

Michigan's Adult Literacy Project



Reading Resources, Part 2

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Meaning Skills – Vocabulary

A person's vocabulary consists of the individual words that he/she understands or knows the meaning. Students need to have a diverse vocabulary because vocabulary is crucial for getting meaning from text. Without a good knowledge of the key vocabulary in a text, a reader will likely struggle to understand the written word.

Vocabulary building is an ongoing process. Take a look at the following list:

- At the age of 4, individuals know about 5,600 words.
- At the age of 5, individuals know about 9,600 words.
- At the age of 6, individuals know about 14,700 words.
- At the age of 7, individuals know about 21,200 words.
- At the age of 8, individuals know about 26,300 words.
- At the age of 9, individuals know about 29,300 words.
- At the age of 10, individuals know about 34,300 words.
- In adulthood, many individuals know in excess of 50,000 - 100,000 words.

What this chart shows is that the more an individual learns, the more vocabulary he/she will know. No matter what a person's age is, he/she needs to continue to learn. Words are simply "symbols" for ideas that then formulate knowledge which is gained in our society primarily through words. However, the average adult has a vocabulary of about 40,000 to 50,000 words out of a language that has more than one million different words.

So, what words should you teach? You won't be able to directly teach your students all the words in the text that they might not already know. In fact, there are several reasons why you shouldn't directly teach all unknown words:

- The text may have too many unknown words for direct instruction to be used
- Direct instruction can take a lot of classroom time that may be better spent on having students read
- Students can understand most texts without knowing the meaning of every word in the text
- Students need opportunities to use their own word-learning strategies to learn on their own the meaning of unknown words.

So, what types of vocabulary words should be taught?

- Important words. Look at the text and directly teach those words that are important for a student's understanding of a concept or the text. Although you will probably not teach

all of the words that they do not know, make sure that you teach word-learning strategies as part of your classroom activities.

- Useful words. Teach words that students are likely to see again and again, both in their academic world and in real life.
- Difficult words. Teach students words that are particularly difficult for them. Words with multiple meanings often meet this criterion. Students may have difficulty understanding that words with the same spelling and/or pronunciation may have different definitions depending on their context. Students also may have difficulty with idiomatic expressions such as “I get the picture.”

In order to successfully use words, students need to “own” the word. There are three levels of word knowledge:

- Unknown – the word is completely unfamiliar and its meaning is unknown
- Acquainted – the word is somewhat familiar and the student has some idea of the word’s basic meaning
- Established – the word is very familiar and the student can recognize it immediately and use it correctly

The research literature also identifies four different types of word learning. They are:

- Learning a new meaning for a known word
- Learning the meaning for a new word representing a known concept
- Learning the meaning of a new word representing an unknown concept
- Clarifying and enriching the meaning of a new word

Adults have many real life experiences that provide them with the opportunity to continually learn new words. The trick to teaching vocabulary is to have as many ways as possible to teach word meaning so that students “own the word.” Words are like telephone, credit card, and PIN numbers, the more we repeat them, and use them, the more we’re likely to remember them. If you recycle vocabulary in interesting and imaginative ways for students, some of it will eventually stick!

Background Knowledge

Students bring to your classroom a rich array of life experiences that can be used to acquire new knowledge. Adult students exhibit better reading skills when reading familiar texts. However, even with unfamiliar texts, students often have real life experiences or background knowledge regarding the topic. To assist students in attaining better comprehension skills, have them review “what they really know” about a topic before reading a passage. You may also wish to use reading materials that connect students’ prior knowledge, experiences, and interests with what is being taught.

In order to activate background knowledge:

- Put students in interactive discussion formats so that their ideas and experiences come into direct contact with others
- Bridge the gap between personal and text knowledge during activities, and between home and school experiences, languages, and cultures
- Understand and respect diversity
- Instruct students on a moment-to-moment basis, responding to confusion and providing support on a continuing and evolving basis predicated on what students know and don't know; using the discussion to make instructional decisions

Help students:

- Make simple inferences
- Establish causal connections
- Recognize stereotyped situations
- Predict and generate plans
- Track their goals
- Recognize thematic relationships between individuals and society
- Employ beliefs about work
- Access and utilize raw facts

Silent Reading Comprehension

There is more research on reading comprehension instruction than any of the other major topics of reading. According to the National Reading Panel, research strongly supports eight different kinds of instructional strategies for teaching effective comprehension skills.

“The eight kinds of instruction that appear to be effective and most promising for classroom instruction are:

- Comprehension monitoring in which the reader learns how to be aware or conscious of his or her understanding during reading and learns procedures to deal with problems in understanding as they arise.
- Cooperative learning in which readers work together to learn strategies in the context of reading.
- Graphic and semantic organizers that allow the reader to represent graphically (write or draw) the meanings and relationships of the ideas that underlie the words in the text.
- Story structure from which the reader learns to ask and answer who, what, where, when, and why questions about the plot and, in some cases, maps out the time line, characters, and events in stories.

- Question answering in which the reader answers questions posed by the teacher and is given feedback on the correctness of his/her answers.
- Question generation in which the reader asks himself or herself what, when, where, why, what will happen, how, and who questions.
- Summarization in which the reader attempts to identify and write the main or most important ideas that integrate or unite the other ideas or meanings of the text into a coherent whole.
- Multiple-strategy teaching in which the reader uses several of the procedures in interaction with the teacher over the text. Multiple-strategy teaching is effective when the procedures are used flexibly and appropriately by the reader or the teacher in naturalistic contexts.”¹

The research not only identifies the types of comprehension strategies that are effective, but also how to teach the comprehension strategies. Effective instruction is explicit and direct. It can be accomplished through cooperative or collaborative learning and effective instruction helps learners to use comprehension strategies flexibly and in combination.

So, in order to ensure effective learning of reading strategies, the teacher should:

- Provide a direct explanation of the strategy, explaining why the strategy helps comprehension and how to apply the strategy
- Model or demonstrate how to apply the strategy, usually by “thinking aloud” while reading the text that the students are using
- Provide guided practice as students learn how and when to apply the strategy
- Help students practice the application of a strategy until they can implement the strategy independently
- Use cooperative learning by having students work together as partners while they apply the strategy.
- Help students to coordinate and adjust several strategies to assist comprehension, e.g. asking questions about the text while they are reading, summarizing parts of the text, clarifying words and sentences that are not understood, and predicting what might occur next in the text.

¹ Krudeneier, J. Ed. D. Research-based principles for adult basic education reading instruction. (2002). National Institute for Literacy. Produced by RMC Research Corporation. Portsmouth: NH. Retrieved from the World Wide Web at:
http://www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/publications/html/adult_ed/index.html.

Strategy - Cloze Procedure

A cloze activity is a useful means of assessing students' reading strategies and abilities to make sense of texts. A cloze procedure involves deleting words from a passage of text and replacing them with blank lines. The student must provide the author's original word (or a suitable synonym) for each space. Such use of a modified cloze technique gives teachers an indication of a student's ability to construct meaning.

The cloze technique is used to:

- Identify students' knowledge and understanding of the reading process
- Determine which cueing systems readers effectively employ to construct meaning from print
- Assess the extent of students' vocabularies and knowledge of a subject
- Encourage students to monitor for meaning while reading
- Encourage students to think critically about text and content

To prepare materials for cloze exercises, any of the following techniques may be used:

1. Select a self-contained passage of a length appropriate for the academic level of the students being assessed. Use materials easily read by the students.
2. Leave the first and last sentences and all punctuation intact.
3. Carefully select the words for omission using a word-count formula, such as every fifth word or other teacher-defined criteria. To assess students' knowledge of the topic or their abilities to use semantic cues, delete content words which carry meaning, such as nouns, main verbs, adjectives and adverbs. To assess students' use of syntactic cues, delete some conjunctions, prepositions, and auxiliary words.
4. When preparing the final draft of the passage, make all blanks of equal length to avoid including visual clues about the lengths of omitted words.
5. Have the students read the entire passage before they fill in the blanks.
6. Encourage the students to fill in each blank if possible.
7. Suggest that students reread the completed passage.

Scanning

Scanning is a fast reading technique that is used to look for specific information in a text. Scanning can be used to look up a phone number, read through the small ads in a newspaper, or for browsing TV schedules, timetables, lists, catalogues or web pages for information. Scanning is also useful when studying or looking to find specific information from a book or article quickly as there is not always time to read every word.

Scanning Activities with Lower-Level Readers

Provide students with authentic or real-life materials. Have them find their favorite recipe in a cookbook or the phone number of a plumber in the local Yellow Pages. Scanning strategies can also be used to locate words from a student's reading word list in print media, such as newspapers or magazines. Provide students with a newspaper or magazine article and have them "Find the Words" that they have on their reading list. Beginning reading lists to use include the Dolch and Frye Reading Lists.

Scavenger Hunts: A Scanning Activity for Higher-Level Readers

The newspaper scavenger hunt is a good reading exercise which familiarizes students with the format of local English newspapers. It is also a fun way to practice both scanning and skimming reading skills. Additionally, students will become aware of important news events.

When making a scavenger hunt, decide on the level of difficulty that you want your students to encounter and choose appropriately. You might also take into consideration which news events or sections of the newspaper are of interest to your students, as well as any possible follow-up activities to the scavenger hunt. Scavenger hunts can be created with novels, short stories, phone books, and many other texts. The following is an example of the types of questions that can be used at different levels. Notice the different levels of critical thinking skills required.

Sample Types of Questions for Newspaper Scavenger Hunt

Easy Level

1. How much is the newspaper?
2. What are the names of the comic strips?
3. What is the weather forecast for today in Buffalo?
4. What sports are shown in photographs?
6. What is the name of the world's longest suspension bridge?

A Little More Difficult Level

7. Who will marry in Barcelona?
8. How much are llama vests selling for in Vermont?

9. What is causing forests to lose public support?
10. What TV program is on at 8:54 on channel 5 in Buffalo?
11. Why is drought a concern for people in certain areas of the country?

More Difficult

12. How much beef did Texas export to South Korea last year?
13. What percent of schools in Buffalo have access to the Internet?
14. What is your opinion of a speech made by an Australian at the United Nations?
15. Paraphrase the main idea of the explanation given by the Department of Education to explain why test scores are not increasing?

Strategy – TIPP?

TIPP? is a strategy that can be used to skim text. When using TIPP?, you focus on the titles, introduction, first sentence of each paragraph, photographs, and other graphic material (graphs, charts, tables) and then determine what questions you have that may be answered by the text. You can use the following graphic organizer to TIPP? an article or any text.

TIPP?

Title	What do the titles/subheadings and layout tell me?
Introduction	Skim this to get the main idea.
Paragraph	Read the first line of paragraphs/text boxes.
Pictures	What do the diagrams, photos, and graphs show me?
?	Can you come up with any questions?

Elements	Notes
T - Title What do the title, subheadings, and layout tell me about this text?	
I - Introduction What is included in the introduction?	
P - Paragraphs What information is included in the first sentence of each paragraph?	
P - Photographs What do the photographs, maps, charts, tables, illustrations tell me?	
?? - Questions What questions do I have about this text?	

Strategy – KWL

Another technique is KWL. The first column is completed prior to the lesson being taught. A student is asked to list what he/she knows about a topic. Next, the student writes in what he/she would like to know about the topic from the lesson, and finally, after the lesson is completed, the student writes down what he/she has learned.

KWL

Strategy Sheet		
What We Know	What We Want to Find Out	What We have Learned

Strategy – GIST: 5Ws and an H

The GIST Procedure (Generating Interactions between Schemata & Text) is a strategy that can be used to improve students' abilities to comprehend the gist or main ideas of paragraphs by providing a prescription for answering the 5 Ws and H questions and then summarizing the passage or by reading and summarizing from sentences to paragraphs to the entire passage. This strategy incorporates reading and writing. At a higher level of comprehension, students may even wish to try to get the "gist" of an entire chapter or unit in a summary sentence.

Name of Text _____

Who?	
What?	
When?	
Where?	
Why?	
How?	

Write a GIST statement of 20 words or less that summarizes the text.

3 – 2 – 1 Summarize

3 – 2 – 1 is a way for students to summarize key ideas, rethink them in order to focus on those in which they are most intrigued, and then pose a question that shows where they still are not clear in their understanding. This strategy was developed by Penny Juggins of Fairfax County, Virginia.

Students complete a 3 – 2 – 1 chart with:

- 3 things they found out
- 2 things that interest them
- 1 question they still have

3 – 2 – 1 can be modified depending on what area the students are working. For example, if they are studying the American political system and specifically working on the differences between democrats and republicans they could write down:

- 3 differences between democrats and republicans
- 2 similarities
- 1 question they still have

Strategy - Engaging Students in Reading

Pre-reading:

- Discuss the title, author, and student knowledge/experience with the topic, captions, format of newspapers, articles, etc.
- Predict the content from the title, key words from the piece, excerpts, first sentence
- Write your own story from key words
- Chart: What we know/What we want to know
- Formulate your own questions/ purpose for reading
- Read comprehension questions first
- Discuss the reading process and strategies
- Look at the graphic information. What story does it tell?
- Read aloud to students first
- Create a mind map with students about what they already know about the subject

Reading:

- Were the 5W and 1 H questions answered?
- Were the student's questions answered?
- What new ones do they have? What did they learn?
- Continue to predict along the way
- "Write back" to the text along the way
- Write own ending
- Scan for information using vocabulary and format clues
- Make a statement and ask students to find facts to support or dispute it

After reading:

- Discuss inferential/referential questions before detail/informational questions
- Retell (paraphrase) what you have read
- Retell from various perspectives
- Do a timeline of events
- Check text against your predictions (and discuss why you're correct or not)
- Discuss characters, role play, write to a character or as a character
- Write comprehension questions; write math problems
- Discuss reactions - How did the article confirm or contradict what you believed?
- Discuss themes, issues, facts v. opinions - support your points with the text
- Where else can we get information on this topic?
- Have students pick words they want to remember and make sentences with them
- How can we share what we've learned with others?
- Do a dictation
- Create a scavenger hunt with cue cards related to one or more articles

Cards for Comprehension

Use 3 x 5 index cards to provide students with a during- and post-reading activity where they identify what is specified. This is an effective type of comprehension strategy to use with lower-level readers who have limited writing skills. Examples are:

Who
What
Where
When
Why _____

Skim and find:

What event happened?
First
Next
Then
Last

List five words to describe _____ (character)

