

# Interventions for Reading Success Second Edition

by

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# Contents

About the Reproducible Materials .....	vii
Alignment to the Common Core State Standards.....	viii
About the Authors .....	ix
Acknowledgments.....	xi

## **Section I Overview**

Chapter 1 Introduction to Reading Intervention.....	3
Chapter 2 Reading Intervention and Response to Intervention in Schools .....	7
Chapter 3 Using Assessment to Guide Intervention .....	19
Chapter 4 How to Use the Activities in This Book: The Nuts and Bolts of Implementing Intervention .....	25

## **Section II Classroom Activities**

Chapter 5 Phonological Awareness .....	49
FOCUS ON: Rhyming.....	52
FOCUS ON: Onset–Rime .....	61
FOCUS ON: Segmenting and Blending.....	81
Chapter 6 Alphabetic Principle.....	129
FOCUS ON: Letter–Sound Correspondence.....	132
FOCUS ON: Adding Sounds .....	139
FOCUS ON: Deleting Sounds .....	149
FOCUS ON: Substituting Sounds .....	157
FOCUS ON: Long Vowel Spelling Patterns .....	167
FOCUS ON: Variant Vowel Spelling Patterns.....	193
FOCUS ON: Multisyllabic Decoding .....	223
Chapter 7 Fluency with Connected Text.....	229
FOCUS ON: Reading Fluency and Accuracy .....	232
FOCUS ON: Classroom Management .....	235
FOCUS ON: Word-Level Fluency .....	238
FOCUS ON: Passage-Level Fluency .....	249
Chapter 8 Vocabulary Development .....	257
FOCUS ON: Active Use of New Words.....	267
FOCUS ON: Deepening Understanding of Words .....	274
Chapter 9 Comprehension .....	293
FOCUS ON: Reading Comprehension Strategies .....	310
FOCUS ON: Working with Partners .....	324

**Section III Home-School Connection Activities**

Phonological Awareness .....	329
Alphabetic Principle.....	363
Fluency with Connected Text.....	448
References .....	461
Index .....	465

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## CHAPTER 8

# Vocabulary Development

### INTRODUCTION: INTEGRATING VOCABULARY INTO TIERED INSTRUCTION

Vocabulary and comprehension skills lead to reading with understanding. The foundational skills of phonological awareness, alphabetic principle, and fluency with connected text are the building blocks for acquiring new vocabulary words from print. For reading intervention, teachers need to focus on the critical vocabulary that individual students need to be successful in the general reading curriculum. The earlier chapters of this book provide a set of intervention activities to boost students' skills in specific aspects of phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, and fluency with connected text. Vocabulary development and comprehension, the remaining two Big Ideas of reading (NICHD, 2000; Simmons & Kame'enui, 1998), are different from the other skill areas because they have to do with linking the printed words to their meaning. Like the other key areas, vocabulary and comprehension provide a foundation for later literacy learning, but unlike the other areas, they continue to develop throughout the K–12 school years and beyond. Reading for meaning becomes the main focus of reading instruction by the intermediate grades, and it is important to help students build depth and breadth of knowledge of words.

Vocabulary development and comprehension are typically taught throughout the reading curriculum and even across the curriculum in other subject areas because they are not easily broken into component subskills. Teachers continually highlight and reinforce students' understanding of vocabulary words, passage comprehension, and strategies for independent reading. Although we provide some vocabulary activities that can be done in small-group intervention, we want to stress that the vocabulary words you teach should align with what students are learning in the core curriculum and the vocabulary typical of the classroom. Our purpose is to show you how to integrate vocabulary from the core curriculum into tiered instruction.

ELLs often experience significant challenges in learning English vocabulary while learning to read in English. These students will benefit from extensive vocabulary and comprehension support during reading instruction. Teachers often integrate the teaching of English vocabulary and language structure into their reading lessons. Intervention time is a good time to reinforce vocabulary and comprehension development for ELLs who are struggling to read. Chapter 2 explains the STAR strategy, a simple approach to systematic vocabulary and English language support for ELLs.

This chapter specifically focuses on vocabulary and how vocabulary development strategies can be integrated into Tier 1 core reading and content area instruction and small-group Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction. Vocabulary instruction is context based; that is, the words students need to know to comprehend the text vary by the selection they are reading,

whether it be from a core reading program, leveled readers, trade books, or content area textbooks. Although there are lists of vocabulary words that students should know (Coxhead, 2000), developing lessons for words out of the context of a reading selection may be counterproductive as it does not lead to a deep processing of the word's meaning.

## HOW TO USE THE ACTIVITIES IN THIS CHAPTER

This chapter and the next are different from the previous chapters because of the different nature of teaching reading for meaning. This chapter provides you with the information and sample activities you need to develop effective vocabulary lessons that will accommodate a diverse span of abilities and the variety of texts students need to comprehend. Rather than a progressive set of activities that go from easier subskills to more difficult ones, the activities here are meant to be repeatedly used with a progression of teacher-selected vocabulary words that are appropriate for the students in your intervention groups. That is why there are fewer activities in this chapter. Specifically, this chapter begins with a description of the research base on effective vocabulary instruction and a strategy for selecting words to teach from narrative and informational text. Then the components of a lesson design based on research are explained in order to provide a clear idea of how you can develop effective vocabulary lessons. Next, it provides an example of each component of an effective, well-orchestrated Tier 1 vocabulary lesson. This is followed by an explanation and an example of an approach that can be used to modify the lesson design for students who need more intensive Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction. Last, it provides a variety of activities that will promote deep processing of word meanings followed by a strategy for teaching students how to determine the meaning of words from context.

### Selecting Words to Teach

Narrative and informational texts contain many words whose meanings are unfamiliar to students. It is impossible and impractical to directly teach all of those words. Dimino and Taylor (2009) developed a strategy for selecting words that students need to know in order to understand the selection they will be reading. This strategy was derived from a research study investigating the effects of teacher study groups on vocabulary instruction, teacher knowledge, and student achievement (Gersten, Dimino, Jayanthi, Kim, & Santoro, 2010). To implement the steps of this strategy effectively and efficiently, it is important to discuss three essential concepts—categories of natural context, word tiers, and the difference between brief and elaborate instruction.

### Categories of Natural Context

Isabel Beck and colleagues (2002, 2012) identified four categories of natural context that show the extent to which context enhances or hampers the reader's ability to determine a word's meaning.

1. *Misdirective*: Words in the misdirective context lead students to an incorrect meaning of the word.
2. *Nondirective*: The context in which the word appears does not help students determine the word's meaning.
3. *Directive*: The word is explicitly defined in the text.
4. *General*: The context contains enough information to give students a general idea of the meaning of the word.

### Word Tiers

Beck and her colleagues (Beck et al., 2002, 2012) introduced the concept that words can be categorized into tiers. Tier 1 includes the most basic words that frequently occur and usually do not need to be taught (e.g., *table, pencil, cup*). Tier 2 is composed of words that occur in a variety of subject areas (e.g., *fascinating, consistent, diverse*). Stahl and Nagy (2006) described them as words one would expect to be part of a literate person's vocabulary. Discipline-specific vocabulary found in content area texts (e.g., *peninsula, circumference, ozone, diode*) falls into the Tier 3 category. (Note: These tiers do not correspond to the three tiers of reading instruction in RTI.)

### Brief and Elaborate Instruction

After you have selected the words your students will need to know to comprehend the selection, you must decide whether to briefly or elaborately teach the word. Brief instruction includes a student-friendly definition, an example within and beyond the context of the selection, a contrasting or nonexample, and a concrete representation of the word. Elaborate instruction includes the instructional elements previously listed plus activities to promote word learning. Because there are no hard and fast rules for determining whether a word should be briefly or elaborately taught, you will have to use your professional judgment to make this decision. Examples and explanations of brief and elaborate instruction are listed later on in this chapter.

### Steps for Selecting Words

Follow the next steps to determine whether a word should be taught. This process can be used for narrative and informational text, using Figure 8.1 as a guide.

*Step 1:* As you read the selection, generate a list of words that may be critical to understanding the selection.

*Step 2:* Choose up to 10 words from the list that you think may be important to teach.

*Step 3:* Determine if the first word you have chosen is in the misdirective or nondirective category. If yes, then continue to Step 4. If not, then choose another word.

*Step 4:* Determine if the word is critical for understanding the selection. If yes, then continue to Step 5. If not, then choose another word.

*Step 5:* Determine if students have had sufficient previous experience with or exposure to the word. If not, then continue to Step 6. If yes, then choose another word.

*Step 6:* Determine if the word is important for students to know 5 years from now. If yes, then continue to Step 7. If not, then choose another word.

*Step 7:* Categorize the word as either Tier 1, 2, or 3. Write the word in the appropriate column in Figure 8.1. Follow Steps 3–7 with the next word you have chosen.

*Step 8:* Develop student-friendly definitions, examples, nonexamples, and concrete representations for words you decide need brief instruction.

*Step 9:* Develop student-friendly definitions, examples, nonexamples, concrete representations, and activities for words you decide need elaborate instruction.

*Note:* If fewer than 5 of the 10 nominated words make it to the brief or elaborate instruction columns, then repeat Steps 2–9 until at least 5 words are selected. No more than 10 words per selection should be taught.



Selection: \_\_\_\_\_

Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3

Brief instruction	Elaborate instruction

**Figure 8.1.** Selecting words to teach table. (From Dimino, J., & Taylor, M.J. [2009]. *Learning how to improve vocabulary instruction through teacher study groups*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.; adapted by permission.)

### TEACHING VOCABULARY WITHIN A THREE-TIER INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL

Research investigating the amount of time spent on explicit vocabulary instruction has been conducted since the 1980s. Durkin (1979), a pioneer in this line of research, conducted a landmark observational study of core reading instruction. She reported that .43% of the reading block was spent on teaching word meanings, whereas .09% and 2.10% of the time allocated for reading instruction was spent reviewing the definitions of words and provid-

ing application practice respectively. Scott, Jamieson-Noel, and Asselin (2003) investigated the amount of time teachers spent on explicit vocabulary instruction and found that 6% of the school day focused on vocabulary instruction. Instead of teaching the words' meaning, however, instruction centered on students writing the words multiple times and using them in a sentence. Wanzek (in press) investigated the nature and amount of time spent on explicit vocabulary instruction. Unfortunately, after more than 30 years, not much has changed. Wanzek reported that an average of 8% of the reading block was allocated to explicit vocabulary instruction. More disturbing is that only 1.4% of the time was spent on direct vocabulary instruction in reading intervention classes. Evidence from this research clearly indicated that more time needs to be spent on high-quality vocabulary instruction. Next, components of vocabulary instruction that have been proven to be effective are explained, and examples are provided.

### Tier 1 Vocabulary Instruction: A Sample Lesson

Tier 1 vocabulary instruction is provided in a whole-class setting. The consensus from the research indicates that effective vocabulary instruction should focus on definitions and contextual explanations (Apthorp et al., 2012; Beck et al., 2012; Gersten et al., 2010). This type of instruction specifically includes a clear, student-friendly definition; examples within and beyond the context of the selection; concrete representation of the word; and activities that provide multiple meaningful exposures, nonexamples, and deep processing of vocabulary. Incorporating these essential elements into vocabulary instruction encompasses Tier 1 instruction. The lesson design described next is based on this research.

#### 1. Develop Student-Friendly Definitions

Effective vocabulary instruction begins with a student-friendly definition that conveys the connotation of the target word (how it is typically used) in understandable, everyday language (Beck et al., 2002; Dimino & Taylor, 2009).

#### 2. Provide Examples within the Context of the Selection

Students are given examples of the word that relate to the context of the selection. Examples within the context of the selection help clarify and pinpoint the meaning of the word. For example, when teaching the target word, *frighten*, the teacher explains that in the story they are about to read, Josh is *frightened* of being alone in the dark.

#### 3. Provide Examples Beyond the Context of the Selection

Examples beyond the context of the selection broaden students' understanding of the word. These examples teach students that the meaning of the word is not limited to the situation the teacher used to describe examples within the context of the story. When the teacher explains that spiders and snakes *frighten* some people, she is providing an example beyond the context of the selection.

#### 4. Provide Nonexamples or Contrasting Examples

Nonexamples or contrasting examples further clarify the meaning of the word by providing students with aspects, elements, or features of the word that are not part of its meaning. Simply put, teachers are telling students what the word is not.

### **5. Provide Concrete Representations of the Word**

Pictures, diagrams, facial expressions, demonstrations, role plays, realia, and so forth are concrete representations of words that help students make the connection between language, which is abstract and conceptual, and something that is tangible.

### **6. Discuss the Word with the Students**

Ask students strategic questions that will give them an opportunity to share their background knowledge about the target word. Students who have no knowledge of the word learn a great deal from their peers' contributions during these discussions.

### **7. Activities to Promote Word Learning**

These activities provide students with the multiple meaningful exposures they need to make the word become part of their listening, speaking, reading, and writing vocabulary. These activities can be classified into three levels of increasing difficulty—association, comprehension, and generative. This chapter focuses on the second two levels in the intervention strategies provided.

#### **Levels of Vocabulary Knowledge**

##### *Association Level: Basic Understanding of Word Meaning*

Association level activities are the lowest level of difficulty and encompass activities such as completing crossword puzzles, playing matching activities, memorizing definitions, and writing sentences for target vocabulary words. Typical vocabulary instruction often covers words at a surface level without deepening students' understanding. This is a necessary first step, but high-quality vocabulary instruction goes beyond association level.

##### *Comprehension Level: Active Use of Newly Learned Words*

These activities require students to use their knowledge of the target vocabulary to complete graphic organizers such as word maps, semantic feature analysis (SFA) grids, and Venn diagrams.

##### *Generative Level: Deepening Understanding of Word Meaning and Use*

Generative activities are higher order thinking activities that require students to apply the information about a word's meaning in unique ways, resulting in responses that demonstrate their deep understanding of the word. Beck and her colleagues (2002, 2008) developed several engaging generative activities. Examples of comprehension and generative level activities are described at the end of this chapter.

### **8. Discuss the Word in Context**

Briefly discuss the words when students encounter them in the context of the selection.

### Sample Tier 1 Vocabulary Lesson

Following is an example of a vocabulary lesson using this instructional design. The students are going to read a selection titled *The Giant Jam Sandwich* (Lord & Burroway, 1972). In this story, millions of wasps are taking over the village of Itching Down. The word *nuisance* is one of the words on the list the teacher generated as she read the selection. The teacher used the Selecting Words to Teach steps and determined that the word was in the nondirective category of natural context, conceptually central to understanding the story, unfamiliar to her students, and important for the students to know 5 years from now. Therefore, she decided that *nuisance* was one of the words that should be explicitly taught.

1. Student-friendly definitions
  - *Nuisance*: If you say someone or something is a *nuisance*, then the person or thing makes you mad, upsets you, or causes a lot of problems for you.
2. Examples within the context of the selection
  - Wasps are taking over the village of Itching Down. They are a *nuisance* because they sting, chase, and dive at people. Also, their buzzing and humming is very loud. These wasps are causing problems and making people mad. They are a *nuisance*!
  - A family is having a picnic. Ants are causing a problem because they keep trying to get at the food. The ants are a *nuisance* because the family has to keep the ants away from the food; the family members cannot enjoy their lunch.
  - Mosquitoes are trying to bite the campers as they sit around the campfire. The mosquitoes are a *nuisance* because the campers have to keep shooing them away.
3. Examples beyond the context of the selection
  - You missed the best part of your favorite television show because you were interrupted by a loud noise that lasted a long time. The noise was a *nuisance* because you couldn't hear what the people on the television were saying and you missed the best part of the show.
  - Going to Disneyland is fun except that the long lines you have to wait in to get on the rides are a *nuisance*.
  - Losing recess is a *nuisance* because you can't play with your friends.
4. Nonexamples
  - Receiving a gift or a treat is not a *nuisance* because it makes you happy, not mad or upset.
  - When a teacher says, "You don't have homework tonight," it is not a *nuisance* because you have more time to play after school.
5. Concrete representations
  - The teacher and a student participate in a role play. The teacher keeps disturbing the student while he is trying to read a good book. When the role play is over, the teacher explains that she was being a *nuisance* because she kept disturbing the student while he was trying to read.
6. Discuss the word with the students
  - What does *nuisance* mean?
  - Take a minute and think back to a time when you experienced something or somebody that was a *nuisance*.

7. Activities to promote word learning

- Place the number of these phrases on the following word line. Explain your placement. How much of a *nuisance* is it when
  1. Someone talks during a movie?
  2. You watch your favorite television program?
  3. A child does not stop crying?

Little nuisance . . . . . Great deal of nuisance

8. Discuss the word in context

- We have just come to the word *nuisance* in our story, *The Giant Jam Sandwich*. What does *nuisance* mean? What was the *nuisance* in this story? How were the wasps a *nuisance*? When something is a *nuisance*, how does it make you feel? We are going to read more to see what they did about the *nuisance*.

**Tier 2 Vocabulary Instruction**

Struggling readers often need additional instruction to learn the vocabulary in reading selections. Tier 2 intervention ideally would reinforce and reteach vocabulary words taught in the core curriculum. Some intervention programs operate separately from the classroom setting. In those cases the words should be taken from selections to be read in the intervention setting. The purpose of Tier 2 vocabulary instruction is to provide students with more intensive, meaningful interactions with target vocabulary that will give them the practice opportunities they need to thoroughly process and internalize the words' meanings. High-quality research studies have been instrumental in defining this section (Apthorp et al., 2012; Beck & McKeown, 2007; Coyne, McCoach, & Kapp, 2007; Pullen, Tuckwiller, Konold, Maynard, & Coyne, 2010).

The instructional routine is similar to that described for Tier 1. The lessons begin with the teacher reviewing the student-friendly definition, examples, nonexamples, and concrete representations that were initially taught during Tier 1 instruction (or in a prior reading of the selection if intervention operates separately from the classroom). In Tier 2 intervention the teacher provides additional activities to promote word learning (see Dimino & Taylor, 2009). Students are expected to use their knowledge of the word to generate responses and justify them, giving them opportunities to deeply process the word's meaning, which is critical in making the word part of their working vocabulary. Following is an example of a Tier 2 vocabulary lesson that was developed to provide additional instruction for the target word, *nuisance*, that was chosen for *The Giant Jam Sandwich*.

**Sample Tier 2 Vocabulary Lesson**

1. Review the student-friendly definition
  - One of the words we learned was *nuisance*. Remember, if you say someone or something is a *nuisance*, the person or thing makes you mad, upsets you, or causes a lot of problems.
2. Review examples within the context of the story
  - The wasps in *The Giant Jam Sandwich* were a *nuisance* to the people living in Itching Down. The wasps stung, chased, and dove at people. Their loud humming and buzzing sounds were a *nuisance*, too.

3. Review examples beyond the context of the selection
  - It is a *nuisance* when you are trying to watch your favorite television show and all of a sudden there is a noise that is so loud and lasts so long that you miss the best part.
4. Review nonexamples
  - When I don't give you homework, you have more time to play; that isn't a *nuisance* because it doesn't upset you or make you mad.
5. Review concrete representations
  - Remember when Mark and I did the role play where he was trying to read his favorite book? I was a *nuisance* because I kept bothering by asking him questions while he was trying to read.
6. Provide additional activities to promote word learning
  - Would you want to be around a person who is a *nuisance*? Why? Why not?
  - Everyone said he was a *nuisance* because. . .
  - When might your friend say, "You're being a *nuisance*?" Why?
  - If a person is a *nuisance*, then would you ask him to be your friend, or would you find another person to ask? Why?
  - If someone is a *nuisance*, then how would he or she act?
  - You can describe someone as being a *nuisance* if she. . .
  - If a person is a *nuisance*, then is she making you happy or making you mad? Explain.

### Tier 3 Vocabulary Instruction

To date, there is no empirical evidence describing the features of effective Tier 3 vocabulary instruction. Therefore, the design of Tier 3 instruction is based on recommendations from Gersten et al. (2008) and a logical extension of the research. Students who experience difficulty understanding and processing the meaning of words during Tier 2 instruction need more intensive Tier 3 instruction. The design of instruction is essentially the same as Tier 2. Decreasing the group size to one to two students and increasing the length of the session intensifies instruction and provides more opportunities for students to interact with the target words. Adjusting these factors provides students with more time to participate in the activities that are critical to help them deeply process the words.

### WRITING ACTIVITIES

Writing activities can be integrated into your intervention lessons by asking students to write their answers to activities rather than, or in addition to, verbally responding. Writing responses will be too difficult for most kindergartners and first graders. Most students in the second grade and above, however, could accomplish this task. These activities can be assigned as homework to reinforce new vocabulary and provide cumulative review for previously taught words. They can also be used as learning center activities that students complete while you are conducting small-group differentiated instruction.

It is important to teach students how to write responses using the same lesson design you used to teach students how to verbally respond to these activities. Following is an example of how to implement this lesson design for writing activities. Teach students how to verbally respond before teaching them how to write responses. It will be easier for students

to compose their answers if they have become facile with verbally responding to these activities.

If you would like to reinforce the steps of the writing process, then you can ask children to write a draft or “sloppy copy” of their response, revise and edit before writing, or enter their final version into the computer. You may also use these activities as a “free write” opportunity where students write their thoughts without worrying about spelling, grammar, and so forth.

### FOCUS ON: Active Use of New Words

1. Semantic Feature Analysis (SFA) . . . . .	267
2. Semantic Mapping . . . . .	268
3. Word Map . . . . .	269
4. Frayer Model . . . . .	271
5. Venn Diagram . . . . .	272
6. Sentence Frames . . . . .	273

### FOCUS ON: Deepening Understanding of Words

7. Describing/Explaining 1 . . . . .	275
8. Examples/Nonexamples . . . . .	276
9. Relationships Among Words . . . . .	277
10. Vocabulary Logs . . . . .	278
11. Writing Prompts . . . . .	279
12. Fix-Up Strategies . . . . .	280
13. Yes or No . . . . .	282
14. Idea Completion . . . . .	283
15. Tell Me Why . . . . .	284
16. Making Choices 1 . . . . .	285
17. Making Choices 2 (Examples/Nonexamples) . . . . .	286
18. Describing/Explaining 2 . . . . .	287
19. Create Examples . . . . .	288
20. Relationships Among Words . . . . .	289
21. Words with Multiple Meanings . . . . .	290
22. Making Choices 3 . . . . .	291