



Content Vocabulary Instruction, Distilled*

*Distilled (di-stild') adj. 4. Separated or extracted essence

Why we need to explicitly teach vocabulary ...

- Knowledge of content vocabulary helps build background knowledge.
- Pre-teaching key vocabulary provides scaffolding for struggling learners.
- Words at the heart of the discipline are critical for content understanding.
- Explicit vocabulary instruction has been proven to increase student achievement and close the achievement gap.
- Language is both the foundation of and the vehicle for learning.
- The language a person uses indicates his/her understandings and insights about the world and his/her place in it.

What explicit vocabulary instruction is...	What it is NOT ...
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- Asking students to provide explanations, descriptions and examples of the word rather than a definition.
- Giving students multiple and varied exposures to the words.
- Requiring students to use their own words and non-linguistic representations of the words.
- Teaching word parts (root words, prefixes, suffixes) as a way to unlock new vocabulary.
- Giving students multiple opportunities to “play” and interact with the words.
- Including key academic vocabulary in the planning of any instruction.
- Making connections between new vocabulary and students’ background knowledge.
- Implementing a systematic plan for building the content vocabulary of your students.

- Giving randomly chosen word lists not connected to the content and context of the learning.
- Having students memorize words in isolation.
- Asking students to look up the definitions in the dictionary and write sentences for each word.
- Giving students 10, 20, or some other number of words to look up each week, quizzing students on Friday, and then beginning the process again the next week.



Strategies for selecting content vocabulary

- Select . . .
1. words that students will encounter frequently in the discipline/subject area
 2. words which students will encounter in their reading or need to use in their work.
 3. words that are critical for the understanding of key concepts.
 4. content words that might be frequently misunderstood.
 5. words that increase a student’s knowledge of terminology important to the content of the discipline.

Steps for planning vocabulary instruction

Make a systematic plan for the implementation of your vocabulary instruction, employing research-based best practices. For example, you might use the six-step process suggested by Robert Marzano and Debra Pickering (2005):

1. Provide a description, explanation, or example of the new term.
2. Ask students to restate the description, explanation or example in their own words.
3. Ask student to construct a picture, symbol, or graphic representing the term.
4. Engage students periodically in activities that help them add to their knowledge of the terms in their notebooks.
5. Periodically ask students to discuss the terms with one another.
6. Involve students periodically in games that allow them to play with terms.

(Quoted from *Building Academic Vocabulary*, Alexandria, VA: ASCD)

Strategies for reinforcing content vocabulary

3-2-1 \$2 summaries Headline summaries Vanity Tags Key Points Summary Word Walls Acrostics	Written conversations Think-Write-Share Word Splash One-Sentence Summary Word Sorts Frequent use of words by both teacher and student	Framed Paragraph Sentence Starters Give One-Get One Frayer Model Alphabet Game Concept/Word Map Sticky Notes
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