

This document provides a summary of Recommendation 1 from the WWC practice guide *Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices*. Full reference is on the last page.

CONTENT: **Reading**
GRADE LEVEL(S): **4–12**
LEVEL OF EVIDENCE: **Strong**

Recommendation

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

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

Instructional strategies from the examples

- Introduce students to new vocabulary prior to reading the specific text selected.

South Carolina standards alignment

ELA: RL.LCS.10, RI.LCS.10, RI.LCS.9

TEACHER: INST.PS.2

Ensure students understand 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.

Instructional strategies from the examples

- Engage students in multiple opportunities to learn new vocabulary from specific reading selections.
- Provide explicit instruction for frequently repeated words; provide scaffolded support and definitions for words that do not appear frequently.

South Carolina standards alignment

ELA: RL.LCS.10, RI.LCS.10, RI.LCS.9

TEACHER: INST.LSP.3, INST.AM.1

Students learn vocabulary most effectively when exposed to words multiple times, ideally over an extended length of time. 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.

Instructional strategies from the examples

- Provide opportunities for students to practice new vocabulary in multiple different domains, including speaking, writing, and reading.

South Carolina standards alignment

ELA: RL.LCS.10, RI.LCS.10, RI.LCS.9, W.MCC.1, W.MCC.2, W.MCC.3, W.L.4, W.RC.6, C.MC.1

TEACHER: INST.PS.1

Students will best learn the correct meanings and use 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.

Instructional strategies from the examples

- Focus instructional time on teaching root words, prefixes, and suffixes as they relate to the new vocabulary word.
- Explicitly teach students how to use text tools, such as a glossary, to decipher the meaning of a new vocabulary word.

South Carolina standards alignment

ELA: RL.LCS.10, RI.LCS.10, RI.LCS.9

TEACHER: INST.MS.1, INST.PIC.2, INST.PIC.5, INST.PIC.6, INST.PIC.7, INST.AM.1, INST.Q.1, INST.Q.2, INST.Q.3, INST.Q.4, INST.Q.5, INST.Q.6, INST.Q.7, INST.Q.8, INST.TH.1, INST.TH.2, INST.PS.1, PLAN.SW.1, PLAN.SW.3

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 responses 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 are 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 the 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>

Roadblock	Suggested Approach
<i>Teachers may perceive that they do not have time to teach vocabulary.</i>	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.

Reference: Gersten, R., Beckmann, S., Clarke, B., Foegen, A., Marsh, L., Star, J. R., & Witzel, B. (2009). Assisting students struggling with mathematics: Response to Intervention (RtI) for elementary and middle schools (NCEE 2009-4060). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/2>