



EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Vocabulary Tip Sheet

Grade 1 Language and Literacy Project

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“Vocabulary knowledge is the single best predictor of academic achievement across subject matter domains.” (Saville-Troike, 1984)

What is vocabulary?

Vocabulary, in its simplest definition, is knowing the meaning of words that are used in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Vocabulary can be acquired incidentally and through explicit teaching. Vocabulary can be classified into three levels:

- **Tier 1** includes the basic words we use every day (e.g., happy, big, house).
- **Tier 2** includes high-frequency words that are used in a variety of environments. They are often encountered in writing rather than oral language and are the most important words that require direct instruction. Examples include descriptive words and many words with multiple meanings (e.g., required, maintain, perform).
- **Tier 3** includes low-frequency words specific to a topic, subject area or academic context (e.g., photosynthesis, crepe, economics).

What vocabulary should be addressed in school?

All learners need to develop a strong base of Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary to be successful in school. Academic language (e.g. to classify, identify, summarize) is built through repeated exposure to vocabulary that goes beyond the Tier 1 words we hear and use in day-to-day conversations.

What does the research say about the importance of teaching vocabulary?

Research shows that students’ vocabulary level affects their reading comprehension. It is important to teach students the vocabulary necessary for academic success — especially for English Language Learners and students with language delays.

Academic vocabulary is best taught:

- **Explicitly.** Students need to be shown the connection between using everyday language and academic language, (e.g. when birds fly away to a warm place in the winter it is *migration*).
- Using words **multiple times**, both directly and indirectly. A student has to hear and say the word multiple times, in a variety of contexts before it becomes a part of their lexicon.
- Using **multiple means**, such as pictures, videos, active language learning through physical actions, art and mnemonic to create opportunities for students to make personal connections. For example, students can better understand words that have multiple meanings, such as bank or run, when presented in a visual way.
- Using rich vocabulary in a **variety of contexts** (e.g., read alouds, poetry, readers’ theatre, etc.).
- Using **categories, themes and pre-teaching** important new words in content areas.

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