

LITERACY ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Pocketbook

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Cartoons:
Phil Hailstone



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1. The vocabulary ladder



Teaching subject-specific words can be challenging. One way to begin is by thinking about the rungs on the vocabulary ladder.

1. What are the most challenging or difficult words in the topic you will be teaching?
2. Make sure that you have a list of them – and check that their spelling is correct in your notes and that they appear accurately in displays and worksheets.
3. How you will introduce them? What strategies do you personally use to remember them?
4. Praise pupils for their efforts to use correct terminology – if they make mistakes help them to correct themselves.
5. Ensure that pupils record the correct spelling and definition – some schools use different colour pens for this or allocate parts of their books for key terms.
6. Check and reinforce pupils' knowledge by getting them to use the words in a real context – perhaps get them involved in a test or game.
7. New vocabulary is secured.

2. Make it memorable



When teaching complex new vocabulary, think about ways to help pupils remember these new terms. **Mnemonics** can make important aspects of a word, or even the spelling, memorable.

Start by sharing your own knowledge – what helps *you* learn? Helping pupils to make up their own mnemonics will make the learning stick. Encouraging your class to compete in devising mnemonics to sort out common errors can make difficult ideas fun.

In subjects such as Science where difficult terms need to be learnt in a correct order, mnemonics are invaluable, eg the hierarchical organisation of life will always spring to mind if pupils learn that:

<i>King Philip came over for greasy sausages</i>	=	Kingdom Phylum Class Order Family Genus Species
------------------------------------------------------	---	-------------------------------------------------------------------

Similarly, tricky spellings can suddenly become straightforward with a clever mnemonic. Who will forget how to spell 'necessary' when they link it to a shirt with 'one collar and two sleeves'?

3. Weave a web of words

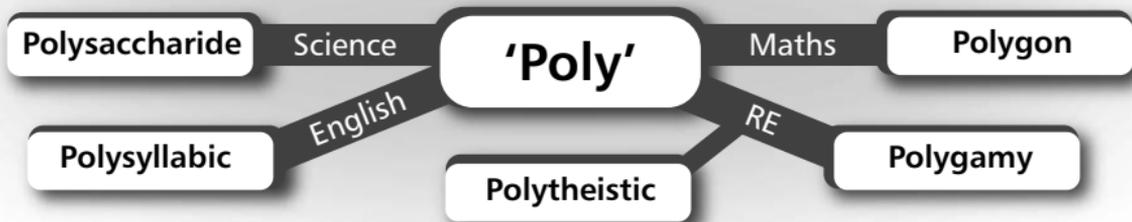


Helping pupils understand patterns and word groups is an effective way of expanding their word power. If they learn that certain prefixes mean certain things, then teaching them a few can help them decipher and build up a wide vocabulary that can transfer to other studies.

Complex scientific words can be baffling, but teaching a tiny number of Latin or Greek roots will help your pupils build up a personal lexicon.

The word '*polysaccharide*', for example, looks complicated, but once pupils learn that '*poly*' means 'many' and '*saccharide*' means 'sugar', it's a small step to seeing that '*polysaccharide*' means: 'many molecules bonded in a chain to make sugars'.

Learning the prefix '*poly*' helps with many other words: '*polygons*' in maths (a many-sided shape), or '*polygamy*' or '*polytheistic*' in RE (marrying more than one partner and believing in more than one God).



4. Webs on the wall



Using your classroom wall to display and build wall webs is a fun and highly visual way to show pupils how word meanings connect. Start with displaying a prefix connected to your topic. Get pupils to add to and develop the wallweb using dictionaries and their notes, eg:

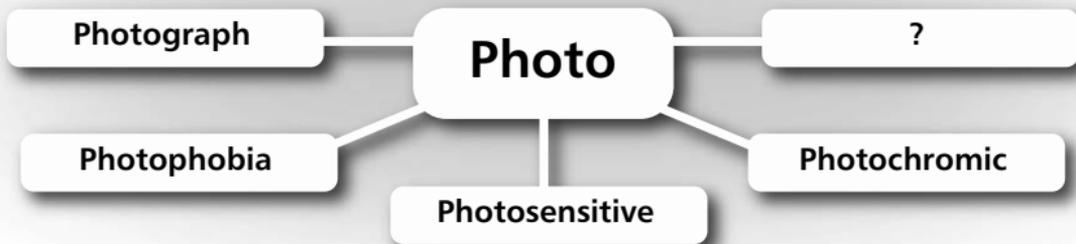
'*Photo*' means 'signifying light'. Add in '*synthesis*'. This means 'to make things'. So '*photo*' + '*synthesis*' means 'light to make things'.

Photograph = light + pictures

Photophobia = light + fear of

Photosensitive = affected by light

Just teaching pupils one prefix and exploring it can both develop their subject-specific knowledge – in this case science – and widen their general vocabulary.



5. Look it up!



Having good reference dictionaries on hand in all classrooms is a great way to help pupils investigate and take an interest in words. The choice of dictionary will be dependent upon the ages and abilities of the pupils you teach.

Suitable dictionaries for secondary schools/ Key Stage 2 include: *Collins new School Dictionary* or *Oxford Dictionary for Schools*. Look for a dictionary that includes the origins of words. Pupils can then investigate words and understand how they are connected, thus building up their word power.

www.oxforddictionaries.com has lots of dictionary ideas, interesting vocabulary information, and suggestions for teaching pupils about words. The '*children's and schools dictionary selector page*' shows age-specific pages from different dictionaries. There is good access to online dictionaries and helpful tips on how to use them.

Encourage pupils to record new words by starting their own dictionaries in the back of their exercise books. This can be linked with spelling – see page 32 for an example of how a school incorporates a dictionary with spelling practice.

6. Repeat, repeat, repeat

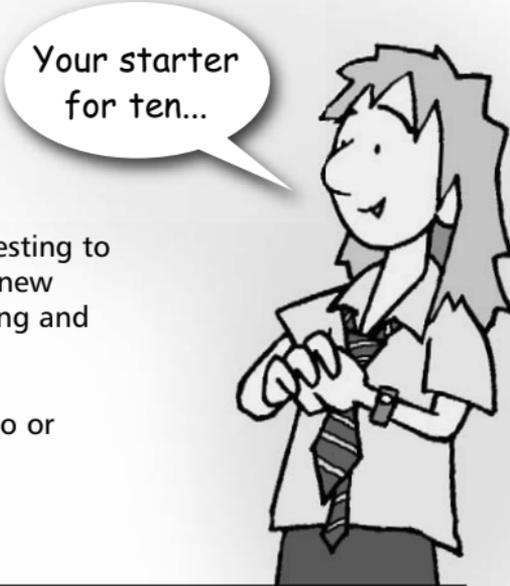


Recording words is important, but it's not enough to cement the learning. Repetition is a key strategy for embedding new vocabulary – it is thought that we need to hear and reflect on new knowledge five different times to secure it.

Mini tests at the start of a lesson are helpful. Try a **'quick ten quiz'**, with ten questions linked to words pupils have met in their studies. This hooks students into the lesson and reinforces learning from the previous lesson.

But teaching vocabulary needs to be fresh and interesting to keep pupils on their toes. By using games to secure new vocabulary you can repeat and reinforce while exciting and enthusing your pupils about language.

Have you tried Key Word Pictionary, Vocabulary Bingo or Spot the Word Difference? Read on!



Your starter
for ten...

7. Key Word Pictionary



In the classic Pictionary game the aim is for a person to draw a word so that their partner can guess it. In school, Pictionary can be used to reinforce understanding. It's an ideal plenary or revision activity lasting 5-15 minutes maximum.

1. Create at least 15 cards with key terms / vocabulary on them, eg: 'VAT', 'sole trader', 'limited company', 'profit', 'cash flow', etc. You can laminate them for future reference.
2. Divide class into groups of 4 to form 2 teams of 2 people. Give each group a set of cards.
3. One person in each team looks at the word or term on the first card and both draw it (without using words or symbols). Their respective team mates have to guess what it is.
4. The team who gets it right first gains a point and a further point for giving the definition. You could award a bonus point for spelling the answer correctly. Pupils take turns to draw until all the cards are gone – the winning team has the most points.

How would you draw: 'arable farming' / 'personification' / 'prime numbers' / 'transubstantiation' or a 'crustacean'? Pens to the ready for a fun and memorable way to reinforce vocabulary!



8. Vocabulary bingo



Vocabulary bingo is another favourite for consolidating understanding of technical terms, or reinforcing new vocabulary. It works well at the end of a unit / topic.

1. You need to have taught a range of technical terms and their definitions – ideally at least 15 – and have given pupils time to learn them, perhaps for homework.
2. You can make and laminate bingo cards for future use, or just ask pupils to draw a large five by five grid. List on the board all of the vocabulary under consideration.
3. Ask pupils to copy them randomly on to their grids.
4. You also need slips of paper, each containing a definition. When you pull a slip of paper from the hat and read out the definition, pupils must tick off or place a counter on the matching term on their grids. Walk round the room to check it's being done correctly.
5. Pupils who get a line of answers first are the winners.
6. Issue rewards and take time to clarify meanings and misconceptions.

About the author

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Caroline Bentley-Davies has been an English Adviser for a Local Authority and an Inspector. She has run training for thousands of teachers on aspects of outstanding lessons, Literacy Across the Curriculum and how to improve English GCSE results.

She teaches demonstration lessons and runs master classes on creative writing for pupils from primary age to A Level. She has written a range of popular GCSE English text books and runs English GCSE revision classes for A/A* pupils and those on the C/D borderline. For information about her training, consultancy and other books visit Caroline's website: www.bentley-davies.co.uk or follow her on twitter @RealCBD

Caroline also runs Literacy Across the Curriculum training courses with Osiris Education (www.OsirisEducation.co.uk) as well as training days directly with individual schools.