

Vocabulary Resources

These resources were compiled to provide educators with essential foundational knowledge to support students' vocabulary development. The information is not meant to be comprehensive. For more information, please refer to the references. This document includes an introduction and information about:

- ▶ **Teaching vocabulary indirectly and directly**
- ▶ **Word learning strategies**
- ▶ **Specific word knowledge**

Introduction

Vocabulary knowledge refers to knowledge about the meanings, uses, and pronunciation of words. As students learn more about and understand meanings of words, they are likely to read more and this in turn has an impact on increasing their word awareness and expands their opportunities to use language in both oral and written forms. Vocabulary can be taught indirectly and directly.

Teaching Vocabulary Indirectly

Students can acquire vocabulary indirectly through

- everyday conversations,
- teacher read-alouds,
- teacher-guided and small group discussions, and
- reading independently.

These types of activities can give students repeated and multiple exposures to words as well as provide a way to see and use vocabulary in rich contexts. For example, during teacher read-alouds students are read to and exposed to rich and descriptive language through an abundance of different types of texts. Vocabulary development can be embedded in structured read-alouds before, during, and after reading the text to students. The text provides a strong context within which to teach target words.

Teachers can provide opportunities for students to think about and learn from text during teacher-guided and small-group discussions. Rich, varied discussions about the use and meanings of words in context can directly increase students' ability to think about and learn from text. Students also benefit by building on the cumulative knowledge of their peers and hearing thoughtful ways to analyze text to support comprehension.

Independent reading is another way in which students can learn vocabulary. However, students need to learn word learning strategies and be able to use them independently in order to determine meanings of unknown words when reading on their own.

Selection of Text and Strategy

Students learn vocabulary through direct methods such as explicit teaching of specific words and word-learning strategies. Explicit instruction of key words increases both vocabulary and reading comprehension. Explicitly teaching vocabulary words assures that students have multiple *opportunities* to interact with words, learn their meanings, and learn how to use them in oral and written language. Explicit instruction involves selecting words to teach and using an instructional routine to teach words explicitly.

When we think about all the words there are to teach, it can become overwhelming! Beck, McKeown, and Kucan introduced us to the idea of classifying words by tiers. Each tier represents the type of word as it relates to selecting words for teaching explicitly. Understanding this classification maximizes our instructional efforts because we'll spend more time teaching words that are considered Tier 2.

- **Tier 1 words** are considered basic vocabulary and except for English learners or students who may have difficulties with language or literacy, they seldom require direct teaching. The meanings of basic, or Tier 1 words, are learned through frequent exposure and context in a student's environment. Words like *happy, table, in, walk, and go* are all considered basic vocabulary.
- **Tier 2 words** are those considered as high utility, that is, students will have many opportunities to read these words and use them in speaking and writing. They occur frequently across texts and domains, and in the oral and written language of mature language users. Words such as *ecstatic, investigate, section, clumsily, separate, fortunate, and emerging* are examples of Tier 2 words.
- **Tier 3 words** are more technical and domain-specific than Tier 1 or Tier 2 and although many may require direct teaching, it is usually in the context of the domain or technical topic. Tier 3 words, while important, may not be as useful for other contexts when we consider the instructional time required to teach some words directly. *Democracy, metamorphosis, chrysalis, taxation, chemical, and hypothesis* are all examples of Tier 3 words. Although they may have application in other contexts, they occur less frequently across contexts and are considered domain-specific.

Part of explicit instruction is using an instructional routine to teach Tier 2 words. In addition, providing multiple exposures to the words is necessary. This six step instructional routine uses elements from Beck and McKeown's research on effective vocabulary instruction.

1. Introduce the word. Have students say the word.
2. Present a student-friendly *explanation*.
3. Clarify the word's meaning.
4. Actively engage students in using the word.
5. Check students' understanding of the word.
6. Expand students' understanding and use of the word.

One method to teach vocabulary explicitly is to have grade-level teacher teams develop a common set of vocabulary words that align with reading selections and curriculum standards. Words on the list should occur frequently in a variety of contexts but should otherwise be unfamiliar to most students.

Each week teach 12-15 of those words explicitly by providing a clear definition, a meaningful example, and supportive sentences that include the word in multiple contexts. Following that, extended opportunities can be provided for students to use the word in their reading, writing, and discussions.

Word Learning Strategies

Since it is not possible for teachers to explicitly teach the meanings of all new, unfamiliar words, it is critical to teach students how to learn word meanings independently. Teaching independent word learning strategies along with explicit word instruction can greatly increase students' vocabularies and help them become independent word learners. Word-learning strategies are tools students use during teacher read-aloud activities, specific word instruction, and independent reading. Word learning strategies include morphemic analysis, contextual analysis, and the use of other resources such as a dictionary.

Teaching morphemes (prefixes, suffixes, and roots) offers students another way to understand meanings of words. Morphemic analysis is the process of determining a word's meaning by analyzing its meaningful parts, or morphemes. Below are frequent prefixes and suffixes, their meanings, and example words.

Prefix	Meaning	Example
un-	not	unkind
re-	again, back	redo, return
in-, im-, il-, ir-	not	injustice, impossible
dis-	not, opposite of	disagree
en-, em-	cause to	encode, empower
non-	not	nonfiction
in-, im-	in, on	inspect, imprint
over-	too much	overpay
mis-	wrong	misjudge
sub-	under	sublease
pre-	before	preview
inter-	between	interact
fore-	before	forewarn
de-	not, opposite	deactivate
trans-	across	transplant
super-	above	superstar
semi-	half	semicircle
anti-	against	antigravity
mid-	middle	midstream
under-	below	underground

Suffix	Meaning	Example
-s, -es	more than one	books, boxes
-ed	past-tense verbs	played
-ing	verb form/present participle	running
-ly	characteristic of	quickly
-er, -or	one who	teacher, actor
-ion, -tion, -ation, -ition	act, process	collection, infusion
-able, -ible	can be done	comfortable
-al, -ial	having characteristics of	personal
-y	characterized by	jumpy
-ness	state of, condition of	kindness
-ity, -ty	state of	formality
-ment	action or process	enjoyment
-ic	having characteristics of	linguistic
-ous, -eous, -ious	possessing the qualities of	joyous
-en	made of	wooden
-er	comparative	higher
-ive, -ative, -itive	adjective form of a noun	active
-ful	full of	thoughtful
-less	without	fearless
-est	comparative (most when comparing)	longest

Adapted from: Honig, B., Diamond, L., & Gutlohn, L. (2018). CORE Teaching Reading Sourcebook, Third Edition. Novato, CA: Arena Press.

Contextual analysis involves inferring the meaning of an unfamiliar word by analyzing the text surrounding it. Types of context clues include definition, synonym, antonym, example, and general.

Other resources, such as a **dictionary**, can help students independently determine the meanings of unknown words. However, it is important to teach students how to use the dictionary efficiently and independently rather than asking them to copy definitions from the dictionary. Model how to analyze a dictionary definition to see how, or if, it fits a particular context and help students apply this critical thinking skill while they are reading. Students can also be taught to use the dictionary to increase their knowledge of a word and its many meanings.

Specific Word Knowledge

A student's specific word knowledge is developed by selecting appropriate words to teach based on the needs of the students in the classroom. The following activities may be used to actively involve the students in developing their specific word knowledge:

- Identifying the new word, pronouncing the new word, spelling the new word.
- Writing the new word.
- Describing the new word using other words that the student already knows.
- Using semantic maps to categorize the new word with other familiar words.
- Verbally using the new word in sentences.
- Writing the new word in sentences.
- Creating "student-friendly" definitions for the new word.
- Identifying antonyms, synonyms, and homophones of the new word.

References

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