Understanding Vocabulary

What do you do when you come across a new word that you want to remember? One of the best ways to do this is by placing the word in meaningful speaking and writing tasks. “The more ways in which [learners] interact with a word, the greater the odds of successful word comprehension and retention. [Learners] benefit from multiple exposures to a word in a variety of contexts to develop profound word knowledge” (Kats Akinola. Vocabulary Development Strategies that Boost Reading and Learning: Across All Subject Areas (Grades 4-12).)

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to do the following:

- Define vocabulary and explain its function as a key component in reading
- Identify Tier 2 words and what they mean
- Identify appropriate materials and activities for vocabulary instruction
- Plan vocabulary instruction

Index Cards and Creating a Word Bank

Index cards are a tried and true form of studying new vocabulary. Still, the tutor needs to engage the learner and introduce multiple contexts to where this word might “live” in. Where does “lightning” live? It may live in the weather. It might also live in the context of speed—violent and precise. For example, the lightning flash of the sword against the dragon.

Use different colored cards for each book. Bind these with a ring; draw pictures on each index card for further context clues.

How does this tutor introduce these new word to her learner?

Multiple Practices for Multiple Contexts

If you decide to use one of the core workbooks (Challenger, Voyager, or Laubach), you will come across vocabulary assignments that have the learner practice using that new word in multiple contexts. These assignments and exercises include:

Fill in the blank: Parents may find Bart Simpson funny, but they do not want their children to __________ his behavior. (emulate)

Complete the Sentence: My young nephew __________ Bart Simpson by __________. (give an example)

Word Families: Introduce new context and meanings of a word by changing its part of speech. In addition to emulate/emulated (verb) in the above example, introduce emulation (noun). You have now introduced a new form of that word and provided the learner with multiple meanings and contexts. “The parents were distressed at their son’s emulation of Bart Simpson.”

Critical Thinking: Take the sentence completion exercise a step further and asks the learner to think critically about a question. Do young people try to emulate other people more or less than adults do? Use critical thinking questions to apply the new word to your learner’s everyday life.

Tier 1–3 Words

How do we decide what new words to introduce to our learner? First, we want to practice words that pertain to their personal goal. Second, we want to vary the level of difficulty. To do this, we categorize vocabulary in three tiers by their frequency, complexity, and meaning. When you are practicing vocabulary with your learner, keep these categories in mind.

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<tr>
<th>Tier</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>This tier consists of the most basic words in everyday speech and typically do not have multiple meanings. Sight words, nouns, verbs, adjectives, and early reading words occur at this level.</td>
<td>girl, dog, run, orange, live, book, library, tutor, learner</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>This tier consists of high-frequency words that occur more often in adult situations and in literature, and many have multiple meanings. These words are important for reading comprehension, are used across a variety of environments, and contain increased descriptive vocabulary. Many learners need to improve their Tier 2 words.</td>
<td>assume, challenge, emphasis, indicate, anomaly, imbue</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>This tier consists of low-frequency words that exist in specific domains. Domains include school, work, technology, weather, math, etc. These words are usually studied and practiced as they come up in a story or tutoring session. Tier 2 and 3 are not clear cut in their description, but your learner’s word experience and goals will help you determine whether to delve into this new word or gloss over it.</td>
<td>genotype, hypotenuse, cumulative, Revolutionary War, crepe, amino acid</td>
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