Teaching vocabulary: principles for reading success
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What is vocabulary?
- Knowledge of words’ meanings
- Breadth: Knowing a lot of words
- Depth: Understanding the complexity of words

Vocabulary breadth
- What are synonyms for excellent?

- Informal synonyms and near synonyms: A1, awesomeness, brill, fab, on fleek, ripping, smoking, spiffing, supercalifragilisticexpialidocious, tip-top, wicked

- Australian words (maybe?): a beautey, a percy, a ripper, bazzof, brilliant, grousil (Victorian), deck-up, wtf

Vocabulary depth
- What does principal mean?

1. Noun: A school leader (in the U.S.)
2. Noun: Original amount of a debt
3. Adjective: Most important
4. Noun: Lead person (of a company or dance group)
Vocabulary & Reading Comprehension

- Is vocabulary knowledge related to reading comprehension?
- Yes
- It is one of the strongest predictors of reading comprehension performance.

Why is Word Knowledge Important?

Understanding vocabulary words helps students make sense of related text.

Many students do not have necessary vocabulary knowledge.

We provide this knowledge prior to reading text to enhance comprehension.

Example of the Problem

Understanding hegemony

"It is claimed that each foreign policy strategy is linked to a hegemonic project and that a crisis in political hegemony in most cases will also imply a change in foreign policy strategies."

What do you do?

- Choose good words to teach
- Teach them effectively

What to Teach

Words They Don’t Know

Words that are useful for comprehending the given text

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generally-useful</th>
<th>Content-specific</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>academic words</td>
<td>useful words</td>
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<tr>
<td>vocabulary</td>
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<td>selection</td>
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<td>absent</td>
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<td>essential</td>
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<td>pretested</td>
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Choosing Which Unknown Words to Teach

Some words are not useful enough

You could skip them and meaning isn’t affected at all

Her refusal to move was a quiet and simple action, but she took a risk that evening.

Her refusal to move was a quiet and simple action, but she took a risk that evening.
Teaching Focus Words: Same as Fact Words

- Short definition
- Image (sometimes)
- Explicit link to text

Teaching Focus Words: Examples & Non-Examples

Adult example: ambivalent

- Examples (good instances of the word’s use)
  - “If you had to choose between hiking 3 miles to work and driving an hour, you might be ambivalent because it’s hard to choose”
  - “In the text, Americans felt ambivalent about participation in World War II because they wanted to defeat the Axis but felt frightened about possible casualties.”

- Non-examples (to clarify subtlety)
  - “If someone does not care who wins the election and does not vote, that person is not ambivalent. An ambivalent person cares who wins but is torn between the two sides.”

Teaching Focus Words: Examples

Interference

when you do something that messes something up

Teaching Focus Words: Non-Examples

Interference

If you are doing homework or tutoring, you really need interference. It’s not interference.

Teaching Focus Words: Group Practice

Ask questions that encourage thinking (Baumeister, 2002)

- Which word goes with fabulous - a) or b) or c)?
- Why does a) go with fabulous?
- Is it fabulous if you fail or complete an exam?
- What would it be?
- Marie thought her son was fabulous because... The family had a fabulous time at the park.
- How could a family have a fabulous time?
- What does it mean to be fabulous?
- Is it embarrassing fabulous? Why?
- The concert was the best he had ever heard. Every note seemed perfect. Are we talking about fabulous or disastrous?
Teaching Focus Words: Interference

Questions to check for understanding

If [example 1] is that [word]?

If two of your friends start arguing and you separate them and tell them to calm down, is that interference?

Some companies have been dumping sand in spaces in the reef. Are they interfering with the reef? Is this human interference?

Thoughts: Is that human interference? Wait for my signal.

[Pause. Put out hands for response.]

We agree. It’s tall, with your associate. Why is that an example of interference?

[Students discuss in pairs.]

How to Teach: Student Engagement

It is important to keep students engaged when you’re explaining things.

Quick Practice Techniques

- Partners first: produces higher-quality answers and allows cold calling.
- Wait time before asking teachers often give less than a second. 3-5 seconds helps a lot.
- Whip around/Pass

Practice Pass:
With your partner, come up with examples of well-written devices people might still use. If optional or creative:
- flash drives
- mix tape
- floppy disc
- 525
-... (students add)

Whip around/Pass:
Look at the vocabulary words on the board. I’ll say a sentence and you give me the correct vocabulary word.
- You’ve got 10,000 oranges when all you need is a banana.
- She’s at the dock, looking over the moans, head down, and her face drizzled in (clouds).

Yes, No, Maybe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence</th>
<th>Thinking?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Borrowing a shirt from your sister</td>
<td>Maybe</td>
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<tr>
<td>When an enemy invades a village and takes all their treasures</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking your shirt out of bed and leaving</td>
<td>No</td>
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Which Word Fits

- Students are asked a question and then given two choices from a vocabulary list.
- After deciding which word fits the question, students hold up the word card.

An example of focus word instruction

- A circus company is peri-patetic because they are always moving from place to place.
- You might feel peri-patetic for a day if you were running lots of errands and had to visit lots of different stores.

An example of focus word instruction

- Questions:
  - A person who is lost in the desert will wander around looking for water and shelter. Is this person peri-patetic or why not?
  - Which person is peri-patetic? A person who travels from New York to Paris for a month-long visit or a person who spends a month visiting different presidential libraries in the U.S.? Why?

Analyze Word Knowledge Video

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word Knowledge</th>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Peer Words</th>
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Prepare to teach focus words

Choose a limited number of words
- Wasted
- Create: a simple definition
- Trouble
- Give an example
- "If your dad tells you not to play in the basement, what do you do? Are you out of the basement?"
- Give another example
- "If your mom tells you to walk straight home from school without stopping, and you do, it's not trouble, right?"
- Create practice questions
- "If I sneak a cookie from the cupboard when my parents are out, is that stealing?"
Check for Understanding: 3B

1. When choosing vocabulary words for a given text, it is important to choose:
   a) Generally useful academic words
   b) Common specific word
   c) Both a and b

2. True or False: "Fast" words are words that can be easily explained using short definitions and an image.
   a) True
   b) False

3. For both Fast and Focal words, it is important to:
   a) List a few definitions for each word, even if not applicable to the text.
   b) Have students get an overall understanding of the word.
   c) Find several images to illustrate the word, even if the images show opposite meanings.
   d) Explicitly link the words to the text.
   e) Ask students if they know what the word means before giving them the definitions.