

## Vocabulary

Focusing on vocabulary instruction can make a difference in improving reading comprehension and increasing reading achievement.

### Factoids

- Children growing up in less economically advantaged homes have fewer experiences with words before they enter school. On an average, a pre-school child from a professional family is provided annually experiences with **11** million words, a working-class family **6** million words, and welfare family **3** million words (Hart and Risley, 1995).
- Vocabulary assessed in first grade predicted **over 30%** of reading comprehension variance in 11<sup>th</sup> grade (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1977).
- In the upper grades, those who enter 4<sup>th</sup> grade with significant vocabulary deficits show increasing problems with reading comprehension, even if they have good reading (word identification) skills. The available evidence does not suggest a substantial “catching-up” process, but rather a continuing slippage relative to those with average and above-average achievement (Biemiller, 2003).
- McKeown, Beck, Omanson, and Pople (1985) found that while **four encounters** with a word did not reliably improve reading comprehension, **12 encounters** did.
- Chall and Jacobs (2003) report that for low-income children in grades 4-7 the **first skill to slip** by fourth grade is **word meaning**.
- Walsh (2003) reports that the five most widely used **basal readers do not provide** the kind of sustained vocabulary instruction essential to increase reading comprehension.

### How Can Teacher’s Help?

We know a great deal about vocabulary instruction. Teachers can and must help students increase a student’s vocabulary by:

- Providing students with ample opportunities to read from a wide range of text including informational text. Fifth grade students who read for **10 minutes** a day **read 622,000 more words** each year than students who did not read independently (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1998).
- Selecting read-alouds that contain interesting vocabulary and concepts. Teachers should conduct read-alouds for 15-20 minutes daily and include rich discussions of words.
- Engaging students in interactive and cognitively challenging dialogue.
- Providing discussion and **direct** vocabulary instruction in teaching individual words and vocabulary strategies.

### What instructional activities do you consistently use with students to improve their vocabulary?

Review the material in this appendix for evidence/research based activities that improve student achievement. You will also find a listing of the Roots and Affixes listed in the Illinois Assessment Framework. Students need to receive instruction on the identified roots and affixes.

### References

- Biemiller, A. and Slonim, N. (2003). Estimating root word vocabulary growth in normative and advantages populations: evidence for a common sequence of vocabulary acquisition. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 93, 498-520. Chall, J. and Jacobs, V. (2003). Poor children’s fourth-grade slump. *American Educator*, Spring, 2003.
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