

Guide
to
Teaching:



Vocabulary

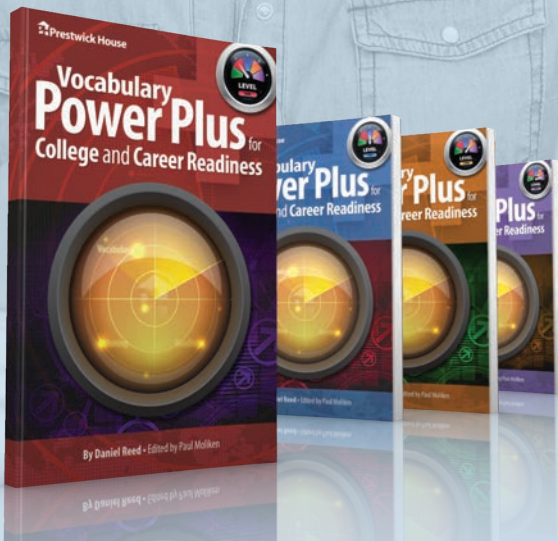
Issue 1, Volume 1

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**Prestwick
House**



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“Vocabulary size is a convenient proxy for a whole range of educational attainments and abilities—not just skill in reading, writing, listening, and speaking but also general knowledge of science, history, and the arts. If we want to reduce economic inequality in America, a good place to start is the language-arts classroom.”

— E. D. Hirsch Jr.



ANALYZING LITERATURE, writing essays and stories, understanding difficult informational texts, speaking persuasively, developing rhetorically effective arguments: There’s no element of English/language arts instruction, or any subject area for that matter, in which having a powerful vocabulary isn’t important—at times it’s crucial—yet it’s difficult to find the time to make vocabulary a priority in an already over-extended classroom. We often hope that students will be able to pick up enough vocabulary just by reading, but those who are below grade level in vocabulary almost never catch up.



Prestwick House has been developing vocabulary programs to help busy teachers like you help your students score better on standardized tests and become better readers for more than 25 years. In this guide, you’ll find advice on adding vocabulary to your classroom, tips on how to teach more effectively, and background information that we’ve learned and disseminated over the last quarter century.

If you have any feedback or tips you’d like to share, please give us a call at 1-800-932-4593 or email us at info@prestwickhouse.com. *We’d love to hear from you.*

James Scott, Ed.D

Founder of Prestwick House

*“The limits of my language
mean the limits of my world.”*

— LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN

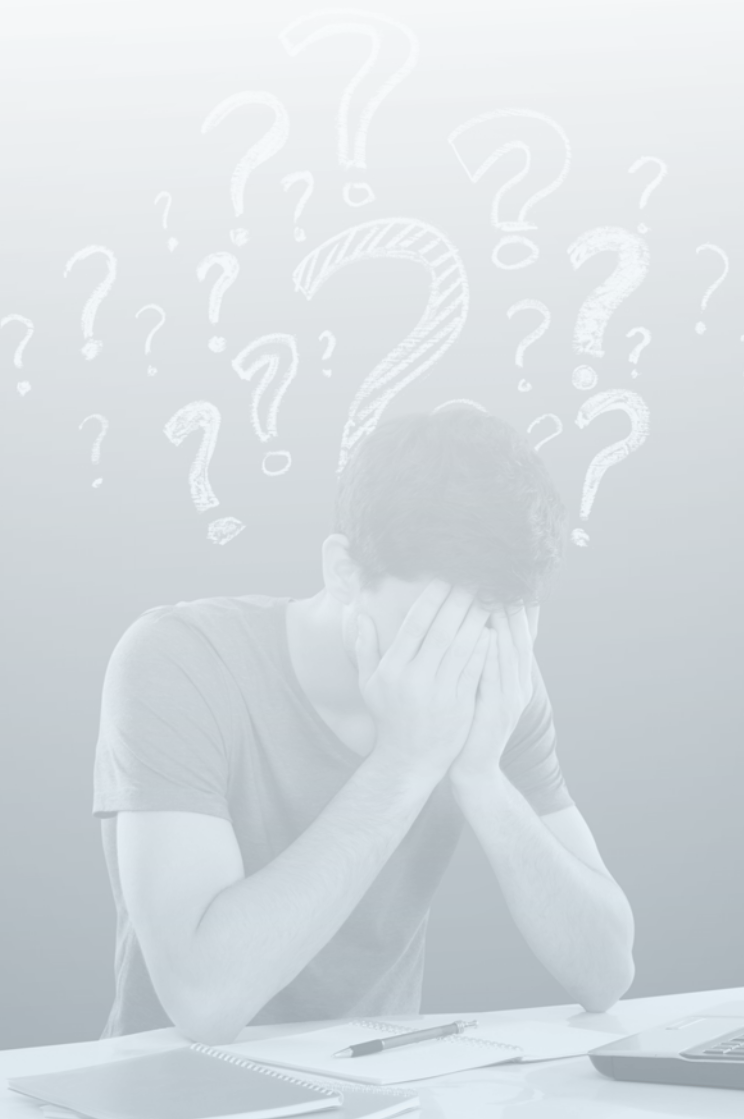
How Important is Vocabulary Instruction?

A WELL-DEVELOPED VOCABULARY is essential for success on more than just standardized tests; it's critical in nearly every element of academic life. Students who struggle understanding words will struggle in every academic pursuit—from history and social studies to science and other STEM classes. Those students who don't have the basic tools it takes to understand the texts that they're reading quickly give up and don't do the work necessary to succeed. We lose too many students this way; too many become either apathetic or frustrated.



Studies have shown that socioeconomic background correlates with vocabulary development; children from poorer households tend to enter school with a smaller vocabulary than children from richer households. Schools catering to students from lower-income neighborhoods may need to compensate by devoting more time to explicit vocabulary instruction.

The writers of modern standards—from the Common Core to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills—have all specified that vocabulary needs to be a central element in your classroom, so what are the best ways to teach vocabulary?



“Will I have to use a dictionary to read your book?” asked Mrs. Dodypol.

“It depends,” says I, “how much you used the dictionary before you read it.”

— ALEXANDER THEROUX, DARCONVILLE’S CAT

Indirect vs. Explicit Vocabulary Instruction

INDIRECT VOCABULARY learning comes from encountering the words in context, not from focused instruction based on working with specific words. Indirect vocabulary learning can be improved by teaching the skills that students need in order to draw their own conclusions about vocabulary, discover word meanings through root analysis, and develop context skills.

Explicit vocabulary instruction is based on the teacher clearly laying out the goals for the student and directly teaching the meanings of words through a close examination of specifically targeted words.

Which method is most effective?



Indirect vs. Explicit Instruction

ALTHOUGH THERE ARE AS MANY DIFFERENT METHODS of teaching vocabulary as there are teachers, the most successful teachers use a variety of different approaches to vocabulary, including both explicit and indirect means to help their students build language skills.

One Vanderbilt University¹ study on word acquisition showed that excellent readers succeeded through both methods of vocabulary instruction, but those previously identified as average or below average readers had to work harder with indirect instruction—for them, explicit instruction was more valuable.

When you're developing your vocabulary curriculum, it's important to keep in mind that having a broad range of approaches to learning new words will be most effective in your classrooms.



¹ Neural circuitry associated with two different approaches to novel word learning. *Neuroscience & Education*, Feb. 2012.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1878929311000582>

“One forgets words as one forgets names. One’s vocabulary needs constant fertilizing or it will die.”

— EVELYN WAUGH

Methods of Vocabulary Instruction

THE MOST EFFECTIVE vocabulary instruction doesn’t focus on one type of instruction; it blends multiple different elements of indirect and explicit instruction including:

Indirect Instruction

- Passive Acquisition
- Context Skills
- Multiple Exposures

Explicit Instruction

- Vocabulary from Literature
- Root Analysis
- Direct Vocabulary Instruction
- Dictionary Skills
- Word Consciousness



Indirect



Explicit





Indirect Instruction – *Passive Acquisition*

ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL to developing a strong vocabulary, incidental learning—or learning words naturally from reading—is the way that students gain the most words throughout their lives, yet it’s very difficult to apply this technique in the classroom. It’s nearly impossible to assess what your students have learned or help them without supplementing their learning with some of the more direct methods. However, interrupting in-class reading for vocabulary instruction often spoils students’ appreciation for the richness of literature.

The good news, though, is that as students become more familiar with the other vocabulary acquisition methods—such as root analysis and using context clues, the ability to grow vocabulary through reading is lifted.

One of the best methods of improving incidental learning is by pre-teaching words that students will encounter in their reading assignments. This improves vocabulary awareness, gives students targeted words to focus on, eliminates interruptions to in-class reading, and directly improves comprehension.



Indirect Instruction – Context Skills

WHEN YOUR STUDENTS ENCOUNTER new words in reading passages, how do they try to figure out their meaning? The best readers are able to quickly assess the context, which assists in deciphering the word's meaning, while those who struggle have a more difficult time. One quick way of helping to develop skills is to help your students learn to identify the following 4 context clues.



Comparing/Contrasting – While Tom's musical tastes are eclectic, I only like Rock and Roll.

Definition – Susan blanched at the sight of the ghost, his face turning white as a sheet.

Synonym – While that movie might be good for the hoi polloi, the commoners, my tastes are more refined.

Illustration – The field was filled with the dross of the party, food wrappers, popped balloons, and leftover soda bottles.



*“The beginning of
wisdom is to call things
by their right name.”*

— CONFUCIUS

Indirect Instruction – Multiple Exposures

REGARDLESS OF THE METHOD of acquisition used, students need repeated exposure to vocabulary words in order to internalize them, and simply reviewing the same flashcard over and over again isn't enough. Students need to explore the words repeatedly in different contexts to get the most out of their study time. They should encounter words repeatedly in different contexts and over a longer time period than a single class period.

Using a vocabulary workbook, students first encounter the word in class, and then given a number of repeated exposures to that word over the course of a week. Best practices would encourage students to do more than just work with cloze passages; classes should also have experiences that encourage exploring word use, e.g., creatively completing sentences showing context, drawing examples of the words, and making personal connections to words.

If you're developing your own vocabulary curriculum for the classroom, repeated exposure takes a bit more work, but using concepts such as word walls, using words from the literature you're teaching, developing your own cloze sentences, and encouraging students to write their own examples will yield more lasting results than simply writing down the definition and instructing students to memorize it will.



Explicit Instruction – *Direct Vocabulary Instruction*

THE CORE OF MOST VOCABULARY PROGRAMS is direct instruction—introducing a series of words, learning the definitions, synonyms, antonyms, and learning how these words are used in context. While this may seem old fashioned, study after study shows that direct vocabulary instruction is effective in both teaching students to understand a set list of words and in becoming more conscious of words that they encounter in indirect meanings.

In his article “Teaching Vocabulary to Improve Reading Comprehension,” Dr. William Nagy cites a study that finds that uninstructed students have a one-in-twenty chance of incidentally learning a new word only from context. While different researchers show different effects of vocabulary instruction—from Bromley’s article in the *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, which states that direct instruction is the most important influence on comprehension to Marazano, who writes that it is one of the “most crucial services teachers can provide,” researchers repeatedly show that direct instruction, which has been used in classrooms for almost 100 years, has proven to augment natural acquisition.



“The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.”

— MARK TWAIN

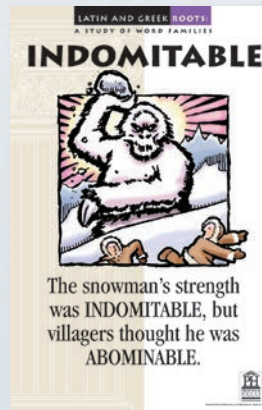
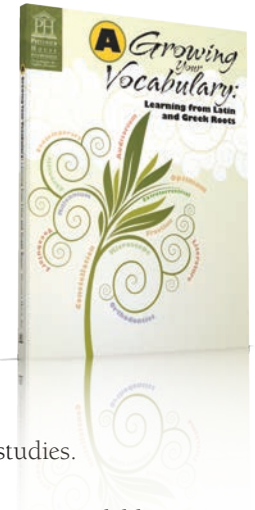
“The more words you know the more clearly and powerfully you will think... and the more ideas you will invite into your mind.”

— WILFRED FUNK

Explicit Instruction – Root Analysis

When we encounter a new word, there are three distinct strategies for discovering meaning: looking the word up in a dictionary, using context clues to decode the word, and analyzing word roots to understand the etymology of the word. None of these methods works in isolation, but together they make up the toolkit for developing a strong vocabulary. While most students will inherently understand that words with similar forms often have related meanings, explicit instruction in understanding roots, prefixes, and suffixes will make sure that students get the most out of their studies.

Organizing your entire vocabulary lessons around roots can be daunting, but there are programs available, like *Vocabulary from Latin and Greek Roots* and *Growing Your Vocabulary: Learning from Latin and Greek Roots*, that are entirely based around using root words. If you don't want to make root study the focus of your class, an alternative is to add a weekly activity in which you target the root words in one or two of your vocabulary words and brainstorm other words that use those roots. Then, use an etymological dictionary to learn the origins of the roots and the word's meaning.



VOCABULARY FROM LATIN AND GREEK ROOTS

UNIT TWO

TOM

Greek TEMNEIN “to cut”

TOME (tōm) *n.* A large and serious book
G. *temnein*, “to cut”

When I removed the scholarly *tome* from the shelf, I saw that it had not been read for years.

EPITOME (i pit' ə mē) *n.* The best or most typical example
G. *epi*, “upon,” + *temnein* = *cut upon*

I hardly think I am the *epitome* of good citizenship, since I'm not even a registered voter.
syn: embodiment

DICHOTOMY (dī kot' ə mē) *n.* Two opposite parts of one whole
G. *dicho*, “two,” + *temnein* = *cut in two*
The film critic discussed the fundamental *dichotomy* in the movie.

ANATOMY (ə nat' ə mē) *n.*

III An epitome (literally “cut off from”) was originally the book in a series that summarized the other books (think of an index to a set of encyclopedias). It now

“The most important thing is to read as much as you can, like I did. It will give you an understanding of what makes good writing and it will enlarge your vocabulary.”

— J.K. ROWLING

Explicit Instruction – Pre-Teaching Vocabulary from Literature

WHILE STUDENTS WILL GAIN SOME EXPOSURE to vocabulary merely through passively encountering new words in the books they’re reading, studies show that students vary greatly in their ability to pick up words as they’re reading. To help students both understand what they’re reading and better retain vocabulary words, one of the best ways to teach vocabulary is through pre-teaching potentially difficult words that students will encounter in their reading.

It’s very time-consuming to read a book, highlighter in hand, and develop vocabulary activities to expose your students to the words they’re likely to have trouble with, but there are some commercial products that can help. Some editions of literature, like *Prestwick House’s Literary Touchstone Classics*, include vocabulary words and definitions directly in the text. If your edition doesn’t include vocabulary, some teaching guides such as *Prestwick House Literature Teaching Units* also include vocabulary and definitions, which will give you a great start on your vocabulary lessons.



“Words—so innocent and powerless as they are, as standing in a dictionary, how potent for good and evil they become in the hands of one who knows how to combine them.”

— NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

Explicit Instruction – Dictionary Skills

IN THE 21ST CENTURY CLASSROOM, the dictionary, often seen as outdated, remains a powerful tool for students to get the most out of their vocabulary instruction, and we shouldn't neglect to teach students how to effectively use this resource, especially as digital tools make it more useful than ever before.

Beyond encouraging students to use the dictionary for definitions, your students can also find root words, example sentences, pronunciations, alternate meanings, word histories, special uses, and related words, with little effort. A fifteen-minute introduction to dictionary usage will make your students more comfortable in developing their own vocabularies.

Dictionaries in the 21st-Century

In the always-connected worlds in which your students live, a dictionary is always at hand, so it's easy to encourage students to look up words that they don't understand. In addition, some specialty online resources have brought a new approach to classic dictionaries.

Ninjawords is a fast dictionary that uses the open source dictionary Wiktionary to let people search multiple words at once. Very useful for students who refuse to crack open a book because it takes too long.

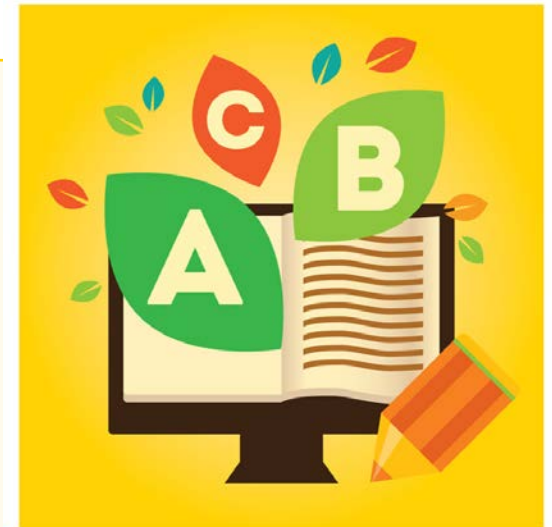
<http://ninjawords.com/>

Onelook is a bit more complex, but it provides tools for complex searches like searching only adjectives or words related to a topic.

<http://www.onelook.com/>

Visual Thesaurus is a fun one to get lost in. It shows students a map of synonyms to explore word meanings.

<http://www.visualthesaurus.com/>



Explicit Instruction – *Developing Word Consciousness*

SCOTT AND NAGY DEFINED WORD CONSCIOUSNESS as “the knowledge and disposition necessary for students to learn, appreciate, and effectively use words,” especially as it relates to understanding the difference between formal and informal means of communication, making effective arguments, and understanding the language of schooling.

Regardless of the methods used, spending time working on vocabulary throughout the course of the year lifts word consciousness and helps your students become aware of the words around them. Spending time learning words on a weekly basis helps your students learn about the importance of a powerful vocabulary. It encourages them to take the time to look up difficult words, to recognize the roots that they’re already familiar with, and to stop and pay attention to clues in the sentences they’re reading.

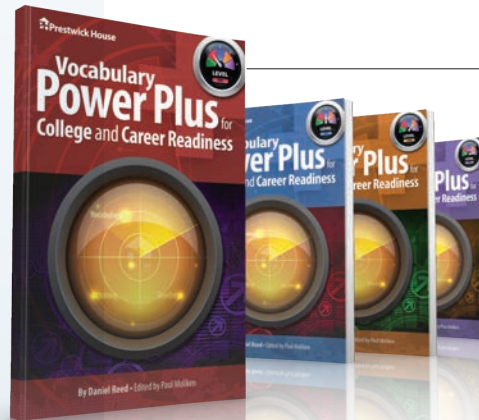


*“By words
the mind
is winged.”*

— ARISTOPHANES.

Prestwick House *Vocabulary Programs*

WHILE IT'S CERTAINLY POSSIBLE to develop your own vocabulary regimen in your classroom, we know how busy the life of a modern teacher is. To that end, every Prestwick House vocabulary program is designed to be ready to use right out of the box. Whether you're looking for a program based around word roots, one designed to improve test scores, or one to help students reading below grade level, Prestwick House has something that will help. Find out more about our programs at www.prestwickhouse.com.



Vocabulary Power Plus for College and Career Readiness

The new edition of the best-selling program that has helped more than one million students prepare for the SAT and ACT was updated in 2014, with more tier 3 words and new exercises similar to those found on the PARCC and Smarter Balanced Tests. Each lesson includes word in context, roots, prefixes and suffixes, inference, and sentence completion exercises; and each lesson also includes test prep activities, including writing prompts, multiple choice grammar and usage, and reading comprehension passages modeled after the SAT, ACT, and other standardized tests.

[Click here to get a sample of our most popular vocabulary program for grades 7-12.](#)



Vocabulary from Latin and Greek Roots

The #1 roots-based program for grades 7-12, *Vocabulary from Latin and Greek Roots* makes teaching from classical roots easy. Every lesson is organized around root words to help students develop an awareness and understanding of word origins, while activities are designed to help students learn to use the words in authentic contexts.

[Click here to learn more.](#)



Growing Your Vocabulary: Learning from Latin and Greek Roots

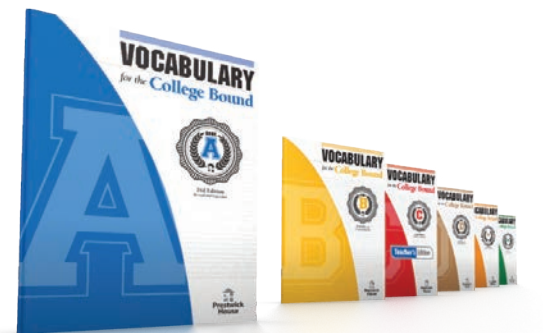
Roots-based vocabulary instruction for younger students is not only effective, but also fun. Filled with illustrations, interesting activities, cross-curricular connections, and fun explanations of words that go beyond simple definitions, *Growing Your Vocabulary* brings academically rigorous vocabulary instruction to grades 4-6.

[Click here to learn more.](#)

Vocabulary for the College Bound

There's so much for an English teacher to cover during the year that it's hard to find time to teach vocabulary, much less find room in the budget. *Vocabulary for the College Bound* is a classroom program that has been used in classrooms for more than 25 years, and it's available at a price that can't be beat.

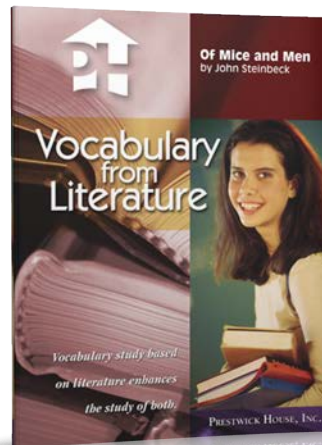
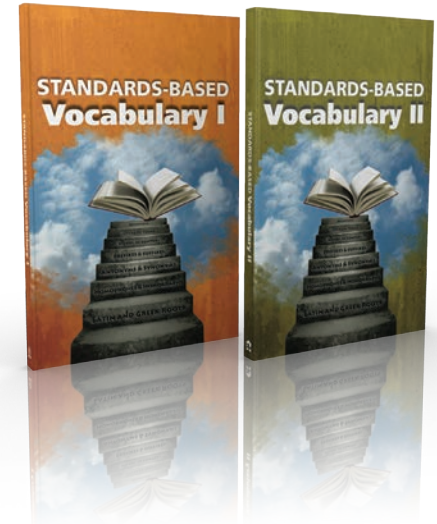
[Learn more about the new 2nd Edition here.](#)



Standards-Based Vocabulary Study

When students are reading below grade level and you need to lift them to meet your standards, try *Standards-Based Vocabulary*, which uses approaches gleaned from over one dozen different standards documents to make sure that high school students reading at a 4th-6th grade reading level have access to the same skills as their peers.

[Click here to learn more.](#)



Vocabulary from Literature

Preparing a literature-based vocabulary program is time consuming and difficult—unless you're using our reproducible *Vocabulary from Literature Units*. Each unit targets the specific literature from one book with ready-to-use activities, worksheets, and assessments selected for that book. Programs are available for more than 20 of the most popular classroom books.

[Click here to learn more.](#)



Christine Lawson, Customer Service Manager — 14 years

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