

What You Need to Know: Vocabulary

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What is Vocabulary Instruction

Students cannot understand texts if they do not understand the words. The same is true when they are listening to people speak. On the flip side, they have to know the meanings of words to express their own ideas. When we talk about vocabulary, we ask “How many words does a student know?” From the standpoint of reading instruction, the definition of “vocabulary” is broader than how many words a student knows.

Definition

Ability to understand words as they are used in a text.

The phrase “as they are used in a text” is important to remember. As we saw in the discussion of oral language development, words can have many meanings. In vocabulary instruction, we want students to learn not only what words mean but also what they mean when the author uses them. Sometimes they are the same, but other times they are not.

This phrase also means that students need to learn how to understand and interpret words. Students, and all people, will encounter unfamiliar words or words used in unfamiliar ways. Vocabulary instruction also needs to help students figure out what new words mean and what the author intends to communicate by using them.

Students with good vocabulary skills not only know the meanings of many words but also know how to discover the meanings of words.

Breaking Down Vocabulary Skills

Now that we have applied the definition of “vocabulary” to reading instruction, we have a good idea about the various sub-skills of vocabulary development and use. The eight sub-skills are as follow.

Word application: using words appropriately according to their meaning and context (See the chapter on Oral Language Development for more information about using words appropriately for the context.)

Meaning discovery: applying a learning process for discovering the meanings of new words found in a text (This sub-skill is the basis for the next six sub-skills that follow.)

Decoding: sounding out words

Word part knowledge: identifying and understanding components of words, typically prefixes, suffixes, and roots; understanding how words change for tense and person

Word replacement: identifying synonyms and antonyms for words

Word comparison: identifying other words that have similar parts or that fit the same grammatical usage

Content analysis: identifying the theme or topic of a passage, identifying words or phrases that provide clues about unfamiliar words

Definition research: finding a reliable source for the definitions of words; analyzing given definitions for their relevancy to the content

Explaining These Sub-skills

Word application: Word application has two parts. First, once the reader understands what the word means, the reader uses it multiple times. This increases familiarity with the word, leading to automaticity. Also, this is how new words found in text become part of a reader’s oral vocabulary. Second, the reader considers how the word applies in different contexts and how the word may be used in different ways to communicate ideas. This is done through reading the word in multiple texts and through hearing and using the word in different situations.

With word application, the reader learns to use the new words. In fact, the various sub-skills are only valuable when they lead to word application.

Meaning discovery: We cannot teach students every word they need to know. Students will always encounter new words while reading. The discovery process is how strong readers learn the meanings of unfamiliar words. It is a multi-step process that starts with decoding, continues to word analysis and analysis of context clues, and may require research. When students learn the discovery process, they will have the skills needed to understand new words they find and to expand their vocabulary on their own. The next section will discuss the discovery process in more detail.

The remaining sub-skills help students apply the meaning discovery process.

Decoding: Students, like all people, may misread words in text. They may read the word but think it is something else. This is actually quite common. For example, the text may use the word “assent” but the student reads “accent.” Because the brain tries to force new information into existing patterns, a student may see an unfamiliar word and think it is a more common word. This will lead to confusion about the word and the passage as a whole.

Students may also encounter words that look unfamiliar but are actually known. Like most people, students tend to have a larger oral vocabulary than reading vocabulary. Oral vocabulary refers to words a student understands when he or she hears them; reading vocabulary refers to words that a student understands when he or she reads them. As a result, the student may see a word in text that looks unfamiliar but that he or she already knows.

In both cases, accurately sounding out the word will help students understand and use the word. If a student can recognize the word when it has been decoded, the student expands his reading vocabulary and understanding of the text passage.

Word part knowledge: Word part knowledge allows reader to find the meaningful parts within words, interpret the meaning of those parts, and then put all the meanings together to define a new word.

All words have a root form, which is the basic word once you strip away anything added to it, such as prefixes or suffixes. For example, the word “indefatigable” seems like a pretty complicated word. When we examine it, however, we see that it has the root word “fatigue” (not “fat”!) with two prefixes and one suffix added to it. The first step in word part knowledge is learning to identify the root word. Once the student does that, we start to look for any additions to the word that might affect its meaning. In this example, prefix “in” means “not”;

When helping students analyze words, we ask them, “Do you recognize any parts in this word? Does anything look similar to what you have seen in other words? What do those parts mean when you use them in other words?” If they can figure out the parts, they can figure out the word.

Word comparison: This sub-skill is actually an extension of the word part knowledge skill. With word comparison, students consider words that have similar parts, such as similar suffixes or similar roots. By analyzing similar words, readers get clues about what the currently unfamiliar word means.

For example, consider “indefatigable” again. Think about other words that contain the suffix “-able”, such as “eatable,” “drinkable,” and “navigable.” In each case, the suffix “-able” indicates that something can be done or accomplished or that the action is possible. By thinking about how the suffix “-able” is used in similar words, we get a clue about how it applies to “indefatigable” and how it modifies the root word. What we are doing is comparing “indefatigable” to other words that have similar parts. Good readers do this naturally, but others may need to develop this habit.

To perform this mental task, students first must be able to identify the parts within words, which is word part knowledge.

Content analysis: Another way to describe this skill is “Context Clues,” but what readers are actually doing is analyzing the content surrounding the new word. They first think about the overall topic of the passage or paragraph. The passage will be about one topic, and all the information and words in that passage will relate to the topic. The unfamiliar word, too, will likely be about that topic. That is the first clue.

Then readers think about key words and phrases in the passage. What are they about? What words are commonly used and what do they mean? The unfamiliar word will likely relate to those words. Finally, readers consider the sentence in which the word appears. The preceding text may indicate what information is being provided by the new word. I mentioned this before, but one way we figure out what the word may mean is to mentally blank it out. Once you do all the preceding steps, consider what word would make sense in the blank?

Using content analysis may not provide a specific definition of the word, but it does give readers a general sense of what the word might mean or what information it provides. In most cases, this is enough to make sense of the entire passage.

Definition research: When all else fails, look up the word online or in a dictionary. (I usually type “define ___” into an Internet search engine.) But looking up a definition is not sufficient. Most words have multiple meanings, and a reader has to choose the one that seems to fit the

content best. Even a word as simple as “air” has more than five definitions. Which one is the right one?

To use the dictionary definition, several things must happen first: the reader must have an understanding of the content, the reader must figure out what part of speech the word is, and the reader must be able to identify parts within the words. In short, before being able to use a dictionary definition, the reader has to first conduct word part and content analyses.

The Word Discovery Process

What Strong Readers Do with New Words

When people with good reading skills encounter new words in text, they generally follow the same process for figuring out what those words mean. (This assumes, of course, that they do not skip over the words.) They follow a process of decoding and discovery. The process looks like this.

1. Attempt to decode the word.

Readers try to sound out the word first to see whether or not they actually do know the word. After all, it is possible that they know the word but simply do not recognize it when written.

If they know the word once they decode it, great! They keep reading. Otherwise, they go to the next step.

2. Analyze the word parts.

Readers look for suffixes, prefixes, root words, parts of root words, etc., to try to find clues about the word meaning. For example, if they come across the word “aggrandize,” they might recognize the root “grand,” which means “big” and “important.” They might also recognize the “ize” which means “to make something.” Once they recognize those parts, they put them together to create “make something seem bigger or more important.”

Overall, if readers know what the parts mean, they can come up with a working definition of what the word as a whole means. Once they have done that, they sound out the entire word again (decoding) and keep reading. Otherwise, they go to the next step.

3. Examine the context.

Readers consider the entire passage in which the word occurs. They ask whether they understand the theme or topic of the passage. They look for key words or phrases that might explain the unfamiliar word. They mentally blank out the unfamiliar word and try to figure out what word or meaning would fill in the blank according to the passage.

If they think they know approximately what word or words might fit the context of the passage and what might fill in the blank, they read the entire passage with that filled-in information to see whether the passage still makes sense.

If the passage still makes sense, they do not keep reading. Instead, they re-examine the original word and see if they can now interpret the word parts. They ask themselves whether or not the possible definition fits any of the parts of the word (word analysis), they sound out the entire word (decoding), and then they keep reading. Otherwise, they go to the next step.

4. Look up a definition.

If, and only if, all the previous steps failed to give them a sense of the word meaning, readers look up the definition. This is the last step in the process, not the first step! It might take a strong reader only seconds to get to this step, but that is not the point. The point is that strong readers try to figure out the meaning before they look up the word.

Once strong readers have looked up a word, they do not keep reading. First, they have to make sure the definition fits the passage (examine the content), they see if the dictionary definition gives any clues about word parts (word analysis), they sound out the entire word (decoding), and then they keep reading.

This is the entire decoding and discovery process. As you can see, strong readers do not jump to any particular step. They go through the process. Neither do they keep reading once they have an idea about the meaning. They go back to prior steps and confirm their ideas.

What Weak Readers Do with New Words

Weak readers typically either skip the word, which means they may not understand the passage, or they jump to looking up the definition, which means they do not consider how the definition is supported by, or contributes to, the meaning of the entire passage. In both cases, they do not expand their vocabulary.

By following this process, good readers will learn new words and comprehend the text. How can weak readers get the same benefit? They learn to follow the decoding and discovery process.

Principles for Vocabulary Instruction

Students need to know a lot of words to become strong readers. Also, as described above, students need to know what to do when they encounter new words while reading. The principles for vocabulary instruction, if applied to your instruction, will help students with both needs.

If you will think for a moment about how very young children learn words, you will see that certain principles are in effect. For example, hearing certain words determines whether or not students will learn those words. If children hear a lot of words, they learn a lot of words. Unfortunately, the reverse is true, and many students enter school knowing fewer words than they will need.

These principles, therefore, are based on the processes for how people naturally acquire new words. As a teacher, your role is to make sure those processes are occurring. In our reading programs, we encouraged teachers to use strategies based on these principles for vocabulary instruction, and, as a result, students made significant gains in reading comprehension.

We will get to instructional strategies next. In the meantime, as you think about strategies and as you design instructional activities to help students develop their vocabulary, consider these five principles.

1. Instruction needs to increase students' exposure to words.
2. Instruction is both direct and incidental.
3. Instruction requires students to use new words.
4. Instruction promotes both recognition and analysis of new words.
5. Instruction is linked to real text.

Increase Students' Exposure to Words

This first and most important principle has a very important implication for you as the teacher, regardless of the students' ages: you have the responsibility to use a lot of words, use new words, use correct and accurate words, and use them repeatedly. When you repeatedly use new words, students will become familiar with them and will develop a deeper understanding what they mean and how they can be used.

We sometimes refer to "kid-friendly" language, meaning we use simple words that students already know. If we only use simple language, we will not increase students' exposure to new words, academic words, subject-specific words, or the multiple words that are available to describe things and concepts. We will not give them the words they need to understand what they hear and read or the words they can use to express their own ideas.

On the other hand, "kid-friendly" language does have its place in instruction. We can use simple language to help students understand new words and concepts. We use what they already know to help them learn something new. The point is to increase the number of new words that students hear, read, and have available to use. Do not be afraid to use new words with students. Use them, help students understand them, and keep using them.

This principle has another implication for instruction. To build a larger vocabulary, students need to read a wide variety of fiction and nonfiction texts. Young children, before they begin to read, need to hear a wide variety of stories and listen to information about many topics. By reading or hearing about many topics, both fiction and nonfiction, students will be exposed to a broad selection of words. Then, when they study unfamiliar words they read or hear, they learn new words that, over time, will become part of their oral and reading vocabularies.

Is this really true? Yes! Many research studies have shown that children who are exposed to a greater number of words develop stronger reading abilities, mainly because they understand the words in the texts.

Direct and Incidental Instruction

Direct instruction means the teacher has a plan for helping students learn specific words. With direct instruction, you decide what words you will expose students to, and then you engage

students in activities to learn those words. Direct instruction works well if you know that students will encounter unfamiliar words in a text, need certain words for a subject or topic, and need better ways to explain their ideas. Generally, you help students become familiar with words, and then they encounter those words in text or discussion.

Incidental instruction is the opposite of direct instruction. With incidental instruction, students encounter unfamiliar words as they are reading, and you stop the reading to help them understand those words. This form of learning mimics what actually happens when people read: you are reading along happily and then run into a new word. With incidental instruction, that is the point where learning occurs. Generally, students encounter new words in text or discussion, and then you help them learn those words. Students will use the discovery process at this point. Keep track of those words and use them often in discussion.

Although both forms of instruction work, direct instruction may be better for helping students learn new words. However, incidental instruction is necessary because students need to know what to do when they find new words—and because you simply cannot plan for all the unfamiliar words they will encounter.

Require Students to Use New Words

Have you ever heard someone say, “Oh, I used to speak a little Spanish, but now I’ve forgotten most of it”? The same person may remember events from his or her childhood, including conversations and names. How can this be? A person can “forget” because the connection created within the brain is weak. The neural link within the brain that connects words to their meaning goes dormant. To prevent this from happening, the new information must be reinforced through sustained use.

The process of learning new words is no different. To ensure that students can understand, remember, and apply new words, provide them with sufficient opportunities to use those words. Once students have an introduction to a new word, subsequent reading instruction activities should provide opportunities (require) for students to keep using those words. Conversations with students, too, should provide opportunities and encouragement to use the new words. The more students use and encounter the new words, the better able they will be to remember what they mean.

Recognition and Analysis

The prior principle addressed remembering the meanings of new words. This is a little different here. By recognition, I am referring specifically to sight words: words that the student sees or hears and understands without having to think about them. These are words that have become a part of the student’s oral vocabulary. Another way to say this is “automaticity,” meaning students can see or hear the word and automatically know what it means. For example, if I say “Maintenance staff dismantled my desk,” you probably do not need to think about what I mean by “dismantled.” You recognize the word and automatically know what I am talking about.

As an instructional principle, recognition refers to providing students with sufficient exposure through a wide variety of activities to help them automatically recognize and understand a word.

Analysis, on the other hand, means providing instructional opportunities that require a student to break words apart into meaningful parts, interpret how the parts influence the root word, and then put the parts back together to create a whole definition of the word. Analysis will include a study of prefixes, suffixes, etc., as well as a study of root words and their meanings. This is a process that good readers use, and it is one that all developing readers need to be taught. Instructional strategies, therefore, must accommodate and address the analysis process.

Link to Meaningful Text

Words are only important if they are used to communicate ideas. Additionally, you only know what a word is supposed to communicate when it is used in context, whether in speech or in text. Any study of vocabulary must be immediately applied to text or discussion. There is little point to learning new words if the learning is not applied to discussion and text. From the standpoint of reading instruction, students need opportunities to read the new words in text. Basically, we do not teach students a lot of words and then hope they will find them in text sometime later. Nor is there any reason to study words that students are not going to encounter, particularly in text.

The term “meaningful text” is also important to this instructional principle. Meaningful text does not include worksheets, flashcards, or similar artificial reading selections. It means text, both fiction and nonfiction, that has content of value, use, and interest. Bottom line: Students study words they will find in text, and vocabulary instruction needs to be integrated with actual reading.

With direct instruction: study > read > study > read (etc.)

With incidental instruction: read > study > read > study (etc.)

What Works for Vocabulary Instruction

The principles for vocabulary instruction give you the big ideas to consider when designing instructional activities. They reflect how people learn new words, from birth onward. These big ideas suggest that seven instructional strategies will be beneficial.

The seven strategies below are approaches for putting the principles into practice. The first two strategies are for you as the teacher. They are things that you can do, rather than what you want the student to do. You will use them all the time.

The next five strategies are types of activities that engage students in the normal, natural processes that all people use learn new words. Over time, you will use all the strategies. You may have other strategies that work, but these have proven to be effective.

Seven Strategies for Teaching Vocabulary

- Modeling
- Word wall (for the teacher)
- Study and apply

- Substitution
- Writing
- Self-defining
- Graphic organizers

Modeling: For the teachers and anyone else who wants to help students increase their vocabulary, use words that you want students to learn. Use them, maybe explain them or have students study them at first, but then keep using them. Use them when you talk to students, and use them when you write something that students will read. Continual exposure will lead to students' vocabulary development. Many words have more than one meaning, so also use them in a variety of ways. This will help students increase their knowledge of what the words mean and how they may be used to communicate different information.

Modeling is not a specific instructional activity, but it is a powerful strategy for helping students learn new words. Modeling new words is an essential strategy. No matter what else you do, do this!

Word wall: Many teachers use word walls: a list of vocabulary terms that is posted somewhere noticeable. Word walls help improve student familiarity with vocabulary terms, and they might help students remember how to spell them. For teaching students the meanings of words, however, they are very weak. They do not provide instruction, and they do not show students how words are used in text or speech.

To increase the instructional value of word walls, you could write sentences that use the words, or use completed graphic organizers. This would be better than simply listing the words.

From the standpoint of helping students increase their vocabulary, the best use of word walls is as a tool for the teacher. Word walls provide the teacher with a reminder to use the word, to find texts that use the word, and to develop specific instructional activities that build students' knowledge of the words. The word wall is not for the student but for the teacher! The strategy of using the word wall for teachers is a top recommended strategy.

Study and apply: Study and apply is the direct instruction approach to teaching vocabulary. Following this strategy, students study new words and then read them in text. Studying words before reading in text is shown to significantly help students improve their vocabulary and their comprehension of the text. You can use a wide variety of instructional activities for the "study" part of this strategy. Once students complete an activity, they should read text that contains those words.

You may pre-select the words. You may also have students skim through the text and find unfamiliar words. Study those words with a variety of activities, including using context clues from the passage in which they occur, and then read the text. Follow-up discussion about the text should encourage the students to use the words. This is a top recommended strategy.

Substitution: Many new words that students learn have similar meanings to words they already know. To help them learn and use the new words, have them switch the new word for one they already know. For example, if students are learning the word "fantasy," teach them that

“fantasy” is similar to “make believe.” When they read or hear fantasy, they can think of “make believe.” This strategy uses synonyms as definitions for new words. It will help students remember the meanings of new words while improving their comprehension of what they read and hear. If you use this strategy, make sure students are using the new word, not the “easy” word in discussions and writing.

Writing: Students need practice using the new words. Although practice is often in the form of discussion, writing exercises also provide practice with new words. In fact, student writing is a great way for students to prepare for discussions about a text. Have them use the new words in their writing.

Using writing this way is far better than the typical “write a sentence using the word” type of activities. Making up sentences to use a word is a weak way to have students learn words. Isolated, invented sentences that use a new word do little to strengthen a student’s understanding of what the word means and how it can be used. It might give you clues about a student’s understanding, which makes it assessment, but it is not instructional. Instead, have students write their ideas, opinions, and knowledge about a topic. In this way, the writing actually has a purpose that contributes to reading comprehension while helping them learn to use new words.

Self-defining: Can you explain the meaning of “enjoy”? Can you explain it well enough (without using it) for another person to know what word you are describing? This is the basis of the self-defining strategy. Students create their own definitions for words and share them. They may compare their definitions to other students’ definitions, and they may work with other students to create a common definition.

You will not use this strategy until after other types of activities for learning and using the words. Students need to learn something about the word first. Using this strategy makes students think carefully about the word meaning and its use, and it helps students improve their recognition and knowledge of the word.

Graphic Organizers: Graphic organizers are powerful tools for developing comprehension, and they work very well for vocabulary instruction, too. Graphic organizers help students collect information and categorize information about a word. They help students create a visual representation of information that can then become a mental framework for understanding and using the word. Students’ (and everyone’s) brains will try to do this naturally; the graphic organizer facilitates this process.

There are many types of graphic organizers and many ways to lay out information. A useful graphic organizer will include specific types of information:

- most commonly used dictionary definition,
- other definitions or uses for the word
- sample use of the word from a text students are reading or have read,
- parts of the word with meanings for those parts,
- synonyms and antonyms,
- part of speech, and

- and a sample from the student’s writing.

Below an example that shows how a graphic organizer can depict information about a word. (I am sure you can design or find graphic organizers that are more attractive than this one.)

<p style="text-align: center;">Word used in text:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">My writing:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>				
<p style="text-align: center;">Synonyms:</p> <p>_____</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Antonyms:</p> <p>_____</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; width: 100px; height: 100px; margin: 0 auto; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <p>WORD</p> </div>	<p style="text-align: center;">Given definition:</p> <p>_____</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Other meanings:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>			
<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 33%; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Word Parts</p> <p>Part: _____</p> <p>Means: _____</p> </td> <td style="width: 33%; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Word Parts</p> <p>Part: _____</p> <p>Means: _____</p> </td> <td style="width: 33%; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Word Parts</p> <p>Part: _____</p> <p>Means: _____</p> </td> </tr> </table>			<p style="text-align: center;">Word Parts</p> <p>Part: _____</p> <p>Means: _____</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Word Parts</p> <p>Part: _____</p> <p>Means: _____</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Word Parts</p> <p>Part: _____</p> <p>Means: _____</p>
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Sample Activities for Vocabulary

You can do many types of instructional activities to help students develop their vocabulary knowledge. As long as you are addressing the principles for vocabulary instruction and using effective strategies, the activities will lead to improved vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. Sample activities to address the various strategies are below.

Strategy	Sample Activity Types	Vocabulary Sub-skills
Modeling	Continuous exposure by the teacher or other adults	Decoding Word part knowledge Word replacement Word application

Word Wall (as used by the teacher)	Continuous use by the teacher or other adults	Decoding Word part knowledge Word replacement Word application
Word Wall (with instructional content for student use)	Reference for other activities	Decoding Word part knowledge Word replacement Definition research
Study and Apply	New word search Graphic organizers Identifying context clues Create-a-dictionary Creating word categories Visual representation	All sub-skills
Substitution	Word mapping Creating word categories Erase and replace Definition mapping Word look-up Create-a-dictionary Call and response	Word replacement Word comparison Definition research Word application
Writing	Journaling Response to prompts	Decoding Word replacement

	Opinion essays	Content analysis
	Contrast / argument responses	Word application
Self-defining	Cards on head	Word replacement
	Create-a-dictionary	Word application
	Discussion	
Graphic Organizers	Partner graphic organizers	Decoding
	Create-a-dictionary	Word part knowledge
	New word search	Word replacement
		Definition research
		Word application

What Does Not Work for Vocabulary Instruction

As long as you are engaging students in recognizing words, analyzing word parts, reading and using new words, nearly all instructional activities will increase students' vocabulary. However, a few types of strategies are not effective, or are minimally effective.

Strategy	Reason Why It Does Not Work
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Single or Short-term Use (words of the week)	To increase familiarity with new words and how they may be used correctly, students need a lot of exposure to and practice with the new words. Studying words for a few days and then leaving them will not provide the long-term exposure and use students need.
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Single-sentence Writing	This strategy refers to activities in which students write a made-up sentence for a word. This is not instruction but assessment. Also, writing a single sentence or two that use the word does not provide meaningful, real use of the word for communication. It is artificial and does nearly nothing
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to help students understand what a word means and how it can be used. A better approach is to have the students write a reflection or summary of the text in which they use the new words.

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR)	Sustained silent reading may increase exposure to words, but for learning new words, it is minimally effective unless students know the discovery process. An interesting way to use SSR for vocabulary development is to have students keep a log of new words they find and then create a graphic organizer they can share. Students can also search for new words first, study them, and then read silently.
Oral Reading	Reading aloud does not increase vocabulary, although students may come across new words while reading. To use oral reading as a vocabulary exercise, have students first find new words and study them. Then, when reading aloud, students will understand the words and the text they are reading.
Computerized Instruction	Computerized instruction generally provides short-term exposure, study, and practice with words—not the long-term study that students need. It also doesn't provide broad-based exposure, such as in reading, discussion, or listening. Computerized instruction also generally does not provide the word analysis that students can use to figure out the meanings of words, and it certainly does not coach students through the discovery process. It might be useful as a supplement for live instruction, but it will never be as good.

Companion Reading Components

Vocabulary contributes to several other reading components, such as oral language, phonics, fluency, and comprehension. It goes both ways. If you are focusing on helping students develop their vocabulary, provide instructional activities in oral language, phonics, and comprehension that use the new words.

Oral language: Words can be used in many ways. With oral language instruction, students explore how word meanings change according to how they are being used. When oral language instruction is combined with vocabulary instruction, students study what the words mean according to an author and other ways the new words can be used. The result is an improved ability to understand and use words to communicate a variety of messages.

Phonics: Decoding is the first step in the process for learning new words and recognizing them

in text. This has two implications for vocabulary instruction. First, students need to know how to decode words and have decoding skills that are sufficiently advanced for decoding the new words. Second, whenever students first encounter new words in text, or when they are using the discovery process for new words, they need to spend time decoding the words. Not only will this reinforce the first step in the discovery process but also will help students recognize the words when they find them in text.

Comprehension: Once students have a grasp of what a word means, they need to see how the word contributes to the meaning of a text passage. Learning words in isolation (without reading them in text or using them in discussion) has almost no value. Words must be applied. In terms of reading instruction, this means that students need to read the new words in meaningful text. As they do so, provide comprehension activities about the text. After all, the end goal of vocabulary instruction is not to learn new words. The end goal is to understand the text.