EXPLICIT VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION: DIRECTLY TEACHING SPECIFIC WORDS

Module Resources

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**Academic Language** The vocabulary and ways of speaking that are used in school subjects (distinct from social language).

**Background Knowledge** A collection of existing knowledge formed through life experiences and learning.

**Communication** Any means of sending or receiving information. Spoken language and written language are both forms of communication. But so too are gestures, images, and many other things.

**Evidence-Based** Programs, practices, strategies or activities that have been evaluated and shown to improve student outcomes.

**Explicit** Stated clearly and directly, leaving no room for confusion. When used in reference to instruction, explicit means overtly teaching a new skill or concept through clarity of language and purpose, demonstrations and modeling, affirmative and corrective feedback, and varied types of practice.

**Literacy** The ability to read, write, and engage with printed and written materials in everyday life.

**Modeling** Overtly demonstrating a new skill, strategy, or concept that students will be expected to learn.

**Morpheme** The smallest unit of meaning in a language.

**Morphology** The study of word parts that carry meaning.

**Phonics** A method of teaching reading and spelling that teaches the relationship between sounds and the letters representing them.

**Practice** When students are asked to apply what they have just been taught.

**Reading Comprehension** The ability to comprehend written language.

**Reading Fluency** Reading with expression, accuracy, and sufficient automaticity to support comprehension of text.

**Tier 1 Vocabulary Words** Basic words that are commonly used in spoken language.

**Tier 2 Vocabulary Words** Words that frequently appear across contents areas and in academic texts but are used less frequently in oral language. High frequency words that are found across subjects

**Tier 3 Vocabulary Words** Words that appear in specific subjects and fields of study

**Vocabulary** The body of words known to a person.

**Word Recognition** The ability to transform print into spoken language.
REFLECTION QUESTIONS

As you navigate through the module, take some time to reflect.
Section: Vocabulary is at the Center of Learning

How do you typically design learning of new vocabulary? How do you know when a student in your class has a strong vocabulary? What types of academic difficulties do you observe in students with poor vocabulary?

Were you able to read all the words in the example paragraph? Were you able to comprehend the words' meanings? Did you understand the essence of the text’s message? What is the main idea?

If you found it challenging to understand the text given the specialized vocabulary, how did that make you feel? Did this passage create an interest to learn and explore within the subject? Would you feel motivated to read texts like this in the future?
Think back to yourself as a middle school or high school student. What are your memories of learning new words during this time period of your life? Do you recall how vocabulary was taught to you in school? How did you come to know the words you know today? Can you recall another student who had a larger vocabulary than you? Why do you think the two of you ended up with differences in your vocabularies?

Imagine that you are on a teacher-based-team (TBT) with Mrs. Dean. One of the goals of the team is to improve the vocabulary of the students, as it was clear from the state test data that most of the students are struggling with vocabulary in all areas. Even though Mrs. Dean already came up with an action plan to target this area, she was hoping to get input from the team regarding more teaching strategies or if there was something that might be more impactful than the current plan. Your team has a system in place that when a teacher asks for feedback, each team member picks out two things they really like about the proposed strategy/idea/approach and two things that the teacher may want to consider in order to help achieve the end goal. Using the ‘Take Notes’ function, describe what you might share with Mrs. Dean:

- Things I think are great about how you are teaching vocabulary
- Other things you might want to consider to help increase students’ vocabulary
Section: Developing a Plan for Teaching New Words

Reflect on how you will carve out time in the school day to provide direct instruction in word meanings. Within the course of a specific lesson, where can 5 minutes of direct vocabulary instruction fit?

After watching the video "A Schoolwide Vocabulary Approach", please respond to the following questions:

- Does your school’s approach to vocabulary teaching afford students enough time to learn and practice essential vocabulary that will enhance their literacy and learning across all subject areas, including in your domain of instruction?
- If you are a science, social studies, history, technology or art teacher, where does vocabulary fit into your instruction?
- For all educators, how do you coordinate your vocabulary instruction with other teachers in your grade-level team, school, and/or district?
- Based on the video or your own experiences, what do you think are the main benefits of a school-wide approach to vocabulary instruction?
Section: Using Instructional Routines

After watching the YouTube video, "Anita Archer explains the use of instructional routines in the classroom," consider some overarching benefits to having an instructional routine in place for direct instruction on vocabulary. How do teachers benefit? In what ways might students benefit?

Section: Step 2, Introduce the Meaning of the Word

Definitions of Whimsical: 1) resulting from or characterized by whim or caprice, 2) playfully quaint or fanciful, 3) whimsical things are amusing, playful, and slightly odd. Of these three definitions, which do you think is the most useful definition? Why?
Section: Step 2, Introduce the Meaning of the Word

Develop a student-friendly definition of the word ‘signify’. Use the resources in this lesson to help you create an explanation of the word using everyday language. Then, look up the word's dictionary definition and compare your explanation with the dictionary definition. How does your explanation differ from the dictionary definition of ‘signify’?

Section: Step 4, Check for Understanding

After watching the YouTube video, "**Vocabulary Instruction - Sixth Grade Language Arts**," please respond to the following questions: 1) What steps were used in the vocabulary instructional routine to introduce each of the vocabulary terms? 2) What other procedures were used to extend vocabulary instruction? 3) What delivery skills were used? 4) Were there any missed opportunities?
Engaging Actively with the Word

What tasks do you currently give to students to learn new vocabulary? Are there some tasks that students seem to enjoy over others?

Can you think of additional ways to increase vocabulary practice opportunities beyond the examples provided in this module?
Section: Summing It Up

What insights have you gained about the necessity of phonics instruction? Based on the information you have learned, what is one action step you plan to take to implement aspects of what you have learned, gain additional knowledge of phonics instruction, or strengthen your current practice?
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Implement new instructional routines and practices; then reflect and share.

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Now that you've learned about the benefits of a school-wide approach to vocabulary instruction, reflect on the following discussion prompts with a colleague or teacher-based team.

What are the current responsibilities of content area educators for teaching new vocabulary? What do you perceive to be the benefits of integrating vocabulary teaching into content-area classes?

How can you leverage your district's collaborative teaming structures to identify specific Tier 2 words to teach at each grade level?
Now that you've learned about the benefits of using an explicit instructional routine for vocabulary, reflect on the following discussion prompts with a colleague or teacher-based team.

**Ponder**

Describe an instructional routine that you currently use to teach new skills or content. In what ways does using a consistent routine help? What are the drawbacks?

**SHARE**

Discuss what you perceive to be the potential benefits of using a consistent instructional routine to teach new vocabulary.
Activity: Using a Vocabulary Instructional Routine

Activity: Implement an explicit instructional routine for vocabulary during instruction.

Plan

1. Decide the words you want to teach or reinforce from the text or vocabulary scope and sequence.
2. Develop student-friendly explanations of the vocabulary terms.
3. Identify in advance the morpheme parts to which you will draw attention when introducing the word meanings.
4. Develop several verbal, visual, and/or concrete examples per word to demonstrate their meanings.

Class/Period: _______________________
Unit/Lesson: _______________________
Vocabulary Words: _______________________

Dates of Implementation: ______________

Implement

1. Introduce the words through spelling and telling their pronunciations or guide students in decoding the words through syllabication.
2. Introduce the meaning of the words through student-friendly explanations and word part analysis. Illustrate the words with examples and non-examples of the word’s use.
3. Present and visual and concrete examples whenever possible.
4. Check for understanding through questioning and actively involving students in interacting with the words. Ask students to generate their own examples of the words.

Reflect

How did your students respond to the explicit vocabulary routine?

What went well? What was challenging?

Share

Discuss with a peer or with your Teacher-Based Team what you noticed.
Activity: Using a Vocabulary Graphic Organizer

Activity: Graphic organizers are an effective way to learn and practice vocabulary in any subject area. Implement a graphic organizer during whole group or small group instruction.

**Plan**

1. Decide the word(s) you want to teach or reinforce.
2. Choose a graphic organizer that aligns with your learning objectives and the word you plan to teach. For example, you might use a Bubble Map when teaching a word or concept that is a noun.
3. Decide whether you would like students to complete the organizer in groups, pairs, or individually.
4. Choose dates/time to implement the organizer.

   - Class/Period: ________________________
   - Unit/Lesson: ________________________
   - Vocabulary Word(s): ________________________
   - Graphic Organizer: ________________________
   - Time to Review Organizer: ______________
   - Dates/Times of Implementation: ____________

**Implement**

Implement the graphic organizer! Ask students to complete the vocabulary map for the selected word(s). Once complete, decide whether you would like students to share their responses with the class.

**Reflect**

How did your student respond to the use of a graphic organizer?

What went well? What was challenging?

What other vocabulary graphic organizers are you interested in using? How will you use them?

**Share**

Discuss with a peer or with your Teacher-Based Team what you noticed.

Was student vocabulary learning and/or engagement enhanced? How do you know?

NOTE: If your students do not have experience completing graphic organizers, first be sure to model how to use one. Then, complete the organizer together before having students try it out themselves.
EXPLICIT VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION: DIRECTLY TEACHING SPECIFIC WORDS

All the module text in one handy location

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Module Introduction/Homepage

Explicit Vocabulary Instruction: Direct Teaching of Target Words
The desired outcome of skilled reading is understanding and learning from text. Explicit vocabulary instruction is a member of a set of evidence-based teaching practices shown to improve reading comprehension in adolescent learners. This type of instruction teaches new vocabulary with many opportunities for student practice and review. Through explicit instruction on target vocabulary, students understand important and useful words that facilitate their comprehension of grade level text (est. completion time: 3 hours).

Prerequisites
Completion of The Simple View of Reading comprehensive learning module, or sufficient background knowledge of the Simple View of Reading.

Module Description
This module is the first part of a two-part series on Explicit Vocabulary Instruction. Part 1 presents explicit vocabulary instruction as a method to improve adolescent literacy. You will learn how to directly and explicitly teach target vocabulary words using step-by-step instructional routines, activities, and sequences that are easily implemented in the classroom. Part 2 will describe how to teach students word learning strategies that can be applied independently during reading.

In this module, the following topics are discussed in text, linked resources, and embedded audio and videos:

- Vocabulary and its impact on academic success
- Direct teaching of specific words
- Selecting words to teach
- Conveying a word’s meaning
- Engaging actively with words
- Repeated practice
- Educator and expert perspectives on vocabulary instruction

The content of this module is designed to assist all educators, including English language arts and content-area teachers, to help students understand what they are reading, enhance their reading efficacy, and increase their enjoyment of reading.

Navigation and Learning Objectives

Explicit Vocabulary Instruction: Directly Teaching New Words

The content of this module is designed to assist all educators and other interested stakeholders in helping adolescents acquire the knowledge and skills to become proficient readers.

Welcome!

Welcome to Ohio Literacy Library online learning modules. These modules are designed to support you in furthering your knowledge and skills in literacy practices grounded in the science of reading.

Whether you are a teacher, administrator, paraprofessional, parent, related service provider, higher education faculty or candidate, or have another role in helping someone develop their reading skills, we want to first say THANK YOU. Your experiences bring wisdom and a perspective that is unique and valued. We know you would not be here, desiring to learn more about teaching language and literacy, if you did not care deeply about children's literacy success.

We also want to acknowledge that there could be frustrations and challenges in completing these modules. Some of you might already know the information that is being covered. Others might feel confused or identify that the new information conflicts with previous learning and typical literacy practices. Still, others might enjoy the content but feel pulled by other responsibilities and tasks on your never-ending to-do list. Regardless of the challenge, just know we are glad you're here. We appreciate the time you devote to this professional development and desire to make it worth your while.

Throughout each course, we wish to hear from you. Please reflect on the discussion board and offer feedback about aspects of the professional development courses you find helpful and enlightening. Please also share what areas need refinement or clarification. Your feedback will help us make the best product for you and for future educators who choose to enroll in All Ohio’s comprehensive learning modules.

Desired Outcome

You will learn how to incorporate explicit vocabulary instruction into your content-area classroom. By implementing the routines and evidence-based practices described in the following sections, we hope your students improve their vocabulary, reading enjoyment, learning, and general reading comprehension.
Learning Objectives

1. Identify the benefits of enhancing vocabulary in adolescent learners.
2. Select useful words to directly target for explicit vocabulary instruction.
3. Develop student-friendly definitions and illustrate vocabulary with examples and non-examples.
4. Identify the four steps of an explicit instructional routine for vocabulary.
5. Identify and implement effective instructional practices for vocabulary learning.

Vocabulary is at the Center of Learning

What is Vocabulary?

Vocabulary refers to the words and word meanings used in a language. Vocabulary includes all of the words used when speaking and writing, as well as the words that are understood when listening or reading. Hence, a good vocabulary forms the basis for oral language development and comprehension.

Reflection

How do you typically design learning of new vocabulary? How do you know when a student in your class has a strong vocabulary? What types of academic difficulties do you observe in students with poor vocabulary?

Why Does Having a Large Vocabulary Matter?

For students, having a good vocabulary facilitates opportunities to engage in the academic curriculum and plays a crucial role in learning. The evidence showing the importance of vocabulary acquisition to academic success is overwhelming (Baker et al., 1998). Beck, Mckewon, and Kucan (2013), experts on vocabulary, explain in Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction:

“Indeed, a large vocabulary repertoire facilitates becoming an educated person to the extent that vocabulary knowledge is strongly related to reading proficiency in particular and school achievement in general” (p. 1).
It is difficult for education to take place without foundational vocabulary knowledge. Students must know the meanings of words that teachers use during everyday instruction to think about new concepts and learn the content. When students have an extensive and rich vocabulary, they may find it easier to learn to read, communicate through writing, and understand oral and written discourse. In fact, vocabulary knowledge is one of the strongest predictors of how well students will comprehend what they read (Ahmed et al., 2016; Oslund et al., 2018; Tunmer & Chapman, 2012; Yovanoff et al., 2005). To make meaning from print, students must be able to read the words accurately AND understand their meanings.

To illustrate the critical importance of vocabulary to reading comprehension, try reading the following paragraph:

Unsupervised binning, on the other hand, relies on discriminative nucleotides, sequence composition, and taxa abundance, which is inferred in terms of contig coverage. Binning techniques that rely on sequence composition assume that each taxon has a unique genomic signature, which is represented as k-mer frequency vectors. Example tools include 2Tbinning, LikelyBin, Metawatt, SCIMM, self-organizing maps, and VizBin. For low-abundance taxa, composition-based techniques are prone to incorrect taxon assignments since the generated clusters for these taxa tend to be poorly described. In addition, they typically require high-quality reads or contigs that are over 1000 bp in length to achieve acceptable accuracy. Abundance-based techniques are much better at handling low-abundance taxa and shorter reads. For single-sample studies, limitations associated with low-abundance taxa are mitigated by enforcing distributional assumptions (e.g., the Lander-Waterman model) to the k-mer abundance coverage profile. For multi-sample studies, the taxa abundance profiles are assumed to be correlated between samples. (p.74)


**Reflection**

Were you able to read all the words in the above paragraph? Were you able to comprehend the words’ meanings? Did you understand the essence of the text’s message? What is the main idea?

If you found it challenging to understand the text given the specialized vocabulary, how did that make you feel? Did this passage create an interest to learn and explore within the subject? Would you feel motivated to read texts like this in the future?
As the reflection activity above demonstrates, comprehension of written material depends upon vocabulary knowledge. Experts estimate that students need to know 90-95% of the word meanings in a text to comprehend it (Nagy & Scott, 2000). However, there can be considerable differences among students in the size of their vocabularies. Many secondary-level students experience weaknesses in vocabulary that make reading grade-level text challenging.

Here are some signs for educators that a student may have academic difficulties as a result of vocabulary:

- They often cannot find the right word to describe something or express ideas.
- They do not retain information well or understand content-area text.
- They seem confused about what the words mean in grade-level text.
- They struggle to make connections among vocabulary during reading tasks.
- They do not always understand what teachers say.
- They forget new vocabulary.
- They can decode accurately, but they read slowly and do not understand the text.
- They often fail quizzes after going through a unit of study on a topic or theme.

Helping Adolescents Read with Understanding

Although recognizing printed words is one important aspect of skilled reading, it is possible to read words accurately yet not understand the meaning of the text. Cognitive science shows how once students have learned how to decode words, the key to understanding reading is having a strong understanding of the language used in the text. Students cannot comprehend what they read if they do not know what the words mean (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Vocabulary learning is important as students progress through school because the vocabulary coverage in text expands dramatically at the secondary level. By the time they enter middle school, students must skillfully tackle challenging texts with many domain-specific words. Having a wide vocabulary helps adolescent learners read increasingly diverse and complex texts with greater ease and understanding. Adolescents who understand a breadth of words and who can figure out the meaning of unknown words are better prepared to deal with the reading requirements across the content areas.
Explicit Vocabulary Instruction

How Do Students Learn New Words?

You may be surprised to learn that the average student in elementary or high school adds approximately 2000 to 3500 individual words to their vocabularies every year (Anderson & Nagy, 1993). How do students learn so many new words in such a short time?

Reflection:

Think back to yourself as a middle school or high school student. What are your memories of learning new words during this time period of your life? Do you recall how vocabulary was taught to you in school? How did you come to know the words you know today? Can you recall another student who had a larger vocabulary than you? Why do you think the two of you ended up with differences in your vocabularies?

Incidental Vocabulary Learning

Incidental vocabulary learning is one of the main modes of learning new vocabulary. Incidental vocabulary learning is the process of learning new words naturally in the context of everyday life without a stated plan for learning new vocabulary. Incidental vocabulary learning occurs through extensive reading and communication in language-rich environments.

Incidental Word Learning: Benefits & Limitations

A great deal of vocabulary is learned incidentally through everyday experiences with oral and written language. At the secondary level, these experiences can occur in multiple contexts: through daily conversations, listening to books read aloud, rich oral discussion, and reading widely, to name a few. Regular wide reading is critical to vocabulary development over time (Anderson et al., 1988; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Nagy et al., 1985). Wide reading provides opportunities to learn word meanings from context. However, it is not enough for students to be passive observers of the vocabulary they encounter in written text. Many students, particularly struggling readers, tend not to read widely, which impacts their exposure to print vocabulary and subsequent vocabulary learning. Further, students learn only about 5% to 15% of the unknown words they encounter in everyday reading (Nagy et al., 1985; Swanborn & de Glopper, 1999). Deliberate instruction on word meanings is needed to ensure that all students acquire the vocabulary necessary for successful reading and academic performance.
A Stated Plan of Learning New Vocabulary

Although much vocabulary is learned through everyday reading and conversation, you found out that only a small percentage of words are learned incidentally through exposure to print and oral communication. This poses a challenge for adolescent readers as they are asked to confront the vocabulary demands of complex text. Some content area reading can present a challenge to even strong readers who are unfamiliar with the specialized terms embedded within the text. If students don't know enough of the words, they are likely going to have a hard time understanding and learning from the text.

To meet the goal of comprehension, adolescents need educators' support to build a vocabulary that will help them gain meaning from rich and complex text. Instruction on vocabulary is an ideal focus for literature and content-area teachers who want to help students gain more from their reading.

There are a variety of approaches to vocabulary instruction, but which approach is the best?

Read below about a secondary teacher's quest to increase the vocabulary learning of her students. The teacher wants to help her students but is not certain of how. In the reflection that follows, you will be asked to consider what you already know about effective vocabulary instruction and offer the teacher some advice.

Lois Dean is a middle school teacher who recently accepted an English teaching assignment in a large suburban district with a diverse student population. Her students come from a range of cultural backgrounds and economic situations. After the first couple of weeks of class, Mrs. Dean noticed that many students were struggling with the vocabulary of the reading materials assigned. Relatively common academic vocabulary like ‘civilization’, ‘benefit’, or ‘declare’ did not seem to be a part of her students’ repertoire of vocabulary knowledge.

Mrs. Dean realized that she really needed to target her students’ vocabulary in order for them to better comprehend the material. She developed a plan and picked out 15 vocabulary words from the assigned text that she noticed were words that most of the students didn't know. On Monday, Mrs. Dean wrote the list of 15 vocabulary terms on the SmartBoard. She instructed the students to copy the words in their notebooks. For homework, students were assigned to write the definition in their own words of each vocabulary word and then use each word in a sentence. She let them know that they needed to study the words each evening, as there was going to be a quiz on the words on Friday. The quiz had the list of the vocabulary words on the left side with the definitions in random order on the right side. The students needed to match each vocabulary word with the definition.
Explicit Vocabulary Instruction

It simply is not enough to have students look up words in a dictionary and quiz them on the definitions. Word lists, quizzes, and an overemphasis on dictionary definitions will not result in lasting knowledge of words and can sometimes be unmotivating to students (Bromley, 2007). Researchers have identified a number of effective instructional approaches to vocabulary learning that go beyond students copying definitions from a dictionary. The remainder of this module will focus on explicit vocabulary instruction, an evidence-based practice that can improve student vocabulary (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Explicit instruction on vocabulary is a systematic method of teaching specific words using direct explanations and modeling. It involves engaging students as active participants in using and thinking about word meanings. In explicit instruction, new words and word-learning strategies are acquired through deliberate practice and repeated exposures across multiple contexts with the goal of learning the new vocabulary. The Institute of Educational Sciences (IES) published a Practice Guide on Improving Adolescent Literacy that recommends all core subject-area teachers (e.g., math, history/social studies, literature, and science) provide adolescents with explicit vocabulary instruction.
The Benefits of Explicit Vocabulary Instruction

Explicit vocabulary instruction is beneficial for all students. It is particularly crucial for students performing at lower levels who have had fewer opportunities to engage in text, are less likely to engage in wide reading, and find it challenging to figure out the meanings of words through context clues (Beck et al., 2013; Cain et al., 1999). However, even strong readers can be challenged by the academic language and specialized terms embedded in content area reading. Explicit instruction can ensure that all students acquire the print vocabulary needed to comprehend grade-level text and learn the content.

Below is a list of more unique benefits of explicit vocabulary instruction:
- **Improved Vocabulary** Explicit vocabulary instruction enhances vocabulary growth
- **Improved Reading Comprehension** Teaching vocabulary improves comprehension of text containing the target words
- **Increased Learning** When students receive intentional vocabulary instruction, their learning and memory of new content improves

Two Approaches to Explicit Vocabulary Instruction

While the benefits of explicit vocabulary instruction are impressive, it’s one thing to know students need some form of support to expand their vocabulary and another thing to implement research-validated approaches in your classroom. So let’s shift gears and help you build knowledge of effective approaches to explicit vocabulary instruction.

In this module, we will focus on one of two main approaches to explicit vocabulary instruction. The first approach offers students direct instruction on individual word meanings. This module will focus on this first approach, directly teaching specific word meanings. A second approach to explicit instruction involves teaching strategies that students can apply independently to determine the meaning of unknown words. We will cover this second approach in greater detail in another module. The critical thing to know is that both approaches to explicit vocabulary instruction work together to increase vocabulary acquisition.
Direct Vocabulary Learning

What is Direct Vocabulary Learning?

Direct instruction on vocabulary helps students learn words encountered in disciplinary and content-area texts. In direct vocabulary instruction, difficult words are selected in advance that the teacher will discuss. New vocabulary terms can be introduced before, during, or after reading, depending on the instructional context. This direct instruction can be added to a teacher’s instructional routine so that it becomes a regular component of their instruction.

Which Words Need to Be Directly Taught?

Students encounter many words in their textbooks and through daily reading tasks. It is not easy to narrow down a selection of vocabulary words from such a large potential pool of vocabulary. Choosing vocabulary for direct instruction can be especially challenging in content areas where the textbook may contain a wide variety of vocabulary terms and jargon. Not all vocabulary words have equal importance for readers. It is critical to select words that provide students with the most significant opportunity to engage with grade-level content. There are various methods for determining appropriate vocabulary for instruction. In this module, the focus is on Isabel Beck and colleagues’ (1987) three-tiered vocabulary framework.

Tiered Vocabulary
A Model for Categorizing Words

Tiered vocabulary was initially proposed by Beck and colleagues (1987), and is described in Beck, McKeown, and Kucan’s book Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction (2013). Tiered vocabulary is a model for categorizing words. It consists of three different levels. A word’s frequency and usefulness are used to determine into which tier the word is classified in the tiered model.

"The book offers elementary, middle, and high school teachers concrete suggestions for choosing words and teaching them to students. New chapters in the second edition provide important updates for teachers who are data driven, who have students of varying ability levels and language backgrounds, and who focus on the reading-writing connection."

— Rebecca Silverman, EdD, College of Education, University of Maryland, College Park
Beck, McKeown, & Kucan (2013) created a 3 tiered model of vocabulary.

**Examples of Tier 3 Words**
tessellation, isosceles, pallet, chlorophyll, sedimentary, proton, igneous, mitosis, estuary

**Examples of Tier 2 Words**
emerge, justify, parallel, candid, suffice, benevolent, infer, verify, flounder

**Examples of Tier 1 Words**
dirt, mice, run, brown, family, apple, sofa, ocean
Tier 1 Vocabulary

Tier 1 words are high-frequency words that most adolescents already know. We use these words in everyday speech. Tier 1 words usually do not need to be taught to native speakers of English. However, you may have students for whom English is not their first language or others who have had fewer opportunities to engage with written text, creating a gap in knowledge of Tier 1 vocabulary. For students who may have experienced opportunity gaps in exposure to text and English vocabulary, explicit instruction on Tier 1 words can be beneficial.

Tier 2 Vocabulary

Tier 2 words are rich and useful vocabulary that frequently appear across the content areas and in academic texts. These words are used less commonly in oral language (e.g., words like identify, adjacent, and aggregate). Although students may not be familiar with the meanings of Tier 2 words, they usually have ways to explain Tier 2 words using other words in their vocabulary. Because students meet Tier 2 words often in written language and standardized tests, Tier 2 words are ideal candidates for instruction. Tier 2 words often have multiple meanings that can be difficult to decipher for students, which makes instruction on Tier 2 words an integral component of the instructional routine to maximize students’ comprehension of spoken and written language.
Tier 3 Vocabulary

Tier 3 words consist of rare vocabulary terms (e.g., mitosis, carbohydrate) used only in specific domains. Students come across Tier 3 words in academic textbooks that are used in specific content area classes, spanning from history and science to music and career and technical classes. These words may be worthwhile to teach explicitly if students must know their meanings to master domain-specific content.

Considerations for Selecting Words for Direct Vocabulary Instruction

Up until now, you've been building your understanding of appropriate words for direct vocabulary instruction—including useful, high-frequency words worth teaching as well as some low frequency words that may merit instructional time and review. So now let's focus on some final considerations for selecting words.

Know Your Students

The tiers of the tiered vocabulary framework are intended to be helpful guidelines; they are not strict rules. There may be more than one way to classify the words. Knowing your students will help you choose words based on their needs. Choose words for direct instruction that are unknown to your students, yet relevant to their lives to maximize their usefulness.

For example, the word strategy could be a Tier 2 word worth teaching if you are a first or second-grade educator. By middle school, most students will have learned what a strategy is. Middle school students probably have been taught a handful of strategies and successfully applied a strategy to write a paper, comprehend a text or solve a math problem. Therefore, strategy for vocabulary instruction would not merit your instructional time.
Focus on Tier 2 Words

Students need to know high utility (Tier 2) words that they are likely to meet often in academic texts across the content areas. The more Tier 2 words that students know, the better students will access the content in other subject areas. Furthermore, students are more likely to keep these words in their vocabularies because of their frequent use.

The Academic Word Finder is a free resource available from achievethecore.org that can assist you in identifying grade-level Tier 2 vocabulary words found in any text. To use this tool, simply type in or copy and paste an excerpt from a text and choose your grade level. The Academic Word Finder will identify words from the text that are worthy of your instruction.

Choose Words Relevant to the Curricula

Remember that Tier 3, discipline-specific words may also need to be taught explicitly to support learning within a given content area. Teachers should choose Tier 3 words that are critical to understanding the lesson materials. Tier 3 words that are more abstract or difficult to pronounce may require direct instruction.

Trying it Out

Using literature, informational text, or content area curricula from your class, identify 5-10 Tier 2 words for direct vocabulary instruction. Use the handout on the next page as a guide to determine if a vocabulary word falls into Tier 2. Jot down the words you have classified as Tier 2 vocabulary on a piece of paper or write them in the reflection section. You will need these words for an activity that appears later in this module.
Is it a Word Worth Teaching?

Tier 2 vocabulary words are high utility words found across the subject areas. Instruction in these words can add to students' language ability and enhance their reading.

To determine if a word falls in Tier 2

ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:

☐ Is it a word that your students are unlikely to know?
☐ Is the word frequently used in written language?
☐ Is the word used by mature language users?
☐ Does the word have multiple meanings?
☐ Will students have ways to explain the word using everyday language and other words that are already well known to them?
☐ Is the word necessary for the comprehension of grade-level text?
☐ Will the word help students understand concepts and reading materials in other content areas?
☐ Are students likely to encounter the word on standardized tests?
☐ Are students likely to encounter the word in academic texts used in higher grade levels?

If you checked yes to most items, then the word likely meets criteria for Tier 2 vocabulary.
Developing a Plan for Teaching New Words

**Keeping a Good Handle on the Logistics**

In the previous section you identified some useful words to teach. Before getting into the topic of how to teach those words, let's talk about some logistics. You may be wondering whose responsibility it is to teach vocabulary words, how many to teach at one time, or how much time to devote to instruction. Learn the answers to these and other frequently asked questions by reading below.

After selecting words for direct instruction, an important logistical consideration is to determine how much time is needed to teach the words. It is vital to dedicate a portion of regular class time to provide vocabulary instruction. The amount of time may depend on the number of new words students must know to understand the text or curricula content.

The good news is that vocabulary instruction does not need to take up a lot of time! Embedding as little as five minutes per day of direct vocabulary instruction into the class routine results in 25 minutes per week of vocabulary instruction, or nearly two hours per month of teaching. This is time well spent that can enhance students’ core vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension, and content learning.

**Reflection:**
*Reflect on how you will carve out time in the school day to provide direct instruction in word meanings. Within the course of a specific lesson, where can 5 minutes of direct vocabulary instruction fit?*

**Who should teach the words?**
Every teacher has a role to play in teaching vocabulary. The words used for instruction can be divided among content-area classes so that vocabulary learning occurs across the curriculum and no sole teacher bears the responsibility for meeting student literacy needs.

**How many words should you teach?**
Beck et al. (2013) suggest introducing approximately ten words per week through direct instruction.

**In what order should the words be taught?**
A scope and sequence of vocabulary words can prevent teachers at different grade levels from teaching and reteaching the same words (Marzano & Simms, 2011; Shanahan, 2020).
Using a School and District-Wide Approach
It is common to believe that vocabulary instruction is the sole responsibility of English language arts teachers. Some believe that content area teachers should only spend time teaching specialized terms found in their specific fields or subject areas. We know it's easy to want to focus solely on your subject-area content when there is so much information to cover in preparation for end-of-year state testing. However, if this is what you're thinking, you may want to consider whether a siloed approach to vocabulary instruction is helping or hindering your teaching.

Here are a few questions to get you thinking:

Now that you've spent some time pondering those questions, let's bring it back to what the research says about vocabulary:
We know that vocabulary knowledge enhances reading comprehension and that literacy skills are critical for gaining information in all content areas. So, the vocabulary taught in your classroom could impact the texts students understand and their academic success in other subject areas. The reverse is also true (e.g., the vocabulary students learn outside of your classroom can potentially increase their learning and understanding of the course content you teach).

Here's another way to look at it:
Although content is what you teach, vocabulary is a way for students to learn the content. Vocabulary can help students discuss, write about, read about, and understand the content you teach. Existing vocabulary can also help students link what they already know to new concepts, deepening their learning and making it easier to think about what you teach.
Working Together to Teach Vocabulary

The ultimate goal of vocabulary instruction is to raise student learning and achievement across all subject areas, not just in English language arts. In the video below, you will hear a real-life example of students achieving greater academic success when content area teachers work together to implement a consistent approach to vocabulary instruction schoolwide. As you watch the video, listen for additional benefits of a team-approach to vocabulary instruction that extends beyond student achievement.

After watching this [video](#) about a school-wide vocabulary approach, complete the reflection below.

**Reflection:**
After watching the video, please respond to the following questions:

- Does your school's approach to vocabulary teaching afford students enough time to learn and practice essential vocabulary that will enhance their literacy and learning across all subject areas, including in your domain of instruction?
- If you are a science, social studies, history, technology or art teacher, where does vocabulary fit into your instruction?
- For all educators, how do you coordinate your vocabulary instruction with other teachers in your grade-level team, school, and/or district?
- Based on the video or your own experiences, what do you think are the main benefits of a school-wide approach to vocabulary instruction?

As the video you watched describes, a system-wide approach to teaching vocabulary can benefit both teachers and students. The infographic on the following page shows how you can leverage your district's collaborative teaming structures to identify specific Tier 2 words to teach at each grade level.
LEVERAGING TEAMS TO IDENTIFY VOCABULARY TO TEACH
Follow this system-wide process

Identify Words
Teacher-based teams identify lists of vocabulary that would be helpful for their students to know prior to their grade level and words they think would be beneficial to teach at the grade level.

Go Further
Using the information provided by building leadership teams, district leadership teams create a scope and sequence document of Tier 2 vocabulary words to teach at each grade level.

Compile Lists
Building leadership teams then compile this information across teacher-based teams and bring the information forward for discussion at the district leadership team.

Take Action
Teacher-based teams implement the district-adopted scope and sequence of the Tier 2 vocabulary.

Monitor Impact
Teacher-based teams monitor student growth in learning and reading.

Reflect & Adjust
Teacher-based teams reflect on the success of the vocabulary scope and sequence and recommend amendments to the list as needed.
Download & Discuss

Download the discussion prompt handout to the right and reflect on these prompts with a colleague or your Teacher-Based Team (TBT).

**Ponder**
Now that you've learned about the benefits of a school-wide approach to vocabulary instruction, reflect on the following discussion prompts with a colleague or teacher-based team.

**SHARE**

- What are the current responsibilities of content area educators for teaching new vocabulary? What do you perceive to be the benefits of integrating vocabulary teaching into content-area classes?

- How can you leverage your district's collaborative teaming structures to identify specific Tier 2 words to teach at each grade level?
Using a Vocabulary Instructional Routine

What are Instructional Routines?

Instructional routines are specific and repeatable actions enacted in classrooms that give structure to time and teacher-student interactions around content. Instructional routines typically involve the teacher modeling tasks, providing frequent opportunities for students to respond, and giving immediate feedback.

In this video, Dr. Anita Archer explains the use of instructional routines in the classroom and describes their benefit to students and teachers.

An Instructional Routine for Teaching Vocabulary

A vocabulary instructional routine can be helpful to follow when introducing new words. A well-designed instructional routine gives structure to time and facilitates dialogue and thinking about vocabulary that might not occur otherwise. For these reasons, teachers are encouraged to select a consistent instructional routine for vocabulary learning.

Dr. Anita Archer and Charles Hughes (2011) developed a step-by-step instructional routine for teaching vocabulary words. The steps are outlined in the infographic to the right. Each step will be reviewed in greater detail in subsequent sections of this module. Even more in-depth information about the routine can be found in Chapter 3 of Explicit Instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching by Anita Archer and Charles Hughes.

"Explicit instruction is something that benefits every single student, not just those with learning difficulties. This book breaks down how to deliver explicit instruction for a variety of content areas, skill sets, and strategies in a way that will effectively reach a diverse group of learners."

— Courtney Dexter, MEd, special education teacher, Bellefonte Area Middle School, Bellefonte, Pennsylvania
Aligning Instruction to the Four-Part Processing Model

When planning for and using an instructional routine, the steps should be applied in alignment with information from Seidenberg and McClelland’s Four-Part Processing Model for Word Recognition to ensure that students not only understand the vocabulary but can identify it in written text.

The image to the right shows how the step-by-step instructional routine for vocabulary aligns with the Four-Part Processing Model Model. The Four-Part Processing Model identifies the brain regions involved within the left hemisphere where word-level language processing occurs. For the best possible outcomes for word learning, educators need to encourage the integration of previously learned phonics knowledge with the word’s meaning and use within different contexts.

The step-by-step instructional routine for vocabulary developed by Archer and Hughes (2011) supports the brain processing areas involved in word identification and learning. The four steps to the routine will be described in greater detail in the following sections.
Download & Discuss

Download the discussion prompt handout to the right and reflect on these discussion prompts with a colleague or your Teacher-Based Team (TBT).

Now that you’ve learned about the benefits of using an explicit instructional routine for vocabulary, reflect on the following discussion prompts with a colleague or teacher-based team.

Ponder

Describe an instructional routine that you currently use to teach new skills or content. In what ways does using a consistent routine help? What are the drawbacks?

Discuss what you perceive to be the potential benefits of using a consistent instructional routine to teach new vocabulary.

SHARE
Step 1: Introduce the Word

Introducing New Vocabulary

Vocabulary is one of the basic building blocks of learning and reading comprehension, but have you ever put much thought into how you introduce new words? Presenting students with a laundry list of new vocabulary to learn can be overwhelming to adolescent learners. Plus, it is not an effective way to engage students and facilitate new vocabulary learning. So, how can you introduce new vocabulary without resorting to presenting students with lists of words and word meanings to memorize? Read more for the answer!

How to Introduce New Words

When introducing a new vocabulary word, first write the word in a place where all students will see it. For example, you can spell the word on a SmartBoard, a whiteboard or chalkboard, or even the computer screen (for example, if students are learning virtually).

Next, say the word’s correct pronunciation, and have the students echo the word. This helps students create a phonological representation of the vocabulary word.

When introducing a multisyllabic word, it is helpful to break the word into its decodable parts (e.g., me-tic-u-lous). Guide students to read each of the parts and then the whole word. The YouTube video titled Pronunciation of Multisyllabic Passage Words - Sixth Grade Language Arts, shows how to introduce the pronunciation of multisyllabic words by using a teacher strategy called “Loop, Loop, Loop”.
Once students can pronounce the word then it is time to introduce the word’s meaning. In the following section, you will learn more about Step 2: Introducing the meaning of the word. Before you move on, let’s check your understanding of Step 1 of the explicit vocabulary instructional routine: Introducing the word.

### Essential Actions to Introducing a Word

- ✓ Write or display the word
- ✓ Pronounce the whole word or break the word into its decodable parts before saying the whole word
- ✓ Have students repeat the word

**Check Your Understanding**

Read the following scenario and determine if this is a good example of how to introduce a new vocabulary term. Use the checklist above to see if Mr. Lee included the essential actions to introduce the word rebuff.

Mr. Lee, a seventh-grade ELA teacher, displays a new vocabulary word on the SmartBoard. He tells the class, “This word is rebuff.”

Then, he asks students, “What is the word?”

They respond, “Rebuff.” Mr. Lee says, “We pronounce it as re-buff. Now say the word again. Rebuff.”

*Answer: This is a good example of how to introduce a new vocabulary term.*
Step 2: Introduce the Meaning of the Word

What’s the Best Way to Convey a Word’s Meaning?

During a vocabulary lesson, have you ever found yourself asking, “Who knows what the word ____ means?” or “Any guesses as to what the term ____ is referring to?” You may have found that students share incorrect guesses or others do not respond. Maybe instead of this approach, you encourage students to look up the word in a dictionary. Or, perhaps you read the dictionary entry out loud and ask students to write the definition in their notes. Providing access to dictionaries or students guessing the meanings of words will not necessarily give them the information they need to understand the meaning of the word. There are more effective ways to convey word meanings to students. On this page, you will learn how to come up with definitions for words that are supportive of students’ vocabulary learning.

Not all definitions are equally useful when conveying a word’s meaning. Consider these three definitions for the word ‘whimsical’:

**WHIMSICAL**

Adj.

1. Resulting from or characterized by whim or caprice
2. Playfully quaint or fanciful
3. Whimsical things are amusing, playful and slightly odd

**Reflection**

Of the three definitions above, which do you think is the most useful definition? Why?
Student-Friendly Definitions

It is best to introduce a new word through descriptions using everyday language rather than providing a dictionary definition. Dictionary definitions often use complex language that can be difficult for students to understand. Descriptions of new words should be easy-to-understand and contain words that students already know. Descriptions should capture the word's common use. Beck and colleagues (2002) refer to these as “student-friendly explanations.”

“The reality is that traditional definitions are not an effective vehicle for learning word meanings.”
— Beck et al., 2013, p. 43

Here is an example of a student-friendly definition for the word meticulous:

Student-friendly definitions explain word meanings in everyday language —language that is accessible to students. A student-friendly definition uses words in students’ existing vocabulary and includes explanations that are relatable to students’ life experiences.
Keep it Clear, Simple, Understandable

When developing student-friendly definitions, it is important to use language that is clear, simple, and understandable to your students. As an example, imagine that your target word is squander. In that case, you can say: Squander has to do with spending money wastefully. When you squander money, you may become penniless. You would not say: Squander is to dissipate or spend extravagantly through negligence or inaction. The latter description is not as clear and includes some words that might be unknown to students.

If you are having trouble explaining a word’s meaning in everyday language, consider using the Wordsmyth Widget to access student-friendly definitions for words you plan to teach through direct vocabulary instruction.

Using Morphology to Introduce Words

Calling attention to the morphemes in a word is another way to help students determine its meaning. Morphemes are the smallest units of meaning in words; for example, the word transport can be divided into two morphemes, trans and port. English morphemes include roots, base words, prefixes, and suffixes.

Introducing morphemes as they emerge in target words can help students infer the meanings of words. Teachers can guide students to analyze a target word for recognizable word parts. Combining guided morphology analysis with the student-friendly definitions helps students gain a fuller understanding of the word’s usage in text.
Active reflection on a word's morphology has benefits beyond helping students determine the meaning of a target word used for explicit vocabulary instruction. Increasing students' morphological knowledge can enhance their overall awareness of the English Language. This knowledge can carry over to the learning of unknown vocabulary. That is, students can apply morphological knowledge to interpret meanings of new words that have not been directly taught.

The resource section below includes lists of common roots, prefixes, and suffixes which are helpful to reference as you introduce new words. Click to access the resources.

**Morphology Resources**

- **High Utility Morphemes**
  Explore these high-utility prefix, suffix, and root meanings and examples, including their alternate spellings.

- **Ohio Literacy Academy**

- **Roots Trees**
  Explore an exhaustive list of roots trees. The highlighted roots occur most frequently in language.

- **List of Morphemes**
  Consider how these common content area roots and affixes can become a part of core vocabulary instruction across content areas.
Step 3: Illustrating the Word with Examples and Non-Examples

Using Examples and Nonexamples

After you introduce the meaning of a word with a student-friendly definition, what else can you do to support student learning? In this section, you will learn about using examples and nonexamples to teach vocabulary. Examples and nonexamples can engage students’ prior knowledge to make it more likely that they will learn the new term or concept.

Illustrating the Word with Verbal Examples

The third step in the instructional routine is to illustrate the word with verbal examples of the term’s usage. Example and non-example scenarios can assist students to develop a deeper understanding of the word. It is helpful to use clear examples that students can relate to their life.

The verbal examples and nonexample below illustrate the concept of ‘meticulous.’ Notice how the scenarios are relatable to the students’ home and academic experiences.

Quick Tip

Providing additional opportunities to work with new vocabulary can help you determine how well your students have learned new terms.
Illustrating the Word with Concrete and Visual Examples

If possible, couple verbal examples with **concrete** and **visual** examples.

Visual examples are often easy to find. The photos in academic textbooks, images from the internet, or even your own drawings can be used to visually represent vocabulary terms. Even YouTube videos can help students learn new terms if the video can demonstrate a word’s use in its real context.

Concepts can be made concrete by showing an object that is representative of the vocabulary term. For example, a sliced apple could be used to demonstrate the concept of ‘core’ along with an image of the Earth’s layers, with the ‘core’ clearly shown. These examples could then be discussed further to relate back to the meaning of ‘core’ being the most central part.

Another way to make a word concrete is by acting out the concept of the word:

- **Acting out a vocabulary term**, such as *distribute*, *isolate* or *collapse*
- **Showing students an actual object representative of the terms**, like *sphere*, *core*, or *anthology*
- **Performing simple actions that result in a representation of a term**, such as making a *solution* or *mixture*
- **Showing facial expression demonstrative of vocabulary words**, like *depressed*, *infuriate*, or *ponder*
- **Using a video clip (e.g., from current events) to show terms like *antagonize* or *belligerent***

Here are more examples of methods for using tactile and visual representations to make vocabulary representations concrete.

- A sliced apple to demonstrate the concept of ‘core’ along with an image of the Earth's layers, with the 'core' clearly shown. These examples could then be discussed further to relate back to the meaning of 'core' being the most central part.

**3 visual examples of the word 'Core'**

- The central part of some fruits
- Earth's core
- The center or most important part

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**WWW.ALLOHIOLITERACY.ORG**

**Page 47 | Explicit Vocabulary Instruction**
Trying it Out

Directions: In this activity, you will create student-friendly explanations and examples of the Tier 2 words you identified and recorded earlier in this module. To complete this activity, follow these steps:

1. First, use the worksheet on the following page and list the Tier 2 words you selected in the left column.
2. Next, write student-friendly explanations, examples, and nonexamples for the Tier 2 words you plan to teach.
3. Finally, brainstorm ways to illustrate the words using visual and/or concrete examples.
4. Keep your completed worksheet as one resource to help you plan for implementing an explicit instructional routine for vocabulary in your classroom.

Example of the completed activity:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words to Teach</th>
<th>Dictionary Definition</th>
<th>Student-Friendly Explanation</th>
<th>Examples &amp; Nonexamples</th>
<th>Visual &amp; Concrete Examples of the Word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. meticulous (adj.) marked by extreme or excessive care in the consideration or treatment of details</td>
<td>A meticulous person is someone who is very careful and pays great attention to detail.</td>
<td>If the man cleaned every inch of his house until it was spotless, his cleaning efforts were meticulous.</td>
<td>Show a photo of a person examining something through a microscope or a magnifying glass</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Creating Student-Friendly Descriptions with Examples

Tip: Be sure to use words that students already know when developing student-friendly explanations. In the 'Examples and Nonexamples' column, illustrate the words with relatable experiences as well as examples of how the word is used in the text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words to Teach</th>
<th>Dictionary Definition</th>
<th>Student-Friendly Explanation</th>
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</tbody>
</table>
Step 4: Check for Understanding

The Final Step

The final step in the instructional routine is to have the students engage with the vocabulary word. This step requires teachers to ask questions that check students’ understanding of the word.

Have you ever had the experience of teaching a vocabulary word and observing a student’s ability to parrot back its definition? You might conclude that the student knows the word. Even if students know the word’s definition, the student may still have a limited understanding of the word’s full meaning. This is why we need questions. In the video titled Vocabulary Instruction, Dr. Isabel Beck shares an adorable experience that highlights why questions are necessary to discern whether students truly understand a word’s meaning.

Asking “deep processing” questions can help you discern whether students understand the meaning of the word beyond its exact definition. Questions that require students to apply the word’s meaning can also help students see how the word can fit in their own vocabularies. Below are some examples of “deep processing” questions designed to get student’s thinking beyond the word’s definition.

If you were a celebrity who was meticulous about your appearance, what would you do before you attended an Awards event?

What would make someone say, “You are so meticulous!”

Can you describe a time when you were not meticulous but should have been? What happened?
In addition to asking “deep processing” questions, Archer and Hughes (2001) offer more helpful options to check students’ learning, including:

- Asking students to distinguish between examples and non-examples of the word
- Having the students develop examples and nonexamples of the vocabulary term

Students develop a clearer picture of the word when interacting with the word during dialogue with the teacher. These additional opportunities to work with the new word can also help teachers determine how well students have learned the vocabulary.

Putting it All Together: What does an Explicit Vocabulary Instructional Routine Look Like?

Let’s now view what an explicit instructional routine for vocabulary learning looks like in action! Watch Dr. Anita Archer in the video titled “Vocabulary Instruction - Sixth Grade Language Arts” as she demonstrates her explicit instruction routine for vocabulary. As you watch the video, think about the following questions from the video guide. After you watch the video, consider the following questions:

- What steps were used in the vocabulary instructional routine to introduce each of the vocabulary terms?
- What other procedures were used to extend vocabulary instruction?
- What delivery skills were used?
- Were there any missed opportunities?

Now that you have watched the video and completed the reflection activity, see if your reflections match the feedback below:

What steps were used in the vocabulary instructional routine to introduce each of the vocabulary terms?
The instruction followed these steps:
1. Introduce the pronunciation of the word.
2. Provide a student-friendly explanation of the word's meaning.
3. Illustrate with examples.
4. Check understanding by asking questions.

What other procedures were used to extend vocabulary instruction?
One way the vocabulary instruction was extended was through word use. Students were asked to anticipate how the word ‘elude’ might be used in the story. This helped connect vocabulary instruction to the story, which could strengthen students' reading comprehension.

What delivery skills were used?
Active Participation: The instructor created plenty of opportunities for students to actively respond during the lesson. This helped increase on-task behavior and verify student learning. Student responses included choral, partner, and written responses.

Were there any missed opportunities?
The instructor could have asked students how they knew the exemplar was an example or non-example. A question like this could have deepened student thinking in regards to the word’s meaning.
Step 4: Engaging Actively with the Word

Really Learning and Knowing a Word

It can be difficult for students to remember new vocabulary. Much evidence shows that multiple encounters are necessary for a word to be learned (Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986). Some researchers estimate that it takes up to 17 exposures to learn a word (Ausubel & Youssef, 1965). Repeated, deliberate, and varied practice opportunities can help students retain vocabulary words introduced through the explicit instructional routine. Practice opportunities can also facilitate the transfer of vocabulary to reading proficiency—the ultimate goal of explicit vocabulary instruction.

“Really knowing a word...always means being able to apply it flexibly but accurately in a wide range of new contexts and situations. Thus it can be argued that there is no knowledge addressed in school in which application is more crucial than knowledge of word meanings. The challenge for educators is to provide instruction of the sort that will lead to flexible application of word knowledge.”


After going through the instructional routine, it is crucial to provide students with opportunities to process the word’s meaning in additional formats and contexts, including speaking and writing. Students are more likely to remember a vocabulary word if they have considered different dimensions of the word’s meaning in different contexts of use. These opportunities activate the meaning and contextual processors of the brain, which strengthens students’ understanding of the term. Varied encounters with the vocabulary word can support the word becoming an active part of the students’ vocabulary repertoire!

Dr. Curtis describes explicit vocabulary instruction and talks about key strategies teachers of adolescents can use to help students engage actively with words in this video: https://vimeo.com/50547000

Reflection:
What tasks do you currently give to students to learn new vocabulary? Are there some tasks that students seem to enjoy over others?
Teachers can implement the practice activities below to facilitate active engagement with a new word. These activities can be interspersed throughout the week following the initial introduction of the new word.

**Writing Activities**

Writing activities can facilitate engagement with new vocabulary. Read below for examples of some easy-to-implement writing activities. [Click here](#) to download and print the activities as an instructional resource.

**Recording Words, Examples & Non-Examples**

- Students can record this information in a vocabulary notebook or set of index cards that they add to and reference throughout the year.
- Have students rewrite definitions in their own words. This could mean coming up with their own example and non-example scenarios for the word.

**Analysis of the Text**

- Use writing activities that encourage students to return to the text's topic or the part of the text in which they encountered the vocabulary. This is one way to bridge the connection between the word's meaning and the meaning of the text. This helps to deepen students' understanding of the content and the vocabulary word. For example: After reading the text, describe the human impact on the environment. Or: Describe how rainforests play a vital role in regulating climate.

**Writing Prompts**

- Ask students to complete sentence starters. For example: The politician used to be very pretentious until...
- Present other extended writing activities. For example: Can you think of someone who is pretentious? What does that person do that makes them seem pretentious?

**Speaking Activities**

Partner or group activities can get students talking with each other about new vocabulary words. [Click here](#) to download see more examples of how to contextualize words and get students using new vocabulary in speaking activities.

**Investigation of Examples and Non-Examples**

- Students can work together to generate examples of target words. You might encourage students to draw upon their own lives or experiences when generating examples or non-examples of target words. For example: Share with your partner a time when someone showed integrity? What things did the person do to make you think they had integrity?
- After they have generated examples with their partners, have students share out their answers with the class.

**Contextualization of the Words**

- New words can be discussed within the context of the textbook or current unit of study. The point is to get students to think about the words' meanings and to use them in various forms and situations. For example: An example of a character from the text who is assiduous is ____. Or: The country's constitution was amended to allow women to vote. Describe with your partner how it was amended.
Graphic Organizers

How Graphic Organizers Help: Graphic organizers are visual aids designed to help students think about vocabulary words in different ways. Graphic organizers can visually represent information related to a word’s meaning.

Different Types of Graphic Organizers: There are many types of graphic organizers for vocabulary learning. Word maps (see example to the left) are a type of graphic organizer that can be used in any subject at any grade level. Most word maps involve writing the word’s definition, synonyms, antonyms, and/or a picture for a given vocabulary word or concept. Word maps and other graphic organizers can help students develop a deeper understanding of the word’s meaning by showing how the central word relates with other words.

When to Use Graphic Organizers: You can use graphic organizers at any point in a lesson to help students learn new words and classify terms and concepts into meaningful categories.

How to Use Graphic Organizers: Explain to students how to use the graphic organizer you’ve chosen for vocabulary learning. Explicitly teach how to complete the organizer. Provide students time to practice using the graphic organizer.

Graphic Organizer Resources

For more information on graphic organizers, including free templates, you might want to download these graphic organizer forms below or visit the Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk and download the following resources:

- Blank vocabulary graphic organizers
- Fillable vocabulary maps form A
- Fillable vocabulary map form B
- Step-by-step instructions to complete the fillable vocabulary maps
Don't Forget! Repeated Practice is Important

Frequent encounters with target vocabulary serve to protect against forgetting the words. There are numerous ways to ensure that students frequently encounter the new words long after their initial introduction. One method is to integrate previously taught vocabulary into a conversation during the school day. For example, teachers can intentionally embed vocabulary words within a question, such as “Who is opposed to moving the quiz back a week?” or “What is your viewpoint on continuing classes virtually on snow days?”

Another idea is to post a list of vocabulary words in the classroom. Each time a student uses a word from the list in an authentic manner (either in speech or writing), they could receive a point or some form of positive recognition. Students could also earn points for recognizing the word in subject-area reading material.

Isabel Beck, an expert on direct vocabulary instruction, created a game called Word Wizard that encourages students to notice vocabulary words outside of the classroom. Students can find examples of the words they have learned in newspapers, magazines, television, advertisements, etc. and report evidence of their use for extra credit. More information about the Word Wizard game can be found here and in the book Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction.

In this video, Dr. Anita Archer discusses the importance of deliberate practice, retrieval practice, spaced practice, and mixed practice in learning new information.

Reflection:
Can you think of additional ways to increase vocabulary practice opportunities beyond the examples provided in this module?
Summing it Up

In Summary

Because secondary students need vocabulary knowledge to comprehend, learn, and work with grade-level content, it is important that educators teach effective vocabulary acquisition skills. Direct instruction on vocabulary helps students learn new words that are necessary to understanding the subject and text. Educators across the grade levels and content areas can work collaboratively to teach vocabulary essential to students’ academic success.

Some Key Takeaways

4 THINGS TO REMEMBER

1. Vocabulary knowledge is one of the strongest predictors of how well students will understand what they read; therefore, it is important to teach.

2. Explicit instruction is an approach to vocabulary teaching that enhances students’ word knowledge, improves learning, and increases comprehension of text containing the vocabulary.

3. Explicit instruction should focus on high utility (Tier 2) words that students are likely to meet often in academic texts across the content areas.

4. Use an explicit instructional routine to teach new vocabulary. Create opportunities for students to encounter new words in various activities & contexts.
References


References


Torgesen, J. (2004). Lessons learned from research on interventions for students who have difficulty learning to read. In P. McCardle & V. Chhabra (Eds.), The voice of evidence in reading research (pp. 355-382). Baltimore, MD: Brookes.


EXPLICIT VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION: DIRECTLY TEACHING SPECIFIC WORDS

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
Books, online resources, video links, and more!

WWW.ALOHIOLITERACY.ORG
<table>
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<tr>
<th>BOOK</th>
<th>AUTHOR</th>
<th>RATING</th>
<th>READ</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Explicit Instruction</strong></td>
<td>Archer &amp; Hughes</td>
<td>★★★★☆☆</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>NOTES</strong></td>
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<td>Super practical resource for teachers! It can be used for special education, general education, and all grade levels. It even include sample lesson plans and teacher checklists!</td>
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<td><strong>Bringing Words to Life</strong></td>
<td>Beck, McKeown, &amp; Kucan</td>
<td>★★★★☆☆</td>
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<td><strong>NOTES</strong></td>
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<td>Awesome book that talks about the three tiers of vocabulary. It is great resource for teaching ALL ages of students!</td>
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YouTube Videos

A Schoolwide Vocabulary Approach

https://youtu.be/7YtLXcbpg-4

Using Instructional Routines

https://youtu.be/ZzvPwvxnBrQ
YouTube Videos

Pronunciation of Multisyllabic Vocabulary Words
https://youtu.be/TfNYIFSwEU

Checking Students' Understanding of the Word
https://youtu.be/ltSjtcOlf0
An Explicit Vocabulary Instructional Routine in Action

https://youtu.be/IcOP2oY43Kk

Engaging Actively with New Words

https://vimeo.com/50547000
Practice Leads to Learning

https://youtu.be/9JYJ6A8OQdg

Word Smarts - Using Morphology Bases & Affixes to Develop Vocabulary Skills

https://youtu.be/8bfyORN2Scw
Ohio's Plan to Raise Literacy Achievement
Ohio Department of Education


Ohio's Plan to Raise Literacy Achievement outlines evidence-based language and literacy teaching and learning from birth through grade 12. "This plan articulates a state literacy framework aimed at promoting proficiency in reading, writing and communication for all learners. It is driven by scientific research and encourages a professional movement toward implementing data-based, differentiated and evidence-based practices in all manners of educational settings. Specifically, this plan illustrates the strong language and literacy efforts in place in Ohio and the state's vision to expand and strengthen them to support improvement." (Ohio's Plan to Raise Literacy Achievement, January 2020)

Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices
What Works Clearinghouse


A free practice guide that provides five recommendations for improving adolescent

National Reading Panel
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development


Find out what the National Reading Panel's review of the research reveals about the best instructional methods for teaching reading.
INVESTIGATION OF EXAMPLES & NON-EXAMPLES
- Partner or group activities can get students talking with each other about new vocabulary words. Students can work together to generate examples of target words.

- You might encourage students to draw upon their own lives or experiences when generating examples or non-examples of a target word. After they have generated examples with their partners, have students share out their answers to the class.

For example:
Share with your partner a time when someone showed integrity? What things did they do to make you think they had integrity?

CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE WORDS
- New words can be discussed within the context of the textbook or current unit of study. The point is to get students to think about the words’ meanings and to use them in various forms and situations.

For example:
An example of a character from the text who is assiduous is _____.

The country’s constitution was amended to allow women to vote. Describe with your partner how it was amended.

Work with a partner to find two examples in the text of when a character showed empathy.

Do you think that the man gave a coherent answer to the officer’s question? Is coherent a good way to describe his response?
**Writing Tasks**

Writing activities facilitate engagement with new vocabulary

**Recording Words, Examples & Non-Examples**
- Have students rewrite definitions in their own words. This could mean coming up with their own example and non-example scenarios for the word.
- Students can record this information in a vocabulary notebook or set of index cards that they add to and reference throughout the year.

**Writing Prompts**
- Ask students to complete sentence starters

For example:
*The politician used to be very pretentious until...*

- Present other extended writing activities

For example:
*Can you think of someone who is pretentious? What does that person do that makes them seem pretentious?*

**Analysis of the Text**
- Use writing activities that encourage students to return to the text’s topic or the part of the text in which they encountered the vocabulary. This is one way to bridge the connection between the word’s meaning and the meaning of the text. This helps to deepen students’ understanding of the content and the vocabulary word.

For example:
*After reading the text, describe the human impact on the environment.*

*Describe how rainforests play a vital role in regulating climate.*

**www.allohioliteracy.org**
Is it a Word Worth Teaching?

Tier 2 vocabulary words are high utility words found across the subject areas. Instruction in these words can add to students' language ability and enhance their reading.

To determine if a word falls in Tier 2

ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:

- Is it a word that your students are unlikely to know?
- Is the word frequently used in written language?
- Is the word used by mature language users?
- Does the word have multiple meanings?
- Will students have ways to explain the word using everyday language and other words that are already well known to them?
- Is the word necessary for the comprehension of grade-level text?
- Will the word help students understand concepts and reading materials in other content areas?
- Are students likely to encounter the word on standardized tests?
- Are students likely to encounter the word in academic texts used in higher grade levels?

If you checked yes to most items, then the word likely meets criteria for Tier 2 vocabulary.

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LEVERAGING TEAMS TO IDENTIFY VOCABULARY TO TEACH
Follow this system-wide process

Identify Words
Teacher-based teams identify lists of vocabulary that would be helpful for their students to know prior to their grade level and words they think would be beneficial to teach at the grade level.

Go Further
Using the information provided by building leadership teams, district leadership teams create a scope and sequence document of Tier 2 vocabulary words to teach at each grade level.

Compile Lists
Building leadership teams then compile this information across teacher-based teams and bring the information forward for discussion at the district leadership team.

Take Action
Teacher-based teams implement the district-adopted scope and sequence of the Tier 2 vocabulary.

Monitor Impact
Teacher-based teams monitor student growth in learning and reading.

Reflect & Adjust
Teacher-based teams reflect on the success of the vocabulary scope and sequence and recommend amendments to the list as needed.

WWW.ALOHIOLITERACY.ORG
**RECORDING WORDS, EXAMPLES & NON-EXAMPLES**
- Students can record this information in a vocabulary notebook or set of index cards that they add to and reference throughout the year.
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For example: 
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Describe how rainforests play a vital role in regulating climate.

**WRITING PROMPTS**
- Ask students to complete sentence starters.

For example: 
The politician used to be very pretentious until...

- Present other extended writing activities.

For example: 
Can you think of someone who is pretentious? What does that person do that makes them seem pretentious?
5 Types of Context Clues

Inference: The word’s meaning is not explained. Look for nonspecific clues before or after the sentence.

Definition Clues: The word is defined in the sentence. *Signal words:* are, is, means, refers to.

Example Clues: Examples of the word are given in the sentence or the following sentence. *Signal words:* such as, like, including, for example, for instance.

Antonym Clues: The word is contrasted with another word or phrase that means the opposite. *Signal words:* whereas, as opposed to, in contrast, unlike, though, however, but.

Synonym Clues: Another word or phrase is used that has a similar meaning. *Signal words:* also, identical, as, like, likewise, same, similarly, too.
Show and Write

Draw something in the box to help you remember:

Three Synonyms
1.
2.
3.

Example Sentence:

Definition in Your Words:

Word:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORD</th>
<th>DEFINITION</th>
<th>DRAW IT</th>
<th>SYNONYMS</th>
<th>SENTENCE</th>
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INSTRUCTIONAL ROUTINE FOR VOCABULARY

Use this step-by-step procedure to explicitly teach target vocabulary words.

**STEP 1. INTRODUCE THE WORD**
Begin by spelling the word and telling its pronunciation. Guide students in decoding the word through syllabication. Have the students repeat the word until they can accurately pronounce it.

**STEP 2. INTRODUCE THE MEANING**
Next, introduce the meaning of the word by using student-friendly explanations and word part analysis.

**STEP 3. ILLUSTRATE WITH EXAMPLES & NONEXAMPLES**
Then, present students with examples & nonexamples of the vocabulary term’s use with a number of concrete, visual, or verbal examples.

**STEP 4. CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING**
Finally, check for understanding by involving students in interacting with the word. Ask students to generate their own examples, distinguish between examples and nonexamples, or answer questions.

**REMINDERS:**
- The routine may require modification based on the instructional context and individual student needs.

**REFERENCES**
Essential Actions to Introducing a Word

- Write or display the word
- Pronounce the whole word or break the word into its decodable parts before saying the whole word
- Have students repeat the word

Student-friendly Definitions are Descriptions that:

- Use clear language
- Contain known words
- Tell how the vocabulary word is typically used
INTRODUCE THE WORD

Begin by spelling the word and telling its pronunciation or guiding students in decoding the word through syllabication. Have students repeat the word until they can accurately pronounce it.

INTRODUCE THE MEANING

Introduce the meaning of the word by using student-friendly explanations and word part analysis.

ILLUSTRATE WITH EXAMPLES AND NON-EXAMPLES

Present students with examples and non-examples of the vocabulary word's use with a number of concrete, visual, and verbal examples.

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

Check students' understanding by actively involving them in interacting with the word. Ask students to generate their own examples, distinguish between examples and non-examples, or answer questions.