Handout: Vocabulary Terminology

Types of Vocabulary

Listening Vocabulary

These are the words we hear and understand. This is the first type of vocabulary we develop as children. Adults recognize and understand close to 50,000 words.

Speaking Vocabulary

These are the words we use to convey information and ideas when we speak. Speaking vocabulary is typically a lot smaller than listening vocabulary—studies estimate 5,000–10,000 words.

Reading Vocabulary

These are the words we recognize and understand when we see them in print. People typically develop reading vocabulary by reading a wide variety of content. However, to read a wide variety of content, readers need a broad reading vocabulary. Much vocabulary instruction focuses on helping students develop a broad reading vocabulary.

Writing Vocabulary

These are the words we use to convey information and ideas in print. Typically, writing vocabulary is the smallest type and is heavily influenced by the number of words we can spell correctly.

Tiers of Vocabulary

Vocabulary words can be divided into three tiers.

Tier 1

Basic Tier 1 words are typically nouns, verbs, familiar adjectives, and common sight words. They will already be part of a student's oral vocabulary. These words are often found in low-level instructional materials. We use them to teach alphabetics and word study skills specifically because they are already part of oral vocabulary. Examples include *shoe, paper, sad, run,* and *blue.*

Tier 2

Higher-level Tier 2 words are found in more sophisticated texts across a variety of content and genres. They typically have multiple or nuanced meanings and are used to provide description and detail. These words are much less likely to be part of a student's current vocabulary. **For intermediate and advanced students, focus vocabulary instruction on Tier 2 words.** Building students' understanding of Tier 2 words gives them the expanded vocabulary they will need to read higher-level, more sophisticated texts with confidence. That larger vocabulary will also help them express themselves better when writing and speaking**.** Examples include *exertion, unanimous, rickety, benevolent*, and *masterpiece*.

Tier 3

Specialized Tier 3 words are related to specific topics such as health, finance, technology, or occupations. People typically learn these words when the need arises, and they usually do not become part of a person's everyday vocabulary. Vocabulary instruction for Tier 3 words occurs when the words are encountered in reading, and focuses on word meaning to improve comprehension. Examples include *pedometer, creditor, prosecution, isotope*, and *crepe*.

Principles

Pre-teach words before reading.

Analyze a reading passage before students read it. Identify Tier 2 and Tier 3 words they may not know and teach these words before they read. Teaching unfamiliar words before reading improves comprehension.

Ensure multiple exposures.

Choose words to teach that students are likely to see again. Try to ensure multiple exposures. Reinforce vocabulary by including practice activities where students use new words in writing. The more often a student sees and uses a new word, the more likely that word is to be incorporated in the student's vocabulary.

Focus on breadth and depth.

Vocabulary instruction should focus on two things: breadth and depth. By breadth we mean expanding students' vocabularies by exposing them to new words and encouraging them to use these new words in speech and print. By depth, we mean understanding specific meanings, nuanced differences between similar words, word choice for audience and formality, and meaning in specific contexts.

Teach word-learning strategies.

Teach students word-learning strategies that will help them understand the meanings of words. Often a student's first exposure to new a new word will take place while reading outside of class. Teaching students how common prefixes and suffixes affect the meanings of words, how to use context clues, and how to use a dictionary ensures that students have the proper tools to learn new words on their own.

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Handout: Reading Comprehension

The goal of reading is to understand what you have read. To do that, you need to accurately decode the words on the page, recognize what they mean, combine them into meaningful phrases, and read with expression. You also need to interpret what the author intended to say, make inferences, integrate information with your own knowledge and evaluate it, and apply what you've read to other contexts.

Many literacy students may not be aware they have a comprehension problem. Others may realize they don't understand what they are reading, but are unaware of the many comprehension strategies and skills that good readers use to help them gain meaning from text. Tutors must provide explicit instruction in comprehension strategies and skills to help students improve their comprehension.

Comprehension Strategies

Good readers have at their disposal broad-based comprehension strategies they can apply to a variety of reading topics and genres to help them understand what they are reading. They use these strategies before they read, while they are reading, and after they read. These strategies include:

- **Setting a purpose for reading.** Good readers use this strategy when reading nonfiction to learn something; like reading the newspaper or website to find out what happened at the school board meeting, or reading an instruction manual to learn how to program the timer on your coffee pot so you can wake up to freshly brewed coffee. Having a clear purpose for reading helps the reader determine what other reading strategies they might use.
- **Using background knowledge and prior experiences.** Good readers use what they know to help them relate to and understand what they're reading. This strategy can be used for fiction or nonfiction. It generally requires the reader to have some idea of what the text is about before they read. Often the reader will ask themselves questions to help them draw out their knowledge and experiences.
- **Making predictions.** Good readers predict what they expect to find in an article or what a character might do next. This strategy and the next one, asking questions and looking for answers, are strategies a reader uses to help them focus – to look for specific pieces of information or to read and pay close attention to details. Good readers make predictions before they read and while they are reading. Good readers might combine this strategy with marking text, highlighting information, and taking notes.
- **Asking questions.** As they read, good readers ask themselves questions and then looking for the answers in the text. This helps a reader look for specific pieces of information and identify details. Good readers also ask themselves questions after they read a portion of the text to help them monitor their comprehension. If they are unable to answer their questions it might mean they need to reread the portion of the text.

- **Marking text.** Good readers often mark text, such as highlighting important points, and take notes.
- **Summarizing.** Summarizing after reading is a good way to check comprehension. However, good readers also break the text up in smaller chunks and periodically summarize as they read. This is an important comprehension monitoring strategy.
- **Rereading things that don't make sense.** Sometimes readers ask themselves questions they can't answer, or are unable to summarize what they just read. Good readers understand this to mean they didn't really understand what they just read. When this happens, they will reread the text, often applying new strategies while they read to improve their comprehension.
- **Reorganizing information.** When they have finished reading, good readers will often reorganize information from the text into a new format, making it easier for them to understand and apply to other contexts. This often involves the use of a graphic organizer – creating a chart of information, drawing a diagram, or summarizing and numbering the steps in a process.

Comprehension Skills

Good readers also use specific comprehension skills that help them recognize how information is being presented and then make decisions about that information. These include:

- **Recognizing cause and effect.** Cause and effect is an organizational pattern commonly found in news articles, history books, biographies, and fiction. Consider a newspaper article about the school board. A reader might learn from the article that some of the attendees were upset. Understanding the relationship of cause and effect can help the reader identify why the attendees were upset, which might be more important information.
- **Recognizing main idea and details.** This is a foundational comprehension skill for being able to summarize. Good readers need to be able to identify the main idea and make decisions about which details are important and which are not to be able to summarize what they've read, internalize it, and use it. Because it is such a foundational skill to reading comprehension, students are often asked to read texts and identify the main idea and details on academic tests like the GED.
- **Discerning fact from opinion.** Good readers use this skill to help them evaluate information. It is becoming more important as the distinctions between news and commentary; articles, sponsored articles, and ads; and science and sponsored science are blurred.
- **Classifying information.** Grouping or classifying information is an important comprehension strategy for remembering information.
- **Comparing and contrasting.** Comparing and contrasting information is a specific way of classifying how items are alike and different. It is an especially useful comprehension tool when evaluating two things.

- **Sequencing events.** Sequencing is a comprehension skill that good readers often use as they go about their everyday lives. They might use this skill to follow a recipe or follow a procedure at work. Sometimes the sequences are easy to identify, such as in the examples above. A more difficult example would be when a reader follows a sequence of events in a fictional story where the time might change from present to a memory of the past. In these cases, readers rely on keywords to help them identify the proper sequence. This is also where comprehension monitoring is important – a reader must be able to recognize when the sequence doesn't make sense.
- **Drawing inferences and reaching conclusions.** Readers automatically draw conclusions as they read if they are concentrating on meaning. The text supplies the information, but the reader has to determine how the information can be used. Making inferences is more difficult because the information isn't clearly stated in the text. The reader must use clues and draw upon their own knowledge and experiences to infer what the author means. This is why teaching students to use their own knowledge and experiences is important.
- **Understanding how plot, character, and setting contribute to a story.** When reading fiction, good readers use their understanding of the genre, plot structures, characters, and setting to help them understand and enjoy the story.

Different Levels of Comprehension

Literal Comprehension

Literal comprehension is the ability to understand and remember what the text says. It does not involve the reader's feelings or opinions, or require the reader to be able to apply information from the text to other contexts. You can check a student's literal comprehension by asking factual questions about the text such as "what time did Bob wake up?" or "What does the emergency switch do?" You can also check for literal understanding by asking the student to summarize the story or identify the main idea and details of an article. These types of activities check the student's understanding of the entire text, but still at a literal level.

Literal Comprehension provides the foundation for more in-depth comprehension of a passage. Without literal understanding, it is difficult to make inferences or think critically about a text. Literal comprehension is the focus of comprehension for beginning readers. When working with intermediate and advanced students, you will check for literal comprehension and then build on their literal understanding to develop their inferential and critical thinking comprehension skills.

Inferential Comprehension

Inferential comprehension is the ability to combine what the text says with the reader's own knowledge and experiences to draw conclusions about the text. "How" and "Why" questions are good to use to check inferential comprehension. Examples might include "What do you think Mr. Jones thought when Bob showed up late for work?" or "Why do you think the article suggests making a list before going to the grocery?" Inferential comprehension is an area of focus for intermediate and advanced students.

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Critical Thinking Comprehension

Critical thinking comprehension is the ability to understood the information or story well enough to use it in other contexts. This requires the reader to:

- take the knowledge they learned from the article or story and apply it to a different situation
- think more deeply about the characters, exploring their moods and the motivations behind their actions
- develop an opinion or stance based on information from a range of sources, including this text, and then applying it to another text or context
- compare and contrast elements in the text and make judgements based on that information

Examples of questions that require the reader to think critically about the text might include "How do you think the story would be different if this was a job that Bob liked?" or "You said you liked this planning process as a way to help you organize your work. How might you use a similar process with your kids to help them organize their work at home?" Critical thinking comprehension is an area of focus for intermediate and advanced students.