

Improving Literacy: A Parents' Guide

The Different Layers of Literacy

Children's literacy can be measured by their reading age, their ability to use challenging vocabulary or punctuation and the extent that they can produce a sophisticated, detailed piece of writing.

It is not just about reading! Literacy focusses on developing a student's confidence to explain and elaborate within their work.



Confidence when writing

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The more students learn *high utility words* the better they will be able to comprehend text that contains those words or similar ones.”

Steven Stahl

The vocabulary that students use within different subjects at school will not be words that they will immediately be familiar or comfortable using in their own word. However, the more they access texts that use this language, the easier they will be able to replicate this in their own work. Simply put? The words we use day to day are tier 1 words- we don't speak as we need to write and so this is where work needs to be done.

Vocabulary Instruction

Choosing Words to Teach

Tier III

Tier III words are low-frequency words and are limited to a specific "domain". They often pertain to a specific content area. These words are best learned within the context of the lesson or subject matter.

Examples: *atom, molecule, metamorphic, sedimentary, continent*

Tier II

Tier II words are high-frequency words that occur across contexts. These words are used by mature language users and are more common in writing than in everyday speech. Tier II words are important for students to know to enhance comprehension of a selected text. Tier II words the best words for targeted explicit vocabulary instruction.

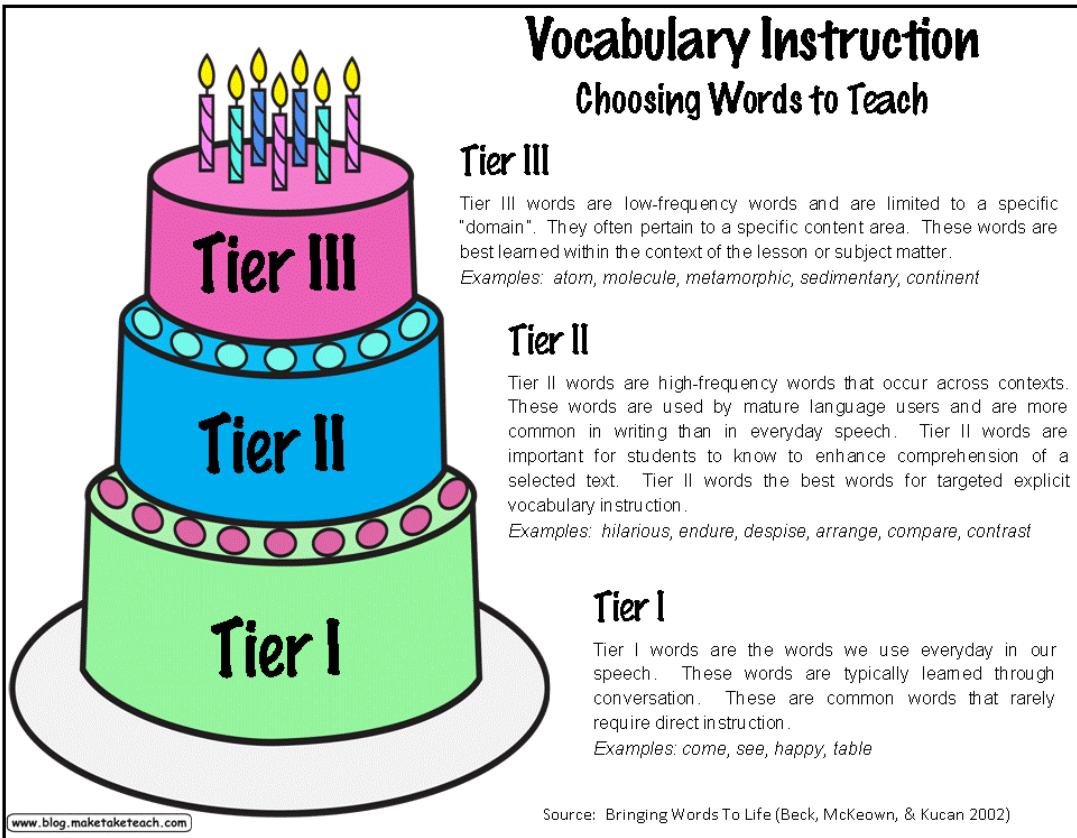
Examples: *hilarious, endure, despise, arrange, compare, contrast*

Tier I

Tier I words are the words we use everyday in our speech. These words are typically learned through conversation. These are common words that rarely require direct instruction.

Examples: *come, see, happy, table*

Source: Bringing Words To Life (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan 2002)



Confidence when writing

At Key Stage Three and beyond, students are required to write in different styles and with increasing formality that they will not use when talking on a day to day basis.

In order to develop confidence in young people to use more sophisticated and subject-specific vocabulary when writing, they have to see examples of it on a regular basis. This is also the case when using both basic and advanced punctuation- the more examples that children see of this in use, the more straightforward it is for them to make sense of it and then use it in their own work.

punctuation

- period**
Used at the end of a complete declarative sentence. Most sentences end with a period. Also used after most abbreviations.
Dr. Pennington spent 100% his day at work.
- semicolon**
Indicates a longer pause than a comma and a shorter pause than a period. Used between two closely related clauses that could be separate sentences. Also used between items where one or both contain a comma.
Clearly related clauses: The teacher had to get to a 10 AM change to leave for work, so he made the train early.
Clause containing commas: The teacher had to get to the 10 AM train, so he had to leave for work, which had to be done early because of the train.
- colon**
Used before the part of a sentence that explains what has just been stated. Also used between a long question and a list.
Explain what has been said: The teacher was told to be on time for the 10 AM train, but he had to get to the 10 AM train.
USE: An apostrophe is both a possessive, possessive and before of the possessive.
- apostrophe**
Shows possession or ownership. Also indicates where a letter or number has been left out in a substitution.
Possession: The teacher's car was parked in the school car park.
Substitution: The teacher's car was not in the school car park.
- comma**
Indicates a pause in a sentence. Used after introductory phrases to set apart nonessential clauses, and to set apart the items in a list or series. Also used to set off the parts of a compound sentence and to help clarify a sentence when there is the possibility for confusion.
Introductory phrase: The teacher was told to be on time for the 10 AM train, so he made the train early.
Nonessential clause: The teacher, who had to get to the 10 AM train, made the train early.
Series or list: The teacher had to get to the 10 AM train, the 10 AM train, and the 10 AM train.
- quote marks**
Used to show where the exact words, but also where in speaking. Also used to set off quoted material in writing. Single quote marks show a quotation inside a quotation.
I told the teacher that I had to get to the 10 AM train, "I had to get to the 10 AM train, so I had to get to the 10 AM train."
- hyphen**
Joins some compound words, or may separate words that are meant to be read together as a single idea. Also used to signal a word break at the end of a line of text.
The teacher had to get to the 10 AM train.
- parenthesis**
Used to set off extra information that is not essential to the main idea but can't separate from the meaning of a sentence.
The teacher had to get to the 10 AM train, (the 10 AM train) and the 10 AM train.
- brackets**
Used to show words in a quote that were the speaker or writer's original words. Can be used to make a comment on the text, to correct an error, or to fill in a missing or changed word.
Exclamation point: "I had to get to the 10 AM train, (the 10 AM train) and the 10 AM train." The teacher had to get to the 10 AM train.
USE: The teacher had to get to the 10 AM train, (the 10 AM train) and the 10 AM train.
- dash**
Emphasizes words or phrases. Used to summarize an idea, to correct an error, or to change or break in a thought.
Exclamation: The teacher had to get to the 10 AM train, (the 10 AM train) and the 10 AM train.
Change in thought: "I had to get to the 10 AM train, (the 10 AM train) and the 10 AM train."
- exclamation point**
Indicates excitement. Used after an exclamation, a statement that expresses strong emotion, or an urgent statement.
Exclamation: "I had to get to the 10 AM train, (the 10 AM train) and the 10 AM train!"
Exclamation: "I had to get to the 10 AM train, (the 10 AM train) and the 10 AM train!"
- question mark**
Used at the end of a sentence that asks a question.
The teacher had to get to the 10 AM train, (the 10 AM train) and the 10 AM train?
- slash**
Shows a choice. Also used as a separator between lines of poetry.
When you get to the 10 AM train, you can get to the 10 AM train, (the 10 AM train) and the 10 AM train.
- ellipsis**
Indicates a pause or interruption. Used to show a statement is trailing off or is unfinished. Also indicates where words have been left out of a quotation.
Pause: "I had to get to the 10 AM train, (the 10 AM train) and the 10 AM train..."
Unfinished thought: "I had to get to the 10 AM train, (the 10 AM train) and the 10 AM train..."
Words left out: "I had to get to the 10 AM train, (the 10 AM train) and the 10 AM train..."

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Talk Around Reading to Raise Writing- Improving Your Child's Literacy

Pie Corbett. Literacy Educational Consultant- Talk for Writing enables children to imitate the key language they need for a topic orally before they try reading and analysing it. Through fun activities that help them rehearse the tune of the language they need, followed by shared writing to show them how to craft their writing, children are helped to write in the same style. Schools that have adopted the approach have not only increased their children's progress but have found that children and teachers alike love it. It not only works throughout primary schools from the early years to Year 6 but also in secondary schools where it is key to making literacy across the curriculum really work.

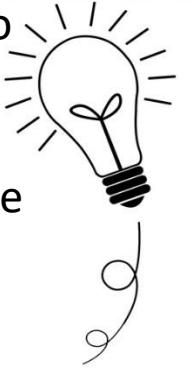


What Can I Do?

Encourage reading of ANY kind- it is just as important that your child reads for pleasure as well as the correct level to challenge themselves.



Motivate your child to ask questions about what they have read- do they agree with the writer? Do they think the writing could be improved and how?



Have discussions around reading- this could be a news article, blog site, book (fiction or non fiction).



Specify reading time and reward for this- for example, finding the film version of a book that they have read.

