



Provide explicit vocabulary instruction



Explicit vocabulary instruction should be a part of all content-area classes. This type of instruction teaches students strategies for deciphering the meaning of new words, resulting in stronger independent reading skills due to an improved ability to construct the meaning of a text.

How to carry out the recommendation	Potential roadblocks
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Dedicate a portion of the regular classroom lesson to explicit vocabulary instruction.2. Use repeated exposure to new words in multiple oral and written contexts and allow sufficient practice sessions.3. Give sufficient opportunities to use new vocabulary in a variety of contexts through activities such as discussion, writing, and extended reading.4. Provide students with strategies to make them independent vocabulary learners.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Students may vary in their response to different vocabulary instruction strategies.2. Teachers may not know how to select words to teach, especially in content areas.3. Teachers may perceive that they do not have time to teach vocabulary.



Reference: Kamil, M. L., Borman, G. D., Dole, J., Kral, C. C., Salinger, T., & Torgesen, J. (2008). *Improving adolescent literacy: Effective classroom and intervention practices* (NCEE 2008-4027). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/8>



How to carry out the recommendation

1. Dedicate a portion of the regular classroom lesson to explicit vocabulary instruction.

Ensure students have an understanding of vocabulary prior to engaging in reading selections. Exposing students to the vocabulary first may result in students having an easier time while reading. The amount of class time dedicated to vocabulary instruction will vary depending on the amount of new vocabulary included in the reading selection and the student's prior knowledge.

2. Use repeated exposure to new words in multiple oral and written contexts and allow sufficient practice sessions.

Students learn vocabulary most effectively when exposed to words multiple times, ideally over an extended length of time. In reality, studies have shown that it can take up to 17 interactions for students to retain the meaning of a new word. Provide students with explicit instruction for frequently repeated words so that students have ample opportunities to learn vocabulary. When words do not appear frequently in a reading selection, provide students with definitions, but do not target the words for explicit vocabulary instruction.

3. Give sufficient opportunities to use new vocabulary in a variety of contexts through activities such as discussion, writing, and extended reading.

Students will best learn the correct meanings and uses of vocabulary when practicing new words across multiple domain areas, including speaking, writing, and reading. Through these experiences, students learn how to effectively use the new vocabulary words and better identify new vocabulary words when reading texts.

4. Provide students with strategies to make them independent vocabulary learners.

One approach is to teach students the function of different parts of words (root words, prefixes, and suffixes) that they can utilize to decipher the meaning of new words they encounter. Another method is to support students in using text tools, such as glossaries.

Potential roadblocks and how to address them

Roadblock	Suggested Approach
<p><i>Students may vary in their response to different vocabulary instruction strategies.</i></p>	<p>Provide multiple and varied learning opportunities to support students in learning new vocabulary. Some students may learn best when they visualize new vocabulary, while others may learn best when they listen to the meaning of new words. Teaching methods may include direct instruction, class discussions, and computer-guided learning experiences.</p>
<p><i>Teachers may not know how to select words to teach, especially in content areas.</i></p>	<p>Identify essential vocabulary versus highly specialized vocabulary and jargon words as a focus for explicit instruction opportunities. One method used is to identify Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III words.</p> <p>Tier I words are high-frequency words already known by students and not recommended for explicit vocabulary instruction.</p> <p>Tier II words occur frequently in the text, are less familiar to students, are important for understanding current context, and are expected to be used by students in the future. Tier II words should be the focus of explicit vocabulary instruction.</p> <p>Tier III words are identified differently as student grade levels increase. In early grade levels, Tier III words, while helpful in understanding a specific text, provide little value to understanding other texts in the near future. In this case, supply the definition of the Tier III word and forego explicit instruction activities. In later grades, Tier III words, while rarely used outside of the content area, are essential for understanding within the content area. These Tier III words should be a focus for explicit vocabulary instruction.</p> <p>A different selection method identifies words that are repeated frequently and are unfamiliar to students for explicit instruction. The value of this method decreases as reading levels increase because students are familiar with most high-frequency words.</p>
<p><i>Teachers may perceive that they do not have time to teach vocabulary.</i></p>	<p>Spending a short, but focused amount of time on explicit vocabulary instruction supports students in becoming effective independent learners of vocabulary. Increasing student skills for deciphering new vocabulary will make it so less time is needed for focusing on teaching new words, meaning more time is available for learning new content. Technology can provide individualized, independent vocabulary learning experiences for students.</p>



For more information on the research evidence and references to support this recommendation, or for more detailed explanation from the What Works Clearinghouse committee who developed this recommendation, please refer to the practice guide cited at the bottom of the first page of this document.