# English K–10 (2022): Additional teaching advice

## Early Stage 1: Vocabulary

The following strategies can be used to support all students’ development of vocabulary, including students who may need additional support or are acquiring these skills at different rates.

### Explicitly teaching words

#### Teach the meaning of ‘a word’

Explicitly teach students that a word is a letter or group of letters that has meaning when spoken or written. Display the written word and model this with individual words. For example, ‘This is the word fish. A fish is an animal that lives in fresh or salt water. It has gills to breathe through and it has scales on its body.’

#### Choose words for explicit teaching

Teachers should plan for words that will be the target of teaching (target vocabulary). These words can be selected from texts read to the students or concepts from Mathematics and other learning areas. It is not possible to teach all the new words that students will encounter throughout the year. Therefore, words targeted for explicit instruction need to be carefully selected. Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013) devised a 3-tiered framework to classify words as follows.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Tier 1** words are basic-level words (eg dog*,* baby*,* happy*,* pretty*).* While we need to teach students how to read and write these words, they rarely require instruction at school in terms of what they mean and how to use them.

**Tier 2** words are of high utility and are found across a variety of domains (eg precede, stale, awful, snuggle). Tier 2 words add power and precision to written and spoken language but many Tier 2 words are most commonly found in written language.

**Tier 3** words are used rarely (low frequency) and only in highly specific situations (eg decibel, atom).

This tiered framework provides guidance on selecting vocabulary words to teach. Tier 2 words, sometimes referred to as ‘academic vocabulary’, appear more frequently in text than in oral language. Students in Early Stage1 are less likely to learn these words without explicit instruction. Tier 2 words:

* are critical to understanding academic texts
* appear in all sorts of texts and are highly generalisable
* require deliberate effort to learn
* are far more likely to appear in written texts than in speech
* often represent subtle or precise ways to say otherwise relatively simple things
* are seldom heavily scaffolded by authors, unlike Tier 3 words.

Teachers should choose at least 3 to 5 new words each week for vocabulary instruction and revision. Where possible, choose these words from rich literature chosen for read-alouds. Select words that:

* are related to other words the students know
* are related to classroom topics/texts
* are not currently part of students’ everyday vocabulary.

For each word:

* display, say and model writing the word
* have students say the word and clap the syllables or count the phonemes
* provide a pre-prepared student-friendly definition
* explain the meaning of the word in the context of text
* provide examples and non-examples (where relevant) of the word used in context. Display visuals or use gestures where this will provide a clearer demonstration of the meaning
* check for understanding by having the students actively use the word. This could be done by having the students think-pair-share after providing an open sentence frame
* ask clarifying questions
* plan to review the word 12 times or more over the course of a week, using varied activities. Plan for distributed review throughout the year
* encourage students to use the word by acknowledging when used.

#### Homophones

Explicitly teach and explore the meaning of homophones, ie words that are pronounced the same but have different spellings and meanings. For example, ate – eight, new – knew, tail – tale, meat – meet. Have students generate examples of these words. Add to this list as new words arise, as part of the classroom interactive word wall. Homophones used for instruction can be the homophones addressed in the teaching of [Phonic knowledge](https://curriculum.nsw.edu.au/learning-areas/english/english-k-10-2022/content/early-stage-1/faab691e21?show=advice) and [Spelling](https://curriculum.nsw.edu.au/learning-areas/english/english-k-10-2022/content/early-stage-1/fa48648c37).

#### Morphemes

Explicitly teach selected Tier 1 base words and morphemes as part of Early Stage 1 Spelling which includes:

* plural-marking suffixes (*s*)
* tense-marking suffixes (ing / s / ed).

Build sentences with students to demonstrate word meanings and display. For example:

* I jump on the bed.
* She jump*s* out of the box.
* I am jumpinginto the pool.
* They jump*ed* off the bed.

Include these words as part of your interactive word wall. Refer to these words and/or morphemes during a break between lessons.

#### Active use of taught words

Providing multiple opportunities for discussion and practice using new words is more effective than providing definitions alone. Plan to provide multiple engaging opportunities for students to actively use explicitly taught words. The following activities provide a variety of ways new words can be consolidated.

##### Making choices

Students show their understanding of target vocabulary by repeating the word when it applies. For example:

Which one of these things might be fantastic? Why or why not?

* Getting a free ice-cream from the canteen.
* Falling over in the playground.

##### Idea completions

Use sentence stems to encourage students to integrate a word’s meaning into a context and explain a situation. Pose a question that incorporates multiple target words and have the students respond with a complete sentence. For example:

If you fell over on the concrete, would that be pleasant or painful? Why?

##### Word association

Students are asked to connect new words with a more familiar word, phrase or concept. Avoid using synonyms and instead focus on associative words. For example:

* Which word goes with sick? (medicine)
* Which word goes with healthy? (exercise)

##### Finish my sentence

Provide students with an oral sentence starter which contains the target vocabulary and a conjunction. Ask them to complete your sentence before repeating the whole sentence aloud. For example:

* ‘I don’t like it when people are selfish because …’
* ‘It makes me furious when …’

##### Have you ever…?

Students connect new words with their own experience. For example:

* Describe a time when you felt confident.
* Tell about someone you know who is courageous.

##### Questions, reasons, examples

Students support their thinking using new vocabulary. For example:

What is something you could do to impress your friend? Why?

### Promoting word consciousness

Word consciousness is an awareness of and interest in words. Teachers should create a sense of excitement about words and word learning in the classroom. Vocabulary instruction should also be an integral part of the daily classroom experience whereby repeated exposure to words is provided.

The following activities can be used to promote word consciousness.

#### Teacher talk

Teachers can promote incidental learning and word consciousness through frequent and deliberate modelling of Tier 2 vocabulary throughout the day. Build on everyday known Tier 1 words over time by using more sophisticated synonyms for everyday classroom words, such as ‘exemplary’ instead of ‘great’ when describing work, or ‘distribute’ to replace ‘handing out’ lunch orders or worksheets.

#### Interactive word walls

As well as providing words, the teacher may support students to set up and maintain lists of words that can contribute to a classroom interactive word wall. These words could be generated from teaching and learning activities and may include, but are not limited to:

* different categories of words (eg, transport or animals)
* words aligned to phonic knowledge and/or spelling teaching sequences
* high-frequency Tier 1 and Tier 2 words
* compound words, homophones, verbs and adjectives encountered in their creation of texts
* significant words encountered during teaching and learning activities.

For Early Stage 1 the use of visual images and realia, where relevant, can further strengthen vocabulary connections and learning. Pair images with the target words and update and add to walls on a regular basis. Refer to words on the display frequently and also encourage students to make connections with the words.

#### Word of the day

Challenge students to use an identified Word of the Day during classroom activities. The identified word could be one provided by a student, related to a specific lesson or activity, or chosen from a text read in class.

#### Monitoring word use

Early Stage 1 students can be motivated to be word conscious by keeping track of words they use and celebrating when they reach set class goals. An engaging way to encourage use of words is to keep a count of how frequently students use new vocabulary. Each time a student or the teacher correctly uses a word found on a word wall, that person adds an object to the word jar or a sticker to the word chart. When the jar is full or the chart completed, the students celebrate the event with a pre-agreed activity such as a favoured vocabulary game. This process can be enhanced by having a class vocabulary ‘mascot’ such as ‘Wordy Wallaby’ who jumps for joy every time a ‘wondrous word’ is used.

#### Describing everyday events

Provide a picture card of an everyday event (children playing with a pet, people shopping) and some vocabulary word cards to match. In groups of 2 or 3, students use their personal and/or topic knowledge to discuss what they see in the picture. They then take turns to select an appropriate vocabulary card and provide a spoken sentence (or sentence using their preferred communication form(s)) about the picture using that word.

When using familiar or everyday objects or events, consider that what may be familiar to one student may not be familiar to others. Provide opportunities for students to identify objects and events that are familiar to them.

#### Describing objects

Place a set of 4 or 5 familiar objects on a table or tray. For example, a mug, plate, glue stick or hat. Students take turns to describe one of the objects to a partner without naming it. The partner tries to identify the object by name.

#### Wordplay

Create a sense of fun with words by promoting wordplay, including identifying and/or saying rhyming words. Read nursery rhymes, riddles and limericks and have students identify and discuss the rhyming words or words they think are funny.

### Teaching word-learning strategies

Word-learning strategies for vocabulary will directly relate to the types of activities undertaken as part of your Early Stage 1 phonological awareness, phonics, spelling and comprehension teaching and learning programs.

#### Using context clues

Contextual strategies involve using clues embedded in the text to help the reader understand a particular word or group of words. For example, when reading the text, Monkey Puzzleby Julia Donaldson to students*,* the target word might be ‘coil’. Use questions such as:

* What is the snake doing? (ie referring to the illustration of the snake coiled around the branch of a tree).
* How is the snake moving?

Use the sentence context to explain that the snake wraps itself around the tree. Encourage students to provide examples of coils that they know about. Re-teach and reinforce the word ‘coil’ on multiple occasions throughout the week.

#### Using morphemes

Structural analysis of a word draws the student’s attention to the individual units of meaning in the word, also known as morphemes. Explicit teaching of individual morphemes and morphological patterns can be undertaken when directly teaching new vocabulary words. This knowledge can be applied to work out the meaning of unknown words. Explicitly teach the meaning of morphemes included in Early Stage 1 Spelling. This may include:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Morpheme** | **Meaning** | **Examples** |
| -s | plural or verb tense | dogs, books, students, runs |
| -es | plural or verb tense | babies, foxes |
| *-ed* | past tense | jumped, played |
| *-ing* | present tense | jumping, playing |

Explicitly teach and explore the meaning of compound words, ie 2 words (morphemes) joined to make a new word that has a new meaning. For example, when reading the text to students, the word ‘boardwalk’ appears. Demonstrate to students that they can work out the meaning of this new word by looking at the parts in the word ‘board’ and ‘walk’'. Re-read the sentence and use the images to confirm the meaning. Include these words as part of your interactive word wall. Refer to these words and/or morphemes during a break between lessons.

### Providing rich and varied language experiences

Oral interactions build students’ vocabulary knowledge. Students should interact with others with more developed language use than their own, including their teacher and peers. Consider how students can be paired or grouped when participating in structured interactions.

#### Text talks

Engage students in ‘rich talk about texts’, exploring and describing characters, retelling events in a story and building their knowledge of and connections between words. Compare and contrast target vocabulary in the text, make connections to what is known.

#### Category words

Create laminated heading cards relating to categories such as animals, vegetables, sport and types of transport. Shuffle the word cards and deal them out to 6 to 8 students who are positioned in a circle. Call out a category. If a student has a card that corresponds with that category, they throw it into the middle of the circle.

Continue calling out random categories. The first person with no cards left is the winner.

This activity can also be completed digitally.

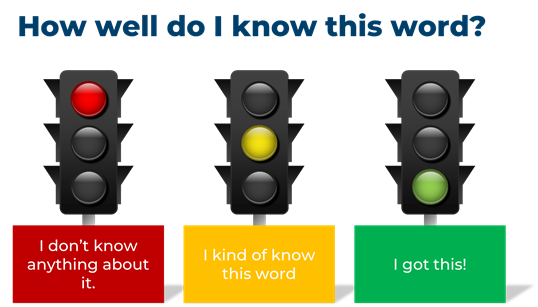
#### Familiarisation with topic words

Prepare an enlarged image. For example, use an illustration from a familiar text related to a current topic. Discuss the illustration with students, naming the items it contains, for example, kangaroo, pouch, joey. Provide copies of the illustration and word labels.

This activity can be completed as:

* a class activity where the teacher reads the word and students indicate where the labels belong
* students work in pairs to discuss the illustration and words on labels. They then match each word label to the appropriate part of the illustration. Provide time for students to compare and check their labelled image with another pair of students.

Support students to identify words they do not know the meaning of by completing a scaffold for chosen target words. An example is provided below. These could be identified from classroom discussion, a text or a topic. For example, during small-group work, support each student to select an appropriate traffic light for the target word ‘splendid’. Model this strategy by thinking out loud while saying, ‘I think I have heard this word before, when Mrs Smith read the story about the Word Collector. I’m not sure how to use the word in a sentence, so I will pick the orange traffic light to show that I kind of know the word.



### Further support

Information about supporting students who may experience specific difficulties with vocabulary development can be found on the [NESA website](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/learning-areas/english-year-10/special-needs-in-english-guide). Additional opportunities for guided and independent practice may be required, either within the classroom or through specific interventions. Early intervention to support the development of literacy skills is essential. Decisions about adjustments for students with disability should be made in the context of [collaborative curriculum planning](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/diversity-in-learning/special-education/collaborative-curriculum-planning).

1. Beck IL, McKeown MG, & Kucan L (2013) Bringing words to life: Robust vocabulary instruction (2nd ed.), Guilford Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)