



Preteaching Vocabulary

Overview

Rationale for Change Idea: Explicit instruction of the vocabulary students will encounter as they read contributes to students' comprehension—in all content areas. Not all students have the skills or stamina to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words (using morphology, context clues, glossaries, etc.), and some technical terms defy the usual strategies for word identification, including use of context clues¹ or morphological analysis.

Students vary tremendously in the breadth and depth of their vocabularies, especially when it comes to the technical or specialized vocabulary they encounter in their content area studies.

They also vary in their skill level for figuring out new words (e.g., by using morphology or even aids offered in their textbooks).

Words that students may know in one context have slightly different or even new meanings in the content area.

Some students who are learning English may have large conversational vocabularies but be less familiar with the technical and specialized vocabularies encountered in the content areas.

Other English learners may have extensive technical vocabularies in their home language, and they can draw on this strength as they learn new content in their classes.

The process of **thinking simultaneously in two languages** is referred to as **translanguaging**.²

Students who are learning English benefit when they are encouraged to draw on their home language as a strength for learning both English and content taught in English.

When Used and Why:

As appropriate at the beginning of each lesson to provide students with an “advance organizer” for their reading assignment and subsequent discussions and writing assignments.

¹ There is no research supporting the use of context clues as part of beginning readers' decoding process. However, in content area reading, especially when texts become denser and more technical, context is often an important a way to begin to understand technical, specialized, and unfamiliar terms.

² See Najarro, I. (2023). What is translanguaging and how is it used in the classroom? *Education Week*.

<https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/what-is-translanguaging-and-how-is-it-used-in-the-classroom/2023/07>

Connection to Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) Goals and Priorities

Understandings and Expectations			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1: Planning standards-aligned content	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4: Evidence of student learning
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2: Equitable instruction	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5: Collective efficacy
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3: Student engagement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6: Equitable and inclusive learning environment

English Language Arts Instructional Practices			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Understanding the text	<input type="checkbox"/>	Critiquing the text
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Responding to the text	<input type="checkbox"/>	Producing text

Note. There are multiple ways to implement the change idea on annotating text. The ideas below for teacher preparation and implementation are just one way of thinking about this work.

Attention to Equity			
	Reflect on one’s own biases to mitigate negative impact on curriculum selection, instruction, and relationships with students, families, and colleagues. (U6)*		Emphasize assets, resilience, joy, and resistance of historically marginalized groups to provide a more comprehensive representation of their lived experiences. (U6)
	Use culturally relevant and sustaining approaches across grade levels and content areas for all students, with a critical eye toward serving those from historically marginalized groups. (U1, U2)	x	Sustain students’ cultural, linguistic, and literate practices while providing instruction that promotes flexibility in their ability to navigate different cultures and contexts. (U1, U2, U3, U6)
x	Position students for success as knowledge producers rather than consumers. (U1, U2)		Use perspective-taking to develop an understanding of the factors that influence varied points of view. (U2, U3)
	Draw on students’ interests and culture to shape curriculum, instruction, and assessment. (U1, U6)		Question the single story/status quo that sustains societal inequities. (U2)
	Use language to discuss asset-based approaches to teaching and learning. (U6)		Center the experiences, voices, histories, perspectives, and dignity of Native People and People of Color. (U6)
	Foster a nurturing and collaborative learning community where students seek feedback from teachers and peers, assess their own learning, and set goals. (U3, U4)		

*LBUSD Understandings Continuum

Who Benefits: All students, especially those who may have less familiarity with technical and specialized vocabulary in the content areas.

When Used and Why?

At the beginning of each discussion or when making reading assignments, depending on the vocabulary load of reading assignments and class discussion.

Preteaching Vocabulary for Use in Social Studies and Language Arts

Middle school social studies and language arts students need to learn and be able to use specialized vocabulary to be successful in their content area learning.

This includes words in the text that relate directly to what is being taught at present (e.g., *causes* for political unrest among the colonists in Massachusetts or *ways in which an author* shows a character’s personality or depicts a mood).

They also need to learn to use skills like morphological analysis to figure out new meanings.

Some textbooks and computer programs have glossaries, highlighted links, or other learning aids that can help students expand their vocabularies, but students need to learn to use them.

Students need to become attentive to common terms used in new ways in their content area reading, including when used in metaphors and similes.

Time Required:

Preteaching specialized and technical vocabulary should take no more than 2 or 3 minutes at the beginning of a class section.

Teachers state the words, display them for students to see, and provide a meaning in the context in which students will encounter them.

Teachers point out that the words may **seem familiar but have more specialized meanings in the content areas.**

As appropriate, teachers point out morphological aspects of the words, especially when knowing the “word families” will help students remember meanings.

Why the Change Idea Is Important

Thorough content area learning is often dependent on understanding specialized or technical vocabulary that students may not have encountered in previous classes or in conversations.

Introducing vocabulary at the beginning of each class takes little time and adds to students’ success.

Teachers may also be able to use this time to familiarize students with vocabulary aids that are part of their learning materials.

Guidelines for Coaches: Introducing the “Preteaching” Change Ideas

Why the Change Idea Is Important: Explaining the Change Idea to Teachers

Remind teachers that one component for success in the content areas is that students understand and can use the specialized or technical vocabulary in each field: Knowledge of this kind sets experts apart from novices.

Some words and terms may be familiar to students in conversational contexts but have different meanings in social studies or language arts.

Some terms may be completely unfamiliar, but understanding them and using them are essential for student comprehension of their reading assignments and participation in classroom discussions.

The **Preteaching Vocabulary** strategy adds very little time to classroom instruction but gives students a valuable “advance organizer” for subsequent learning.

It also gives English learners an opportunity to draw on their home language, whether it is to recognize morphemes (“word parts” or “root words”) that they know or to think about the new vocabulary and content in their home language (i.e., to engage in translanguaging).

Preparing for Implementing the Strategy With Students

Prepare

Decide how to tell students about the importance of technical and specialized vocabulary in their content area learning. For example:

What you read in the content areas often includes specialized vocabulary that may be entirely new to you or may use familiar words in totally new ways. Part of my job is to make sure you can understand this vocabulary when you read and when we discuss the content in class. Part of your job is to become familiar with this vocabulary and can use these words and terms when you talk or write about what you are learning.

Select the specific words or terms to introduce to the class:

Identify key words or terms in students’ reading material that are essential for their comprehension, such as

key technical terms or academic words;
 familiar words used in new ways, especially when specific to the content area; and
 key content-specific words, terms, or phrases.

Sometimes a text—or a teachers’ manual—will specifically identify vocabulary that needs to be pretaught; some sources may highlight or otherwise emphasize such terms in the actual text.

Also as appropriate, teachers encourage English learners to determine whether they already know the terms and their meanings in their home language and help these students make the **translanguage connections**.³

Translanguaging refers to processing information in two languages, most notably one’s home language and the language one is learning.⁴

When teachers encourage translanguaging, they are affirming students’ first or home language, their backgrounds, and their cultural experiences.

Develop easy-to-understand but complete definitions of the terms, and plan to set aside a few minutes at the beginning of class to preteach them.

Provide complete definitions and explanations that students can understand. For example:

Use words in sentences; ask students to use words in sentences

Discuss morphology as relevant to understanding and remembering the words

Remind students about any vocabulary aids available to them

Decide on a strategy to provide a reference or organizer for students as they read that includes the definition and use. Some options to consider are

writing the words/definitions on the board;

charting key words specific to the content, creating a word wall;

providing the students with a copy of the words and definitions specific to this section of text; and

having students develop a personal glossary.

Consider the level of additional scaffolding required for students to be successful with the vocabulary terms and the content of the text. This may include one or more of the following pre-reading examples from the “six steps of the vocabulary instruction process” (Marzano 2013):

Providing a description, explanation, or example of the new term

³ Insert information if needed

⁴ See Najarro, I. (2023). What is translanguaging and how is it used in the classroom? *Education Week*.
<https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/what-is-translanguaging-and-how-is-it-used-in-the-classroom/2023/07>

Asking students to restate the description, explanation, or example in their own words

Asking students to construct a picture, symbol, or graphic representing the term or phrase

Sample Implementation Routine

Introduce the text and purpose for the reading.

Introduce the vocabulary words, definitions, and use; if applicable, introduce the visual reminders or student-developed glossary.

Provide options for students to engage with the text during reading.

- a. Have students read the text independently, with a partner, or as part of a whole-group lesson. As they come across the words in context, have them stop and discuss what the word means and how it helps them understand the text/content. Students may jot or turn and talk with a partner about the words in context.

Provide options for students to engage with the text after reading.

- b. After reading the text, have students talk through or write the summary of the text using the vocabulary words as appropriate to show understanding.
- c. Suggesting students use the words in writing in response to the text.
- d. Use the words in classroom discussion, while continuing to define the words as needed. Use appositives to reinforce vocabulary, for example, “I want you to read to determine the author’s **stance**, that is, the author’s **perspective or attitude**. Is it critical, sympathetic, indifferent, or something else?”

Encourage students to use the appropriate vocabulary in their own discussions and in their writing

- e. Some students may understand the words when encountered in reading and when heard but still be reluctant to use them orally themselves.
- f. Do not penalize students who may stumble over pronunciation of highly technical and specialized vocabulary.

Assessing the Change Idea

Students’ reading comprehension should improve, and their discussions and writing about the content areas should begin to include more technical and specialized terms.

Teacher self-assessment/discussion questions: For reflection during implementation and during the Study phase of the plan-do-study-act (PDSA) cycle.

Use your data to reflect on whether the words selected for preteaching seemed to be the right ones and how helpful the definitions provided to students actually were. The following are questions to consider:

Were the definitions clear enough, easy to understand, and helpful, or were they too technical so that students could not grasp them?

Were students able to use the terms in their discussions and writing?

Are students able to use technical vocabulary **without prompting** when they talk or write about what they have read, that is, is there evidence that they have integrated the target words and terms into their own vocabularies?

Do students in general seem better able to understand **what the class was learning about**?

What proportion of the class seems to understand?

Do students to whom vocabulary was pretaught seem to be more willing to talk about content, share their ideas with peers, and discuss their thinking in class (e.g., they offer ideas and ask questions to clarify their comprehension)?

As appropriate, how many students overall seem to be more aware of and use vocabulary aids available to them?

What objections, if any, did students seem to have about using the change idea?

How might you address these objections?

What seemed to work well in the way the vocabulary preteaching activity was introduced, modeled, and structured for students?

What changes would you make in the approach?

It would be helpful to log some responses to these reflection questions in your implementation tracker. (These questions can be discussion points during coaching in addition to the general implementation questions in the coaches' handbook.)

Rubric to Evaluate Implementation of the Preteaching Vocabulary Change Idea

Rubric for Teacher Evaluation of Student Work			
4 – Excellent	3 – Proficient	2 – Adequate	1 – Not satisfactory
Student understands all the words introduced and consistently uses the words to get to a thorough understanding of the text/concept.	Student understands most of the words introduced and regularly uses the words to understand the text/concept.	Student understands some of the words introduced and sometimes uses the words to understand the text/concept.	Student understands few of the words introduced and rarely uses the words to understand the text/concept.
Student consistently refers to the pretaught vocabulary when talking and writing about the concept or text.	Student often refers to the pretaught vocabulary when talking and writing about the concept or text.	Student sometimes refers to the pretaught vocabulary when talking and writing about the concept or text.	Student rarely refers to the pretaught vocabulary when talking and writing about the concept or text.

(Optional) Discussion Rubric for Teacher Evaluation

Possible Rubric for Coaches to Use With Teachers in Discussion (Not a Measurement Item)			
Teacher assessment	Possible student responses ^a		
Students actively participated in the preteaching vocabulary session in class.	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
Students could use the terms taught in the preteaching vocabulary session in their writing and in discussions.	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
Students understood the text they were reading today.	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
Students seemed to be using the critical reading skills that have been modeled for them.	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
If students did not understand the text they read today, they asked for clarification of vocabulary or consulted their appropriate vocabulary aids to help them comprehend.	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
Students who seemed to feel comfortable using technical vocabulary and sharing their thinking today in class (e.g., offered ideas, disagreed with each other, elaborated on each other’s comments).	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%
Students used their specialized and technical vocabulary appropriately when they took part in classroom discussion .	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%

Possible Rubric for Coaches to Use With Teachers in Discussion (Not a Measurement Item)			
Teacher assessment	Possible student responses ^a		
Students used specialized and technical vocabulary appropriately in completing today's writing assignment about what they have been reading and discussing.	≥ 75%	50%–75%	< 50%

^a To the extent possible, estimate the percentage of students who fall into the “< 50%” category and note those who may need extra help or reteaching.

Optional Rubric for Student Self-Evaluation in Social Studies and Language Arts			
Student statement	Possible student responses ^a		
I understood the vocabulary in what we were learning about today.	Yes	No	Sort of
Learning the meaning of new vocabulary before reading helped me understand the text we were reading today.	Yes	No	Sort of
Learning the meaning of new vocabulary before reading helped me prepare for our class discussion or writing assignment.	Yes	No	Sort of
When I didn't understand words in the text we read today, I knew how to figure it out (either on my own or with help).	Yes	No	Sort of

^a Select “sort of” to indicate “to some extent” or “somewhat but not as much as I'd like or need to.”

