

Tools for Vocabulary Instruction

Research also demonstrates that vocabulary deficits are a significant detriment to reading, and that learners' varied levels of vocabulary knowledge significantly widens the literacy achievement gap. According to Biemiller, while average students acquire an average of 2.4 root words a day, students at the bottom quartile acquire only an average of 1.6 root words per day. Without focused intervention, this problem compounds over time, as demonstrated below:

Grade	Average Student (at 2.4 root words per day)	Bottom 25% (at 1.6 root words per day)
End of Pre-K	3,440	2,440
End of K	4,300	3,016
End of Grade 1	5,160	3,592
End of Grade 2	6,020	4,168

Source: Diamond, Gutlohn, Honig, Teaching Reading Sourcebook, 2008, p.413

An effective strategy to increase literacy achievement, and narrow the knowledge gap, is to focus vocabulary instruction on root word acquisition. Vocabulary researchers basically agree on the number of words that can be directly taught in a school year. 2 words per day can be taught directly or 10 per week.

Per School Week	Per School Year/180 days	Researcher
about 10	360 root words	Biemiller 2005a
about 8 to 10	about 400 word families	Beck et al. 2002
about 8 to 10	300 to 400 word families	Stahl et al 1986

Source: Diamond, Gutlohn, Honig, Teaching Reading Sourcebook, 2008, p. 412

The **first step** in teaching vocabulary is deciding which words will be taught directly. New words are learned more effectively in a rich context. Selecting words that students will encounter in a variety of texts allows multiple exposures and a higher probability of acquisition. Therefore, selecting words that students will come across in books inside and outside of school and that will be useful in reading (not just high frequency words) makes the task of learning the words more worthwhile and purposeful for students (McKeown, Beck, Omanson, & Pople, 1985).

Beck, et al., (2002) describes a practical method of selecting terms for explicit instruction. This method includes categorizing words into three areas:

- Basic words (tier one) known by most students at a particular grade level (e.g., ball, person, bike)
- High-utility words (tier two) that students encounter frequently in many contexts and across content areas (e.g, compare, examine, coincidence)
- Content-specific words (tier three) pertaining to a subject area that often lack generalization to other subject areas (e.g., photosynthesis or quadrilateral)

Basic words rarely require instruction for most students. However, ELL students may need additional instruction in tier one words. Beck recommends providing explicit instruction on the high-utility words (tier two) in reading classes. Teachers select tier two words based on the importance and utility, the instructional potential, and student's conceptual understanding (Beck, 2002). The word "collaboration" is an example because students have a conceptual understanding of what it means to "work together," even though they may not know collaboration. Content-specific words are best learned in the subject area where they are encountered. Choose content-specific words that are the most important for understanding the concepts that students are expected to learn. Preteaching these important words before reading the text will help students to comprehend at higher levels (Louisiana's Adolescent Literacy Plan, 2010).

Graves, Juel, & Graves (1998) developed criteria for narrowing the list of words and deciding which words to teach:

- Identify the words students do not know
- Identify the more important words
- Identify the words students may not be able to figure out on their own
- Identify words students will encounter frequently

The **second step** in teaching vocabulary is providing explicit instruction for the words you have chosen. According to the National Reading Panel (2002), explicit instruction of vocabulary is highly effective. All of the studies of the NRP found that both comprehension and vocabulary improved as a result of explicit and direct instruction (NICHD, 2000). William E. Nagy (Teaching Vocabulary to Improve Reading Comprehension, 1988, International Reading Association) tells us that “effective vocabulary instruction helps the learner to use the instructed words meaningfully. One motivation for this property is simply that students learn more when they are actively involved. Another is what has been called “depth of processing.” Simply stated, the more deeply some information is processed, the more likely it is to be remembered. In other words, vocabulary instruction that makes students think about the meaning of a word and demands that they do some meaningful processing of the word will be more effective than instruction that does not.” Two frameworks or routines that encompass explicit instruction and deep processing are Marzano’s six-step process and the Instructional Routine for Teaching Critical, Unknown Vocabulary Words from the Western Regional Reading First Technical Assistance Center.

Marzano’s (2004) six-step process is a framework for providing direct and explicit instruction to further develop word meanings. Active engagement is infused throughout the framework.

- Provide a description, explanation, or example of the new term. (Include a non-linguistic representation of the term for ELL students).
- Ask students to restate the description, explanation, or example in their own words. (Allow students whose primary existing knowledge base is still in their native language to write in it).
- Ask students to construct a picture, symbol, or graphic representing the word.
- Engage students periodically in activities that help them add to their knowledge of the terms in their notebooks.
- Periodically ask students to discuss the terms with one another. (Allow in native language when appropriate).
- Involve students periodically in games that allow them to play with terms.

Western Regional Reading First Technical Assistance Center Vocabulary Routine

B * (T) D A	INSTRUCTIONAL ROUTINE FOR TEACHING CRITICAL, UNKNOWN VOCABULARY WORDS		V
PROCEDURES: Use in combination with Template #17.			
STEP 1	Introduce the Word A. Write the word on board. B. Read word. Students repeat. C. Repeat for unfamiliar words.	EXAMPLE	"This word is <i>reluctant</i> ." "What word?"
STEP 2	Present a Student-Friendly Definition A. Tell students explanation, or, B. Have students read explanation with you.		" <i>Reluctant</i> means you are not sure you want to do something." "When you are not sure you want to do something, you are ..."
STEP 3	Illustrate the Word with Examples <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concrete examples • Visual representations • Verbal examples 		"If your mother asked you to try a new food, you might be <i>reluctant</i> ." "You may be <i>reluctant</i> to watch a scary movie."
STEP 4	Check Students' Understanding Option 1: Deep processing questions Option 2: Examples/Nonexamples Option 3: Students generate examples Option 4: Sentence starter		"Why would a student be <i>reluctant</i> to go to a new school?" "Would you be <i>reluctant</i> to go to recess on a warm, sunny day?" "Tell your partner something you would be <i>reluctant</i> to do." "Tell your partner something a cat might be <i>reluctant</i> to do. Start your sentence by saying, 'A cat might be <i>reluctant</i> to' Then tell why."
Western Regional Reading First Technical Assistance Center			

B * (T) D A	INSTRUCTIONAL ROUTINE FOR TEACHING CRITICAL, UNKNOWN VOCABULARY WORDS		V
PROCEDURES: Use in combination with Template #17.			
STEP 1	Introduce the Word D. Write the word on board. E. Read word. Students repeat. F. Repeat for unfamiliar words.	EXAMPLE	"This word is <i>reluctant</i> ." "What word?"
STEP 2	Present a Student-Friendly Definition C. Tell students explanation, or, D. Have students read explanation with you.		" <i>Reluctant</i> means you are not sure you want to do something." "When you are not sure you want to do something, you are ..."
STEP 3	Illustrate the Word with Examples <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concrete examples • Visual representations • Verbal examples 		"If your mother asked you to try a new food, you might be <i>reluctant</i> ." "You may be <i>reluctant</i> to watch a scary movie."
STEP 4	Check Students' Understanding Option 1: Deep processing questions Option 2: Examples/Nonexamples Option 3: Students generate examples Option 4: Sentence starter		"Why would a student be <i>reluctant</i> to go to a new school?" "Would you be <i>reluctant</i> to go to recess on a warm, sunny day?" "Tell your partner something you would be <i>reluctant</i> to do." "Tell your partner something a cat might be <i>reluctant</i> to do. Start your sentence by saying, 'A cat might be <i>reluctant</i> to' Then tell why."
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