

# Unit 2 • Module 1: Selecting Words

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## Section 1

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### Slide 1—Title Slide

Welcome to the first module in the Vocabulary Instructional Routines unit, Selecting Words.

### Slide 2—Vocabulary Instructional Routines

This unit will focus on supporting students' vocabulary knowledge before, during, and after reading text. This particular module will focus on selecting words to teach explicitly, usually before the lesson. The remaining modules in this unit introduce instructional routines to support students as they learn to pronounce, understand, and use unfamiliar words.

Please read through **Handout 1: TEKS/ELPS/CCRS Connections**, which explains how this routine will assist students in meeting specific subject area expectations of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS), and College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS). Take a moment to review this handout before beginning the next video presentation.

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## Section 2

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### Slide 3—Objectives

Now that you have had an opportunity to review the relevance of this module to your particular subject area, let's examine our objectives: to understand the importance of preteaching critical vocabulary to struggling readers; to distinguish between common, academic, and content-specific words; and to identify appropriate academic and content-specific words to teach.

As we begin the module, you may hear or see terms with which you are unfamiliar. These will be explained as we work through the slides.

## Slide 4—Why Should We Focus on Vocabulary?

“The relationship between students’ vocabulary knowledge and their reading comprehension increases as they advance in grade levels.”

This relationship is equally important for students of different language backgrounds and/or learning disabilities, and is why it’s important vocabulary words be *taught* to students—not just *assigned* as an activity.

## Slide 5—Why Should We Focus on Vocabulary? (cont.)

Vocabulary knowledge is an especially important factor in the reading comprehension and performance of English language learners.

The link between vocabulary and comprehension is critical for all students, especially English language learners, for whom the “achievement gap” is primarily a vocabulary gap.

## Slide 6—Types of Vocabulary

It is important to preteach vocabulary words that will appear in your lessons, but which ones should you teach?

It would be impossible to directly teach all of the words students should learn each year, so teachers must identify which words have a higher instructional priority. To do that, researchers such as Isabel Beck and Margaret McKeown have used a classification system similar to the one on this slide.

These researchers advocate prioritizing the instruction of academic words and content-specific vocabulary. Academic words are high function and high utility while content-specific vocabulary are vital to understanding content area texts. These two categories will be the focus of the vocabulary instruction routines in this unit.

## Slide 7—Examples of Words

Please peruse the list of common, academic, and content-specific words on the slide.

Common words are encountered frequently in everyday life. It is important to remember that these words are not “common” to English language learners (ELLs) at lower levels of proficiency. Recent immigrants (typically in their first 2 years) are often still working on their basic interpersonal communicative skills, or BICS.

Academic words include words that are associated with instructions and questioning in school—words like *analyze, contrast, define, evaluate*. They also include more sophisticated

language, such as *legitimate, provoke, reluctantly*.

Content-specific words are highly localized and unlikely to be encountered outside of a subject area. However, these words are often critical to understanding subject area concepts. Content-specific words include commonly known words that take on a very specific meaning in the content area, such as *volume* and *net*.

All students need support in acquiring academic and content-specific words.

However, students with reading and language difficulties may need additional scaffolding. Some ELLs will appear to be proficient in English because they demonstrate good conversational skills. However, it can take 5 to 7 years for them to acquire the academic and content-specific vocabulary needed to bolster their cognitive academic language proficiency, or CALP.

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## Section 3

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### Slide 8—Classifying Words

This slide shows suggested classifications for words in **Handout 2: The Problem with Mercury**.

It's likely that you diverged on how to classify some of the words. It's often difficult to know what should be "common" to your students and what should be considered more sophisticated language. There is no hard-and-fast rule for making that determination, but the more you work with the words and terms in your course, the more comfortable you'll become classifying them.

The words in the first box, Common Words, can be encountered frequently in everyday life.

In the second box, Academic Words, there are three different types of words. Words that are a little more sophisticated, such as *ancient, extracted, fast-moving, high temperatures, and several*. There are also words that have more than one meaning, such as *earth*, which can mean "soil," "globe," "terrain," "world"; *god* (e.g., "supreme being," "expression of a strong feeling," "supernatural being," "iconic image," "someone highly admired in a field"); and *meanings* (e.g., "definitions," "intentions," "significance," "inner importance"). Finally, there is also a proper noun: *Rome*.

The words in the final box, Content-specific Words, are specific to science or have a particular definition when used in scientific concepts. You will notice that the word *mercury* was explained with two different definitions in the first section of the passage; it was described as

a planet and then as an element. The authors acknowledge that the term could be confused if students were not aware of this second meaning.

## Slide 9—Preteach the Academic and Content-specific Words

Preteaching difficult vocabulary words is recommended for all students but is particularly helpful to students who struggle with content area reading. You might preteach the academic and content-specific words that are:

- New words not common to oral language, or the language of everyday speech (like *sycophant*);
- Mature or more precise labels for concepts already under the student's control (for example, using *ravenous* for *hungry*);
- Abstract words and words not easily pictured, often derived words ending with *-t-i-o-n* (*sensation*), *-m-e-n-t* (*predicament*), *-i-t-y* (*purity*), etc.;
- Words that require background knowledge for concept development (for example, *igneous rocks* in science require knowledge of state changes, exothermic processes, magma, elements, and minerals); and
- Multiple-meaning words, often words that have an everyday meaning, but also a very specific definition in the content areas, such as *net*, *volume*, and *table* in mathematics.

In some models of instruction, an activity might be used to stimulate curiosity and activate prior knowledge before exploring the content concepts. You may decide to allow students to have this introductory experience before presenting the vocabulary for the lesson or text. However, be sure to present vocabulary up front that is needed for students to benefit from this activity.

English language learners have additional needs in vocabulary instruction. After concrete words that can be shown to students with pictures, visual aids, or demonstrations, research indicates that you should choose abstract words, multiple-meaning words, and texts that include rich, evocative vocabulary—provoking a memory or mental association.

In addition, ELLs need to be explicitly taught words that can be used in various parts of speech—such as the word *light*—as well as idiomatic expressions or figures of speech. Both idiomatic expressions and figures of speech are often culturally based, so they tend to present difficulty to students who do not share the originating background.

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## Section 4

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### Slide 10—Selecting Vocabulary Words to Teach

Some academic and content-specific words are used primarily as labels and may not require deep instruction. These might be proper nouns, such as *Sacajawea*, or Latin names for biological organisms, such as *Canis latrans* for *coyote*. Students may need help pronouncing these words—as we will discuss in the next module—but they do not need to study the words in order to understand the passage.

Even after removing these types of words, you still may have quite a long list. It is not practical to teach directly all of the academic and content-specific words you may have identified in a passage. Therefore, you will need to decide which of these words to define for the students. This can be done by showing a picture, demonstrating an action, or using the word in a sentence. Or teach words using an extended instructional routine. We will learn this process in the later modules of this unit.

Deciding how many words to teach can be a challenge. It is best to use the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) to guide your selection from the words in your textbooks and other curricular materials.

### Slide 11—How Many Words Should Be Taught?

Although students should learn thousands of new words each year, it is difficult to accomplish that solely through direct instruction. Particularly for students who are significantly behind their peers in knowledge of words and word meanings, direct and explicit instruction in vocabulary must be accompanied by exposure to enriched vocabulary in classroom discussions and supplemental materials, including opportunities to read a variety of authentic texts.

There is no hard-and-fast rule to determine the exact number of words that should be taught each day. This number will be dependent upon the instructional objectives and accompanying resources. Collaboratively reviewing student performance data, the TEKS, and available materials with other teachers can be useful in planning an appropriate amount of vocabulary instruction to help students progress and access the curriculum.

### Slide 12—Brief vs. Expanded Instructional Routine for Vocabulary

Let's examine the steps for teaching vocabulary using our words from the passage "The Problem with Mercury."

Please refer to the two routines on the slide.

If the goal is to have students recognize a word and understand it in context while reading, you would use the brief routine. The academic and content-specific words that you feel merit a bigger commitment of instructional time will be elaborated upon in step 3 of the expanded routine: generating examples and nonexamples of words.

For example, the word *extracted* might come up in a short story that is being read in English language arts or reading. In that case, the teacher will most likely just touch on a general definition of what *extracted* means. However, a science teacher might need to take the students through the expanded instructional routine if the word *extracted* is integral to a unit of instruction on minerals.

If the goal is to have students correctly use the word in oral and written communication, it might be necessary to use the expanded routine.

## Slide 13—Planning for Vocabulary Instruction

To determine whether to use the expanded instructional routine, or to simply “tell” the students the word and its meaning, consider the following questions:

Is the word critically important for comprehension? In content area classes, the words most critical to comprehension may only be used in that particular subject but are necessary for concept development. From our list of words in the passage “The Problem with Mercury,” for example, we would want to ensure students know the correct meaning of the word *mercury*.

Is the word encountered frequently? If students see the word or derivatives of the word in other settings, they will profit from the expanded instructional routine. This would include words that students are not likely to see outside of school but will encounter again in academic settings. Using our list from the passage about mercury, we might want to teach students the word *contaminate* because it would be useful for other lessons in science and, perhaps, social studies or even literature.

Is the word a multiple-meaning word defined differently in other contexts? Many words seem familiar to students because they learned one definition in one context. However, if the word takes on a different or unique meaning in the content area, deeper instruction may be necessary to prevent confusion. For example, the “Mercury” passage repeatedly uses the word *mine*. This word has a common meaning (“belongs to me”) as well as two unique meanings in this science article (“a place where minerals are extracted” and “to extract minerals from the earth”). Multiple-meaning words can be confusing for students unfamiliar with their use in various contexts. They can also present particular challenges to English language learners.

## Slide 14—Summary

We have reached the end of this module. You should now be able to: understand the importance of preteaching critical vocabulary to struggling readers; distinguish between common, academic, and content specific words; and identify appropriate academic and content-specific words to teach.

In the next module, we'll learn a routine for pronouncing and defining the words you identify for instruction.