

Activities to Support Vocabulary Learning in Secondary School

Why is vocabulary important?

- At secondary level, vocabulary skills at age 13 strongly predict GCSE results at age 15
- Students in secondary school are learning a huge number of new words
- Vocabulary is important for both understanding and using language

How can I help?

- **Teach words using as many senses as possible** – Write it, say it, get students to say it, show a picture, do a demonstration, link the word to an action, link the word to an experience
- **Repeat new words often** – both in the lesson and by providing opportunities for the student's to hear/ read/ say the word before and after the lesson (pre and post teaching, overlearning).
- **Encourage students to rate their knowledge of new words** – this could be done at the start and or end of a topic and encourages student to develop self- awareness skills, e.g. recognising when they might need some help.
- **Include information about the sounds in the word (syllables, initial sounds rhyming words)** – have you ever experienced the 'tip of the tongue' phenomenon? This is where you can remember the meaning of the words, but not the sounds you need to say it. Research shows that by teaching the meaning **and** the sounds in new word, students learn the word more deeply. This could be through an informal quiz '*tell me a type of rock beginning with 's' (sedimentary)*' or '*It rhymes with frenetic and is the type of energy created by a rolling ball (kinetic)*'.

Which words should I teach?

It may not be possible for all students with language difficulties to learn and retain all words, so choose words that will have a far reaching impact. For example the words students will hear across different lessons, as well as the words they need to know to understand other words (think three for the price of one!).

- **Explicitly explain question words like 'summarise', 'compare' and 'analyse'** – we often assume students know these words and don't directly teach them as they aren't 'topic'

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words. However, these words are really useful as they occur across all lessons and are often in exam questions.

- **Draw students' attention to the meaning of root words.** For example, if a student knows that 'oxi' means something related to oxygen, they can begin to decode the meaning of other words like 'oxidisation', 'carbon dioxide'.
- **Teach prefixes and suffixes** – For example, when a student knows that adding 'dis' to the beginning of a word means 'not' (e.g. disappear, dislike, disagree), they can begin to work out the meaning or new words.
- **Use Mind Maps** to link information about a topic together – this will make it easier for students to remember.

Further information / resources

- **'Secondary Language Builders – Advice and Activities to encourage the communication skills on 11-16 year olds'** – book by Henrietta Mclachlan and Liz Elks
- **'Language for Learning in the Secondary School – A Practical guide for support students with speech, language and communication needs'** book by Sue Hayden and Emma Jordan
- **'Vocabulary Enrichment Programme: Enhancing the Learning of Vocabulary in Children'** intervention programme by Victoria Joffe
- **'Supporting new word learning in secondary schools - Word learning session plans'** online intervention programme by Sarah Spencer
<https://adolescentvocabulary.wordpress.com/example-word-learning-session-plans/>
- **ICAN Developmental Language Disorder webinars** for Secondary School Teachers– scroll two thirds of the way down the page and click on the tab for Secondary School Teachers
<https://ican.org.uk/educational-support-for-children-with-developmental-language-disorder-dld/>

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