

# Selecting and Using Academic Vocabulary in Instruction

This guidance document provides research-based strategies and classroom activities to support academic vocabulary instruction. In this document you'll find:

- Activities for All Students
- Additional Supports for ELLs
- How to Select Words for In-Depth Instruction with ELLs

## Activities for All Students

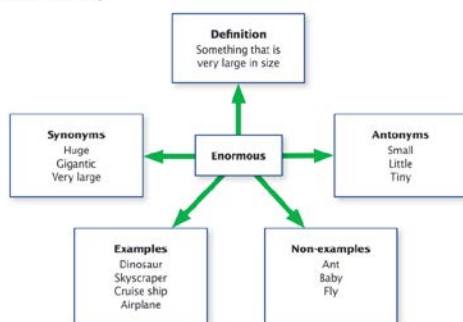
1. Explain to students that this word has many meanings; teach your students the meaning that matches the one in the text.
2. Use several of the many proven activities to build students' understanding of the word:
  - Suggest students create pictures to show the meaning of the word.
  - Encourage students to use the word in context, either in speaking or writing.
  - Create a list of synonyms and antonyms.
  - Develop a student dictionary for students to reference.
  - Create a word wall (a collection of words that can be used in writing or discussion—displayed on a classroom wall, bulletin board, or other highly visible place).

## Additional Supports for ELLs

In addition to the word list activities suggested above, the following research-backed activities make use of the word list to specifically support students learning English.

1. **Word Banks**—Create a word bank that students can refer to in a given assignment (either written or oral) and require that students use new vocabulary from the bank in their responses. *More information on word banks can be found [here](#).*
2. **Sentence Frames**—Use sentence frames to guide students to practice using new vocabulary correctly, when appropriate. *Note: Sentence frames should only be used with students who would be unable to produce structured responses on their own. More information on sentence frames can be found [here](#).*
3. **In-depth Vocabulary Study**—Choose six to eight vocabulary words to study together as a class. Use graphic organizers, such as a word map, to help students develop an understanding of the word's meaning in multiple ways. Word maps (see example below) also help students develop and reinforce knowledge of other words in relation to the central word, building students' overall vocabulary. When possible, include visuals as one of the components of the graphic organizer.

Exhibit 1.4. Word map



4. **Visual Glossary Creation**—Have students create their own visual glossaries, using the student-friendly definitions along with the text itself to develop an understanding of a word's meaning.
5. **Word-Part Instruction**—When a word contains a prefix or suffix that has been introduced before, highlight how the word part can be used to help determine word meaning.
6. **Home Language Connection**—When a student's home language is known, show the student how the English word is a cognate of the home language word when applicable. Here is a list of [Spanish cognates](#) and [guidance on using cognates](#) as part of instruction.

7. **Differentiated Word Lists**—Create differentiated word lists for your class, choosing words which are on or above grade level for the whole class. These are also the words you’d select when choosing words for whole-class explicit instruction. Create an additional word list of below-grade-level words to hand out as a reference document to English Language Learners.

### How to Select Words for In-Depth Instruction with ELLs

When providing in-depth instruction on vocabulary, select no more than six to eight vocabulary words to look at in a particular lesson or text to allow you adequate time to work closely with each word. Attend to these [six criteria](#) when considering which words to focus on with ELLs:

1. **Words central to understanding the text.** These words are essential for students to make meaning of the text. Words bolded by the publisher can be good clues; however, when considering support for ELLs, be sure to consider un-bolded words as well since these may prove an impediment to their understanding.
2. **Words frequently used in the text.** These words will give students multiple opportunities to see the words used in context.
3. **Words that might appear in other content areas.** Understanding these words will allow ELLs to access the content in other subject areas more successfully. (Examples: identify, describe, illustrate)
4. **Words with multiple meanings.** These words will help ELLs build an understanding of how words function differently in different contexts. (Examples: character, hard, volume, set)
5. **Words with affixes.** Words with prefixes and suffixes help ELLs learn to make meaning of new vocabulary on their own. Through practice with these words, students will learn how changing the affix will change the meaning of the word (e.g., adding the prefix “un” to different roots alters their meaning). (Examples: value, valued, overvalue, undervalue, devalue)
6. **Cross-language potential.** If a student’s home language is known, using cognates to support the learning of new words can be helpful. *Note: this works best with students who speak a Romance language.* (Example: investigation/investigación)