

# Choosing Words to Teach - Tier 1, 2, 3 Vocabulary

There is no set formula for choosing vocabulary to explicitly target. Many vocabulary words that are important for students to learn are encountered in the context of authentic literacy experiences. It is also important, however, to prioritise words that are useful in multiple contexts, and for multiple purposes.

Beck and McKeown (2002) recommend that teachers consider the following when choosing vocabulary words:

- How generally useful is the word?
- How does the word relate to other words, to the ideas that students know or have been learning?
- What does the word bring to a text or situation?

Given the research into how new words are learnt, vocabulary should be taught in relation to other words, like a web of connected words and concepts. Teachers should highlight the similarities and differences between words, so that students are more likely to remember vocabulary words they encounter, are taught, and meet again in a different context.

Words that we explicitly teach should also be as *functional* as possible, so that students have multiple opportunities to comprehend and use these words.

Beck and McKeown (1985) proposed that vocabulary should be categorised according to three Vocabulary Tiers:

	<i>Explanation</i>	<i>Examples</i>	<i>Recommendation for teaching</i>
<b>Tier 1</b>	<b>Everyday</b> words encountered in everyday conversation	dog go happy drink phone play sad	These words do not necessarily need to be explicitly taught, especially in upper grades with native English speakers.  <i>Note: Children with learning difficulties or an English as a Second Language background may still benefit from explicit teaching of some Tier 1 words.</i>
<b>Tier 2</b>	Words that are needed in an academic context, and provide access to more complex topics and discussions outside of the everyday. Words that are useful across <b>multiple topic and subject areas</b> .	relative vary formulate specificity accumulate calibrate itemise falsely description hypothesis misfortune dignified faltered distinctly resolve	<b>Teachers should explicitly teach these words</b> , to ensure they can develop their students' understanding and expression of complex ideas. <b>These words are useful for multiple purposes</b> , and their use and understanding reflect and mature understanding of academic language. Students should learn to use Tier 2 words in multiple contexts and for multiple purposes.
<b>Tier 3</b>	Words that are <b>relevant for specific subjects or content-areas</b> . Words that have distinct meanings and purposes, relevant to a specialised topic or discourse.	lava carburettor legislature circumference aorta polyglot sonata isosceles	<b>Students should learn these for the particular content-areas</b> , but <u>should not be preferenced over more useful Tier 2 words</u> . Students should learn to use Tier 3 words in the context of the specific subject matter where they are useful.

These tiers are helpful for determining how functional and useful words will be to explicitly teach. Depending on the needs of your students, Tier 2 words provide access to academic discourse with the greatest functionality and utility across subject areas. Tier 3 words can also be targeted but only for specific areas of study (e.g. aeronautics, geology, geometry, philosophy, psychology, physics, geography, music, art).

The three types of words (Tiers 1-3) relate to the idea of common-sense and technical language, relevant to literacy across the curriculum.