

EVERYDAY VOCABULARY STRATEGIES

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WORD KNOWLEDGE: THE BASICS

The word knowledge students bring to school varies widely. Socioeconomic backgrounds and the amount of language used at home can significantly affect the opportunity of expanding their vocabularies.

Good reading comprehension is dependent on the reader knowing approximately 90 per cent of the words in a text, so increasing vocabulary is vital to our students' reading and learning success. Researchers suggest that students are taught approximately 300 words per year through direct instruction. Most of these 300 words are considered academic vocabulary and are words they will not encounter on their own.

Promoting the use of academic language in speech and writing will also encourage further understanding. The more words students know, the easier it is for them to make connections to new vocabulary. Teaching academic language increases the ability for students to learn the meanings of approximately 50 000 words by secondary school graduation.

FOUR ESSENTIAL VOCABULARY COMPONENTS

This guide addresses four essential components of vocabulary (Graves, 2016):



Provide rich and varied language experiences: Students must experience words through a variety of genres and experiences within reading, listening, speaking and writing.



Teach individual words: Explicitly teach new words using various methods that address learning differences.



Teach word-learning strategies: Model the use of context clues to infer meaning. Teach specific strategies for word-part analysis.



Foster word consciousness: Playing with words helps students understand their usefulness. Emotions are contagious and expressing an interest and excitement in words may ignite the same in students.

3 TIERS OF WORDS

Three tiers of words have been defined and widely recognised for vocabulary study by Beck, McKeown and Kucan (2013). The words that will have the biggest effect on vocabulary growth are those that are seen often in books, but not heard often in speech: Tier 2 words.

	Definition	Examples
Tier 1	These words of everyday speech are usually learned in the early year levels or at home, though not at the same rate by all children.	Baby, chair, phone, food, girl, boy, dog, run, sad, mad, school, house
Tier 2	These are often referred to as <i>academic words</i> . These words appear in all sorts of texts such as academic texts and literary texts. Tier 2 words are used more in writing than in speaking.	Saunter, compare, summarise, annoy, consequence, adjacent, analyse, predict
Tier 3	These words are more common in informational text than in literature. They are often key to understanding new concepts, so they are often defined within the text.	Mitosis, isotope, peninsula, integer, thesis, imperialism, filibuster, allegory, hypotenuse

SURROUND ALL STUDENTS WITH TIER 2 ACADEMIC LANGUAGE

All of our students are academic language learners (ALLs). Kid-friendly definitions are useful, but our students must be able to use academic language in writing and speaking.

- ✦ Teachers and co-teachers, paraprofessionals and any other adults in the classroom should use academic vocabulary when speaking. Students will pick up that language and begin using it in a matter of weeks.
- ✦ Teach and use the academic standardised tests. Verbs such as *analyse, summarise, compare, contrast, describe, predict* and *synthesise* are useful words both in the classroom and in mature conversations.
- ✦ Separate the use of social and academic language. For social interactions, kid or social language is helpful in making some relational connections. Explain the difference in speaking in those situations and in academic situations.
- ✦ Use academic language in newsletters, school blogs and classroom websites to reinforce the importance of these words and to encourage their use at home and school.