



Shotton Hall
Research School

5 MINUTES ON...

VOCABULARY

...in speaking o
from *dico dict-* s
ionary /'dɪksjənəri
book listing (usu. al
explaining the words
ving corresponding
nguage. 2 reference
e terms of a pa

What does the evidence tell us about vocabulary?

The EEF's Key Stage 2 Literacy Guidance Report states that 'Approaches to develop vocabulary can be split into two groups:

- (1) explicit teaching of new vocabulary and;
- (2) exposure to a rich language environment with opportunities to hear and confidently experiment with new words (implicit vocabulary teaching).

Both approaches should be used, and the following points should be considered:

- Repeated exposure to new vocabulary is necessary across spoken language, reading and writing.
- Pre-teaching and discussing new words can support reading comprehension.
- Pupils should learn new words, as well as how use familiar words, in new contexts.
- Vocabulary learning should entail active engagement in learning tasks.
- Digital technology can be used to help develop and teach vocabulary.'

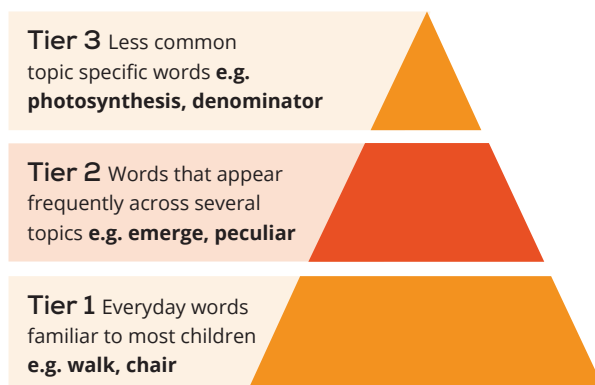


3 tiers of vocabulary

Beck and McKeown introduced the concept of '3 tiers of vocabulary' ² (see infographic for more information). Tier 1 is comprised of words that appear in everyday speech. Tier 2 are words that appear frequently across multiple disciplines or topics. Tier 3 words are rarely encountered: they are subject or discipline-specific words.

During their academic careers, pupils are exposed to countless examples of vocabulary. Therefore, all vocabulary cannot be taught explicitly. In their 'Improving Literacy at Key Stage 1' guidance report, the EEF draw a distinction between explicit and implicit language teaching, as well as receptive and expressive vocabulary. Receptive vocabulary is how well pupils make sense of words that they encounter through reading and listening. A rich receptive vocabulary helps pupils to make meaning. Receptive word knowledge tends to come before expressive use.

Finite curriculum time means we cannot teach all vocabulary explicitly. Much of the vocabulary we expose our pupils to is *actually done* implicitly, through having a language-rich classroom and engineering high-quality language interactions. This might include teacher questioning, dialogic interactions and modelling correct language use and thinking. Although important at all key stages, this is pivotal between ages 1 and 4, because this is a key stage in a child's language acquisition. The EEF offer the following advice for teaching language implicitly in their 'Improving Literacy in Key Stage 1' guidance report.³



Narrating a child's activity e.g. "The Stegosaurus is stomping and plodding his way into the tidy up box."

Commenting e.g. Child: "Look at what I found". Adult: "WOW, that is a hairy spider!"

Recapping e.g. "First we did... then we... finally we..."

Reflecting e.g. "I was thinking what a great idea it was to..."

Extending e.g. Child: "MY car was the fast. Adult: "Yes, your red car was the fastest."

Implicit corrections e.g. Child: "I hided the dinosaur in the box." Adult: "Yes, you hid the dinosaur in the box."

Make links e.g. "It's just like when you..."

Suggest ideas e.g. "We could try..." or "Perhaps..."

Imagining e.g. "What might it be like to..."

Reminding e.g. "Remember when you had this problem before? What did you do to fix it?"

Explaining e.g. Child: "When is it cold outside, we wear more clothes to keep warm."

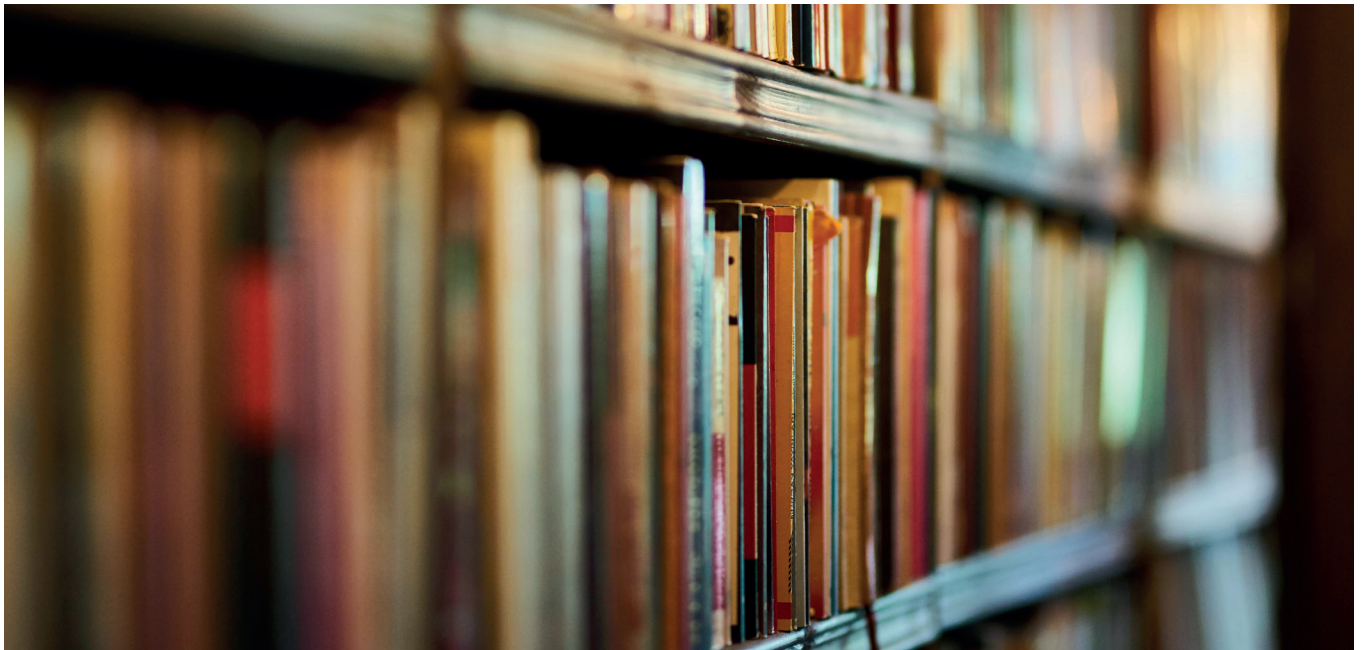
Pondering or asking open questions e.g. "I wonder why..." or "What could happen next?"

Posing problems e.g. "Maybe there's a way of..."

Modeling your thinking e.g. "I think I'm going to use the small paint brush so I can carefully add the eyes."

Explicit teaching of vocabulary:

Judicious selection of which words to teach is an important aspect of curriculum design and effective instruction. When selecting which words to teach explicitly, it is important to choose high leverage words that pupils will encounter in multiple contexts to further develop their 'word consciousness'. Graves (2008) describes word-consciousness as an 'awareness of and interest in words and their meaning'. It's an understanding of where words come from, how they are built, their varying uses and their particular power. Alex Quigley, in 'Closing the Vocabulary Gap', argues that 'when children develop word consciousness, it initiates a new way of thinking that can prove of life-long worth for our students.'⁴



¹Improving Literacy in Key Stage 2 (2021) EEF. Available [here](#).

²Beck, I., McKeown, M.G., and Kucan, L. (2013). Bringing Words to Life. 2nd ed. New York: Guilford Press

³Improving literacy in Key Stage 1 (2021) EEF. Available [here](#).

⁴Quigley, A. (2018) Closing the vocabulary gap. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

What great vocabulary teaching is not:

Don't do this	Why not?
Dictionary work (like copying definitions) in isolation from context	Teaching new vocabulary, firmly located in curriculum context and linked to curriculum content, helps pupils to engage with the meaning of new vocabulary, see how it is used, as well as providing opportunities for pupils to actively use their new vocabulary. This ensures both depth and breadth of vocabulary. ⁵
Only teach or expose a pupil to a word once	<p>Vocabulary is a form of knowledge so will benefit from recall like any other knowledge. Practise for fluency with new vocabulary across spoken language, reading and writing is also key.</p> <p>The frequency of exposure required for understanding a vocabulary item can vary, however, research suggests that encountering a word approximately 10 to 20 times can lead to a basic level of understanding, while 30 to 40 exposures may be necessary for a deeper and more robust comprehension.</p>
Choose too many words to teach	Teachers should choose high-leverage words to teach as part of their curriculum offer. Too many words will overload the working memory and will not be retained.
Rely on 'one off' words, such as superficial 'word of the day' activities, where pupils never practise using vocabulary	To help pupils retain and use new vocabulary, teachers should focus on providing repeated exposure to new vocabulary in multiple contexts, including modelling and scaffolding of its use. ⁶
Giving pupils lists of words or glossaries with no discussion or linked activity	Practise for fluency with new vocabulary across spoken language, reading and writing is also key. Provide opportunities to use the vocabulary in different contexts through planned teaching opportunities for talk, reading and writing.

What great vocabulary teaching is:

The 'Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools' guidance report states that 'there is relatively limited evidence about how best to teach vocabulary explicitly' but that there are 'promising ways to promote targeted instruction of academic language in the classroom'.⁷ One promising way is Alex Quigley's SEEC approach – 'we need to be selective when choosing the vocabulary that we want to teach. We need to choose high leverage words, that will make a big difference to pupils' vocabulary depth. (Adapted from Alex Quigley).⁸

Select	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consider the unit of work ahead.• Select the words that are most important to understand this topic.• Consider which words are unlikely to be part of your pupils' prior knowledge.• Be word conscious – what are the origins of these words? Which words are interrelated? Where have we seen these before? Where might we see these in other contexts for subjects?• Plan the explicit teaching of the vocabulary.• Plan for repeated exposure.
Explain	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Say the word carefully. Break it down into syllables.• Write the word and comment on common sounds or letters in the word.• Give a pupil friendly definition.• Give multiple, meaningful examples.• Ask for pupils' examples and identify any misconceptions.
Explore	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explore the etymology and morphology.• Explore any common word families to build pupil schema of language.• Consider synonyms and antonyms of the word.• Explore how the word might be used in different subjects.• Use multiple choice questions that offer examples of the word in use.• Ask questions to check for pupils' understanding.• Explore strategies to help remember the word.• Make it memorable.
Consolidate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Test and learn.• Revisit multiple times to aid retention.• Reward and praise correct use of the word in context.

⁵Improving Literacy in Key Stage 2 (2021) EEF. Available [here](#).

⁶Improving Literacy in Key Stage 2 (2021) EEF. Available [here](#).

⁷Improving literacy in Secondary Schools (2021) EEF. Available [here](#).

⁸Quigley, A. (2018) Closing the vocabulary gap. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Teaching morphology

A high-leverage strategy to build word knowledge:

Morphology is the study of word parts and their meanings. Morphemes are the smallest units of meaning in words: they cannot be broken down any further. Explicitly teaching morphology is a high-leverage strategy that can help pupils break down unfamiliar words, thus supporting word recognition and reading comprehension. Pupils need to learn the meaning of many words; it's also vital that they learn relationships between words and subtleties of meaning. These two ideas are known as vocabulary breadth and depth, respectively. An awareness of morphology helps both: teaching morphology can support both word breadth and word depth. Evidence suggests that depth might actually be more than breadth. Because morphemes have their own distinct meaning, teaching morphology can open up patterns between words: these patterns support pupils to build rigorous, connected schema around the language they encounter. It supports pupils to develop rich, networked vocabulary knowledge.

There are three main types of morphemes we should teach:

Roots: the main part of a word that gives it its basic meaning.

Prefixes: added to the start of a root or word.

Suffixes: added to the end of a root or word.

Whereas roots give the base meaning of a word, adding prefixes and suffixes to them alters their meaning. Let's take the example 'monochrome':

Root = '**chrom**' (Greek), meaning 'colour'

Prefix = '**mono**' (Greek), meaning 'one'

Monochrome = 'comprised of one colour'

Now, let's think about the word 'polychrome', which we are likely to be less familiar with.

Root = '**chrom**' (Greek), meaning 'colour'

Prefix = '**poly**' (Greek), meaning 'many, much or multi'

Polychrome = 'comprised of multiple colours'

Roots, prefixes and suffixes

Many roots, prefixes and suffixes in the English Language have their origins in Latin or Greek. In fact, 60% of the English Language is derived from these ancient languages. What's more, 90% of our technical vocabulary in disciplines, such as science and maths, are made up of Greek and Latin. Pupils encounter increasingly technical vocabulary as they progress through the different key stages. However, the transition from Key Stage 2 to 3 can prove particularly tricky: from KS3 onwards the curriculum is mediated through increasingly dense non-fiction texts. One of the biggest factors contributing to their difficulty is tier 3 vocabulary.

How might I teach morphology?

1

Breaking down words

When teaching pupils new vocabulary, break relevant words down (mono + chrome) explicitly into morphemes. Let's take a different example of 'chronological': its root means 'time' and the word means 'sequence in time'. 'Chron' is another Ancient Greek root: the Greek god 'Chronos' was the god of time.

2

Create new words

Create new words with a common part (chronicle, chronological, chronograph, synchronised, chronic and anachronism): forge the schema and create connections.

3

Model words

Model the taught word – emphasising its root, in a contextually-relevant sentence to pupils. Model in verbal and written forms. Ensure pupils are confident with its pronunciation.

4

Multiple practice

Provide pupils with multiple practice – both written and verbal - opportunities. This practice will involve using the word 'chronological' in sentences, verbal answers and writing regularly. If this knowledge is secure, it might also involve multiple iterations of practice using some other words with the root 'chron' in them.

5

Revisit

Revisit words, morphemes and meanings regularly: encourage multiple interactions with the word and its morphemes.

Questions to ask yourself

1. Do teachers have word consciousness in my school?
2. How might we develop word consciousness amongst colleagues?
3. To what extent do teachers have a consistent approach to explaining the origins of new words?
4. Do teachers always connect new words to similar and familiar ones that have common elements?
5. What obvious examples can you think of from lessons you have seen recently?
6. Do subject areas have a list of pre-defined vocabulary? Have they mapped out where the new words will be introduced? Have they identified linked words? Have they planned for repeated exposure?
7. Have you identified words that appear in several subjects and how their meanings change (polysemous words)?
8. How are pupils rewarded for using the taught vocabulary?

Resources and further reading on vocabulary:

Vocabulary | EEF (educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk)

Vocab in Action (d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net)

Vocabulary in Action Misconceptions (d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net)

Through the Keyhole of the Reading House | EEF (educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk)

New EEF podcast: Vocabulary and Language | EEF (educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk)

Explicit Morphology Instruction to Improve Overall Literacy Skills in Secondary Students (ed.gov)

Preparing for Literacy | EEF (educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk)

Improving Literacy in Key Stage 1 | EEF (educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk)

Improving Literacy in Key Stage 2 | EEF (educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk)

Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools | EEF (educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk)

References

1. Quigley, A. (2018) Closing the vocabulary gap. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
2. Education, U.S.D. Explicit vocabulary instruction, AdLit. Available at: <https://www.adlit.org/topics/vocabulary/explicit-vocabulary-instruction> (Accessed: 26 January 2024).
3. Improving literacy in Key Stage 1 (2021) EEF. Available at: Improving Literacy in Key Stage 1 | EEF (educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk) (Accessed: 26 January 2024)
4. Improving Literacy in Key Stage 2 (2021) EEF. Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/literacy-ks2> (Accessed: 26 January 2024)
5. Improving literacy in Secondary Schools (2021) EEF. Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/literacy-ks3-ks4> (Accessed: 26 January 2024).



**Shotton Hall
Research School**

Shotton Hall Research School

The Academy at Shotton Hall
Passfield Way
Peterlee
County Durham
SR8 1AU

enquiries@shottonhallresearchschool.co.uk
0191 518 0222

www.researchschool.org.uk/shottonhall

Proud to be part of:



**North East
Learning Trust**