VOCABULARY

The goal of English language arts (ELA) is for all students to read, understand, and express their understanding of complex, grade-level texts. At the heart of being able to read and understand complex texts is the ability to decode words automatically and fluently[1] and determine how they work together in sentences to produce meaning. Having "language sense" combined with other factors, such as having robust background knowledge and a wide vocabulary, is a key determining factor in what makes a student able to read and understand complex texts (Shanahan, Fisher, & Frey 2012).

The size of a reader's vocabulary directly affects how well that person can read a complex text. While there are multiple ways to learn vocabulary, research has shown that most vocabulary is learned through reading. Thus, those who can read well get better at it as they get older, and those who don't read well get worse at it as they get older.[2]

To speed up vocabulary growth for all students:

- Read aloud texts that are written at a level above what students can read independently.
- Engage students in studying the language of complex texts through work with mentor sentences.
- Ensure students have an opportunity to read a large volume of texts for interest and pleasure.
- Prompt students to read a series a texts on the same topic.
- Teach words and phrases that demand more teaching time.

How does reading a series of texts on the same topic speed up vocabulary learning? The way we store words in our brains is an ever-shifting nexus. As we learn new words, we connect them to words that have already been learned. When we read the word "joyful," we tag it to "joy" and "happy"; we may also tag it to "upset" and "sad." Knowing that "joyful" is the opposite of "sad," or that "joyful" and "joy" mean similar things but are in different forms, helps us to know more about the meaning of those words. As we read more words in different contexts, our nexus of words grows in size and the connections among words grows stronger, allowing us to know the meaning of more words from reading than we can be taught directly (Adams 2009).

Learning words in English is about making connections. The goal of teaching vocabulary in ELA should be to build students' understanding that one word can have varied, but related, meanings, depending on context. This means that students must be reading the same words in multiple contexts. For example, as we encounter the word "challenge" across multiple texts, it also helps grow our understanding of "difficult," "challenging," "easy," and "obstacles."

Growing students' vocabulary knowledge is a critical goal of the ELA Guidebooks 2.0 units. Each unit is organized as a series of texts on the same topic. By design, the units provide context for students to grow their vocabulary knowledge at a rapid rate. That said, additional work can be done with words and phrases in the units outside of the instruction provided in the guidebooks. The following page provides a recommended process to support this work.

In the classroom, the main words and phrases to focus on are those that need to be taught explicitly to students. These include words and phrases important both to building knowledge for the unit focus and to understanding the meaning of a complex text. Students must have a solid understanding of these words and phrases so they can read, understand, and express their understanding of complex, grade-level texts.

1 Access the **Reading Fluency Guide** to learn more about supporting students in reading complex texts.

2 **http://www.standardsinstitutes.org/sites/default/files/the_matthew_effect_in_elaliteracy.pptx**

There are two sets of words and phrases in the guidebook units:

- Words and phrases to teach
- Words and phrases to define

Words and phrases to teach include words and phrases likely to appear in future texts students will read, important to understanding the text, not a commonly known synonym for a concept or idea most students know, and/or that have different senses or meaning in different contexts. For example "cling" is far more than a synonym for "hold" and should be taught. "Blemish" is both a skin condition and a negative action or event in a person's work history, so it is worth teaching explicitly.

Words and phrases to define are also important to students' ongoing language development, but they take less time to teach. These include words and phrases that are concrete, have a commonly known synonym, and/or can be easily explained in 2-3 words. For example, "accustomed" can be easily defined as "used to."

Identify vocabulary using the **Academic Word Finder** and/or the words identified for each unit.

General Protocol for Explicitly Teaching Vocabulary[3]

1. **Presentation**: Present the word or phrase in context.
2. **Definition**: Guide students to use context clues, word parts (i.e., prefixes, root words, suffixes), or word relationships (e.g., synonyms, antonyms, etc.) to develop a student-friendly definition.
3. **Explanation**: Ask students to explain the word or phrase orally or in writing with words and/or pictures.
4. **Connections**: Help students make connections. For example:
   a. Have students classify or compare the new word and phrase with other known words (e.g., identify synonyms or **word families** or write analogies).
   b. Show a short video that illustrates a real-life context.
   c. For English language learners, connect the word to the home language or identify **cognates**.
5. **Application**: Direct students to use the word or phrase in new contexts. For example:
   a. Ask students to answer questions about the text that require them to use the word or phrase.
   b. Have students participate in wordplay or games with the word or phrase, such as acting out the meaning.

3 Each step can be taught across several lessons or combined into a single lesson. Some of these steps, such as steps 3-5, can be completed for homework. Make decisions about how and when to teach vocabulary based on students' knowledge and vocabulary needs.

Resources

- Adams, M. J. (2009). The Challenge of Advanced Texts: The interdependence of reading and learning. In E. H. Hiebert (Ed.), *Reading More, Reading Better: Are American students reading enough of the right stuff?* Retrieved from **http://www.childrenofthecode.org/library/MJA-ChallengeofAdvancedTexts.pdf** and Landauer, T. K., & Dumais, S. T. (1997). A Solution to Plato's Problem: The latent semantic analysis theory of acquisition, induction, and representation of knowledge. Retrieved July 19, 2016, from **http://lsa.colorado.edu/papers/plato/plato.annote.html**
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