



# R/ELA Weekly Tidbits

Maryland Common Core State Curriculum Framework  
Maryland School for the Deaf

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Dear Teachers,

We hope you all had a nice spring break and are ready to tackle the rest of the school year. The end is rapidly approaching us and before we know, summer will be on us. Being a teacher has one of its best rewards: a summer vacation of around two months.

R/ELA Common Core State Standards and the Seven Capacities of a Literate Individual heavily emphasize on: content area vocabulary; articulation skills; reading comprehension; writing skills of various purposes with a wide-ranging and precise vocabulary. The vocabulary capacity shall be the main focus of this newsletter as vocabulary is a principle contributor to comprehension, fluency, and achievement. Vocabulary aids understanding of single words and comprehension is tied to larger units of text. We believe in order for students to become as literate as possible, we need to incorporate direct vocabulary instruction on a daily basis with students. Research has shown that improved comprehension is related to direct vocabulary instruction. In fact, a meta-analysis conducted by Stahl and Fairbanks (1986) indicated that improved comprehension is related to direct vocabulary instruction. Researchers found that on average, students who had placed at the 50th percentile in reading comprehension scored 30 percentile points higher after receiving direct vocabulary instruction. This by itself is every teacher's dream, having a student score 30 percentile points higher toward the end of a school year.

What should teachers understand about word learning? There are nine things teachers may have forgotten (or have never known) but need to remember about words and word learning to be effective teachers of vocabulary and their content area. Suggestions for classroom practice related to each idea are provided in the next two pages.

Enjoy the spring weather,

Bonnie Kramer and Elizabeth Reed

R/ELA Curriculum Coordinators

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Ideas for this  
newsletter are  
always welcome?

### **1. English is a huge and unique collection of words.**

- ◆ English is three times larger in total number of words than German and six times larger than French.  
Thing(s) to do:
- Give students a passage that contains words like *good*, *nice*, *said*, and *happy*. Have them work in pairs using online dictionaries and thesauruses to find substitutes for these overworked words. Then, have students rewrite the passage and share it with the class to show how they have made it more interesting and powerful.

### **2. The rules of English are simple and consistent compared to other languages.**

Thing(s) to do:

- Teach students the prefixes, roots, and suffixes that appear most often in English and are constant in their meaning. When students know one prefix, root, or suffix, it helps unlock the meanings of other words with the same prefix, root, or suffix.

### **3. Language proficiency grows from oral competence to written competence.**

- ◆ Broad word knowledge enables students to communicate in ways that are precise, powerful, persuasive, and interesting because words are tools for analyzing, inferring, evaluating, and reasoning.  
Thing(s) to do:
- Read literature aloud to students, stopping to explain and talk about words they may not know.
- Tape a new word on a child's top and have the child explain what the word means every time someone asks for the definition.
- Make a point to talk (Stephen Krashan's *i + 1 language input* from issue 2) over students' heads as much as possible. Fingerspell words you know students do not know and expect them to ask what the word means. Make it necessary for survival in your classroom. In other words, make them accountable for their vocabulary learning.

### **4. Words are learned because of associations that connect the new with the known.**

- ◆ Learning a word's linguistic elements is enhanced by storing a nonlinguistic form or sensory image along with the linguistic image.  
Thing(s) to do:
- Engage students' prior knowledge and related experiences before teaching new words. For example, you want to teach the word *blog*. Define the word, provide the word's derivation, and show a picture of someone seated at a computer composing an essay to post on their personal website. Then, show students an actual blog.
- Have students create three-dimensional words. Have students include a definition, sentence, drawing, and real object to represent the word. Then have students peer teach their words to one another in small groups or to the whole class and post their work on a word wall for review and reference.

**5. Seventy percent of the most frequently used words have multiple meanings.**

Thing(s) to do:

- Use fiction or nonfiction selection to teach students how context can give clues to a word's meaning in several ways. Show students that many words have multiple meanings and explicitly teach them how to use context and references to help unlock appropriate meanings.

**6. Meanings of 60% of multisyllabic words can be inferred by analyzing word parts.**

- ◆ This is especially true in science because it contains many multisyllabic terms.

Thing(s) to do:

- Have students bookmark the Dictionary of Greek and Latin Roots found at <http://english.glendale.cc.ca.us/roots.dict.html> in their computers. Encourage students to use the list to unlock meanings of words.
- Encourage students to create word trees of often-used roots. Print a prefix on each branch, and students can add appropriate words to each one.

**7. Direct instruction in vocabulary influences comprehension more than any other factor.**

**8. Teaching fewer words well is more effective than teaching several words in a cursory way.**

Thing(s) to do:

- Teach struggling students no more than three to five new words at a time because they might have difficulty retaining more than that. Teach only words related to the main idea of new material.
- Call attention to important terms that appear in bold or italicized print. Show students that the meaning often follows the term or appears in the glossary at the back of the text.
- Occasionally teach new words after reading to allow students to use their own word-attack skills independently.

**9. Effective teachers display an attitude of excitement and interest in words and language.**

- ◆ They are excited about words and language.

Thing(s) to do:

- Provide students with a Word of the Day.
- Regularly involve students in games that allow them to play with terms.

As a conclusion, the goal of vocabulary instruction should be to build students' independent word learning strategies that can empower them for lifelong learning.

Works Cited

Bromley, Karen. "Nine Things Every Teacher Should Know About Words and Vocabulary Instruction." *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 50:7Apr. 2007. Print.

# Bookmark This.

For more information and/or ideas for vocabulary instruction, here is another article: Chapman, Carolyn and Rita King. "Vocabulary." *Differentiated Instructional Strategies: for Reading in the Content Areas*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2009. Print.

Here is another book that can be used as a vocabulary resource book: Edward Fry. *The Vocabulary Teacher's Book of Lists*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley and Sons, Inc, 2004. Print.

## Time for humor

