

Vocabulary Power Plus Online



Advantages of Direct Vocabulary Instruction in a Digital Format

Introduction

DU TO ADVANCEMENT and innovation in technology, best practices in education today are miles from best practices only ten years ago and may be unrecognizable ten years from now. Through smartphones, tablets, and even smartwatches, students have instant access to each other and the world at large, and these interactions are bound to increase in convenience and allure over time. Among all these changes, however, the keystones of English language arts instruction—vocabulary acquisition in particular—remain steadily significant to students’ futures. Therefore, it is up to us, as dedicated educators, to continually strategize, regroup, and meet students where they are by leveraging the digital tools upon which they have come to rely. A substantial amount of pedagogical research has examined the overlap between vocabulary instruction and the digital realm and reached helpful conclusions about the effectiveness of direct vocabulary instruction on a digital platform.

In this white paper, we will address the effectiveness of direct vocabulary instruction as a whole. We will then outline the benefits of delivering instruction in a digital format. Prestwick House’s new program, *Vocabulary Power Plus Online*, offers comprehensive acquisition, practice, and assessment of the tier-two and tier-three vocabulary from the *Vocabulary Power Plus: College and Career Readiness* series in a completely digital format that contains the important features of automatic progress reporting for teachers and immediate feedback for students.

Abstract

This report examines the effectiveness of improving students’ vocabulary acquisition through a direct-instruction vocabulary program in a digital format. The report presents the data asserting the necessity and effectiveness of direct vocabulary instruction, offers research supporting the benefits of delivering instruction via a digital platform, and provides an example of a well-developed program that seamlessly fuses vocabulary instruction and digital platform best practices through a four-part systematic approach.

Effectiveness of Direct Vocabulary Instruction

The significance of vocabulary acquisition cannot be overstated.

“Vocabulary knowledge is knowledge; the knowledge of a word not only implies a definition, but also implies how that word fits into the world” (Stahl, 2005).

Research indicates a positive correlation between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension: “If students do not adequately and steadily grow their



vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension will be affected" (Chall and Jacobs, 2003).

"Vocabulary instruction should provide students with opportunities to encounter words repeatedly and in a variety of contexts" (Stahl, 2005). This is not an easy feat for an educator who depends on traditional incidental learning, through literature or otherwise, to achieve when you factor in every other standard and goal the teacher must juggle each day. Class time must be reserved for teaching specific sets of high-frequency "added value" words based on their relevance to specific subjects or their occurrence on standardized assessment tests (Bates, 2008).

Incidental learning alone is not enough to ensure students' success in developing a robust vocabulary. Direct instruction should be employed to achieve that goal. Direct instruction is "a model for teaching that emphasizes well-developed and carefully planned lessons designed around small learning increments and clearly defined and prescribed teaching tasks" (Engelmann, 2015). Researchers who prize reading tend to agree that direct vocabulary instruction is essential to any good curriculum (Nelson, 2008; Kail, 2008; Marzano & Pickering, 2005; Marzano, 2010). Bromley holds that direct instruction is the most important influence to comprehension, while Marzano calls systematic instruction one of the "most crucial services that teachers can provide" (Bromley, 2007; Marzano & Pickering, 2005).

Success, however, must be weighed against the time involved. A teacher's time is precious. The adaptability and efficiency a digital format offers has two vital benefits: time and energy conservation for the educator without sacrificing quality and rigor, and increased connection to the digitally native students in the classroom.

The Benefits of Digital Education

According to the 2010 National Education Technology Plan, "technology is at the core of virtually every aspect of our daily lives and work, and we must leverage it to provide engaging and powerful learning experiences and content, as well as resources and assessments that measure student achievement in more complete, authentic, and meaningful ways."

A meta-analysis of studies done by the U.S. Department of Education in 2009 demonstrated that in more than a thousand empirical studies of online learning, students in online learning conditions, in general, performed better than students who received only face-to-face instruction. Furthermore, classes that combined face-to-face instruction with online learning showed a greater improvement than classes that used purely online learning.

The combination of digital coursework with traditional classroom instruction—often referred to as "blended learning"—increases success for both the educator and the student. According to research summarized and delivered by the University of Cincinnati online Masters of Education degree program, the one-on-one instruction of an online platform allows students extra time to self-troubleshoot and pace themselves while working. At the same time, teachers receive actionable information so they can easily identify and provide intervention to students who are struggling with the material (2015).

Effectiveness of Methods in Vocabulary Power Plus Online

Prestwick House leveraged these findings to devise our own four-part system of vocabulary acquisition implemented in our new digital program, *Vocabulary Power Plus Online*. For use either independently or with its print counterpart, *Vocabulary Power Plus*, this program fuses the efficiency of direct instruction and the

engaging digital experience into one platform designed to make vocabulary instruction easy for teachers and fun for students.

Vocabulary Power Plus Online is structured for ease of daily use, as prescribed by both Amanda St. Clair Otten and Thomas Smith, in order to better complement the reality of student psychology, which dictates short but frequent vocabulary activities (2003; 2008).

Vocabulary Power Plus Online offers word study that builds upon itself over the course of each five-word lesson. A fresh take on the timeless systematic approach of W. E. Nagy (1988), who prescribed a three-pronged method of integration, repetition, and meaningful use, each lesson includes the following sections:

- 1) **Learn** – an overview of the words and definitions via audible dictation and on-screen text
- 2) **Practice** – a non-graded “playground” for trial and error, with unlimited chances to answer correctly; students have the opportunity to work through until mastery of the content is demonstrated.
- 3) **Show** – a workspace to practice/learn via multiple-choice and multiple-choice fill-in-the-blank exercises
- 4) **Apply** – context-based assignments



In line with Stahl's emphasis on exposure to multiple contexts (2005), the activities in *Vocabulary Power Plus Online* use vocabulary words in various scenarios so that students develop and retain a multifaceted understanding of the words applicable far beyond the program itself. In total, students have the opportunity to use the words at least six times each in increasingly comprehensive contexts.

It's important that instructional programs use digital tools that have been proven to capture the interest of students (Dalton & Grisham, 2011), and *Vocabulary Power Plus Online* does just that. Features like drag and drop, immediate feedback, clickable multiple-choice response, audio, and on-screen text place digital natives in comfortable territory and create the recommended “engaging, relevant...learning experiences for all learners that mirror students' daily lives” (U.S. Dept of Education, 2010).



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Vocabulary Power Plus Online

Ready to take vocabulary instruction to the digital sphere?

Vocabulary Power Plus™ Online for Grades 9-12

For over ten years, *Vocabulary Power Plus* has helped more than one million students build vocabulary and improve reading comprehension, writing skills, and test scores, thanks to its multifaceted approach to vocabulary learning.

This year, we're proud to present a new entry into the *Vocabulary Power Plus* lineup: *Vocabulary Power Plus Online*! This program offers the core vocabulary instruction of the traditional series in a completely digital environment!

Each level in the *Vocabulary Power Plus Online* program is designed to strengthen high school students' vocabulary skills in just minutes a week. Interactive exercises and bite-sized lessons provide individualized vocabulary instruction on over 1,200 high-level words across the series. And because of its online format, learning can take place anywhere, even outside the classroom!



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for the 2019-
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- Introduce over 300 vocabulary words per level
- Challenge students with rigorous vocabulary activities
- Provide individualized student reporting
- Automatically assess students' work
- Save time usually spent on traditional classroom instruction

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