

# 10 Do's and Don'ts for Effective Vocabulary Instruction

- ✓ There is a strong relationship between vocabulary and comprehension, and student achievement.
- ✓ Effective vocabulary instruction across grade levels and content areas is key increasing student learning and achievement.
- ✓ The following "do's" and "don'ts" provide a great place to start when implementing effective vocabulary instruction in your setting.



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## Do's

## Don'ts

**amiabile  
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**You should**  
provide multiple exposures to words. New words are learned and meaning is shaped through many exposures over time.

**You should not**  
have students only look up words in the dictionary and copy definitions. Don't over-rely on dictionary definitions.

**You should**  
have students create nonlinguistic representations for key words - images, pictographs, and acting out new words supports word learning.

**You should not**  
teach too many words at one time. Students will only learn words at a cursory level and quickly forget them.

**You should**  
focus on academic vocabulary for instruction - Tier 2 and Tier 3 terms. See "No Tears for Tiers: Common Core Vocabulary Made Simple" for guidance.

**You should not**  
introduce words and promptly forget about them. New words are learned over time through a variety of exposures.

**You should**  
support independent reading in a variety of genres and text types. Wide reading builds a rich, useful, and diverse vocabulary.

**Assessment**  
**You should not**  
think you need to assess every single word. Use a variety of assessment methods to determine word learning.

**You should**  
integrate word walls into vocabulary instruction and practice. See "Top Tips for Word Walls" for great ideas.

**You should not**  
require students to use new vocabulary in sentences too quickly. Students need more familiarity with words in order to use them in speaking and writing.

**You should**  
harness the power of digital tools for practice, review, and to connect words to images. See "21 Digital Tools to Build Vocabulary" for ideas.

**You should not**  
arbitrarily assign lists of words for students to learn. Connect vocabulary to a context - text, language, writing - in order for word learning to be rooted in meaning.

**You should**  
directly teach individual words. Pronounce each word, spell it, provide a kid-friendly definition and encourage elaborations & nonlinguistics.

**You should not**  
rely solely on leveled books for word learning. Children's literature, including picture books, will introduce students to advanced vocabulary within context.

**You should**  
read aloud to students - picture books, trade books, and informational text. Reading aloud exposes students to higher-level vocabulary.

**You should not**  
forget the power of a print-rich environment to support word learning. Classroom libraries, books, read alouds & discussion flood students with language and new vocabulary.

**You should**  
create semantic maps and webs of words to make word learning visible. It is critical to discuss the relationships of words to support word learning.

**Context Clues**  
**You should not**  
forget that context clues are more reliable for informational and expository text than for fiction and narrative.

**Word Learning Strategies**  
**You should**  
teach students independent word-learning strategies. These include context clues, word parts, reference tools, and strategies for personalized word learning.

**words  
words  
words**  
**You should not**  
get overwhelmed with the amount of words students need to know. Focusing on cross-curricular terms (Tier 2 words) can make an important difference in academic growth.