

### Survey Question

9. In this subject, the teacher helps me to build my vocabulary

Australian  
Professional  
Standard

Professional Knowledge Domain

Standard 2: Know the content and how to teach it

Focus areas:

- 2.1 Content and teaching strategies of the teaching area
- 2.2 Content selection and organisation
- 2.5 Literacy and numeracy strategies

What does this  
sound like in the  
classroom?

"Writing down a list of words from the board and then looking up the definition in the dictionary for homework doesn't really help me learn the new vocabulary for a subject."

Why is this  
important?

Gone are the days of distributing a vocabulary list to students, giving them the week to find the appropriate definition and issuing a test to ascertain their 'knowledge' of the words (which too often remained discrete and disconnected). The research now shows that students need multiple and various exposures to a word before they fully understand and can apply the word in context. Vocabulary instruction and knowledge of word meanings can significantly help students' reading skills, especially when combined with the other four pillars of good reading instruction recommended by the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency and comprehension (Hattie, 2009; Rowe, 2005). Sufficient background knowledge and vocabulary is required to make written texts meaningful and interesting to students (Rowe, 2005).

Vocabulary instruction needs to start in the early years of learning and be sustained all the way through schooling (Hiebert & Kamil, 2005). Vocabulary needs to be explicitly taught and involve more than copying and studying definitions (Archer, 2011). Effective vocabulary instruction should be multifaceted and include teaching individual words, exposure to rich oral and written language, and building word-learning and linking strategies (Hiebert & Kamil, 2005).

Researchers (Archer, 2011; National Panel on Reading, 2000; Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986) have broadly agreed that the characteristics of effective vocabulary instruction include:

- providing both clear definitional and contextual information including word meanings and contextual examples
- involving students in deeper processing, by applying words in ways

- that require creativity and connections with existing knowledge
- giving students more than one or two exposures to the words. Multiple encounters with target words over time will increase reading comprehension.

**What strategies have been shown to work in the classroom?**

Throw out the glossary as a starting tool for learning new vocabulary, and encourage students to engage with new words with a dynamic or contextual initial introduction of vocabulary. Try the 'Kick Me' exercise (see video resources below), which could be applied across all subjects. Often vocabulary terms are introduced but not reviewed on a regular basis, so aim where possible to distribute the practice of new vocabulary over subsequent lessons and include a planned, cumulative review of terms (Archer, 2011). For a vocabulary word or concept to be truly understood, a student needs to have learned both when and when not to apply it (Archer, 2011).

To prepare for vocabulary instruction, teachers should:

- Determine which words will be the most useful to students both now and in the future. For example, identify which words are unknown to students, important to the understanding of a passage or unit, or the most difficult to learn or infer.
- Determine how each word's meaning will be communicated to students. For example, present a student friendly explanation, guide students through a formal definition, or explore the meaning of embedded prefixes, suffixes or roots.
- Develop examples to illustrate each word, and non-examples to establish what the concept is not. This may include concrete, visual or verbal examples of how the term is used. Extension strategies could include synonyms, antonyms, word families, word parts, and multiple-meaning words.

A routine to explicitly teach a vocabulary word could involve:

1. Introducing the word and explaining why it is being taught
2. Introducing the meaning of the word (using one of the strategies above)
3. Illustrating with examples
4. Checking for students' understanding through practice and review

As a revision or consolidation tool, graphic organisers can also help students categorise and remember critical information like key vocabulary words. These could include word maps, word walls, vocabulary logs, semantic mapping and concept mapping.

**What three things can I try in my classroom tomorrow?**

1. Ask students to draw a picture of the word or what the word represents. This will encourage them to unpack the word's meaning.
2. Instead of asking the students to find the definition of a word, ask them to find synonyms and antonyms for each word on a list. Give each student a nametag that includes either the critical word or its synonyms. Let students figure out which words are related and form synonym groups.

3. Hold a 'Vocabulary Bingo' game, where bingo cards have definitions in each of the squares. Students can sign one of each other's bingo squares if they know which word fits the definition. With fully signed off bingo squares, draw student names out of container and students can cross off the square signed by that student. When they have four/five in a row, the four/five students whose names are crossed off on the card must know the correct word.

What opportunities are there for collaboration with my colleagues?

Ask a colleague to observe your class to assess the use of key words identified for the unit of work. It may be that your colleague takes a simple 'tally' as they hear the words spoken by the students, or you may be able to gradate the key words according to depth of understanding. This could give you a good indication of whether or not students have achieved satisfactory understanding.

Where can I find out more?

#### Video

- Teaching Channel: Kick Me activity
- Vocabulary paint chips
- Anita Archer's **Explicit Instruction** website
- Teaching Channel: Extending Understanding – Vocabulary Development
- Teaching Channel: Learning Difficult Vocabulary

#### Referenced articles, books and other great reads:

- Archer, A. & Hughes, C. (2011) *Explicit Instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Blachowicz, C, Fisher, P. (2003) Best Practices in Vocabulary Instruction: What Effective Teachers Do. In *Best Practices in Literacy Instruction*, edited by L. M. Morrow, L. B. Gambrell, and M. Pressley, 87-110. New York: Guilford Press.
- Hattie, J. (2009) *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*. Routledge Press.
- Hiebert, H. & Kamil, M. (2005) *Teaching and learning vocabulary: bringing research to practice*.
- McKeown, M. G., and I. L. Beck. (2004) Direct and Rich Vocabulary Instruction. In *Vocabulary Instruction*, edited by J. F. Baumann and E. J. Kame'enui, 13-27. New York: Guilford Press.
- Rowe, K. (2005) Australian National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy: [http://research.acer.edu.au/tll\\_misc/5/](http://research.acer.edu.au/tll_misc/5/)
- Stahl, S. & Fairbanks, M. (1986) The effects of vocabulary instruction: A model-based meta-analysis, *Review of Educational Research*, 56(1)
- United States National Panel on Reading, (2000).