

Best Practices for Systematic Curriculum-Aligned Vocabulary Instruction

In order to readily comprehend a text, students need to know about 90% of the words in it.¹ That's what makes vocabulary learning and retention such a key piece of the reading comprehension puzzle. With this in mind, consider putting the following protocol in place to maximize reading comprehension and long-term recall of word knowledge.

Step 1: Before Reading

Analyze the Words in the Text and Develop a Word List

The first step in preparing your students to read a text is analyzing its “word load” and determining which words your students should preview before beginning to read. Isolate those **words that are the most essential to understanding the particular text** and the **Tier II academic vocabulary words** that they will most likely encounter again and again across the disciplines. Vocabulary.com’s list maker -- VocabGrabber -- can do this work for you, while still providing you the flexibility to customize the list for your particular students.

Preview the Vocabulary

Having your students preview the key words they will encounter in a text will give students a heightened awareness of those words when they encounter them in context. It’s what Isabel Beck refers to as “word consciousness.”² **Previewing vocabulary doesn’t mean reading off a list of words and their definitions.** Practicing the list of words on Vocabulary.com provides a more dynamic and interactive introduction to the words; rather than rote memorization of definitions, students will encounter each word on the list in a variety of contexts.

¹ Hirsch, E.D. (2003). Reading comprehension requires knowledge – of words and the world: Scientific insights into the fourth-grade slump and the nation’s stagnant comprehension scores. American Educator, Spring, 2003. American Federation of Teachers.

² Beck, I.L., McKeown, M.G., & Kucan, L. (2002) *Bringing Words to Life*. New York: Guilford Press.

Step 2: During Reading

Analyzing Words in Context

Visit pivotal passages and model word inference strategies that can expose students to the “habits of mind” most helpful for word learning. For example, show students how to **use context clues from a sentence or paragraph** to help them determine which particular meaning of a multiple-meaning word is being used in that instance.

Relating Word Choice to Tone

Beyond determining words’ meanings in context, ask students to **relate the writer’s choice of words to the overall purpose and tone of the text**. How does the writer’s word choice and language affect the reader?

Step 3: After Reading

Use the words!

Encourage students to use the words they’re learning in their own writing and speech. They can **model their usage on usage examples** they can find on the Vocabulary.com Dictionary pages.

Reward Vocabulary Achievement

Rewarding students for word mastery and usage will contribute to a class culture that values words and language. Use the Vocabulary.com class leaderboards to stir competition and highlight the word stars among your students.

Systematically Revisit and Review Trouble Words

Students usually require between 10 and 16 encounters with a word before they learn it; therefore, **it is necessary to have a systematic mode of vocabulary review**. Vocabulary.com automatically does this by adding trouble words to each student’s individual learning program. Students will continue to review the words with which they have struggled until they have demonstrated mastery of all the meanings of those words.

Monitor Progress and Identify Struggling Students

Use the Teacher Dashboard to help you differentiate vocabulary instruction. Dedicate whole-class instruction to the top Trouble Words for the class. Also, look at each student’s unique set of trouble words so you can arrange partnerships or small groups to collaboratively work on shared trouble words.