

Top 10 Evidence-Based Vocabulary Strategies

An effective way to become a good facilitator of vocabulary strategies is to become a good personal user of vocabulary strategies. How do *you* learn new words? Do you take notice of new words (word consciousness)? Do you hope you will hear a new word again so you can be *sure* you know what it means (redundancy)? Do you mentally place a new word in a similar group (semantic field)? Do you stop for just a second and think of another word that sounds almost the same (dense neighborhoods)?

Your reactions to learning vocabulary can be found in a collection of 10 key evidence-based instructional strategies used in *The Bridge of Vocabulary 2*. These Top 10 Strategies have been researched in clinical and educational environments and tested for efficacy at various age levels. They have been collected to streamline your search for “what works.” These strategies match academic standards developed in schools, interventions used in speech-language therapy settings, and developmental milestones applied in child health environments.

1. **FOUR WORD TYPES:** The four types of vocabulary—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—are distinctly different and are best taught with distinctly different methods (Parris & Headley, 2015).
2. **TIER 2 WORDS:** The three tiers of vocabulary allow professionals to purposefully target which types of words to teach and when (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013).
3. **REPETITION:** Although some youngsters can “fast map” (learn new words after one exposure), most do not and instead benefit from structured teaching and significant redundancy (Pence Turnbull & Justice, 2017).
4. **DENSE NEIGHBORHOODS:** Words that are part of “dense neighborhoods” are considered similar, either phonologically (pit, pat, pet, pot, hit, fit); semantically (words about playgrounds); or in usage (prepositions); and are easier to learn than words in sparse neighborhoods (Hoover & Storkel, 2005).
5. **CONCEPT EXPANSION:** Learning entirely new concepts and the words that represent those new ideas advances language development. Students’ actual experiences, both exploratory and emotional, propel the word acquisition process (Gillon, Moran, & Page, 2007; Nagy & Hiebert, 2011).
6. **WORD CATEGORIES:** Introducing words in a highly organized manner builds powerful semantic fields. This practice is frequently referred to as categorizing. Organizing objects, pictures, or words in categories is not just for young children; it strengthens vocabulary growth in all age groups (McGregor & Duff, 2015).
7. **WORD CONSCIOUSNESS:** Students develop vocabulary faster if adults help them to discover word consciousness; an awareness of, and interest in, words, their meanings, and their power! (Dunaway, 2012; Scott & Nagy, 2004).
8. **LEVELS OF KNOWING:** Identifying three levels of word knowledge—unknown, acquainted, established—is facilitated with direct and repeated practice (Beck et al., 2013).
9. **WORD MEANINGS:** Effective vocabulary development is intensified when students learn word meanings and then what words mean when used together (Nagy & Townsend, 2012).
10. **STUDENT-FRIENDLY DEFINITIONS:** The use of spoken vocabulary instead of reading vocabulary accelerates learning. Dictionary definitions have little value because they frequently “define” words using greater, not less, complexity (Beck et al., 2013).

Full citations for these Top 10 Strategies can be found in the References list.