Brain-based Strategies and Critical Thinking to Maximize Vocabulary Acquisition

This interactive webinar will focus on maximizing vocabulary acquisition for English learners with a focus on easy-to-implement classroom strategies and activities based on brain-based learning and critical thinking.

This session will:
• explore how to assess students’ vocabulary knowledge and determine what words to teach
• discuss how the brain learns and stores words
• share and demonstrate instructional strategies including graphic organizers, word study, word sorts, and games
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She has a Masters degree in TESOL from Boston University and a Ph.D. in Literacy Education from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

She loves languages and collaborating with teachers around the world.
Using Brain-based Strategies and Critical Thinking to Maximize Vocabulary Acquisition
I am a word nerd and proud of it!
Today’s Focus:

- Demonstrate how to select vocabulary words to teach
- Discuss and practice brain-based vocabulary strategies
- Discuss and practice critical thinking strategies for teaching vocabulary
Vocabulary Word Selection
Vocabulary Word Selection

1. Use the 3 Tier System to select words
2. Assess students’ word knowledge
3. Select only 5-8 words to teach
Beck and McKeon’s 3 Tier (Level) System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier 1</th>
<th><strong>Tier 2</strong></th>
<th>Tier 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Common words that students should know</td>
<td>Words that students should know for future English study and communication</td>
<td>Words that students will rarely need to know or use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Excellent</td>
<td>Exceptional Outstanding Superb</td>
<td>Sterling Stupendous</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Today’s Vocabulary

<table>
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<th>Tier 1</th>
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<tr>
<td>Smell (verb, noun)</td>
<td>Odor (noun)</td>
<td>Pungent (adjective)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fragrance (noun), fragrant (adj)</td>
<td>Aroma (noun), aromatic (adj)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Sniff (verb), sniff (noun)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assessment of Word Knowledge

1. Write a list of possible vocabulary words on the board.

2. Ask students to do the following:
   
   • Raise your hand if you have never seen or heard the word before.
   • Raise your hand if you have seen or heard the word before, but are not sure what it means.
   • Raise your hand if you know the word well. Tell me what it means.

3. Select 5-8 words to teach that most of the students do not know or do not know well.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Know it Well</th>
<th>Have Seen or Heard it</th>
<th>Do not know it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smell</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odor</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sniff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pungent</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
What strategies do you use when introducing vocabulary?
Brain-based Strategies and Critical Thinking
Brain-based vocabulary strategies

Our brain remembers words by how they are connected to other words, images, and information.

Example:
What is a chicken?
What is a kitchen?
Introducing Vocabulary Words

When introducing a new vocabulary word, you should provide students at the minimum...

1. a student-friendly definition
2. a rich context
3. a picture or visual representation

Help students make connections with the word!
# Introducing Vocabulary Words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Odor</th>
<th>Fragrance/Fragrant</th>
<th>Aroma</th>
<th>Pungent</th>
<th>Sniff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Definition</strong></td>
<td>A bad smell</td>
<td>A beautiful, sweet smell</td>
<td>A good smell; usually food</td>
<td>A spicy smell</td>
<td>To take a quick smell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Word in Context</strong></td>
<td>The garbage had a strong <strong>odor</strong>.</td>
<td>The flowers were very <strong>fragrant</strong>.</td>
<td>I love the <strong>aroma</strong> of coffee.</td>
<td>Onions and garlic are <strong>pungent</strong>.</td>
<td>The dog <strong>sniffed</strong> the ground.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visual</strong></td>
<td><img src="skunk.png" alt="Skunk" /></td>
<td><img src="flower.png" alt="Flower" /></td>
<td><img src="coffee.png" alt="Coffee" /></td>
<td><img src="spices.png" alt="Spices" /></td>
<td><img src="dog.png" alt="Dog" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Critical Thinking Skills & Vocabulary

You want students to think about the meanings of words.

Blooms Taxonomy - Revised

- Creating
- Evaluating
- Analyzing
- Applying
- Understanding
- Remembering
Brain-based Vocabulary Strategies: Analyze and Evaluate Words

1. Frayer Model
2. Word Map
3. Select the Best Word
4. Degrees of Meaning
5. Word Analysis
6. Charades
Activity 1: Frayer Model
Have students make connections with the word

**Step 1:** Ss write vocabulary word in the center.

**Step 2:** Ss work individually or in pairs to complete the card.

**Step 3:** Ss share and talk about their cards with other Ss.
**Definition**

Something that has a beautiful smell

**Facts and Characteristics**

- Adjective
- Noun: Fragrance
- Spanish: fragante

**Examples**

- Flowers
- Perfume

**Nonexamples**

- Dirty socks
- Bad breath
Activity 2: Word Map
Show how words relate to each other

**Step 1:** Ss write the vocabulary word in the center (in pairs or small groups)

**Step 2:** Ss brainstorm and write down connections between other words.

**Step 3:** Ss draw pictures and other information to help them understand and remember
How might you adapt these ideas for your classroom?
Activity 3: Select the Best Word

Which word(s) would you use to describe the smell of this image?

Vocabulary Word List:

1. fragrant
2. pungent
3. Has a good aroma
4. Has an odor
5. sniff
Soaps and shampoos often have a strong ____________.
What level of critical thinking are students using in “Select the Best Word”?
Activity 4: Degrees of Meaning
Evaluate the meaning of each word and how it differs from the other words.

**Step 1:** Put students in groups of 3-4.

**Step 2:** Give a Ss cards with words on them.
- Students can also cut words out from a provided list.

**Step 2:** Students discuss what the words mean.

**Step 3:** Students put the words in order based on determined degree of meaning.
Activity 4: Degrees of Meaning

- Coldest
- Warm
- Tepid
- Scalding
- Chilly
- Freezing
- Hottest
Activity 4: Degrees of Meaning

Coldest

Freezing

Chilly

Tepid

Warm

Scalding

Hottest
How might you adapt this activity to fit your classroom context?
Word Analysis
Give a child a definition and they will know the word.

Teacher a child to analyze words and they will know thousands more!
Teach Prefixes, Suffixes, Root Words, and Compound Words

• **Prefix** – comes before the root word
  mis (wrong)  **misspell**  “spell wrong”

• **Suffix** – comes after the noun
  Ful (full of)  **helpful**  “full of help”

• **Root Words** – the word that holds it together
  spell  help

• **Compound Words** – two nouns together
  Toothbrush  tooth + brush
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Root: frac frag</th>
<th>Example Words: Fraction – part of a whole Fragment – a broken piece Fragile – easily broken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: to break</td>
<td>Sentence: I was very careful when I held the fragile vase.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activity 5: Word Analysis
Analyze words by looking at the parts of the word

Step 1: Write the word on the board.
Step 2: Ask students to look for parts of the word that they know.
Step 3: Ask students what the word means.
Step 4: Ask students to use the word in a meaningful sentence.
Step 5: Do an example with the class first.
Activity 5: Word Analysis

Example: misplace  \(\text{Mis} = \text{wrong} \quad \text{place} = \text{location}\)

“I misplaced my car keys and couldn’t drive my car.”

Your Turn: Unbreakable
1. Analyze the word
2. What does it mean?
3. Use it in a meaningful sentence.
Do word searches and/or crossword puzzles require critical thinking about vocabulary?
Activity 6: Charades  (Acting out the Word)
Use word games that require critical thinking

Step 1: Provide one student with a vocabulary word.
Step 2: Make sure the student understands the word.
Step 3: The student acts the word out in front of the class without using any words.
Step 4: The other students guess what word the student is acting out.
Activity 6: Charades: Let’s Try it!

1. I will act out a word. Watch and tell me what word it is.

2. I will give you a word. Tell me how you would act it out.
Practice & Review Vocabulary Words

Students need to **hear** the word in different contexts.
Students need to **read** the word in different contexts.
Students need to **say** the word in sentences they create.
Students need to **write** the word in sentences.

- **Short-Term Memory**: will remember for the test and then forget

- **Long-Term Memory**: will remember for much longer because the brain has made connections
Summing up:

• Teach 5-8 words at a time for deep understanding
• Use brain-based strategies to make connections
• Have students critically think about words and their meanings
• Introduce, practice, and review for long-term memory
• Make vocabulary engaging and meaningful
References


Unless otherwise noted, all images in this presentation are CC0/public domain from Pixabay.com or the author’s own.
Links to Resources

• Selecting Vocabulary Words Using 3 Tier System: https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/selecting-vocabulary-words-teach-english-language-learners

• Word Maps: https://www.readingrockets.org/strategies/word_maps

• Vocabulary Knowledge Rating Scale: https://sniderreadingincontentarea.weebly.com/vocabulary-rating-guide.html
Thank you!

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Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. Consider how you typically help students engage with and remember new vocabulary. Are there any successful strategies that you use that weren’t covered in today’s session? Share your ideas!

2. Discuss the strategies from this session that will be beneficial to incorporate into your instruction.

3. Do you recycle and/or recheck vocabulary knowledge after a unit ends? If so, discuss how you do so. If not, discuss how you might begin assessing students to see which words make it into their long-term memory.