

Teacher, I Need More Words!



**“Why, then the world’s mine oyster,
Which I with words will open”**

slightly paraphrased from
The Merry Wives of Windsor, Wm. Shakespeare

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These activities

- work well in multi-level classes
- create a co-operative atmosphere
- empower students as lifelong learners

And the activities need very little preparation outside class,
so you’ll have more time to observe your students,
assist where needed,
think,
and breathe!

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A Few Guiding Principles

Students know it. Teachers know it. And research supports it:

Students need more words!

Vocabulary plays a critical role in our students' lives and future opportunities.

Three Stages of Learning Words

Students at every level of instruction need help at all three stages of vocabulary development. But most teachers unconsciously gravitate toward Stage 1, Stage 2, or Stage 3.

Once we're aware of this, we can expand our repertoire and make sure we're providing instruction at all three stages of vocabulary learning.

How many words should we teach in a lesson?

(adapted from Beck, p. 17)

- A good guideline is to focus on only 5 to 8 important words per reading. Not ten. (Cut the reading in half if necessary.)
- Individualize as much as possible; vocabulary cards are one good way to give each student a say in what words – and how many words -- they intend to learn.

The bottom line, of course, is that you and your students are the best judges of how many words they can handle.

Direct and Indirect Instruction

In vocabulary, as in other areas of learning, we notice two approaches:

Direct Instruction: “Teacher explains it.” direct, explicit, traditional

Indirect Instruction: “Students will pick it up.” incidental, implicit, communicative

Students at all levels need both direct and indirect learning, in a continuum that shifts as they progress.

Beginning learners need more direct instruction.

Advanced learners can learn from wide, authentic reading and listening. You might establish regular ‘Reading Report’ sessions in which your students show and tell something they read that was interesting. Students may swap reading material after the reports.

Frequency of Review

Spaced learning – with increasing spaces between reviews – is much more powerful than intensively studying a word.

Here’s an example using Vocabulary Cards
(paraphrased from Nation, 2008, p. 113)

Write the words and their translations on a card.

Review the cards after

5 minutes

25 minutes

10 hours (or end of day)

One day

One week

One month

Learning should be enriched as students review.

Start with simple cards. As time goes on, add more information, and review the words in deeper ways.

Stage 1: Meet the Words (initial exposure to new words)

The Keyword Method

This is a classic way to ‘anchor’ a new word: just link it to a similar-sounding word that you already know.

If you want to learn *celerity* (which means “speed”), find a similar-sounding word . . . perhaps “celery”.

Celery is your KEY WORD.

Now form a memorable image that links *celery* with your new word *celerity* – for example, picture a stalk of celery dressed as Superman, hurtling through the sky. Celerity = speed!

The Keyword Method is very effective. It anchors a new word long enough to practice it.

But studies show that the images can fade quickly unless the new word is learned very soon in meaningful ways – so go right on to Stage 2 and 3 activities.

Disappearing Vocabulary List (Adapted from Zero Prep)

Form and pronunciation are important aspects of learning a word. This activity is great for pronunciation and sight-sound correspondence, for beginners and up.

1. Write a list of words on the board.
2. Chant the list several times. a) alone while students just listen, to model pronunciation; then b) students chant the list in unison with you; then c) point to each word silently while the class chants the list.
3. Erase one word, putting a mark where it was in the list. Students chant the whole list again, including the word that you erased.
4. Continue chanting the list over and over, erasing more words until the list is completely gone. Students have the list memorized now!
5. Students dictate the list, spelling each word as you or a student writes it back up on the board.

Vocabulary Cards (adapted from Zero Prep 5.16)

Flash cards work at all three stages of vocabulary learning. With a sketch or translation on the back, a card introduces a new word. With more information on the back, it works for Stages 2 and 3. And students can use cards in many ways to remember and re-use words.

This works better for many students than writing lists in a notebook because:

- They can post cards on their refrigerator, their bathroom mirror, etc.
- They can throw away cards once they've mastered a word.
- They can use the cards as flashcards for review (they see the word but can't see the definition until they turn the card over).

Procedure:

1. On the front of a 3 X 5 card, students print the new word, as large as possible. On the back, the student puts anything that will help him/her remember the meaning (pictures, translations, similar words or opposites, notes about pronunciation or part of speech, etc. Highly recommended: a short sentence in the target language using the new word correctly. (A good learner's dictionary will have useful sentences to copy.) After the beginner level, students write original sentences using the new word. (See note below: Creating Good Sentences.)
2. Students use these as flashcards, quizzing themselves independently (in class and at home) by looking at the front and trying to remember the word, then using it in a sentence. If they need help, they can look on the back.

Extensions:

1. In class, pairs play a card game in which they fan out their own collection of flashcards for their partner to see. The partner points to a card at random, and the holder uses the word in a sentence. This game can be given a competitive edge if small coins are won or lost when a student succeeds or fails to remember a word.
2. Students take out all their cards and arrange them into categories, then explain to a classmate why they sorted them in this way. (Typical categories might be colors, furniture, parts of the body, clothing, easy words / words I need to study more, etc.)

How to Help Students Create Good Sentences for Vocabulary Cards:

After initial teaching and practice with a new word, students are ready to try writing their own sentences using the word. When there isn't time to review every student's sentence, try this:

1. Each student writes an original sentence including the word.
2. A few students write their sentences on the board. (To preserve anonymity, you may collect some unsigned sentences, then hand them out randomly to be written up on the board.)
3. Go over these, clarifying how to use the new word correctly.
4. Now that they understand the word better, students correct the sentences they wrote on their own cards.

This process doesn't take much time.

Act It Out Before We Read It (another great routine from Dr. Natalie Hess)

This kinesthetic preview activity raises interest, pre-teaches vocabulary, and makes the meaning clear. The listening (or reading) that follows becomes a very satisfying experience for students!

Before the class reads or listens to a text, bring volunteers up to the front. Preview the lesson by coaching each student, step by step, on where to stand, what to do, and what to say. As you direct them, students move and repeat your prompts, acting out the basic meaning. (It's like moving pieces on a chessboard.)

Student-Run Vocabulary Review

1. Write on the board some words to review.
2. Read them aloud; students repeat each word.
3. (whole class) Students come up and write their name by any word they remember.
4. One at a time, students re-teach their word to the rest of the class.

Scrambled Words: For sight word recognition: Teacher or students write a sentence on paper and cut the words apart. The student's job is to put these scrambled words back together while looking at an intact copy of the sentence. Very simple, and fun!

What's in My Wallet / Purse? (adapted from Zero Prep) Students set out on their desks several items from wallet, pocket, or purse. The possibilities for vocabulary learning are vast and lead to common, much-needed, high-interest words.

Grab Bag Teacher and/or students bring common objects from home or workplace. Put them in a bag, then pull them out one by one. They can be named, described, grouped . . . again, the possibilities are endless. It's a visual, kinesthetic change of pace.

Words on My Wall Students put words on notes, at school and at home. They tape them up where they'll see them (and say them) often.

Stage 2: Work with Words (manipulating and recycling words)

How Well Do I Know These Words?

(Adapted from **Finding Family**, University of Michigan Press 2010. Natalie Hess, Laurel Pollard, and Rick Kappra)

Students love to see their progress graphically, as they move their words toward the right side of their chart.

Materials: Have a short list of words to show students. Be sure that some are words they already know.

1. Ask “How well do you know these words?”
2. Dictate the words. Students write them, top to bottom, in the first column.
3. Each student asks him/herself: How well do I know this word? They write the word again under column A, B, C, or D. (If possible, they do this in pencil. Later they may move some words farther to the right, and it’s better to erase than cross out.

The chart below shows examples of where one student might place four words. (Your list might have more than four words, of course.)

WORDS	A. I don't know this word	B. I have seen this word before.	C. I understand this word.	D. I use this word easily.
1. paradigm	<i>paradigm</i>			
2. fast				<i>fast</i>
3. summary		<i>summary</i>		
4. race			<i>race</i>	
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				

4. In groups, students talk to classmates about their charts. They teach and learn from one another. As students understand a word better, they may erase it and re-write it in a column farther to the right.

Extension: Students can personalize their chart by putting in words of their own choice.

Categories

Use this routine to review words that students have already studied. As they sort words into categories and explain their decisions, students make new associations with the words. This deepens their understanding and helps them remember the words.

1. Display a group of words that students are already familiar with.
2. Provide headings for categories. For example, if the list is *elbow, father, run, smile, sister, eye, foot, cousin, fly*, you would provide this chart:

People in a family	Parts of the body	Verbs

3. Students write each word in one of the columns.
4. In pairs or groups, they explain why they grouped them this way.

Extension 1: After students have done this a few times, let them choose category headings on their own. For example, what headings might students choose for the following list of words about the American Revolution?

democracy, George Washington, bayonets, muskets, Paul Revere, taxation, cannons, self-governance, freedom of religion, volunteer brigades, Thomas Jefferson

Extension 2: Once students are good at playing “Categories,” go all the way with it! Provide (or have students come up with) a random list of words they’ve studied. Because there is no single best way to categorize the words, each student must decide, group, and label his/her own categories. This can be great fun – it leads to lots of discussions in the pairs and small groups. And because of the discussions, students remember their new words!

Variation: *Graphic organizers:* Instead of a chart, students may categorize a list of words into a Venn diagram, or a meaning web, or another graphic organizer.

6.10 TWO-IN-ONE VOCABULARY REVIEW

In this word association game, the challenge of creating meaningful contexts for seemingly unrelated words activates students' imaginations. The new associations they create will help them remember vocabulary items.

LEVEL: Intermediate—Advanced

AIM: Vocabulary review, fluency

Procedure:

1. With your students, write on the board a list of words to be reviewed.
2. Students form pairs.
3. Circle two unrelated words on the board.
4. Pairs quickly form a sentence using both words. When both partners of a pair agree on a sentence, they raise their hands together.
5. Call on either student from this first pair to say their sentence to the whole class.
6. Other pairs listen carefully and decide whether they have used the two words correctly.
7. If the sentence is incorrect, another pair may try.
8. Give a point to the first pair with a correct sentence.
9. Mark two more words and repeat the contest until all words have been used.

Note: Because students don't know which partner the teacher will call on, both partners in the pair must be ready to answer. You can encourage pairs to collaborate by subtracting a point when the partner you call on is unable to produce a sentence. Partners quickly learn to talk and listen fast to get each other ready.

Variations:

1. Have students do this alone, then compare their sentences with others in a noncompetitive lesson.
2. Put students in groups of three or more.
3. Increase the challenge level by circling three words instead of two. Students must use all three in a single sentence.
4. In large classes, divide the class into two teams. Successful sentences from pairs will score a point for their team.

5.22 ARITHMETIC FUN

People tend to count in their native language. This activity helps students get more comfortable using the numbers in their target language.

AIM: Reviewing numbers

Procedure:

1. Put any two-digit number on the board, for example: 14.
2. Put on the board _____ + _____ = 14
3. Get students to help you do the arithmetic.
4. Put on the board _____ + _____ = 14 and elicit a new combination to equal 14.
5. In small groups, students write down any combinations they can think of whose total is 14.
Examples: 10 + 4, 7 + 7, 6 + 8.
6. Stop when you notice that many students have finished their combinations.
7. Call on any student to read out any *one* number combination on his/her list.
8. Students who have this number combination cross it out.
9. Continue until all number combinations have been read.
10. The student left with a combination that no one else wrote is declared the winner.

Variation: Instead of doing this in small groups, try “Quick Pair-Share”. If pacing is quick and students are challenged, they are less likely to think in English first and more likely to start thinking in the target language.

Note: Be ready to use more complex numbers and other operations as soon as your students are ready for more of a challenge.

5.27 WHAT’S MY NUMBER?

Students really enjoy the movement and the variety of this exercise.

AIM: Review of numbers and arithmetic vocabulary

MATERIALS: tape, blank papers to make signs

Procedure:

1. Students form groups of seven.
2. Assign three random numbers to each of three students in each group. For example, one student gets a ‘7’, one gets a ‘9’, and another gets a ‘3’. Write these numbers on a piece of paper as you speak to the students. Students tape these signs to their chests.
3. Assign the roles of *plus sign* (+), *minus sign* (–), and *equals sign* (=) to three more students in each group. These signs are taped to their chests, also.
4. The remaining student in each group, the “answer person,” has a blank sign.
5. Each group arranges itself in the shape of an arithmetic problem.
Example: 9 – 7 + 3 = . (The “answer person” writes a 5 on his sign.)
6. Each group reads its problem to the whole class.
7. Groups rearrange themselves into new problems. (The answer person makes a new sign for each new answer.)
8. Continue the procedure as long as there is interest.

Stage 3: Make the Words My Own (deeper understanding and long-term retention)

Associations:

Review words by asking, for example, “What color goes with each new word? Why?” Note: Associations are powerful at all three levels of vocabulary learning!

Other associations:

What person . . .

What time of day . . .

What place . . .

Other ideas for associations? Your students can suggest ideas!

Create New Contexts

e.g., students make up a story, rap, or skit using their new words.

Vocabulary House (from *Finding Family*)

This ongoing association activity is a powerful memory aid. And when students tell one another why they put each new word in a particular room, they learn quite a lot about each other!

Materials: Large sheets of paper, such as newsprint, one per student

Procedure:

1. Each student draws the basic floor plan of a house where he or she has many memories. The rooms/yard/gardens should be empty (no furniture) and large enough to write plenty of words in the empty spaces. (Demonstrate this by drawing a simple floor plan of your own present or childhood home on the board.)
2. Students select a new word, associate it with a place in the floor plan they drew, and write the word in that room.
3. After they have done this with several words, students tell each other, in pairs or small groups, why they put each word where they did.
4. They keep their Vocabulary House, adding words to it and talking with classmates about it throughout the course.

Finish the Sentence People remember new words much better when they anchor them in their own personal knowledge and experiences. A simple way to do this: students complete a sentence that contains a word they’re practicing. For example, if the target word is ‘frustrated’, students finish this sentence:

I feel frustrated when . . . _____

Activate multiple intelligences!

- **Intelligence is a multiple reality.**
- **Everyone has a unique profile of intelligences.**
- **Culture influences development of some intelligences more than others.**
- **Intelligence can be enhanced through experience.**
- **We can vary our teaching to include all the intelligences.**

Results: Deeper learning happens for all our students when we use all their different intelligences.

Remember: It's not "How smart is this student?"

but,

"How is this student SMART?"

Eight Intelligences:

1. **Logical/Mathematical**
2. **Visual Spatial**
3. **Bodily/Kinesthetic**
4. **Musical**
5. **Naturalist**
6. **Interpersonal**
7. **Intrapersonal**
8. **Naturalist**

Use music

- ***Singing Dictation***
- ***Sing familiar melodies***, putting in the new words they're learning, or new ***songs they want to learn***.
- ***Teach songs***: they're full of collocations and good words to learn
- ***Sing the Sentences*** Students sing the example sentences they have written using their new words. (Model this yourself, invite a student to model it, or explain it to your class. Some who won't do it in class will try it at home.)

Use rhythm

- ***Jazz Chants*** (See Carolyn Graham's wonderful books.)
- ***Disappearing Vocabulary List***

Use kinesthetic techniques

- ***TPR*** (See Live Action English and other TPR and TPR Storytelling resources.)
- ***Mime***: Teacher and/or students mime words for others to guess.
- ***Act It Out Before We Read It***
- ***Stand For Your Word***
- ***Scrambled Words***: For sight-word recognition: Teacher or students print a sentence and cut the words apart. The student's job is to put these scrambled words back together while looking at an intact copy of the sentence. Very simple and fun.
- ***What's My Number?***

Use visuals

- ***"Pictionary:"*** Teacher and/or students sketch pictures; other students guess which new word is intended.
- ***Half a Picture***: Show half a picture. Generate words about that half – and guess about what's hidden. Show the rest, have fun discussing the guesses.
- ***Graphic organizers***: Students may categorize a list of words into a Venn diagram, or a meaning web, for example.

Use real objects

- ***What's in My Wallet / Purse?***
- ***Grab Bag***

ONE-MINUTE FEEDBACK (Exit Tickets)

Students write a note for you at the end of class about one thing they've learned. This simple routine is surprisingly powerful!

Students

- review what they've learned and evaluate it to choose one thing to write down. This solidifies their learning.
- stay more engaged, often asking more questions during class because they are primed to learn (not just to sit and wait for class to end)
- feel valued because you are showing that you care about what they are learning.

Teachers

- feel satisfied because we get glimpses of what our students just learned
- get good ideas about what to correct / review / continue in tomorrow's lesson.

Procedure:

1. When class begins, give each student a piece of paper (or have them tear one from their notebook).
2. Announce, "At the end of class I'll ask you to write one thing you learned today."
3. Collect these before students leave the room. Read and enjoy!

Note: You can do this after a short lesson segment, or at the end of every class, or once or twice a week – whenever you like!

Teacher Self-Development Checklist

A self-development checklist is a simple tool but a powerful one: over time, it keeps us moving in the directions that lead to a more effective -- and therefore enjoyable -- teaching life. Here's how it works:

1. **Notice what you already do well** (this is important!) and what you want to pay attention to next.
2. **Make a short list of aspects of teaching you'd like to improve.** One item is a good length for this list. ☺ Two or three can be good, also. Four or five items may be too many to pay good attention to, so keep your list nice and short.
3. **Put this list where you will see it** before and after teaching. Some teachers put it on a sticky note also and attach it to their daily lesson plan. Each time you teach, notice how your plan reflects what you've put on your list. Don't try for perfection; small changes add up!

It's as simple as that! Of course, it can be even more interesting (and helpful) to talk about this ongoing process with an ally, another teacher or a friend or family member. But simply posting your list where you will see it every day is enough to bring welcome changes.

As time goes on, you'll find that some items on your list are now comfortable, easy, well-established aspects of your teaching. Your list will evolve as each old issue becomes a thing of the past and drops from the list, and as you add a new item to fine-tune your teaching or add something satisfying to your repertoire.

Recommended resources:

Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction. Beck, Isabel, et al. The Guilford Press. 2002. This is the best resource I know for insights and techniques for teaching vocabulary in K-8 – very useful to teachers of adults too.

Finding Family, a reading and vocabulary text for adolescent and adult ESL students, Hess, Natalie, Rick Kappra, and Laurel Pollard. University of Michigan Press, 2010

Live Action English, Romijn and Seely, 2002 A TPR classic!

Making Content Comprehensible for English Learners: The SIOP Model, Echevarria, Vogt, and Short. Pearson, Allyn, and Bacon Publishers. 2004

Teacher, Ashton-Warner, Sylvia (out of print; get a used copy if you can)

Zero Prep: Ready-to-Go Activities for the Language Classroom, Pollard and Hess, 1997
Alta English Publishers

Zero Prep for Beginners, Pollard, Hess, and Herron, 2001. Alta English Publishers