



## HOW TO TEACH ENGLISH VOCABULARY TO YOUNG LEARNERS

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### ABSTRACT

*It's hard for students to read and understand a text if they don't know what the words mean. A solid vocabulary boosts reading comprehension for students of all ages. The more words students know, the better they understand the text. That's why effective vocabulary teaching is so important, especially for students who learn and think differently.*

*In this article, you'll learn how to explicitly teach vocabulary using easy-to-understand definitions, engaging activities, and repeated exposure. This strategy includes playing vocabulary games, incorporating visual supports like graphic organizers, and giving students the chance to see and use new words in real-world contexts.*

**KEY WORDS:** context, strategies, memory, games, meaning.

The goal of this teaching strategy isn't just to increase your students' vocabulary. It's to make sure the words are meaningful and relevant to their lives.

When choosing which vocabulary words to teach, you may want to pick words from Tier 2 because they're the most useful across all subject areas.

Select a text. Find an appropriate text (or multiple texts for students to choose from) that includes the vocabulary words you want to teach.

Come up with student-friendly definitions. Find resources you and your students can consult to come up with a definition for each word. The definition should be easy to understand, be written in everyday language, and capture the word's common use. Your definitions can include pictures, videos, or other multimedia options. Cambridge Learner's Dictionary, Merriam-Webster Learner's Dictionary, and Wordsmyth Children's Dictionary are all good resources to help create student-friendly definitions.

How to teach:

1. Introduce each new word one at a time. Say the word aloud and have students repeat the word. For visual support, display the words and their definitions for

students to see, such as on a word wall, flip chart, or vocabulary graphic organizer. Showing pictures related to the word can be helpful, too.

2. Reflect. Allow time for students to reflect on what they know or don't know about the words. Remember that your class will come to the lesson with varying levels of vocabulary knowledge. Some students may be familiar with some of the words. Other students may not know any of them. If time permits, this could be a good opportunity to use flexible grouping so students can work on different words.

3. Read the text you've chosen. You can read it to your students or have students read on their own (either a printed version or by listening to an audio version). As you read, pause to point to the vocabulary words in context. Use explicit instruction to teach the word parts, such as prefixes and suffixes, to help define the word. If students are reading on their own or with a partner, encourage them to "hunt" for the words before reading. Hunting for these words first can reduce distractions later when the focus is on reading the text.

4. Ask students to repeat the word after you've read it in the text. Then remind students of the word's



definition. If a word has more than one meaning, focus on the definition that applies to the text.

5. Use a quick, fun activity to reinforce each new word's meaning. After reading, use one or more of the following to help students learn the words more effectively:

Word associations: Ask students, "What does the word delicate make you think of? What other words go with delicate?" Students can turn and talk with a partner to come up with a response. Then invite pairs to share their responses with the rest of the class.

Use your senses: Ask your students to use their senses to describe when they saw, heard, felt, tasted, or smelled something that was delicate. Allow students time to think. Then ask them to give a thumbs up if they've ever seen something delicate. Call on students to share their responses. Do the same with each of the senses.

A round of applause: If the word is an adjective, invite students to clap based on how much they would like a delicate toy, for example. Or students can "vote with their feet" by moving to one corner of the room if they want a delicate toy or another corner if they don't. This activity works especially well if you pair the new adjective with a familiar noun.

Picture perfect: Invite students to draw a picture that represents the word's meaning.

Examples and non-examples: Give one example and one non-example of how the word is and isn't used. For instance, you could tell students that one thing that is delicate is a teacup. One thing that isn't delicate is the cement stairs into the school. Then invite students to share their own examples of things that are and aren't delicate.

After students do one or more of the activities above, have them say or draw the word again.

6. Play word games. Throughout the week, play word games like vocabulary bingo, vocabulary Pictionary, and charades to practice the new words. Include words you've taught in the past for additional reinforcement.

7. Challenge students to use new words. They can use their new vocabulary in different contexts, like at home, at recess, or during afterschool activities. Consider asking students to use a vocabulary notebook to jot down when they use the words. You can even get your colleagues or school administrators in on the fun by asking them to use the words when talking with students

or in announcements. Praise students when you hear them using those words in and out of the classroom.

This explicit approach helps all students and is especially helpful for students who learn and think differently. This includes students who have a hard time figuring out the meaning of new words when they're reading. It can be difficult for them to make an inference or use context clues to figure out what a word means.

Explicit vocabulary instruction with student-friendly definitions means there's no guesswork involved. Repeated exposure and practice help to reinforce the words in students' memories.

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