

Vocabulary Development

Word Play



Think of vocabulary as an ever changing internal lexicon that contains words used in speaking or recognized in listening (oral vocabulary) and words recognized or used in print (reading vocabulary). For adult learners, these reading skills gradually develop over time and reflect the individual's prior experience and background knowledge.

We can consciously expand our word knowledge by engaging in word play, or specific word instruction. Instead of the much dreaded “drill and kill” routines, engage learners in an interactive reading environment with repeated exposure to words in a variety of contexts. In-depth knowledge of word meanings can help learners understand what they are hearing and reading, and use words accurately in speaking and writing.

Fluency, defined as the ability to read a text accurately and quickly, is an important bridge between word recognition and comprehension. When reading silently, fluent readers recognize words automatically. Fluency changes depending on what readers are reading, their familiarity with the words, and the amount of their practice with reading text. Fluent readers recognize words and comprehend at the same time.

Building vocabulary can be as simple as adding one “Word of the Day” (or class session) with direct word instruction designed to build fluency and comprehension. Depending on the skill level of the learner or class, the activities can be easily adapted by targeting specific words in the class curriculum or an approved word list for their reading level. The key is to use word lists that are relevant to the learners, such as survival words and service or utility words. The structured reading activities can be broken into smaller segments over several classes to promote active engagement and provide learners with repeated exposure to new words. These same words are then read by the learners in their class texts and reinforce the practice of the new words. The result is a high frequency impact with easy read practice as the word-conscious learners strengthen their language skills – reading, speaking, listening, and writing.

In addition to the initial 10 steps detailed in the “Word of the Day” classroom example, several activities are provided to extend the direct word instruction, as time permits. These interactive activities provide choices for the classroom and can be used with an individual learner, in pairs, small groups, or whole class. Working in pairs or small groups is highly recommended to improve team work and provide a less threatening learning environment. Although the reading activities are structured, learners are quickly motivated to join in the fun and learning is accelerated. Perhaps the best part for teachers with limited resources is that learners only need a pen and paper.

Enjoy!

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Skill Building with “Word of the Day”

- Introduce the “Word of the Day” by pronouncing the word and writing it on the board. Select a word from the curriculum word list or reading materials selected for the class.
 - *Practiced Skill: Reading, Listening*
- Ask the learner to determine the meaning of the word without sharing their initial guess with others.
 - *Practiced Skill: Listening, Use of prior knowledge and experience to make an initial “guess”*
- Write the phonetic spelling of the word, the part of speech, and read the word aloud. Ask the learner to write the meaning of the word without sharing it with others.
 - *Skill Practice: Listening, Writing*
- Provide a written literary selection with the word embedded to provide context. Read aloud the selection to the class.
 - *Skill Practice: Reading, Listening*
- Allow the learner an opportunity to revise their answer and write it down as a final guess.
 - *Skill Practice: Drawing Inferences from Text, Critical Thinking, Writing*
- Write the word’s origin or history on the board and read aloud. Remember to model fluent reading using expression.
 - *Skill Practice: Reading, Listening*
- Write the meaning of the word as used in the literary selection. Now that the meaning has been given, read the selection again (modeled fluent reading) and ask the learner to compare their guesses to the actual definition. Use the dictionary or thesaurus to check meanings and the right definition for the literary selection.
 - *Skill Practice: Reading, Listening*
- Discuss with the learners what clues or inferences in the literary selection guided their guesses.
 - *Skill Practice: Listening and Speaking. Word Analysis through the review of affixes (prefixes and suffixes), base words, and word roots related to the word*
- Write the different word meanings on the board. Provide a second example of the word used in a different context and discuss the meaning. An example from their class text would provide real-world relevance.
 - *Skill Practice: Reading, Listening, Speaking*
- Create a writing activity based on learner skill level. Start with writing the word and meaning. Then write a sentence using the word or short story of several sentences. This writing activity can also be done in pairs or small groups. Ask for volunteers to read their stories aloud.
 - *Skill Practice: Writing, Speaking*

Extension Activities:

- Provide repetition and reinforcement with the specific word in literature, pictures, graphics to understand the word’s meaning. Use a variety of literary contexts for repeated exposure to the word with famous quotes, riddles, idioms, expressions, puns, palindromes, and poems.
- Review and discuss synonyms and antonyms related to the word.
- Include informational text in reading practice with the specific word embedded in maps, graphs, diagrams, tables, and charts. Allow time for “skimming and scanning” for the specific word search activity.
- Add more writing activities. Modify the short stories by adding to the story or changing the beginning or the end. Encourage volunteers to read their stories aloud and retell or summarize the story. Compare and contrast the changes and outcomes in the story.

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