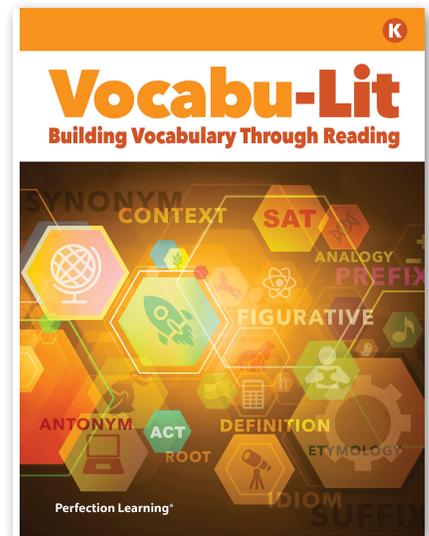
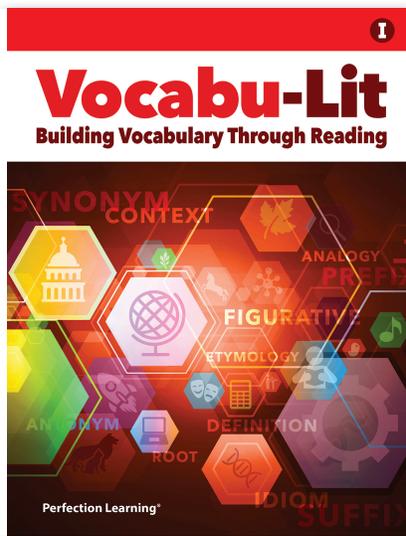
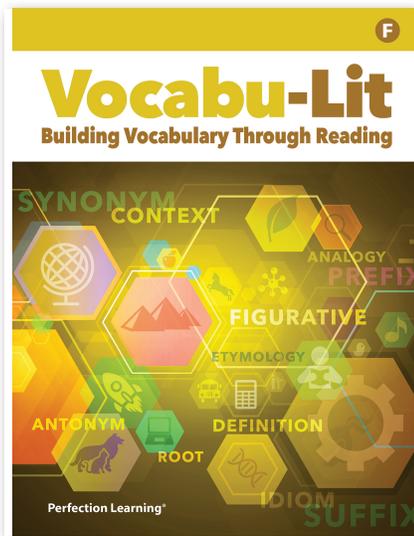


# Research-Based Vocabulary Instruction

## Vocabu-Lit®

Grades 6–12



## Importance of Vocabulary Instruction to Reading Comprehension

**“Vocabulary plays an important role both in learning to read and in comprehending text: readers cannot understand text without knowing what most of the words mean.”**

—National Reading Panel

Most vocabulary is acquired through incidental exposure rather than through direct instruction and most incidental exposure to new vocabulary occurs via reading rather than speaking and listening because many words that are rarely used in speech are used more often in writing (Nippold, 1998; Webb & Nation, 2017). Incidental learning of vocabulary requires students to read voraciously because it takes many exposures to words in context to develop a rich and deep vocabulary network (Swanborn & de Glopper, 1999). As a result, those who lack vocabulary proficiency are likely to struggle with comprehending text and may miss opportunities to increase their vocabulary knowledge incidentally through reading.

According to Bromley (2004), vocabulary is a principle contributor to comprehension, fluency, and achievement. Children who know the meaning of most of the words they hear and read, comprehend more than those who do not (Freebody and Anderson, 1983). Furthermore, a student’s vocabulary is a strong indicator of their success in school (Baker, Simmons & Kame’enui, 1998).

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# Best-practices for Teaching Vocabulary and the *Vocabu-Lit*® Program

## Provide Direct Instruction

**“Effective vocabulary instruction is multidimensional and intentional.”**

—Sweeny and Mason, 2011

Research indicates that students, including struggling readers and those with poor vocabulary skills, will benefit most from deliberate, direct instruction of vocabulary (Sweeny and Mason, 2011). Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013) suggest that instruction that focuses on high-frequency words that occur in a variety of academic domains (Tier 2 words) will have the largest influence on a mature learner’s education. Beck and her colleagues recommend directly teaching ten words a week with daily follow-up activities to reinforce and extend students’ understanding of the words. Furthermore, the most effective course of vocabulary instruction includes a school-wide implementation to provide consistency across grades or subjects and within grade level classrooms. “A school-wide or district-wide commitment to research-based vocabulary

instruction can ensure that there are consistent practices in all classrooms and that there is a cumulative effect on the development of students’ vocabulary across subjects and over the years” (Sweeny and Mason, 2011).

Each *Vocabu-Lit* lesson introduces ten words from a work of literature or nonfiction, focusing on Tier 2 words in order to have the greatest impact. In each lesson, students define the chosen vocabulary in their own words, confirm their definition with the dictionary, and then engage in multiple exercises that teach word relationships. The program provides this consistent direct instruction from grades 3 to 11, using practices appropriate to each stage of reading and language development.

## Present Words in Context

**“In order to ‘know’ a word, one must not only know its definitional relations with other words, but also be able to interpret its meaning in a particular context.”**

—Stahl, 1986

**LESSON 7**

**EXERCISE 1: First Read**

From **Steve Jobs** (biography)  
by Walter Isaacson

The idea that John Lasseter pitched was called “Toy Story.” It sprang from a belief, which he and Jobs shared, that products have an **essence** to them, a purpose for which they were made. If the object were to have feelings, these would be based on its desire to fulfill its essence. The purpose of a glass, for example, is to hold water; if it had feelings, it would be happy when full and sad when empty. The essence of a computer screen is to interface with a human. The essence of a unicycle is to be ridden in a circus. As for toys, their purpose is to be played with by kids, and thus their existential fear is of being **discarded** or upstaged by newer toys. So a buddy movie pairing an old favorite toy with a shiny new one would have an essential **drama** to it, especially when the action revolves around the toys being separated from their kid. The original treatment began, “Everyone has had the **traumatic** childhood experience of losing a toy. Our story takes the toy’s point of view as he loses and tries to regain the single thing most important to him: to be played with by children. This is the reason for the existence of all toys. It is the emotional **foundation** of their existence.”

The two main characters went through many iterations before they ended up as Buzz Lightyear and Woody. Every couple of weeks, Lasseter and his team would put together their latest set of storyboards or footage to show the folks at Disney. In early screen tests, Pixar showed off its amazing technology by, for example, producing a scene of Woody rustling around on top of a dresser while the light rippling in through a Venetian blind cast shadows on his plaid shirt—an effect that would have been almost impossible to **render** by hand. Impressing Disney with the plot, however, was more difficult. At each presentation by Pixar, [Jeffrey] Katzenberg would tear much of it up, barking out his detailed comments and notes. And a cadre of clipboard-carrying flunkies was on hand to make sure every suggestion and **whim** uttered by Katzenberg received follow-up treatment.

Katzenberg’s big push was to add more edginess to the two main characters. It may be an animated movie called *Toy Story*, he said, but it should not be aimed only at children. “At first there was no drama, no real story, and no **conflict**,” Katzenberg recalled. He suggested that Lasseter watch some **classic** buddy movies, such as *The Defiant Ones* and *48 Hours*, in which two characters with different attitudes are thrown together and have to **bond**.

1. Why did the creators believe that viewers would relate to a movie about toys?  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. What does this statement reveal about Katzenberg at work? “At each presentation by Pixar, [Jeffrey] Katzenberg would tear much of it up, barking out his detailed comments and notes.”  
\_\_\_\_\_

Educators agree that teaching words in the context of a text encourages skills that transfer into other reading contexts for both school and life. Nash and Snowling (2006) found that using a contextual approach to instruction provided greater vocabulary gains than teaching isolated word definitions. State tests, the SAT, and the ACT require students to identify word meanings based upon contextual evidence. Learning words in context also exposes students to the style and syntax of high-quality written English. Reading high-quality texts provides the opportunity for analysis of ways in which mature writers use words and grammatical structures (Juel & Deffes, 2004).

*Vocabu-Lit* capitalizes on the way students naturally acquire language by presenting words within an excerpt from authentic literature, including selections from classic and contemporary fiction, nonfiction, speeches, and primary sources. Students hone their ability to discover and use context clues to determine word meanings while being exposed to works of literary significance. Students have the opportunity to learn how great authors use words effectively, thus expanding their knowledge of word meanings, syntax, and style.

## Provide Varied Language Experiences

**“When children ‘know’ a word, they not only know the word’s definition and its logical relationship with other words, they also know how the word functions in different contexts.”**

—Stahl and Kapinus, 2001

Vocabulary learning is most effective when it entails active engagement that goes beyond definitional knowledge. This kind of deeper word understanding comes through repeated interaction with words outside of the context in which the students first encounter it. Stahl (2005) emphasizes that vocabulary instruction should provide students with opportunities to encounter words repeatedly and in a variety of contexts. Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013) note that robust vocabulary instruction must include “frequent and varied” encounters that help students deeply process new words. Research indicates that students “learn a little from the first encounter with a word and then more and more about a word’s meaning as [they] meet it in new and different contexts” (Graves, 2006).

In the *Vocabu-Lit* program, students encounter the words in six different exercises that extend understanding through working with synonyms and antonyms, sentence completions, analogies, multiple meanings, and connotations. The final task in each lesson challenges students to assimilate the word by using it in a real-world writing task that relates back to the introductory text for the lesson. These activities help students understand how the words are used in varied contexts beyond the initial reading passage.

## Teach Word-Learning Strategies

**“An important aspect of developing students’ robust vocabularies is teaching them tools to unlock the meaning of unknown words.”**

—Antonacci and O’Callaghan, 2012

Michael Graves, a senior scientist who has conducted studies on the effectiveness of vocabulary instruction, concluded that students should be taught word-learning strategies that will help them decipher unfamiliar words they encounter on their own (2006). Sweeny and Mason (2011) stress that vocabulary instruction should support students as independent learners by helping them develop strategies for learning words that can be applied in other settings as they move through their educational careers. These word-learning strategies include teaching word families, cognates and roots, and idioms.

**EXERCISE 3: Synonyms and Antonyms**  
Use the synonyms and antonyms in the word list to fill in the blanks except where you see an X.

	Synonyms	Antonyms	Word List	
1. tranquil	_____	_____	agitated	gladness
2. chafe	_____	_____	agree	impulsive
3. pulverize	_____	_____	amble	junction
4. impinge	_____	_____	avoid	restrained
5. exultation	_____	_____	calm	rub
6. correspond	_____	X	caress	sedate
7. staid	_____	_____	collide	solidify
8. impetuous	_____	_____	demolish	stride
9. saunter	_____	_____	depression	wild
10. confluence	_____	_____	division	

**EXERCISE 4: Sentence Completion**  
From the Master Words, choose the appropriate word for the blank in each of the following sentences. Write the word in the space provided at the right.

- The main rule in English class: no student can ...?... on another student's right to make mistakes and to learn from them. \_\_\_\_\_
- After an exhausting summer working as a camp counselor, Rez was glad to have a few ...?... weeks before school started up again. \_\_\_\_\_
- Mel likes to ...?... through the park with her French poodle. \_\_\_\_\_
- The players jumped with ...?... after winning the chess tournament. \_\_\_\_\_
- Pittsburgh is located at the ...?... of three rivers. \_\_\_\_\_
- Tortillas can be made from whole kernels of corn after you ...?... them. \_\_\_\_\_
- Higher ice cream sales seem to ...?... with warmer temperatures. \_\_\_\_\_
- Mary, always ...?... , squirted shaving cream at her art teacher. \_\_\_\_\_

Sample page from the *Grade J Student Edition*

**Unit Word Study**

**Classic Roots and Affixes (potent-, -ial)**  
The Master Word **potential** is based on the Latin root *potes* (from *potens* and *potentia*), which means “power,” and the suffix *-ial*, which means “characterized by.” The words in bold type in the sentences below are based on the Latin root for power. Analyze the words for prefixes and suffixes, if any. Then use the context of the word to write a definition in your own words on the line below the sentence. On the line below that, write the dictionary definition of the word.

**Using Roots, Affixes, and Context for Understanding**

- After opening a new jar of hot sauce, it is a good idea to test its **potency**.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- When the young king took the throne, he wanted to be **omnipotent** and tried to grab all the power.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- The doctor prescribed a very **potent** medicine to fight the infection.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Middle Eastern **potentates** gathered at a meeting of their nations to discuss oil production.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Sample page from the *Grade F Student Edition*

The following chart identifies the recommended practices for different groups of students that are included in *Vocabu-Lit*.

The following strategies are used in all grade levels of <i>Vocabu-Lit</i> .	Recommended by Sweeny and Mason (2011) for the following student groups				
	Grades 6–8	Grades 9–12	At-Risk/ Struggling Readers	ELL	LD Students
Affixes	X	X	X	X	X
Analogies	X	X	X	X	X
Cognates and Roots	X	X			X
Computer Assisted Instruction (Quizlet)				X	X
Idioms and Figurative Language	X	X	X	X	X
Multiple Meanings					
Synonyms and Antonyms	X	X	X	X	X
Word Families			X	X	X

## Conclusion

Vocabulary instruction is a crucial component of reading instruction. Students with expansive vocabularies do better academically. Effective vocabulary instruction includes explicit and intentional instruction of words in rich contexts of fiction and nonfiction. In addition, students should be exposed to the words in a variety of other contexts. Finally, students must be provided with tools to help them learn new words on their own. *Vocabu-Lit* brings these research-based strategies together in one accessible, teacher-friendly program for grades 3 to 11.

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