

# Giving Your Students a Bigger and Better Academic Vocabulary

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Presenter: Laurie Martin, Adult Learning Resource Center  
[Lmartin@cntrmail.org](mailto:Lmartin@cntrmail.org)

## Selecting Words for Focused Instruction

		Sample Words
Basic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Common</li><li>• Concrete</li><li>• In oral vocabulary</li></ul>	
<b>Academic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Abstract</li><li>• Academic (across content areas)</li><li>• In oral and written language</li><li>• Common Core State Standards: words traditionally used in academic dialogue and complex text.</li></ul>	
Content Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Content/subject specific</li><li>• Low occurrences in text</li></ul>	

Source: *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*, Beck, I., McKeown, M., and Kucan, L. 2002. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

## Step 1: Preparation of Teaching Notes and Presentation of Word Meanings

### Sample Teacher Notes

**intrude** (v) – to come or go into a place where you are not wanted

Words in different contexts that have relevance to the instructor

1. A burglar intruded into my apartment and stole my purse. I had to call the police to report the intrusion. They never caught the intruder.
2. My friends planned a vacation. I wanted to go with them because their trip sounded like fun, but I was afraid I would be intruding on their plans.

Prompt for students to try out the word orally:

- Has anyone ever intruded into your home or work area?

## Step 2: Vocabulary Practice

- ★ Students should hear, discuss, and use the vocabulary words in many contexts
- ★ 10 or more encounters
- ★ Recycle vocabulary words constantly

## High Impact Activities to Boost Vocabulary

All high impact activities should be done orally, with the teacher encouraging and facilitating discussion and debate. High impact activities push students to think critically about word meanings and the relationships words have to each other.

### Categories (Name 3)

Teachers prepare prompts asking students to name or list things, situations, people, etc. in categories to which target vocabulary can apply. Students can write notes for homework, then be ready to share answers and discuss them in class. Turn it into a game by giving points for unique answers, or by challenging students to come up with as many items as they can.

Example:

- Name things that can be expanded.
- Name 3 things that can be expanded.

### Say it if...

This activity is done **orally**. Students say the vocabulary word if the stated context applies, then should explain why they chose their answer. Encourage students to be playful and creative when responding. For example, for the first prompt in the list below, a student might say that knocking on a neighbor's door at 3 in the afternoon is an intrusion if you know that they sleep during the day and work at night.

*I'm going to describe a situation. If it's an intrusion, say "intrusion."*

- I knocked on my neighbor's door at 3:00 in the afternoon.
- I kicked my neighbor's door open.
- Two people sat on a bench in the park.

### Make Sense?

Students determine if the sentences make sense. If they don't make sense, the students revise them so that they do. Personalize the contexts whenever possible. Be sure that the sense is not dependent on students' background knowledge. Have students share and discuss their answers orally.

Example:

Vince unlocked his door with his key and quietly intruded into his house.

**Try it!** Select a word from the word bank below and write a statement using the word.

accurate	motivate	attitude
exaggerate	vivid	expand

## Mining for Meaning

Absolute synonyms rarely (if ever) exist in English, though to our students it may seem as though English is full of synonyms. Synonyms differ in subtle ways, including:

- Real-world meaning
- Intensity
- Connotation
- Collocation
- Geographic use
- Formality (Register)
- Professional vs lay terminology

Give students 4-5 vocabulary words they have become familiar with. Elicit one or more synonyms for each word. Pairs or small groups then work together to discuss how the words meanings and/or usages differ. Teach students to use dictionaries, thesauruses, and other resources such as [www.wordnik.com](http://www.wordnik.com). (From *Vocabulary Activities*, Ur, P. 2012. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, pp. 162-3.)

## Connect 2

Students form their own meaningful connections between target vocabulary words, then share and discuss them with other students.

Example:

- *Interfere* is connected to *object* because *I object when my mother interferes in my personal life.*

**Try it!** Choose two words from the word bank below and complete the Connect 2.

intrude	exaggerate	vivid
accurate	attitude	motivation

\_\_\_\_\_ is connected to \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_

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## Step 3: Independent Application and Monitoring

### Conversation & Writing Prompts

Create interesting questions using academic vocabulary words. Let students share their responses orally in a conversation or in writing.

Examples:

- Tell about something you did spontaneously.
- What do you think are the features of a perfect workplace?

## Monitoring Progress

- Pre- and post-quizzes
- Listen to class discussions
- Collect written work regularly
- Provide corrective feedback, clarification, examples

## Resources

### FREE DOWNLOADABLE VOCABULARY UNITS

Complete 10-word vocabulary units of academic words are posted on the Adult Learning Resource Center website at <http://www.thecenterweb.org/alrc/reading-pub.html>. Appropriate for higher-level ESL students. All pages are MS Word documents that you can easily personalize for your own classes. Units include teacher notes and multiple practice activities.

## Professional Resources

*Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*, Beck, I., McKeown, M., and Kucan, L. 2002. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

*Reading in a Second Language: Moving from Theory to Practice*, Grabe, W. 2009. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press

*Teaching Word Meanings*, Stahl, S. and Nagy, W. 2006. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

*Vocabulary Activities*, Ur, P. 2012. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press

*When Adolescents Can't Read*, Curtis, M. and Longo, A. 1999. Manchester, NH: Brookline Books

*Word Knowledge: A Vocabulary Teachers' Handbook*, Zimmerman, C. 2008. New York, NY: Oxford University Press

Curtis, M.E., & Longo, A.M. (2001, November). Teaching vocabulary to adolescents to improve comprehension. *Reading Online*. Retrieved 2009 from [http://www.readingonline.org/articles/art\\_index.asp?HREF=/articles/curtis/index.html](http://www.readingonline.org/articles/art_index.asp?HREF=/articles/curtis/index.html)

## Student Resources

Wordnik, <https://wordnik.com/>

Merriam-Webster's Learner's Dictionary, <http://learnersdictionary.com/>