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Introduction

In order for students to acquire new knowledge and learning, they must be able to understand what they read, hear and are asked to do in the classroom. According to Robert Marzano, a leading researcher in education and author of several books on academic vocabulary, students must comprehend academic vocabulary in order to understand instruction and academic texts. Often, students have a hard time writing to prompts or responding to instructions because they don't know exactly what is being asked. This is because they don't understand the meanings behind instructional verbs or how these words are used in an academic context.

What Is Academic Vocabulary?

Academic vocabulary is the language of the classroom. It includes academic language—the specific words and phrases that students encounter in their academic reading, assignments and daily classroom activities—as well as the grammar and language structures that make up classroom discussions. Academic vocabulary incorporates words not always used in everyday conversation, and sentences may be more complex. In some cases, students encounter words that have different meanings than they do in other contexts.

Academic vocabulary refers to words and phrases that are used in the process of learning. Benjamin Bloom, an educational psychologist, worked with colleagues to create and publish a taxonomy that provides a framework for classroom instruction. Bloom's Taxonomy has been updated to reflect the action words students encounter in their learning while maintaining a hierarchy of higher-order thinking. Each level contains key words found in academic tasks for that level of critical thinking. Current standards emphasise the need for students to develop critical-thinking skills. Bloom's Taxonomy labels the levels of higher-order thinking as remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating and creating.

Teachers and students use academic language to discuss new knowledge and concepts, develop ideas, talk about texts and engage in classroom activities. This book will focus on terms used specifically in classroom instruction. Many of these terms are included in Bloom's Taxonomy, which enables teachers to identify objectives and plan instruction that develop critical-thinking skills and to assess student learning. Direct instruction in academic vocabulary supports students by helping them understand what they are expected to do.

This book contains three main components: strategies to help teachers explain academic vocabulary; lessons that present definitions, examples and practice of academic instructional verbs; and a glossary, which includes related, non-specific academic language to further develop students' working vocabulary.

How to Use This Book


Know the Lingo! Mastering Academic Vocabulary contains strategies, specific lessons and activities, and a glossary to help teachers illustrate and teach instructional verbs and other academic vocabulary. Introduce and discuss the concept of academic vocabulary with students. Explain that in school, teachers ask students to do certain things in the classroom. When teachers tell students what to do or how to do something, we call these sentences *instructions* or *directions*. It is important for students to understand what the words used in directions mean, so they will be able to successfully do what is being asked. In these lessons, students will learn the meanings of words teachers use when giving instructions. Other times, students read words that tell them what to do; these are called *written directions*. When first starting these lessons, help students understand the nature of and expected response to a *prompt*. A prompt is a sentence that tells students which action to take. Review also the concept of *task*, meaning a specific piece of work to be done, often assigned by another person. The glossary lists additional academic vocabulary students encounter in the context of instruction, activities and other classroom materials. Students need to understand the meanings of these words in order to successfully complete academic tasks within the classroom. Copy these pages for students and explain to them that they will keep their glossaries handy to help them understand academic words used in the prompts and tasks in the lessons.

The strategies and examples listed on “Strategies to Teach Academic Vocabulary” (pages 8–9) offer support for students who need additional assistance in making connections between words, their meanings and expected actions. They may be used with various instructional verbs and other academic vocabulary to teach students and help them incorporate academic vocabulary into their daily learning.

The “Academic Instructional Verbs” section (pages 10–105) highlights year level-appropriate instructional verbs that students will find included in many prompts. These words include *describe*, *discuss*, *evaluate* and *summarise*. The word list corresponds with various, Australian year-level standards and Bloom’s Taxonomy. Lessons are presented in an order that correlates to the frequency with which students might encounter the word. For example, most prompts ask students to “write”, so that lesson is one of the first taught. Each verb is explained in the following ways:

- **Define:** Students are provided with a definition of the instructional verb.
- **Study:** Students are asked to review sample prompts and tasks that include the instructional verb as well as sample responses to the prompts and tasks.
- **Practise:** Students practise answering prompts and completing tasks that contain the instructional verb.
- **Check:** Students participate in a small-group or whole-class activity to confirm their understanding of the instructional verb.
- **Review:** Students are reminded of how the instructional verb is used.
- **Collaborate:** Students collaborate in pairs to further demonstrate their understanding of the instructional verb.

How to Use This Book (cont.)

Preview each lesson to ensure you have the needed materials on hand. When this icon appears , prepare or complete the activity as directed. Guide students through the sample prompts and sample answers provided in each lesson to help students understand the meaning of the academic verb. Then preview the practice prompts and tasks to which students will respond. Ensure students have the “Academic Concepts Glossary” (pages 106–110) for reference as they complete individual, whole-class, small-group or paired activities. Designate a place for students to store their glossaries for easy access during classroom instruction and activities. Sometimes a sample prompt or activity includes a short reading passage for students. Most reading passages fall within the Year 3 reading range based on Lexile measures (520L–820L) for this year level. For further review, consider using this comprehension check format as a follow-up to the lesson activities:

Check Your Work

Think about your answers to the following questions. Discuss your thoughts with a partner or other classmates, or write your responses in a journal entry.

- Did you know what to do?
- Was it easy or hard to understand what the word or phrase means?
- Could you tell someone else what to do if they heard this word?
- In your own words, what does this word mean?

Academic Vocabulary Notebooks

Consider having students keep academic vocabulary notebooks. Notebooks will help students with word recognition in future encounters. Encourage students to refer to their notebooks during various cross-curricular activities.

- Create and maintain a class “journal” to observe and discuss academic vocabulary in practice throughout a school day.
- Have students copy the word and a simple definition for reference in small-group discussions and activities.
- Have students write observations and new information about academic vocabulary.
- Have students write comments about their experiences with academic vocabulary in classroom activities.
- Encourage students to make connections across learning areas.
- Have students discuss and compare their observations with classmates.
- Have students compare terms within or between learning areas.
- Provide activities that engage students in using terms from their notebooks.
- Have students edit and revise their notebooks to reflect new learning.

Strategies to Teach Academic Vocabulary

Each lesson includes specific tasks and strategies to help students learn academic vocabulary. Refer to the following tips to provide additional support for students who have trouble grasping a vocabulary concept.

Strategy	Example
Consider the language expectations in the lesson and text before teaching.	What are students being asked to do in this lesson? What academic vocabulary is embedded in the text?
Check which words students need to know in order to understand any instructions in the lesson.	Underline or highlight academic instructional verbs in the lesson instructions. Check for student understanding before teaching the lesson.
Evaluate what students already know about the terms.	Do they know what the word means? Do they know how to perform the action?
Review words and phrases with students to add to their knowledge base.	Point out different types of responses students make during classroom activities to broaden their understanding of the term.
Make sure students understand the words in directions or assignments.	Read a direction aloud. Ask students to verbally <i>describe</i> what they would do to complete that direction, in their own words, if possible.
Model how to use sentence starters to practise completing a writing prompt.	Think aloud to <i>discuss</i> the purposes of informational text. The main idea of this piece is ... In this text, I learned that ...
Provide pictorial representation with the definition of a word when possible.	Show pictures in a logical order (e.g. morning, noon and night) to <i>define</i> sequential order.
Provide students with a description, example or explanation when giving a formal definition of a word or phrase.	Show students a simple diagram to define a word such as <i>distinguish</i> : Draw two circles and explain that we can list characteristics of two things or ideas to tell how they are different.
Have students draw a picture or create a symbol or other graphic to represent the term.	Students might draw arrows to help them remember what to do when they <i>predict</i> or <i>review</i> .
Have students state their own descriptions, examples, or explanations.	Ask students to <i>demonstrate</i> and <i>give examples of</i> what it means to <i>identify</i> an author's purpose, a topic or the way words are used to convey specific meaning.

Strategies to Teach Academic Vocabulary (cont.)

Strategy	Example
Break objectives and prompts down into parts to guide students.	Break a prompt such as “Use evidence from informational texts to support your analysis, reflection and research of a topic” into separate questions: What did you find (evidence) in your research to support the new information you have learned about your topic? How did these facts, details, definitions, examples and reasons (evidence) help you better understand your topic?
Consider having English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) students write definitions in their native language.	Compare the literal translation of the definition in the student’s native language to our wording in English.
Incorporate student practice with vocabulary words and language structures during collaborative or independent work.	Have students explore working definitions of a verb such as <i>discuss</i> and act out/practice what they have learned.
Have students discuss new terms with each other.	Encourage students to discuss what it means to <i>evaluate</i> and <i>give examples of</i> when they have done this.
Include games along with vocabulary activities.	Students may enjoy playing games, such as a matching memory game or a beanbag toss, to learn the meanings of words.
Help students make connections between academic words and what they are expected to do or know how to do.	Consider having students generate a chart listing several instructional verbs with a picture next to each verb illustrating what a student would do to perform that action.
Refer to specific academic vocabulary and its meanings in everyday activities.	If students are making a class decision, ask individuals what they might say to <i>persuade</i> classmates to consider their ideas.
Teach language and content together when applicable.	Provide examples of what it means to <i>report</i> in a variety of contexts (e.g. science or Humanities and Social Sciences).
Brainstorm with students ways they could complete a specific prompt or task.	Conduct a class discussion to create a web or chart listing ways students could develop a topic, or how they could include text features and illustrations to increase reader comprehension.

Lexile Measures

The Lexile® measures for the texts are listed in the table below. For reference, see the key that follows. It lists the Typical Reader Measures by year level, as well as the Typical Text Measures by year level.

Verb	Text	Page # in Book	Lexile® Measure
Define	Practice Task #3	12	630L
Review	Check #1	15	600L
Take Notes	Sample Task #2	16	730L
Take Notes	Practice Task #1	16	580L
Take Notes	Check #1	17	660L
Support	Check #1	25	490L
Describe	Practice Task #3	28	470L
Identify	Collaborate #1	33	610L
Recognise	Practice Task #4	34	500L
Indicate	Practice Task #3	36	490L
State	Practice Task #3	38	760L
Compare	Collaborate #1	41	600L
Contrast	Practice Task #3	42	560L
Relate	Check #1	51	630L
Refer	Practice Task #1	56	800L
Observe	Practice Task #1	64	690L
Order	Practice Task #3	66	920L
Demonstrate	Sample Task #1	68	650L
Demonstrate	Practice Task #1	68	530L
Predict	Practice Task #1	72	620L
Conclude/Draw a Conclusion	Practice Task #4	74	560L
Conclude/Draw a Conclusion	Check #2	75	650L
Analyse	Practice Task #1	82	530L
Illustrate	Collaborate #1	87	600L
Persuade	Collaborate #1	91	660L
Edit	Collaborate #1	95	770L
Summarise	Sample Prompt #2	100	670L
Summarise	Practice Task #2	100	750L
Revise	Practice Prompt #3	102	500L
Infer/Make an Inference	Practice Task #1	104	610L