



**MODULE INTENSIVE READING**  
**(PBI 221)**



**MODULE SESION 5**  
**BUILDING VOCABULARY**

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Good reading comprehension depends on understanding the words you are reading. The more words you recognize and understand in a text, the better your comprehension will be. What do you do when you encounter (meet) a new word in your reading?

- Ask another student about the meaning.
- Try to guess the meaning of the word from the context.
- Look up the definition in a dictionary.
- Skip over the word and continue reading.
- Analyze the word for clues to its meaning.

Compare your answers with those of another student and discuss these questions:

- When do you use these strategies?
- What are the advantages or disadvantages of each?

In fact, a good reader does all of the above at different times, depending on the word, the text, and the reason for reading it.

### **Strategy 1: Check your knowledge of the words used most frequently in English**

Advances in computer technology have made it possible for researchers to analyze thousands of English-language texts containing millions of words. From this research they have learned that a small percentage of words—about 2,000—are used much more frequently than all the other words. In fact, these 2,000 most frequent words account for almost 80 percent of most texts. If you know these words, you have a much better chance of understanding what you read.

## **Strategy 2: Focus on the words used in academic texts**

Research on academic texts (textbooks and academic journals) has shown that certain words are used very frequently in these texts, regardless of the subject matter. These words allow academic writers to explain or generalize their ideas or research, and to compare them with the work of others. Learning these 570 academic words can improve your comprehension of academic materials.

## **Strategy 3: Use the dictionary effectively**

Along with the definition, a dictionary provides a great deal of other information about a word. It tells you the part of speech of the word (noun, verb, adjective, etc.), how to pronounce it, and how to divide it into syllables. An example sentence is often included as well.

## **Strategy 4: Keep a vocabulary notebook**

When you encounter new words, write them in a notebook that you use only for vocabulary and not for other course work. (A small notebook is preferable so you can carry it around with you.) This notebook will help you study vocabulary more effectively. With all your words in one place in the notebook, you can easily check your knowledge of words you have studied before.

### **How to organize and use the notebook :**

1. Decide on a method for putting words in order. Many students prefer alphabetical order, though you may also order words according to other categories, such as topic or source (words from extensive reading books, words from Advanced Reading Power, and words from other course books).

2. Use two pages in the notebook. On the left-hand page, write a word, the part of speech, and the word in syllables. Under the word, write the sentence in which you found it. Then, on the right-hand page, write the meaning. (Note: If you can learn the words more quickly using definitions in your native language, and your teacher agrees, you may write the meanings in that language.)

3. Check your knowledge of the words by covering one of the pages and trying to remember the information on the other.

**Example:**

1. assumption—noun (as-sump-tion)	1. Something that you think is true
o How could you make an assumption	although you have no proof
about their family without meeting them?	

**Strategy 5: Use study cards**

Study cards can help you review words and make them part of your permanent vocabulary. When you have made a set of cards, carry them with you and test yourself often. Add new words that you encounter and want to learn. You should not remove a word from your set until you are completely sure of the meaning and can recall it instantly.

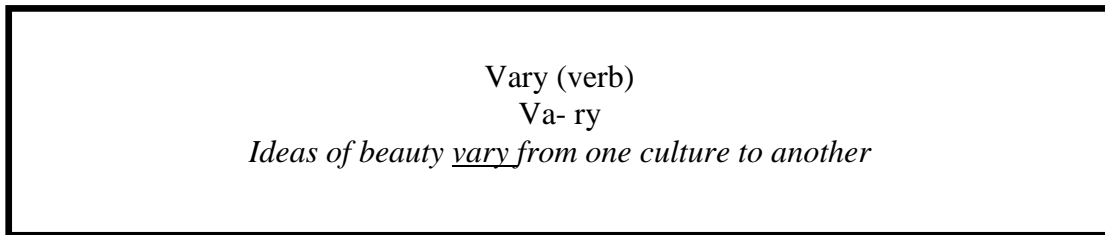
To make study cards, you will need small, blank cards (3 x 5 inches or about 7 x 12 cm).

**Example:**

On one side of the card write a word, the part of speech, the word in syllables, and the phrase or sentence in which you found the word.

<p>Vary (verb) Va- ry <i>Ideas of beauty <u>vary</u> from one culture to another</i></p>
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On the other side of the card, write the dictionary definition of the word as it was used in the passage.



### **Guidelines for Using Study Cards:**

- Go through all your cards twice on your own: Look at each word and say it aloud. If you remember the definition, say it aloud, too. If you do not remember the definition, look at the back of the card. Then say the word and the definition aloud.
- Go through the cards again with another student: Ask him/her to read each word to you. Tell him/her the definition. If you do not remember it, ask him/her to tell you. Then repeat it aloud.
- Rearrange your cards each time you use them, so they are in a different order. Put cards for especially difficult words in a separate group and quiz yourself on them. Then return the cards to the large group.
- Use the words on the study cards in conversation and in writing.
- Carry your cards with you and review your words whenever you have a few spare moments.

### **How Vocabulary Affects Reading Development**

From the research, we know that vocabulary supports reading development and increases comprehension. Students with low vocabulary scores tend to have low comprehension and students with satisfactory or high vocabulary scores tend to have satisfactory or high comprehension scores.

The report of the National Reading Panel states that the complex process of comprehension is critical to the development of children's reading skills and cannot

be understood without a clear understanding of the role that vocabulary development and instruction play in understanding what is read (NRP, 2000).

Chall's classic 1990 study showed that students with low vocabulary development were able to maintain their overall reading test scores at expected levels through grade four, but their mean scores for word recognition and word meaning began to slip as words became more abstract, technical, and literary. Declines in word recognition and word meaning continued, and by grade seven, word meaning scores had fallen to almost three years below grade level, and mean reading comprehension was almost a year below. Jeanne Chall coined the term "the fourth-grade slump" to describe this pattern in developing readers (Chall, Jacobs, and Baldwin, 1990).

### **Incidental and Intentional Vocabulary Learning**

How do we close the gap for students who have limited or inadequate vocabularies? The National Reading Panel (2000) concluded that there is no single research-based method for developing vocabulary and closing the gap. From its analysis, the panel recommended using a variety of indirect (incidental) and direct (intentional) methods of vocabulary instruction.

### **Incidental Vocabulary Learning**

Most students acquire vocabulary incidentally through indirect exposure to words at home and at school—by listening and talking, by listening to books read aloud to them, and by reading widely on their own.

The amount of reading is important to long-term vocabulary development (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1998). Extensive reading provides students with

repeated or multiple exposures to words and is also one of the means by which students see vocabulary in rich contexts (Kamil and Hiebert, 2005).

### **Intentional Vocabulary Learning**

Students need to be explicitly taught methods for intentional vocabulary learning. According to Michael Graves (2000), effective intentional vocabulary instruction includes:

- Teaching specific words (rich, robust instruction) to support understanding of texts containing those words.
- Teaching word-learning strategies that students can use independently.
- Promoting the development of word consciousness and using word play activities to motivate and engage students in learning new words.

### **Research-Supported Vocabulary-Learning Strategies**

Students need a wide range of independent word-learning strategies. Vocabulary instruction should aim to engage students in actively thinking about word meanings, the relationships among words, and how we can use words in different situations. This type of rich, deep instruction is most likely to influence comprehension (Graves, 2006; McKeown and Beck, 2004).

### **Student-Friendly Definitions**

The meaning of a new word should be explained to students rather than just providing a dictionary definition for the word—which may be difficult for students to understand. According to Isabel Beck, two basic principles should be followed in developing student-friendly explanations or definitions (Beck et al., 2013):

- Characterize the word and how it is typically used.

- Explain the meaning using everyday language—language that is accessible and meaningful to the student.

Sometimes a word's natural context (in text or literature) is not informative or helpful for deriving word meanings (Beck et al., 2013). It is useful to intentionally create and develop instructional contexts that provide strong clues to a word's meaning. These are usually created by teachers, but they can sometimes be found in commercial reading programs.

### **Defining Words Within Context**

Research shows that when words and easy-to-understand explanations are introduced in context, knowledge of those words increases (Biemiller and Boote, 2006) and word meanings are better learned (Stahl and Fairbanks, 1986). When an unfamiliar word is likely to affect comprehension, the most effective time to introduce the word's meaning may be at the moment the word is met in the text.

### **Using Context Clues**

Research by Nagy and Scott (2000) showed that students use contextual analysis to infer the meaning of a word by looking closely at surrounding text. Since students encounter such an enormous number of words as they read, some researchers believe that even a small improvement in the ability to use context clues has the potential to produce substantial, long-term vocabulary growth (Nagy, Herman, and Anderson, 1985; Nagy, Anderson, and Herman, 1987; Swanborn and de Glopper, 1999).



## **Sketching the Words**

For many students, it is easier to remember a word's meaning by making a quick sketch that connects the word to something personally meaningful to the student. The student applies each target word to a new, familiar context. The student does not have to spend a lot of time making a great drawing. The important thing is that the sketch makes sense and helps the student connect with the meaning of the word.

## **Applying the Target Words**

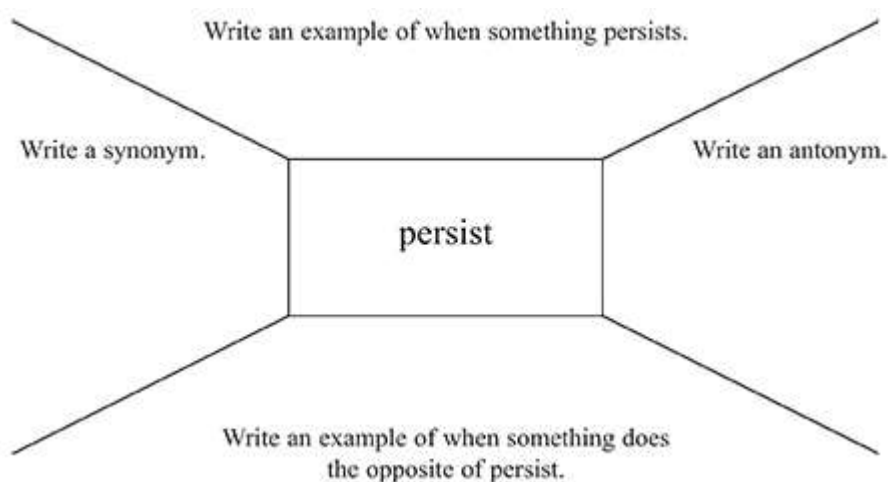
Applying the target words provides another context for learning word meanings. When students are challenged to apply the target words to their own experiences, they have another opportunity to understand the meaning of each word at a personal level. This allows for deep processing of the meaning of each word.

## **Analyzing Word Parts**

The ability to analyze word parts also helps when students are faced with unknown vocabulary. If students know the meanings of root words and affixes, they are more likely to understand a word containing these word parts. Explicit instruction in word parts includes teaching meanings of word parts and disassembling and reassembling words to derive meaning (Baumann et al., 2002; Baumann, Edwards, Boland, Olejnik, and Kame'enui, 2003; Graves, 2004).

## Semantic Mapping

Semantic maps help students develop connections among words and increase learning of vocabulary words (Baumann et al., 2003; Heimlich and Pittleman, 1986). For example, by writing an example, a non-example, a synonym, and an antonym, students must deeply process the word persist.



## Word Consciousness

Word consciousness is an interest in and awareness of words (Anderson and Nagy, 1992; Graves and Watts-Taffe, 2002). Students who are word conscious are aware of the words around them—those they read and hear and those they write and speak (Graves and Watts-Taffe, 2002). Word-conscious students use words skillfully. They are aware of the subtleties of word meaning. They are curious about language, and they enjoy playing with words and investigating the origins and histories of words.

Teachers need to take word-consciousness into account throughout their instructional day—not just during vocabulary lessons (Scott and Nagy, 2004). It is important to build a classroom “rich in words” (Beck et al., 2002). Students should have access to resources such as dictionaries, thesauruses, word walls, crossword puzzles, Scrabble® and other word games, literature, poetry books, joke books, and word-play activities.

Teachers can promote the development of word consciousness in many ways:

- **Language categories:** Students learn to make finer distinctions in their word choices if they understand the relationships among words, such as synonyms, antonyms, and homographs.
- **Figurative language:** The ability to deal with figures of speech is also a part of word-consciousness (Scott and Nagy 2004). The most common figures of speech are similes, metaphors, and idioms.

Once language categories and figurative language have been taught, students should be encouraged to watch for examples of these in all content areas.

### **Reading comprehension and vocabulary: what's the connection?**

Twas brillig, and the slithy toves

Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:

All mimsy were the borogoves,

And the mome raths outgrabe.

“Beware the Jabberwock, my son!

The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!

Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun

The frumious Bandersnatch!

Extract from Jabberwocky (*Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* by Lewis Carroll, 1872)

It has been known for a long time that vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension are strongly correlated (e.g., Davis, 1944, 1968; Thorndike, 1973). Reading Jabberwocky tells us quite a lot about this relationship, as does Alice's response to reading the poem: “It seems very pretty,” she said when she had finished it, “but it's rather hard to understand!” (You see she didn't like to confess even to

herself, that she couldn't make it out at all.) "Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas – only I don't exactly know what they are! However, somebody killed something: that's clear, at any rate ...".

A moment of introspection about Jabberwocky indicates that the relationship between reading comprehension and vocabulary is likely to be rich, interactive and complex. On the one hand, it is clear that vocabulary is needed for comprehension. Without doubt, our lack of knowledge concerning the meaning of individual words impedes our understanding. At the same time, however, it is equally clear that we can construct some meaning from the text, despite the fact that many of the words are nonsense. In turn, this constructed meaning provides an emerging context that helps us construe possible meanings to some of the individual words.

These introspections are consistent with a very large number of studies that have observed a close relationship between reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge. Across the age span, individuals with better vocabulary knowledge tend to show advanced reading comprehension relative to peers with less well-developed vocabulary knowledge. Reviewing this evidence, Tannenbaum, Torgesen and Wagner (2006) reported that the correlation between reading comprehension and vocabulary varied between approximately .3 to .8. The correlation strengthens as children get older (Torgesen et al., 1997) and factors such as test format and the dimension of word knowledge being assessed also impact on the magnitude of the correlation. Limitations in vocabulary knowledge have been suggested to be a putative cause of reading comprehension failure (e.g., Cromley & Azevedo, 2007) and many interventions for poor reading comprehension involve strategies designed to increase vocabulary knowledge (e.g., Beck, 1982). This aim of this chapter is to explore the links between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension, with particular reference to children identified as having specific deficits in reading

comprehension. Before discussing this group of children in some detail, it is useful to review two general (and inter-related) issues. First, why might reading comprehension and vocabulary be associated and second, which aspects of the reading comprehension process might be most closely related to vocabulary knowledge?

### **Why are reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge associated?**

It is very clear that reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge are closely associated. What is less clear is how this association is best interpreted. One interpretation sees individual differences in reading ability being responsible for individual differences in vocabulary knowledge. According to this view, children learn the meaning of new words via reading, amongst other strategies. Consequently, better readers will develop larger vocabularies over time, whereas poor readers, who read less, lack print exposure and this serves to hamper vocabulary development (e.g., Cunningham & Stanovich, 1991, 1997; Nagy & Anderson, 1984; Nagy & Scott, 2000).

An alternative view sees individual differences in vocabulary knowledge being responsible for individual differences in reading comprehension. On this view, if children have limited vocabulary knowledge, or if they are unable to access word meanings rapidly and efficiently, this will be detrimental to their reading comprehension (e.g., Beck, Perfetti & McKeown, 1982; Daneman & Green, 1986). Longitudinal studies provide evidence to support both of these explanations with vocabulary knowledge predicting growth in reading comprehension and reading comprehension itself predicting growth in vocabulary knowledge (e.g., de Jong & vander Leij, 2002; Muter, Hulme, Snowling, & Stevenson, 2004; Seigneuric & Ehrlich, 2005).

An additional possibility is that vocabulary and reading are related because they share common processes. Vocabulary growth requires the development of mappings between the semantic meaning of a word and its phonological form (McGreggor, 2004) and in a similar vein, reading depends upon the development of mappings between semantic, phonological and orthographic units of representation (Plaut, Seidenberg, McClelland & Patterson, 1996; Perfetti, 2007). Within this view, specific underlying processes may be impaired in poor readers and it is these weaknesses that lead to both poor reading and to poor vocabulary. For example, Sternberg and Powell (1983) suggested that the relationship between reading comprehension, vocabulary and general intelligence may be mediated by the ability to acquire new information from context. Domain general cognitive skills such as working memory may also serve to mediate the relationship between vocabulary and reading comprehension.

### **Component reading skills**

Reading comprehension is a complex skill (Kintsch & Rawson, 2005; Perfetti, Landi & Oakhill, 2005). Readers need to recognize or decipher individual words, access their meanings and interpret grammatical structure. Rarely is a text completely literal: readers need to draw on general knowledge and an appreciation of pragmatic factors in order to understand the intended message. Successful reading demands that readers construct a coherent and integrated mental representation of the text, rich in referential relations (e.g., Gernsbacher, 1990; Kintsch, 1998; van der Broek, 1994).

Given that vocabulary correlates with reading comprehension, an important question is whether there are particular aspects of the reading comprehension process that are more closely correlated with vocabulary. To illustrate, consider a

child who has great difficulty reading words. They are slow, inaccurate and effortful. Not surprisingly, they also have difficulty understanding text. They also show low-for-age vocabulary knowledge. Here we observe an association between poor reading comprehension and poor vocabulary, but it is impossible to know whether this is a consequence of vocabulary being associated with the child's word reading problems or with their comprehension-level problems, or with both.

It is helpful to think about reading comprehension as comprising two sets of component parts, one concerned with recognising printed words, and one concerned with understanding the message that the print conveys (e.g., Hoover & Gough, 1990). From this perspective it is possible to ask whether vocabulary shares its association with reading comprehension via word-level reading, comprehension-level processes, or both. Ricketts, Nation and Bishop (2007) investigated this question by assessing vocabulary knowledge and component reading skills in a group of 8-9-year old children. They found that vocabulary was important for both aspects of reading. In terms of word-level reading, vocabulary knowledge was most associated with reading words rather than nonwords, particularly words with irregular or unusual print-sound correspondences. Vocabulary also showed a moderate-to-strong correlation with reading comprehension and regression analyses revealed that vocabulary knowledge accounted for a large portion of unique variance (17.8%) in reading comprehension, even after variance associated with chronological age, nonverbal IQ and word-level reading was controlled.

Further discussion of the association between vocabulary and word-level reading can be found elsewhere (e.g., Nation, in press a) but for present purposes, Ricketts et al.'s findings are important as they show that the association between vocabulary and reading comprehension is not just a consequence of factors

associated with word-level reading. Instead, something more specific about the comprehension process appears to be related to children's vocabulary knowledge.





## REFERENCES

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