Six Steps in Building Academic Vocabulary

Robert Marzano and Debra Pickering describe a six-step process in the instruction of vocabulary in his book, “Building Academic Vocabulary Teacher’s Manual”. The first three steps are to assist the teacher in direct instruction. The last three steps are for students to provide practice and reinforcement.

### Step 1: Introduce Vocabulary
Provide a description, explanation, or example of the new term.

### Step 2: Restate Meanings
Ask students to restate the own description, explanation, or example in their own words.

### Step 3: Visuals in Vocabulary Building
Ask students to construct a picture, symbol, or graphic representing the term.

### Step 4: Activities for Deeper Understanding
Engage Students periodically in activities that help them add to their knowledge of the terms in their vocabulary notebooks.

### Step 5: Vocabulary Discussions
Periodically ask students to discuss the terms with one another.

### Step 6: Word Play
Involve students periodically in games that allow them to play with the terms.

#### Step 1: Introduce Vocabulary
The teacher will give a description, explanation, or example of the new term.

- **Access Prior Knowledge (Find out what they know): Think, Pair, Share, Double-pair, Class Share**
  - 20 seconds: Individually, think “What does ___ mean?”
  - 30 seconds: With one partner, share what you think the term means.
  - 40 seconds: With another pair write (or draw) what you decide *together* that the term means.
  (Class discussion assimilates information from all groups of four)

- **Build on Prior Knowledge (Build on their initial understanding):**
  - Introduce direct experiences (field trip/guest speaker) that provide examples.
  - Tell a story that integrates the term.
  - Use video or computer images as the stimulus for understanding the term.
  - Ask students or groups to present the information (skit or pantomime) to the class.
  - Use current events to help make the term familiar to students.
  - Describe your own mental pictures of the term.
  - Find or create pictures that exemplify the term.
ACTIVITY:
Ask students to fold a sheet of paper in fourths. Fill in part 1 individually for the new term. Fill in parts 2, 3, 4 as other students share what they wrote in part 1 (organized study sheet).

- **Examples and Non-examples**
  As students are learning new terms, provide them with both examples and non-examples and ask them to note similarities and differences to help with identifying the distinguishing feature.

- **Connection: Math Word Meaning - Common Language Usage**
  Make a T-Chart so that the word at the top of the chart is the “term” under discussion. On the left students write the meaning of the word as used in common language (in context outside of this discipline) and write a sentence with it that they might use in a daily conversation. On the right side students write the meaning of the word as used in specific discipline with a sentence. Students follow up with a deeper comparison by finding a similarity and a difference for these. (See handout)

- **Verbal/Visual Context**
  Use the word/term/phrase in a sentence related to something students have already studied.

**Step 2: Restate Meanings**
The teacher will ask the learner to give a description, explanation, or example of the new term in his/her own words.

- **Rephrase Text**
  Ask students to rewrite the sentence without using an identified term(s) and without changing the meaning of the sentence or problem. Remind learners not copy what you said, but use their own words. Monitor students to determine if any confusion exists. Provide more descriptions, explanations, or examples if necessary.

  Request that students record these in their Academic Notebook Worksheet. These notebooks can travel with the learner as he/she moves through each grade level and become a compilation of vocabulary terms mastered.

**Academic Notebook Directions:** The notebook provides the learner an opportunity to:
- Write the term.
- Rate their knowledge level of the term.
- Write examples, descriptions, or explanations of the term. (step 2)
- Draw a picture of the term (step 3)
- Add new ideas to the term as these are discussed in class.
- Each Academic Notebook Sheet (See Handout) provides space to insert two terms.

- **Word Whacker – Word Wall Activity for Definition Restating**
  Student’s select a word from the word wall (from a current word list or from the cumulative word list), write a definition on a 3 x 5 card in their own words, and pass the cards in to the teacher. Ask students to sign their names to the card. Two students stand at the word wall with a flyswatter or a rolled up newspaper. As the definitions are read by the teacher (the name of the contributor is not mentioned), the students try to be the one to ‘whack’ the correct word first. If
there are issues with the definition as stated on the 3 x 5 card, corrections can be offered by the class members or the teacher so that the student can refine his understanding of the word.

**Step 3: Visuals in Vocabulary Building**
The teacher will ask the learner to draw a picture, symbol, or locate a graphic to represent the new term or phrase.

- **Academic Notebook** – Students will use the Academic Notebook Worksheet to draw their nonlinguistic representation of the term in the “Draw” section of the worksheet.

- **Some of the challenges:**
  - Students believe they can’t draw
    - Model
    - Allow students, at first, to work together
    - Trace diagrams /charts
  - Students try to “overdraw”
    - Model
    - Teach the concept of speed drawing for those who labor too long over their work
    - Play “Draw Me” (see handout)
  - Students would rather just copy the written definition
    - Discuss with them the power of pictures
    - Allow them to work together
    - Ask students to share personal stories of how pictures have helped them
  - The students- and you- are having trouble depicting the term
    - Search for images on the Internet
    - Sometimes you can draw the actual term (Ex. Diameter)

- **Symbols**
  Be sure that students can identify the meaning of all symbols (math, science, map, proofreading, abbreviations, icons) and can use the symbol appropriately in writing in the content. Students should be able to identify concepts noted by both symbols and figures.

- **Physical Movement and Academic Vocabulary**
  This activity helps students to associate groups of words but also to distinguish between the words in the group. Do “word aerobics” by acting out the words in the lessons. Tap into the students’ creativity. Who has the best way to model this physically? Or play Simon Says: Simon says show_____. As a game: In one minute, use signals, arm positions, or motions to prompt your partner to say all the terms/words/phrases in one group in any order but without talking, drawing, writing, or spelling with sign language.

- **Cartoons or Comic Strips**
  Students draw figures, graphs, etc. as speaking cartoon characters and provide their thoughts or comments so that words and their meanings are associated.

- **Matching – Concentration**
  Teachers (or students) create matching cards that illustrate vocabulary. After cards are matched, students can play the memory game “Concentration” and keep the pairs which they correctly match when they turn over two cards on their turn.
Step 4: Activities for Deeper Understanding
The learner will participate in activities that provide more knowledge of the words in their vocabulary notebooks

- **The Goal: Good Definitions**
  - Use the extra space in the bottom right-hand section of the Academic Notebook Worksheet to record new insights such as:
    - Antonyms or synonyms for the word
    - Highlight a prefix or suffix
    - Draw and additional picture or graphic
    - List related words
    - Write brief cautions or reminders of common confusions
    - If English is a second language, provide an opportunity to translate the word into their native language (BabelFish)
    - A list of fun vocabulary game can be found at: Word Scrambler- [http://www.superkids.com/aweb/tools/words/scramble](http://www.superkids.com/aweb/tools/words/scramble)

- **Activities**
  - **Free Association Time**
    Any time during the day call out “free association time” and call out a term. Students then call out any word they think is related to the target term. After a few seconds say stop and the last person to say a word must say how that word is related to the target.

  - **Comparing Terms**
    Compare terms using a variety of formats: sentence stems, Venn Diagram, Double Bubble, & the Matrix.

    **Sentence Stems:**
    
    _______and _______are similar because they both____________________
    _______and_______ are different because ______________is_____________ but _________is__________.

    **Venn Diagram:**
    ![Venn Diagram](image)
Double Bubble:

Matrix:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Item 1</th>
<th>Item 2</th>
<th>Item 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characteristic 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Similarities &amp; Differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristic 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Similarities &amp; Differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristic 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Similarities &amp; Differences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Relationship Building – Concept Circles**

  Divide a circle into fourths using two diameters.

  **TITLE____________________________**

  Place four related words in the circle.

  Ask students to decide the title for the set of words.

  Ask questions based on the circle:

  1. Why is each of these words related to your title?
  2. Is another title appropriate for the set of words? Explain.
  3. Could other words have been placed in one of the four sections of the circle?
  4. Replace one word with a different word and determine a new title for the concept circle?

  Example:

  ![Concept Circle Example](image-url)
Alternate version:

**TITLE Given Title**

Divide a circle into fourths using two diameters. Tell students the title for the concept circle. Ask students to write 4 words in the circle that relate to this title. Have class members compare answers. Each student must justify their choice of words for their circle.

1. How many different words did students relate to this word?
2. Are there ways to group the class’ set of words into subsets?

- **Classifying Terms/Related Words - Making Connections within the Content**
  - This strategy helps the student identify mastered concepts, on which new knowledge can be built. It assists them in forming associations and categorizing new knowledge. Ask students to write down all of the other terms or words they know that can be associated with a particular term/word/phrase. Students explain why they listed as they did. They should discuss other words someone else included.

- **Pairs or Groups of Terms**
  - **Synonyms (or Almost Synonyms):** If there is more than one term that means the same as the target term, use that synonym interchangeably with the new word. Some students may already have an understanding of the synonymous terminology. If there is not a synonym, there might still be a term that is similar enough to help students gain an initial understanding and will help students to make a connection to existing knowledge. *Delineating any differences between the similar term and the new term adds to the students’ depth of understanding.*
  - **Antonyms (or Almost Opposites):** If there is a word(s) that students are already familiar with that groups with the new word in some way point out the connection being explicit about the differences. Mentioning meanings of word parts (prefixes) helps with this process.

**Step 5: Vocabulary Discussions**

The learner will discuss the term with other learners periodically.

One of the major goals of Step 5 is to encourage students to help each other identify and clear up misconceptions and confusion. Although discussions can be informal and unstructured, you can also choose a structured strategy like Think-Pair-Share.

**Pair-Share Strategy:**

1. **THINK:** Allow think time (quiet time) for learners to review their own descriptions and images of the terms. Teachers can model by “thinking aloud”.
2. **PAIR:** Put learners in pairs to discuss their descriptions, images, and any new info related to the terms. You may need to guide this by asking them to:
   - Compare their descriptions of the term
   - Describe their pictures to each other
   - Explain to each other any new information they have learned or any “aha” moments
   - Identifying areas of disagreement or confusion and seek clarification
3. **SHARE:** Provide opportunity for groups to share aloud and discuss any new thoughts or understandings they have discussed in their pairs. Then ask students to make additions or revisions in their notebooks.
• Monitor as learners help each other identify and clear up confusion about new terms.

• **What Doesn’t Belong and Why?**

From a list of three or four words/terms/phrases, pick out a word/term/phrase that does not fit with the group and tell the mathematics that explains why. Select words or terms that have more than one correct answer.

• **Word Wall Activities**

Build a word wall by writing terms on an index card and putting them on a wall in the classroom. Periodically have discussions/questions about words on the wall.

• I am thinking of a word… (teacher gives clues until students select the proper word)
• What word means the opposite of ____?
• What word means the same as ____?
• What word(s) goes with ____?
• What words describe types of ____?
• What words describe this picture/diagram? (teacher displays a picture, graph, diagram, etc.)
• What words match with the symbol ____? (teacher displays symbol)
• What word is in a category with ____ and what is the name of the category?
• I will name two words in a category; you find another word on the word wall that belongs to that category and explain the association.
• My word is ____. Pick another word (or two other words) off the word wall and make a meaningful connection between the two words in a sentence.
• Word whacker –
  1. Pass out an index card to each student and tell them to select any word on the word wall and write a good definition for it and collect the definitions.
  2. Designate two students to stand in front of the word wall with a flyswatter (or a rolled up newspaper).
  3. Read out the index cards that the students wrote and ask the students to whack the word for the definition that you read.
  4. Talk about the construction of the definitions as they are read but do not identify the contributor if there are errors.

• **Word Sort**

Begin with a set of words and ask students to arrange them into groups by whatever criteria they choose. They must tell why they grouped them that way, what they have in common, and why these terms are different from the words you have placed in a different group. Is there a term in the group that could be a title for the group? If not, what is a good title for the group? Is there a term that doesn’t fit into any grouping? If so, ask students to create a group with the term that does not fit with any other term.

• **Two-Way Sort**

Terms that relate to the same topic may be confusing. A two-way sort offers students the opportunity to distinguish between terms through application. Students can work in small groups to sort the examples of the terms as well as to group the examples that deal with the same situation.
Step 6: Word Play

As has been demonstrated already, the sixth step emphasizes the importance of games that use the terms and phrases from the academic vocabulary. After each activity students should be asked to make corrections, additions, and changes to the entries in their notebooks. Students’ knowledge of the terms and phrases should deepen and become a sound foundation on which to understand the academic content presented in class.

- **Name That Category or Pyramid**
  - This review game is based on the format of the TV game show “$100,000 Pyramid.” Students are in pairs, one facing the screen, one with his/her back to the screen. On the PowerPoint slide show, enter the words in the boxes on the steps. Put a 5 second delay on the timing between words or adjust timing to suit your class level. You can also copy the stairs below on an overhead projector transparency, write the target words on the stairs and cover them with post-it flags and reveal them in succession. The student facing the screen gives clues (or names examples) for the category on the bottom step and continues to do give new clues until his/her partner has guessed the term. The clue giver repeats his responsibilities for each successive term up the stair case until one team yells, “Finished!” Teams earn the number of points for the last step they had completed before someone finished. Winners add 50 points to their score. Or if you want to be able to assess the groups, put the groups in teams of three. There will be one person who is not playing who can record the clues that were given. This person can also offer suggestions after play is over for another clue that might have helped the guesser.
  - The teacher can construct the categories from the current unit, around a theme (starts with...), or can just select words from review. The whole game takes less than a minute and students have the opportunity to express word meanings in their own words. If the partner is not guessing the correct category, the pair should determine if the examples were deficient or if the guesser did not know the meaning of the category. The students also have the chance to help one another with any troublesome terminology.
  - The same type game can be done with a pyramid game board starting with the lower left corner and completing the bottom row before going to the middle row left to right and then finally the top space. Again a third team member can record the clues and help analyze the play.

- **Vocabulary Charades**
  
  Players silently act out words. There are 2 versions:
  Version 1-Students stand next to their desks and use their arms, legs, & bodies to show they know the meaning of the term called out by the teacher.
  Version 2- Students form teams & then give designated team members a term to act out. The other team members must guess the term as quickly as possible.

- **Talk, Talk, Talk, Talk, Talk...**

  In this game students are in pairs (A & B), with student A facing the screen, and student B with his/her back to the screen. On the screen (PowerPoint, whiteboard, or overhead projector), a category is shown at the top of a page and the terms in the category will be shown in a list. The category will be shown first and student B can look at the screen to see the name of the category but must face away from the screen before the list of terms is shown. Student A can describe any word on the screen and must continue talking until his/her partner has said every term on the screen in any order. No words on the list may be used while Student A is giving the clues.
• **Draw Me**  
  Similar to Pictionary. Students draw pictures as clues to help teammates remember a term. For classroom use, have students draw several words belonging to a cluster of related words.

• **Talk a Mile a Minute**  
  Teams of students are given a list of terms that have been organized into categories. (words related by meaning) To play each team designates a “talker” who is provided with a list of words under a category title, such as the list in this example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SHAPES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rectangle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oval</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

  The talker tries to get the team to say each of the words by quickly describing them but without using any of the words in the category or any rhyming words. The talker keeps talking until all words are guessed or time is called.

• **PowerPoint Games**  
  The PowerPoint games referred to are simple to setup. Simply go to the website, download the PPT and fill in with the vocabulary words.

  - BINGO (K-6) [http://jc-schools.net/tutorials/vocab/STUDY_BINGO.xls](http://jc-schools.net/tutorials/vocab/STUDY_BINGO.xls)
  - PASSWORD [http://jc-schools.net/read6-12/Password.ppt](http://jc-schools.net/read6-12/Password.ppt)
  - JEOPARDY [http://jc-schools.net/tutorials/vocab/jepardy-game.ppt](http://jc-schools.net/tutorials/vocab/jepardy-game.ppt)
  - PYRAMID [http://jc-schools.net/tutorials/vocab/Pyramid.ppt](http://jc-schools.net/tutorials/vocab/Pyramid.ppt)
  - MILLIONAIRE [http://jc-schools.net/tutorials/vocab/Million.ppt](http://jc-schools.net/tutorials/vocab/Million.ppt)

• **Game Boards**  
  Use these game boards and the game cards to provide students an opportunity to practice and review new vocabulary. The games are available in .pdf or Microsoft Word format (customizable). The PowerPoint Template ([http://jc-schools.net/tutorials/game/game-template](http://jc-schools.net/tutorials/game/game-template)) for the basic game board and the 2-fold game board template ([http://jc-schools.net/tutorials/game/2-board.ppt](http://jc-schools.net/tutorials/game/2-board.ppt)) are available at the websites listed in parentheses.

  The basic premise for using the game boards listed above is as follows:

  2. Player does not move until he describes or uses the vocabulary word on the game card drawn in a sentence.
  3. If the player responds correctly, he moves his token the number of spaces his spin or die roll indicated. If he responds incorrectly, he remains in his space.
  4. The game cards were created in Word using the Game Card Template. The game cards can be printed on Avery Business Cards #5371 which can be folded and separated for use or printed on heavy paper and cut apart.