

# Vocabulary Instruction

Vocabulary development for students is closely linked to a student's reading comprehension. (Anderson and Freebody, 1981) Most students with dyslexia remain far behind their peers in vocabulary knowledge because they spend much less time reading. This potential lack of growth impacts a student's ability to comprehend words when they read, and additionally impacts writing and speaking, as the student is not able to use more advanced vocabulary in these additional areas. In fact, even listening comprehension can be impacted when listening to teachers and other speakers. The student may simply not know what the words being used mean. Therefore, every minute spent in vocabulary instruction is critical for many students with dyslexia.

*Appropriate* instruction for students with dyslexia is important. When teaching, a quick introduction of new vocabulary followed by reading the story and a simple vocabulary test after reading or at the end of a unit of study is not enough to lock a new word into memory. Reading research has debunked this methodology. A more interactive introduction and study of words, with frequent reviews will help to lock a new word into the speaking, reading, and writing word banks of students. Research indicates that students need to experience a word around 12 times or more before they can really comprehend it (McKeown, Beck, Omanson, & Pople, 1985). When students have enough exposure with a word, they will begin to use it in their writing and speech. That word will then become a part of their personal vocabulary bank, or lexicon.

We have found that a simple, but dedicated way to bring about vocabulary growth is to provide the following instruction and practice:

1. Introduce a new word to the student by presenting the word orally.
2. Have the student repeat the word. Make certain they are saying the word correctly.
3. Ask the student if they know what the word means. If they do, move on to another word in the vocabulary list for that story.
4. Tell the student a student friendly, short meaning of the word.
  - a. If a word has more than one meaning, teach the meaning used in the story to be read. Tell the student that the word does have more than one meaning. Let them know what the other meaning is but stay focused on the meaning used in the story to be read.
5. Write (or type if working online) the word on the graphic organizer.
6. Write (or type if working online) the student friendly, short meaning of the word in the second space provided on the graphic organizer.
7. Have the student draw a picture of something that would remind them of the meaning of the word. Some guidance may be necessary, but this picture should be of something that would remind the student, not necessarily the teacher, of the meaning.
8. Move on to the next word.
9. Have student read the story and have the graphic organizer next to them for reference if they forget the meaning of one of the new words.
10. Review words learned.
11. Provide a short assessment to determine whether the student has locked the new word into memory.

Additionally, it can be helpful to use the new words throughout the week in day-to-day conversation with the child.

## **Reviewing Introduced Vocabulary Words**

How many words to include in reviewing introduced vocabulary is truly dependent on the memory capabilities of the student. For some students, 5 -8 words would be appropriate. Others may be able to work with a few more words. Review words 2-5 times per week for a few minutes each time.

1. Provide the student with the graphic organizers of the words to be reviewed.
2. Ask student to review the words with the graphic organizer open to all columns.
3. Fold the meaning column so that it is no longer showing.
4. Allowing student to look at the words, say one of the words and ask for it's meaning. The meaning should closely match what was discussed during instruction and is written in the middle column.
5. If a student can't remember, show them the picture column only. Ask if they remember the words' meaning. If not, uncover the meaning and tell them the meaning aloud. (They can then see and hear the word's meaning).
6. Move on to the other words using the same steps.

The teacher will soon see, with the weekly reviews, the meaning of this set of words will quickly be learned by the student.

## **Testing for Vocabulary Knowledge**

To determine whether words and their meanings are held in the student's memory, provide the following assessment:

1. Using the graphic organizer of studied vocabulary words as your guide, Ask the student to tell you the meaning of the word.
2. If the student doesn't know the meaning, mark the word as unknown.
3. Do not go in order of the words on the graphic organizer. Give the third or fourth word on the list, then move on to another word on the list, making certain to ask about each word.
4. Let the student know how they did, praising them for all the words learned.
5. Any words still not known, continue practicing, along with new words.
6. Retest the unknown words at the future testing of the new words.
7. Keep the graphic organizers in a binder. It could be fun to review the words from time to time!

In time, you will see the student's new vocabulary begin to be more evident in their speaking, reading, writing, and listening and reading comprehension abilities.