

**SAMPLE**



# *Vocabulary Instruction* for Intermediate English Language Learners



TEACHING STUDENTS  
IN ENGLISH,  
ESOL, AND ESL  
CLASSROOMS

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# Introduction

*How do I teach vocabulary?*

For many students, vocabulary instruction consists of looking up words in the dictionary, copying the definitions (usually the shortest ones), and writing sentences using the word. This usually amounts to not much more than handwriting practice for most students, since they are only memorizing a definition and not learning meaning or word acquiring knowledge. Word knowledge is much deeper than simple definition knowledge. This manual focuses on strategies for vocabulary instruction that increase the breadth and depth of word knowledge necessary for students to comprehend text.

The first section, *Vocabulary Instruction Management*, explains in detail how to organize and structure vocabulary instruction, from how to choose the words to teach, to how to make word cards and vocabulary notebooks. This section also includes lessons in Dictionary Skills and Thesaurus Skills, since secondary students may still be very weak in those areas.

*Explicit Vocabulary Instruction*, the second section, centers on the strategies that teach specific vocabulary through direct instruction. This instruction involves a variety of techniques that promote active engagement with vocabulary words. Direct instruction has been found to both help vocabulary learning and contribute to better text comprehension.

Since teachers cannot possibly teach all the words their students do not know, much of a student's vocabulary will have to be acquired outside of explicit vocabulary instruction. The third section, *Implicit Vocabulary Learning Strategies*, contains methods to use in teaching students effective word-learning strategies, so that they can determine the meanings of unfamiliar words encountered.

Word knowledge builds over time through multiple exposures to words in different contexts, so section four, *Repeated Exposure to Vocabulary*, points out ways for students to have meaningful, repeated, concrete experiences with new vocabulary words.

All the components of effective vocabulary instruction work in concert, and no component is sufficient in and of itself to ensure success. A great deal of scientifically-based vocabulary research is available, and some of these resources are listed in the Reference section of this manual for a list of resources on the subject. This manual incorporates research findings into classroom instruction. Each lesson plan provides background information for the teacher, a goal, a list of materials, activities, and, in many cases, graphic organizers. The teaching strategies included in this book are varied and differentiated in order to meet the needs of all learners, including English language learners. Region 4 presents this book in the hope that it will support and assist teachers as they strive to teach vocabulary to students in ESL, ESOL, and English classrooms.

# How to Choose Words for a Vocabulary List

## ♦ Choose only 5 to 10 words per week (per content area).

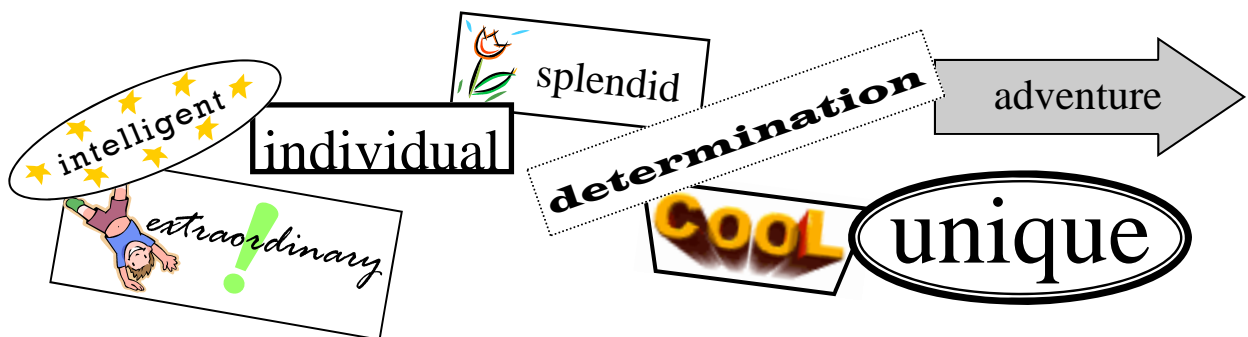
A secondary student has between six and eight different classes a semester, from Computer Applications and Art to American History and Geometry. Ten new words per class each week would result in 60 to 80 words a week, a healthy number of words not only to learn but also to try to retain. Furthermore, English language learners learn far more than ten words per week in their ESL class, and acquire survival vocabulary every day in the halls and the lunchroom, and on the bus. Even at only ten words a week, a student would have an annual total of 360 vocabulary words per class, or 2,880 words for eight classes, for an impressive 17,280 new words over the six years of secondary school.

## ♦ Choose “useful” words.

The vocabulary words listed at the beginning of each chapter in a textbook may not necessarily be the best ones to spend time on teaching and learning. The student may never to use them again after finishing that chapter. For example, the word “ibis” occurs in most vocabulary lists before the short story “The Scarlet Ibis,” but it is not a word that most students will use very much. Also, students could figure out the word’s meaning from the context of the story, which features a large red bird over and over again. Far more useful to students would be the word “scarlet,” which does not appear on the textbook’s vocabulary list and which they probably do not know. This is a word that students could use frequently and would be easy to reinforce throughout the year.

## ♦ Choose words that the student will see again.

Many vocabulary words are used in multiple content areas, such as “scarlet” from the example above. That word will appear throughout textbooks for English (*The Scarlet Letter*), Science (scarlet macaw), and Social Studies (scarlet fever), and possibly even in Math word problems. Each time the student sees the word used in a different context it will be reinforced and retention of the word will become more relevant. In the case of the word “scarlet,” the meaning—the color red—is the same across the content areas. However, some words will have multiple meanings in different subjects, such as the word “table.” It is important to point out that multiple-meaning words may also occur as more than one part of speech.



# Vocabulary Discussions

## Background Information for the Teacher

Classroom discussion is an important element of vocabulary instruction. Discussion involves students in clarifying definitions and helps them feel more connected to the words as they use them orally with their peers. Students also spend more time reflecting on a word's meaning as they try to use it in a relevant context, even if they are not called on to participate in the discussion.

## Goal

The student will increase understanding of vocabulary word meanings by participating in a class discussion about the words' usage.

## Materials

- ◆ Vocabulary list of teacher-selected words
- ◆ Textbook containing the chapter or story from which the words were taken

## Activities

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**Note:** Refer to *How to Choose Words for a Vocabulary List* on page 2 of this manual to learn how to select vocabulary to use in this lesson.

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1. Read aloud the portion of the text that includes the first new vocabulary word. It may be necessary to read a few sentences that appear before and after the sentence containing the target word in order to establish the context.
2. Tell the students the new vocabulary word and write it on the board. Ask them what they think it means and why.
3. Allow the students to share why they may know the meaning of the word, i.e., they were able to guess it from the context around it (How?), they had heard it before (Where?), or they knew the meanings of the root words (What?).
4. Ask the students to use the words in meaningful sentences that are relevant to their lives. It may help to give them some prompts, including gestures and/or visual examples, such as pictures from a book or the Internet, or ones drawn on the board. If appropriate, ask students to come to the front of the room and act out the meaning of the word in pantomime.
5. Discuss other meanings for the word. With some words, it may be useful to discuss synonyms and antonyms. Other words may lend themselves to a discussion of examples and non-examples. ("What are some examples of *precious* things? What are some things that are not *precious*?")
6. Continue the discussion using the same technique for each of the vocabulary words.
7. Ask questions containing the words to check for understanding and discuss any misunderstandings the students may have.

# Possible Sentences

## Background Information for the Teacher

Possible Sentences is a direct vocabulary instruction strategy. It uses prediction to link new vocabulary words with students' prior knowledge by asking students to predict "possible sentences" that they might find in a new and unfamiliar passage of fiction or nonfiction.

## Goal

Using prediction as a pre-reading strategy, the student will improve understanding of vocabulary word meanings.

## Materials

- ♦ Vocabulary list of pre-selected words
- ♦ Possible Sentences handout, one per student
- ♦ Transparency of Possible Sentences handout
- ♦ Transparency markers
- ♦ Essay containing high-level vocabulary, such as "Should Schools Be Wired to the Internet?" from *Time*, May 25, 1998, one copy per student
- ♦ Transparency of the same essay used

## Activities

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**Note:** For this lesson, select six to eight key vocabulary words from either a narrative passage or piece of expository text which the students have not read or heard before. Also choose an equal number of words that the students are likely to know already.

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1. Give a copy of the Possible Sentences handout to each student. Place the transparency of the handout on the overhead projector to model the strategy for the students. Write *Schools and the Internet* on the *name of topic* line.
2. On the board, list the vocabulary words from the passage, mixing the new and the familiar words together. For example, the following words might be chosen from the essay "Should Schools Be Wired to the Internet?"

computer	necessity	enthusiasm	priorities
luxury	communications	attendance	prepare
tools	information	frivolous	future
access	technology	diverting	challenge

3. Define the words for the students, using discussion, dictionaries, and visual examples.
4. Tell students they will be making "possible sentences" about the passage using these words, but they are going to do this before they even read the text. Explain that the sentence contains two vocabulary words and is called a possible sentence because it is possible that there is a sentence like it in the text.

5. Write the words in the Word Bank box on the Possible Sentences transparency. Tell students to do the same on their copies of the Possible Sentences handout. Model the activity first by choosing two of the words from the vocabulary list, such as *computer* and *frivolous*. Point out that you have chosen one familiar word, *computer*, and one unfamiliar one, *frivolous*.
6. Ask students to help you make a possible sentence (one that they think might be in the essay “Should Schools Be Wired to the Internet?”) using both the words *computer* and *frivolous*, such as:

A computer is frivolous because it costs a lot of money.

It is important to accept and record any sentence the students may give, even if the information in it is incorrect. Write the sentence in the first sentence section of the Possible Sentences transparency and underline the vocabulary words. Tell students to write the sentence in the same place on their Possible Sentences handout.

8. Continue to pair vocabulary words with input from the students, and elicit sentences from them. Students may use the same vocabulary words more than once, as long as they are used in different ways. (For example, a string of sentences such as: *A computer is a necessity; A computer is frivolous; A computer is a priority* would not be productive.) Write the words and sentences on the Possible Sentences transparency and tell the students to copy them on their Possible Sentences handouts.
9. Read the passage, using the most appropriate strategy that ensures that students can access it. For example, the teacher may read the passage aloud, have students take turns reading aloud, divide the passage up between several small groups, or have each student read the passage silently. Tell the students that as they read, they should try to discover whether their possible sentences contain information that is accurate and in the text.
10. After reading the passage, read each class-generated possible sentence and determine whether they are accurate. On the transparency, on the line next to the sentence, mark possible sentences that are accurate with a **C** for Correct. If the sentence is inaccurate, mark it with an **I** for Incorrect. Discuss why the sentences marked **I** are inaccurate and revise them to make them all accurate.

## Possible Sentences

Possible Sentences for: \_\_\_\_\_  
name of topic

### Word Bank

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Adapted from Moore, D. W., & Moore, S. A. (1986). Possible sentences. In E. K. Dishner, T. W. Bean, J. E. Readance, & D. W. Moore (Eds.), *Reading in the content areas* (2nd ed.). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.