool of communication in the sense that it enables a student to understand and be understood, and to establish an individual identity. Language is also the means with which one gains access to literature and thereby the cultural treasury of civilization. Across the curriculum, Desert Academy's program stimulates thoughtful, passionate communication about significant literary and cultural texts. We encourage students to view reading, writing, and discussion as processes of exploration resulting in further engagement with the world at large. To this end, our methodology stresses the writing process, including outlining, drafting and revision, thereby defining writing as a mode of thought.

Language Practices

- All teachers will create an environment that encourages risk-taking and exploration with language.
- Teachers will model effective, respectful communication through their interactions with students and each other.
- Teachers will provide opportunities for real-life application of communication skills through activities such as field trips, visiting practitioners in a given discipline, and real-world focused activities.

- Teachers will devote substantial class time to discussion and discussion-based activities.
- Teachers will introduce the concept of reading relevant “texts” to students, including artwork, films, advertisements, symbols, musical scores, and dance performances. The idea that all of these things can be “read” for meaning in the same way we read books should be explicitly taught.
- Teachers will teach specific vocabulary relevant to their disciplines.
- Teachers will use a range of writing assignments including journal writing, creative assignments, writing for a specific genre/academic discipline, brainstorming, outlining, and formal essay assignments.
- Teachers will require that students use MLA citation, with the exception of Diploma Programme courses that may require students to use a referencing method commonly accepted in a particular discipline.
- Teachers are required to develop a discipline-appropriate rubric based on the MYP English Rubric to provide students with concrete feedback on their more formal writing tasks.
- Teachers will stress guidelines for academic honesty and integrity as they relate to plagiarism.

Mother Tongue Support

At present, Desert Academy does not have a significant population of non-native English speakers. In general, we enroll 2-6 foreign exchange students each school year, some of whom require mother-tongue support. When this need arises, we contract with an English as a Second Language teacher to provide these students with a support course during their regular school day. In addition, because Desert Academy’s mission and philosophy stress serving the individual student, teachers are expected to adjust their expectations to address these students’ needs.

Learning Support Services

All students at Desert Academy have access to a range of learning support services related to language development. To begin with, Desert Academy provides a writing center designed to help students with specific writing tasks for their classes as well as with general writing skills. 11th and 12th graders are trained as tutors, who work with the faculty advisor to run the center. One on one tutoring sessions allow both the tutor and the student the opportunity to develop communication, problem-solving, and writing skills.

In addition, Desert Academy provides tutorials in the different subject areas weekly. Students may attend these tutorials after school to work one on one or in small groups with teachers on their subjects of study.

Desert Academy also employs a Learning Specialist who works specifically with those students diagnosed with a learning or language disorder. The Learning Specialist works with the student, parents, and teachers to develop a plan for success including specific accommodations for that student. The Learning Specialist also works one on one with

students in need of coaching in one or more of the following areas: study skills, organizational skills, written and verbal communication skills.

Communication Support Services

Because Desert Academy stresses the importance of respectful, effective communication within our school as well as in our families, community, and world, we have several programs in place to foster healthy communication habits. To begin with, our advisory program teaches a curriculum grounded in the IB learner profile traits that emphasizes, among other skills, communicating clearly with those who may have a different perspective. In addition, advisory group members are encouraged to support each other through problem solving and empathetic discussion.

Desert Academy also provides communication workshops facilitated by our school counselor. “Positive Connections” emphasizes healthy, effective communication with parents, teachers, and peers. This year, all 9th and 10th grade students have participated in “Positive Connections”.

All incoming seventh graders also participate in a mentorship program with the twelfth graders. The twelfth graders are trained to deliver a curriculum that emphasizes positive peer relationships by minimizing relational aggression.

Language B Study at Desert Academy

Introduction

At Desert Academy, we believe that the study of languages provides a powerful means by which one gains understanding of other cultures. Our instructors and curricula encourage and inspire students to cultivate positive attitudes toward speakers of other languages. We empower students to develop an understanding of the nature of language and the process of language learning, and to reflect upon the cultural patterns that affect the thinking, feeling, and actions of the countries and communities in which the target language is spoken.

We affirm that learning a second language provides the following benefits:

- Students of foreign languages tend to score higher on standardized tests. Results from the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) show that students who had studied a foreign language for 4 or more years outscored other students on the verbal and math portions of the test (The College Board SAT, 2003).
- Knowledge of a second language also seems to coincide with high academic achievement. A study by Horn and Kojaku (2001) shows that students who were in “rigorous” programs in high school, which included 3 years of foreign language study, were likely to earn better grades in college and less likely to drop out.
- Learning another language can enhance knowledge of English structure and vocabulary (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004).
- Students of foreign languages may have better career opportunities (Carreira & Armengol, 2001). In a survey of 581 alumni of The American Graduate School of International Management in Glendale, AZ, most respondents said they had

gained a competitive advantage from their knowledge of foreign languages and other cultures. They said that not only was language study often a critical factor in hiring decisions and in enhancing their career paths, it also provided personal fulfillment, mental discipline, and cultural enlightenment (Grosse, in press).

In addition, we believe strongly in preserving and developing a student's native language, should this not be English, for three reasons:

- To encourage a celebration of diversity, and develops cross-cultural awareness and understanding
- To enable the development of higher order cognitive thinking skills
- To enable students who are members of small cultural subgroups within the school to better maintain and transmit cultural identity within our multicultural society.

THE MIDDLE YEARS PROGRAM (MYP) - GRADES 7-10

At Desert Academy, we offer Languages B in Spanish, French and Mandarin Chinese. All languages are taught by our own teaching faculty.

All students in grades 7-10 are required to study Language A English and one Language B.

Our goal is for all students to become proficient in a second language by grade 10.

Occasionally, in grades eight and nine, we have students with a wide variety of background in second language study, depending especially on their language exposure prior to entering these grades at Desert Academy. As a result of this fact, the school recognizes that we must be flexible in our student groupings in the MYP years and provide classroom settings that match as closely as possible the level of proficiency of the students. To that end, we strive to place students in the level appropriate to them and not according to their age/grade.

THE DIPLOMA PROGRAM (DP) - GRADES 11-12

All students in grades 11-12 are expected to complete at least one additional year of language study in addition to the four years of study completed during the MYP. However, students in grades eleven and twelve who are participating in the full Diploma Program, or those wishing to earn a certificate in their Language B, must continue the study of a second language in one of the following ways:

- IB Language B Higher Level or Standard Level (a language learner who has had three or more years of experience with the language).
- IB Language B Ab Initio (a language learner who enters a new language with no prior study of that language, and who completes his/her study of that language over the course of two consecutive years).

Students learn to communicate effectively in a number of situations, from everyday exchanges to literary texts. In this way they develop mastery of language skills.

Desert Academy offers Language B in Spanish and French at the Standard Level and Higher Level. Additionally, we offer Mandarin Chinese Ab Initio. All languages are taught by our own teaching staff.