



SIGHT WORDS

Sight words are high frequency words which make up the bulk of what we read. **Approximately 300 words account for over 70 percent of the words in most reading material** (Gillet & Bernard, 1985). Learning sight words helps to make reading fluent and complements other approaches to learning to read.

Sight words need to be recognised immediately as an automatic response in reading.

The following is one method which helps learners build their bank of sight words:

1. Choose a sight word bank. You may choose one that complements the reading scheme you are using in your classroom, but there are many available (Fry's is my choice, but you can use Dolch, The Essential List, Cohen, Schonell, New Zealand basic Word List, etc.)
2. Identify what the student does and does not know. Pretest the student one on one. Responses must be automatic to register as a known sight word. Any delay in recognising the word, even if correct, does not count as a known sight word. Don't assume any student has no words.

Present the words individually in a font the student has been exposed to previously. There are no cues accompanying the word. Individual flash cards are suitable. Don't present a list as this will distract some students.

You can vary the number of sight words to be mastered according to the child's ability, but three would be minimum. At the moment I have one child with 20, all at various stages of mastery, but I have supplemented these 20 with games so it is a fun activity for the whole family. As he masters 5 I replace them.

For a word to be "mastered" it has to be recognised instantly on five different occasions consecutively. Learning sight words is not a writing activity and the focus should be on instant recognition. However, as the student's bank of sight words grows, it should be accessible for the student to use as a reference for their writing. It also provides a bank of words for you to review to ensure the words are in long term memory. If the word is not known when reviewed, it goes back into the process to be learnt again.

3. Familiarisation

When presenting the word for the first time, some students will benefit from your writing the word in front of them, saying the word as you write. Ask the student to say the word after you. Put the word into a sentence. Ask the student to say the word.

Do this for the five words. Do not choose words that are very alike (such as here and where), or words that start with the same letter for students experiencing difficulty.

When all five words are displayed in front of the child, ask them, "Which word is (you say the word)?" for each of the words. Do this more than once if necessary. Try to improve speed in response. Depending on ability, some students may learn less words, some more. Ask student/s which words they know. They can pick up the card and keep it if they know it. Turn the words over. As you turn them facing the student, say the word or ask the student to say the word. Turn it back over. Do this for all five words. Vary to suit. Ask the student to turn the words over and say the words.

Some students will need more regular exposure to the words and you may restrict the number of sight words being learnt. Put 3 to 5 on individual cards on a key ring or curtain ring. The student has the key ring with them most of the time. Have the students say each one multiple times a day. The individual cards should all be the same font to start with. You might like to vary the presentation as the individual student demonstrates how they learn best. Some will prefer colour, others picture cues. Eventually you will need for the student to know the word instantly without any cues and in any font. I tick the back of the card with a permanent pen. Once there are five ticks I can be reasonably sure the student has mastered the word. I test again in about a fortnight to check. I give students a small reward for FIVE TICK CARDS – a star on a chart is all you need. It's good to have a goal, so you might have a rocket going to the moon with a 25-rung ladder, or similar.

Play different games with the words to reinforce drill sessions. Some games suit a small bank of words, others are useful to practise the current words and reinforce previously mastered sight words. Choose games to suit your student/s needs. Laminating basic shapes (such as the fish, bingo cards or board games) with blanks allows you to sticky tape individual words over. These are easily peeled off when not needed anymore. Parents may be happy to play sight word games at home.

Sight Word Games Organisation

Once students have a common bank of sight words you can develop some games for consolidation. Start with the first 10 and call this group the 10 Club (or the Red Club if you sort your sight words by colour). Use the same game ideas for students who have larger banks of words, e.g., 50 Club, etc. Laminate cards and game boards so you can re-use them for different sight words. Students know if they are in the 50 Club, they can pick a 50 Board Game. Use the same board game layouts for each level and the student will not have to learn new game rules each time.

Memory

Make up two flash cards with each word. Spread the cards, face down, on a surface. Student turns a card over, and says the word. If they turn over both cards, they say the word again and “win” both cards.

Go Fish

The flash cards are fish shapes which have a metal paper slide on them. The student “fishes” with a rod and string with a magnet on the end. If they can say the word they “catch” they keep it. Adapt this to all sea creatures. Some could be turtles, dolphins, etc.

Drawing from the Deck

All sight words cards are placed face down in a deck on the table. Students take a card and turn up it and if they say the word they keep the card. If not, they put it down beside the deck. Winner is the student with the most cards at the end of the game.

Word Race

There are two lines – a start and a finish with a grid or lines in between (about 5). Each student has a cardboard plane or car. As they read a sight word (which may be held up by another), they move one space for each correct word.

Bingo

Each player has a card with sight words on it. Someone calls the words and students cover the words as they are called. When all the words are covered, the winner calls, “Bingo!”.

Board Games

Adapt a board game so that, as the student moves around the board, they are expected to say words. Use any board game template. You can download my boardgames designed for this purpose from www.teacherspayteachers/Store/learning-solutions

Say a Word

Draw a spiral path (such as a snake) and mark off into spaces. In each space write a sight word. Each player moves according to a throw of a die. When a player lands on a space they say the word. If they know it they stay there. If they don't know it, they move back a space until they know the word. Make sure you adapt this game to the appropriate level so students achieve success.

Tic Tac Toe

Each player has a board with a 3X3 grid of 9 squares. They place their individual words in each square. All sight words to be learnt by all players are in the deck and the deck is scattered, face down, between the players. Each player takes a card and tries to match it with their board. If it is a match, they keep it and try to get three in a row, horizontally, vertically or diagonally. If it is not a match they return it to the table face down. The next player may choose that card if they need it, or choose one of their own. First with three in a row is the winner (just like in Tic Tac Toe).