

Language Learning Strategies across the Curriculum

A Guide for Staff

Produced by
Glenrothes High School Working Group
in collaboration with
NHS Fife Speech & Language Therapy Service



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Aims of the booklet

This booklet is intended to provide examples of good practice from Glenrothes High School and from a selection of other secondary schools.

The booklet aims to;

- raise awareness of vocabulary teaching and why it is so important
- highlight the impact that focused vocabulary teaching can have on success in the curriculum
- demonstrate tried and tested methods of vocabulary teaching which can be implemented easily and quickly into current teaching methods.

Introduction

"I used to think I was poor. Then they told me I wasn't poor, I was needy. Then they told me it was self-defeating to think of myself as needy. I was deprived. (Oh not deprived but rather underprivileged.) Then they told me that underprivileged was overused. I was disadvantaged. I still don't have a dime. But I have a great vocabulary."

Jules Feiffer (American novelist and cartoonist)

Vocabulary is one of the main components of language and operates as part of complex system made up of;

- **Phonology**, *the speech sounds we use to make words*
- **Semantics**, *our understanding and use of vocabulary*
- **Syntax**, *the way we use words in sentences, governed by the grammatical rules of English*
- **Morphology**, *the rules which affect different words or types of words, e.g. plurals, tenses*
- **Pragmatics**, *e.g. the influence of non verbal communication on meaning etc.*

Many students have issues accessing the curriculum because of difficulties with one or all of the above components of language. Consider the make up of your classes; they may contain students with a wide range of learning needs such as those with,

- General learning difficulties
- English as an additional language
- Specific language difficulties, for example specific language impairment
- An Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Specific learning difficulties, for example dyslexia
- Socially or linguistically impoverished backgrounds
- In addition, students in lower ability/set classes may also experience similar difficulties.

All of these students may find it difficult to learn new words and consequently find it difficult to access the curriculum and to achieve success.

Why do we work on vocabulary?

Vocabulary is a powerful predictor of reading comprehension, i.e. the ability to understand what you read. The more words you understand, the better you can read. Additionally, the more words you know, the better your decoding will be, i.e. the skills you use to decipher printed words (Stahl & Nagy, 2006).

Several studies have shown that by the end of primary school

- an average student has acquired around 6000 word meanings,
- a student in the lowest quartile has acquired around 4000 word meanings
- a student in the highest quartile has acquired around 8000 word meanings.

In secondary school, the average student adds 2,000 -3,000 word per year to their reading vocabulary but less able students do not (Stahl & Nagy, 2006). Consequently the gap between more able and less able students grows **each year**.

The importance of vocabulary teaching & learning.

Vocabulary is not a skill that we can ever fully master, we continue to expand and develop our vocabularies throughout our lives (Hiebert & Kamil, 2005).

Students may experience a 'slump' in reading comprehension levels caused by below average vocabulary levels. Studies have suggested that this occurs between Primary 6 and S1 and will therefore have an impact on students entering High School (Hirsch, 2003). This decrease in reading comprehension skills will influence classroom success, general level of ability and achievement in examinations.

Students may be faced with reading material which contains many unfamiliar vocabulary items, not just unfamiliar terminology. This will cause significant difficulty with text comprehension and creates the potential for misunderstanding.

Often there is little emphasis on the **acquisition** of vocabulary in secondary school. Teachers are teaching words but not all pupils are acquiring them! Clearly there is a breakdown between what teachers think they are teaching and what pupils are actually learning. Perhaps this occurs because vocabulary is not being explicitly taught. Students may be expected to acquire new vocabulary by being exposed to it; however, studies suggest that many students do not acquire vocabulary simply by hearing it and need direct instruction (Nagy, 2005).

Research studies and classroom practice indicate that specific, direct support on vocabulary can have an impact on all areas of learning.

How can secondary school teachers support vocabulary acquisition?

The following components are recommended to support the development of a student's vocabulary. These are based on components which have been recommended for an effective vocabulary programme by Michael F. Graves (Professor of Literacy Education);

1. Wide ranging, independent reading.

This should be promoted across the school.

Students should be encouraged to access written material (books, magazines, newspapers) and alternative forms of literature i.e. audio books etc.

2. Instruction in specific words.

This is recommended for all subject areas.

The main focus of this booklet is to highlight methods to support teachers in this aspect of vocabulary acquisition.

3. Teaching independent word learning strategies

This will be introduced in English classes and reinforced in all subject areas where possible.

4. Promoting word consciousness.

This is recommended for all subject areas.

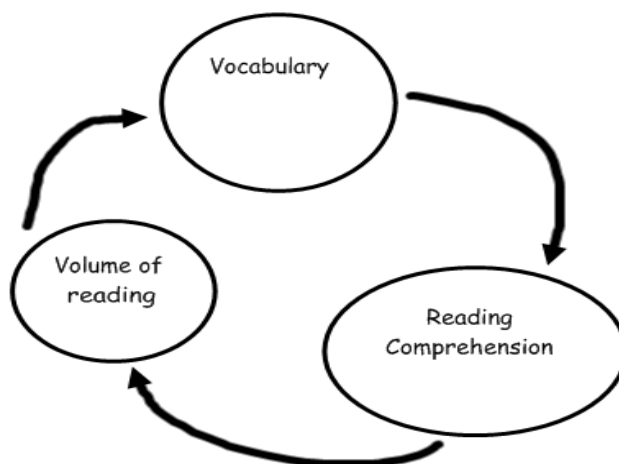
Teachers who identify, discuss and show that they are interested in words are already using an extremely useful strategy! This can motivate and foster interest in vocabulary.

Key facts about vocabulary

- To **know** a word and be able to use it, students need to have access to;
 - **The phonological form**, *i.e. the sounds we use to say a word*
 - **The orthographic form**, *i.e. how we spell a word*
 - **The meaning**, *where there are multiple meanings students need to know which meaning is most appropriate in that context.*
 - **The part of speech it belongs to**, *i.e. noun, adjective etc*
 - **The context in which to use it**
 - **The other words or knowledge this word relates to.**
- Vocabulary teaching is most effective when teaching is tied to the specific materials being used and when learning is spaced and revised over time. Students learn vocabulary most effectively when it is embedded in teaching about **content** (Stahl & Nagy, 2006). Additionally, students appear to learn and retain words more effectively when they feel there is a purpose to their learning, i.e. words are related to the theme of a topic. (Kamil & Hiebert, 2005). Students need to learn relevant, useful words which will support them in a particular subject/topic area **and** extend to other areas of the curriculum.
- Providing numerous opportunities for students to gain exposure to new words is the most effective way to support their learning. Students make the highest gains in learning new words when they are given multiple exposures in 'real' contexts that extend beyond individual classes (Beck & McKeown, 2007).
- For every word a student learns, it is estimated that there are an average of 1-3 additional related words that should also be understandable to the student (Nagy & Anderson, 1984). Therefore, vocabulary teaching can be considered to have a cumulative effect.
- Vocabulary instruction needs to go beyond the definitions. It is not enough to know the definition of a word! Students need to engage in using and thinking about words **and** in creating relationships among words (Diamond & Gutlohn, 2007).

- The more words you know, the more words you can learn! The 'Matthew effect' (Stanovich, 1986) is described by a number of researchers in relation to vocabulary knowledge, i.e. the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Students with bigger vocabularies tend to read more and therefore acquire more vocabulary. On the contrary students who are poorer readers tend to read less and fail to develop large vocabularies (Stahl & Nagy, 2006).

Reciprocal model of vocabulary & reading comprehension (Nagy, 2005)



- More than 60% of new words that a student encounters have a transparent structure, i.e. they can be broken down into meaningful parts, i.e. prefixes, compound words etc (Nagy & Anderson, 1984). This is why the direct teaching of independent word learning strategies can be extremely beneficial as pupils learn how to break down unfamiliar vocabulary to extract meaning.
- The amount of vocabulary which can be learnt from context alone is very small. Research suggests there is about a 15% chance of learning the meaning of a word after encountering it in text (Swanborn & deGlopper, 1999 cited by Nagy, 2005). Studies have suggested that less able students cannot use context successfully as they do not know the meaning of the other words in the context which are supposed to provide the clues (Stahl & Nagy, 2006). Therefore explicit vocabulary teaching must also take place.

Section 1

Explicit vocabulary teaching in action

We know that students who have language learning difficulties often have visual learning strengths. These may act as a compensatory strategy for auditory and/or linguistic weaknesses. Many of the strategies contained in this booklet focus on visual learning as this will support the learning style of a large number of students. We would encourage teachers to use the spoken word in addition to visual presentation methods.

1. Introduce vocabulary items using visual representations of the word.

Images could be taken from the internet or from Wikimedia which is an online database of copyright free images http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page

Example A was developed in English to support students reading the novel 'Fat Boy Swim'. The pictures are designed to give strong visual definitions of the words.

alert



weary



devouring



energetic

2. Use visual representations to link the word and the word meaning.

Use images which support links between the word and the word meaning. Alternatively encourage students to draw images which represent the word/meaning for them.

Example B was developed in Home Economics using different fonts in Microsoft Paint.



pierce

flexible

decorative

fray

Example C was developed by Science students for a wall display of word meanings.



increasing

Evaporation

vibration

Particles

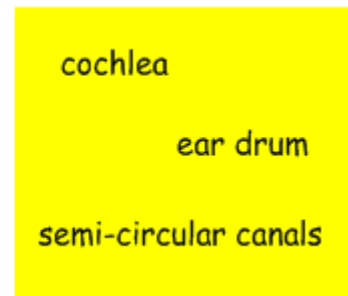
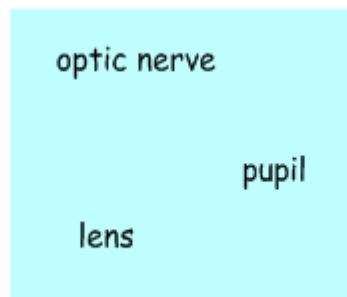
3. Use colour as a visual aid to links words & word meaning and to support recall.

Students can use colour to give a strong visual aid to support word learning and to assist recall. Example E shows how colour can be used to help categorise words into groups. This strengthens the links between words as the colour signifies the category/group they belong to.

Example D is taken from a Physics course. The students wrote the words to correspond with the colour of the wire used in a plug.



Example E is taken from a Science module (the colours were chosen by the students and words were sorted onto coloured paper. This could also be done on a SmartBoard.)



Example F is taken from a Geography module on weather systems. The pupils chose red for the words linked to a depression, i.e. warm air rises and blue for the words linked to an anticyclone, i.e. cool air sinks.

Anticyclone

High pressure
Light winds
Fine settled weather
Sinking air
Few clouds etc

Depression

Low pressure
Strong winds
Unsettled weather
Rising air
Clouds form etc

4. Break down words to identify known parts

Students need to learn words in an environment which encourages them to make connections to other words (Stahl & Nagy, 2006). Words are not stored as arbitrary units; they are stored in complex networks. It is important to make links between words as students can then integrate new information into existing cognitive structures. This also reduces the word learning demands of the task.

Example G is taken from Standard Grade Biology.

The target words are *kilojoules*, *imbalance*, and *calorific value*.

Students are asked to explicitly identify parts of the words they already know by underlining them.

Kilojoules ⇒ *kílo*

Imbalance ⇒ *balance*

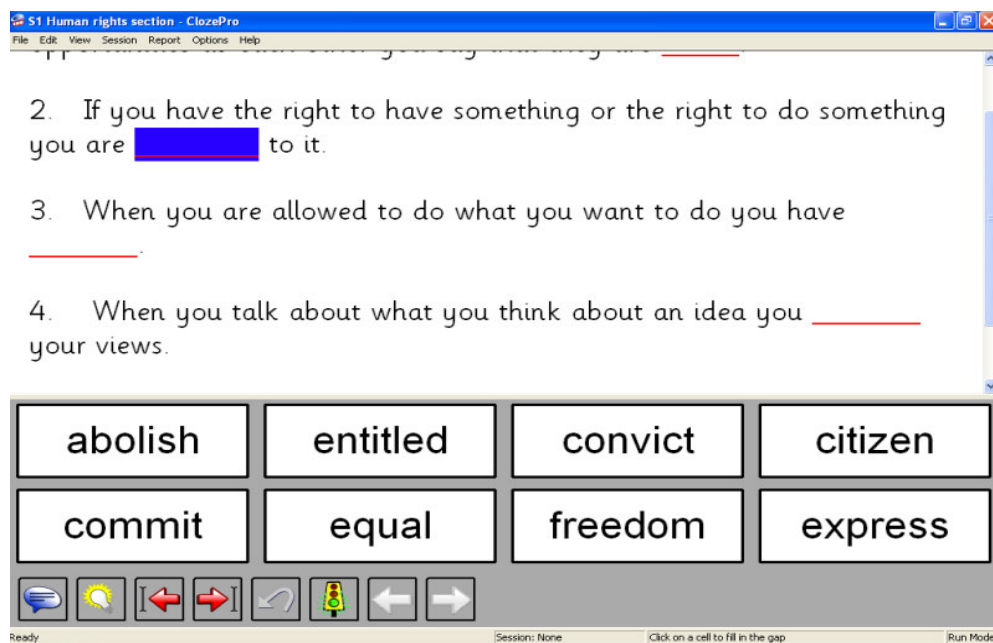
Calorific ⇒ *calorie*

The students discuss the parts of the word they already know and **predict** the word meaning. This helps to develop interest in words and to support active engagement in word learning.

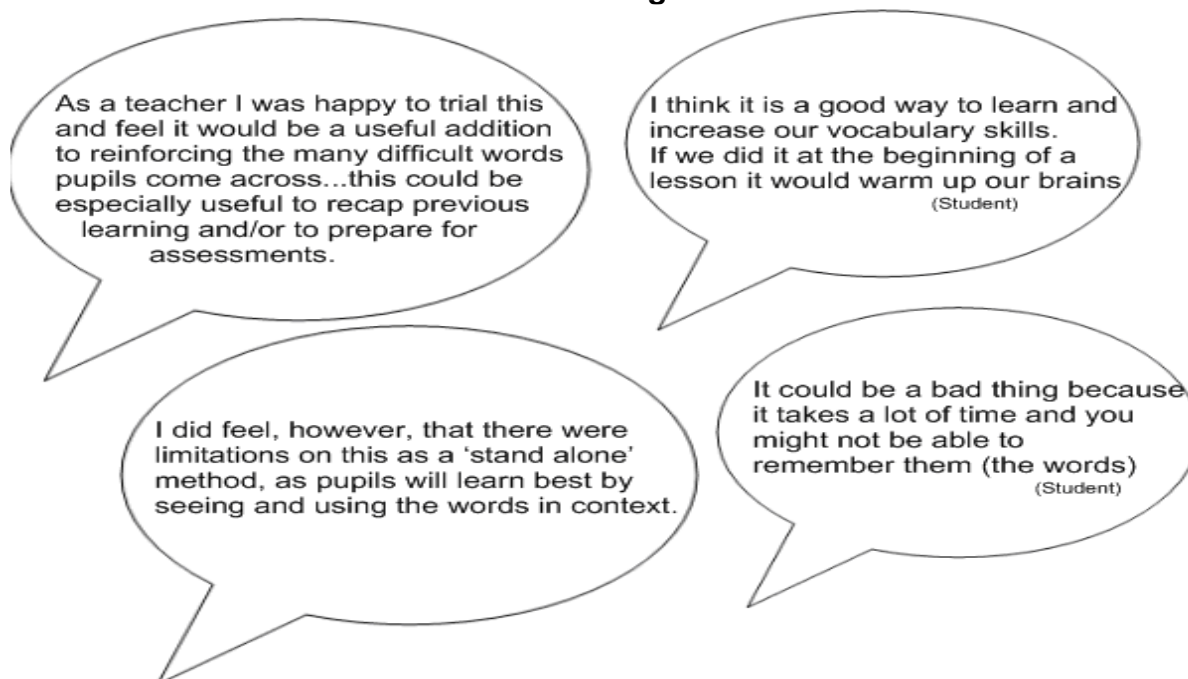
The word learning demands in this task are reduced as the students identify a small part of a word that is unfamiliar to them. This helps the task to seem more manageable rather than the challenge of learning an entire new word.

5. Where possible use ICT and/or software to facilitate ongoing revision and repetition of vocabulary learning.

a) ClozePro (produced by Crick Software) is available in some departments in the school. The school holds the master copy of this software therefore your Department can purchase an additional licence for a small fee to enable you to use this in your classroom.

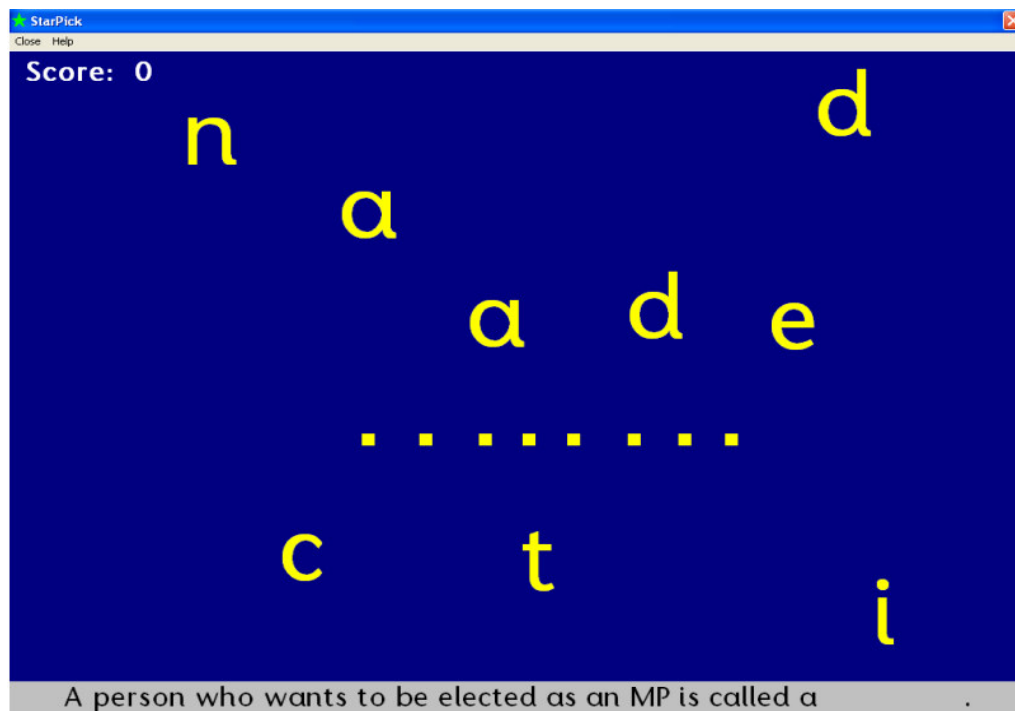


Comments from students and a teacher trialling ClozePro in GHS



b) StarSpell (Fisher Marriott Software) is also available in some departments.

StarSpell has traditionally been used as a spelling programme but it can be used for whole class work on vocabulary repetition and revision. It is an errorless learning programme with an attractive visual representation. Students click on the letters using a mouse or touch the SmartBoard screen. Teachers can input their own vocabulary and the definition which is best suited to the context. The programme may help students to learn the sound sequence of the word to enable them to say it and to reinforce the spelling.



Repetition and multiple exposures to words are essential components of vocabulary teaching (National Reading Panel, 2000). ICT can offer opportunities to repeat and reinforce vocabulary where time is limited and where teachers need to support visual learning. It is recommended that computer and multi-media are used to increase speed & variety of a student's access to vocabulary (National Reading Panel, 2000). If you do not have access to ICT there are many other ways you can provide opportunities for repetition. You colleagues have suggested ideas and you will find these on pages 21-23.

6. Consider the vocabulary you are teaching!

We often focus on the acquisition of terminology when we are teaching vocabulary. However, sometimes it is not the terminology which places the greatest demands on students. Often it is the words which surround the terminology that cause the greatest barrier to comprehension. Additionally these are the words which tend to have the most 'general' use, i.e. they will appear in other subject areas and in other contexts.

For example, in the Standard Grade Art course there is a large amount of terminology, e.g. *muted, contrast, tone, texture*. There is no doubt that these words require explanation and teaching but it is also important to consider the words which are found in the written information but which are not classified as terminology, e.g. *appreciate, visual, integral, justified, relevant*.

Researchers Beck, McKeown & Kucan advise spending time teaching this kind of useful vocabulary, which they call Tier 2 words.

- Tier 1-** everyday common vocabulary which would not need explicit teaching
- Tier 2 –** ***language enriching vocabulary***. (i.e. words which are often not explicitly taught but which will have general use across the curriculum.)
- Tier 3-** terminology and technical vocabulary.

Tier 2 words are identified as;

- words which are used by more mature language users and appear across a variety of domains
- words which can be worked with in various ways to enable students to develop a deep knowledge of them and their connections to other words
- words for which students already understand the general concept, but these provide greater precision and specificity.

For more information on this approach see Beck, McKeown & Kucan (2002) *Bringing Words to life*; robust vocabulary instruction. Guildford Press, NY.

b) Consider the definition you use.

Dictionaries can be a useful starting point for investigating new vocabulary but it cannot be assumed that a dictionary definition will enable a student to learn a new words. However, some dictionary definitions are too challenging for students to access independently. The message is... choose your dictionary carefully! An example of a dictionary which could be used with students is the Collins Co-Build Advanced Learner's English Dictionary. This dictionary is '*modelled on the way people explain the meanings of words to each other*' (CoBuild, 2006 p7). It also gives an appropriate example of the word used in context. For example, the definition of the word 'agile' is given from a range of sources.

– Definition from a standard adult dictionary

- 1 : marked by ready ability to move with quick easy grace, an *agile* dancer
- 2 : having a quick resourceful and adaptable character, an *agile* mind

– Definition from a Children's dictionary

- 1 : able to move easily : NIMBLE
- 2 : mentally quick, an *agile* thinker>

– Definition from the Collins Co-Build Advanced Learner's English Dictionary

- 1: Someone who is agile can move **quickly** and **easily**.

(In addition the Collins Co-Build Dictionary has a CD Rom which may be useful for students who have poor dictionary skills. Students can type the word they would like to know the meaning of into the search box. In addition, this can be projected from the computer as a whole class teaching tool.)

7. Ideas for classroom strategies

a) Word of the week

This is very easy to implement and again is a useful strategy to raise awareness of vocabulary and to generate interest in words. The 'word of the week' does not have to be an item of terminology but rather it could be a useful piece of vocabulary. Teachers can generate ideas for word categories, students can listen out for unfamiliar vocabulary on television, in other classes or teachers can offer an unfamiliar word for students to investigate. There are many options!

b) Word spotting/ noticing

This can be easily linked to the word of the week. Can your students spot & report back on any occasions when one of their other teachers used the 'word of the week'? Did they hear it used on the television or radio? How was it used? In what context was it used etc?

c) Whole class dictionaries

This strategy can be used in a variety of ways,

- The class can use the dictionary to keep a record of new words they read or hear you use.
- The class dictionary can be used to compile lists of new words and then used for revision, quizzes etc.
- The dictionary can have a 'theme', e.g. a dictionary of descriptive vocabulary.
- The words can be listed alphabetically or according to type, e.g. nouns, verbs etc.
- It can contain lists of useful words for the students to use in their own writing. Points or prizes can be given for using target items correctly in written work.

d) **Word histories** – this really can generate interest in words!

This is a slightly unusual angle and one which may appeal to some teachers and not to others! Many of your students have an extremely restricted knowledge of words. However, stories and information about words can generate discussion and interest. If you can encourage your students to be more interested in vocabulary and to notice new words, you will have taken a huge step forward.

For example here are some 'interesting' facts!

- Did you know that the word 'salary' comes from the word salt? (Roman soldiers were paid in salt because it was a valuable commodity.)
- Do you know where the word 'sandwich' came from? (The Fourth Earl of Sandwich had sandwiches made for him so that he did not have to leave his gambling table to go for a meal!)
- The word 'volcano' is based on mythology as Vulcan was the Roman god of fire.

If you know facts about words or are interested in word origins, share these with your students! They make words more interesting **and** ultimately more memorable. There are many books available on the topic if this appeals to you.

e) **Word Walls**

Word walls are posters showing key topic words. Word walls are a useful to remind teachers to focus on vocabulary; they can act as a memory aid! Word walls are usually only helpful to students if the teacher actively engages with the poster. Teachers who use this strategy in their classroom often add words to the poster during lessons or refer students to the poster for information or use it as part of their teaching, e.g. for quizzes etc.

Revision games and ideas for vocabulary consolidation activities

1. www.halfbakedsoftware.com

'The Hot Potatoes suite includes six applications, enabling you to create interactive multiple-choice, short-answer, jumbled-sentence, crossword, matching/ordering and gap-fill exercises for the World Wide Web. Hot Potatoes is not freeware, but it is free of charge for publicly funded, non-profit, educational users who make their pages available on the web. Other users must pay for a licence.' (Information from website)

2. "I am... who is?"

The teacher makes a sequence of cards & definitions, one for each student in the class. Each card contains a target word, i.e. "**I am...** *infrared*" and a definition, i.e. "**Who is...** *another name for heat radiation?*" Each card links to the next until every pupil has had a turn. The last pupil will simply have "I am X" on their card which signals the end of the activity. It is an engaging activity which encourages students to listen to each other, support each other with identifying the words on their card and helps to reinforce key words/concepts.

3. Word games

Students can make up spider diagrams of synonyms or antonyms for a target word.

Synonyms= words which mean the same as the target word (e.g. **exceptional** = brilliant, outstanding, extraordinary etc)

Antonym= words which mean the opposite of the target word (e.g. **exceptional** = mediocre, average, ordinary etc)

4. ClozePro

Ready made ClozePro grids can be downloaded from www.learninggrids.com

The grids are available for use by any Department who has ClozePro installed on their computer. There are a variety of topic areas available to download.

5. Acrostic poetry

These are quite tricky and might only be useful with more able students. Each letter of a target word is used at the start of the line of the poem and the words of the poem link to the target word. You can make and print them online at <http://www.readwritethink.org/materials/acrostic/>

6. Mystery words

Students use clues to figure out the identity of the mystery word. Words are chosen from a word list or word wall. Each clue should help the students to narrow down the list to find the correct word. Your clues can target components of a word other than the definition, for example, “The mystery word has 3 syllables.”, “The mystery word has 5 letters” “It rhymes with X”, “It is a doing word/describing word” etc.

7. Bingo

All year groups love bingo! Teachers can reinforce vocabulary by asking students to write a number of target words on their bingo sheet. The teacher reads the definition of the word and if the student has the corresponding word on their sheet they score it off. When all the words are scored off they call ‘bingo’ or another appropriate item of target vocabulary!

8. Mini-white boards

If you have access to mini-white boards these can be a great way to engage students with vocabulary learning. Teachers can read clues to a word/concept and ask students to write

their answers on the white board before raising it in to the air. You can use the boards to ask students to vote for the correct answer to a question. You can read a target word and ask them to write a synonym. The student who writes an appropriate word and raises their board in the air first wins!

9. Interactive voting systems

This system can be used to monitor vocabulary learning as each student is assigned an individual remote which can be tracked. The system has a wide variety of uses and although it can be time consuming, it appeals to a wide range of students.

10. Internet games

There are a huge number of web based games which can be used as whole class consolidation activities. An internet search should highlight games which are available in your subject area. A site which lets you make your own games is <http://puzzlemaker.discoveryeducation.com/>

11. Card/matching games

These games are low tech but if you introduce a timed/competitive element they become very appealing! Students are given a pack of words and a pack of definitions. Working on their own or in a pair they simply match the word and definition. They can try to beat their own time or play against another pupil. If you have access to a SmartBoard you can devise a similar activity. The students can then move words/definitions around to match them up on the board.

12. Never ending stories

This works well with small groups of students working together. The students tell a story and during the story they have to integrate a list of target words. Their peers give feedback on how successfully the word was used or how it could have been used better.

Section 2

Writing accessible worksheets

How to make the language of written materials accessible for students who may be finding it difficult to access the curriculum:

Hints and tips for teachers.

Research and classroom practice have identified issues which may cause students to have difficulty understanding written language (based on principles identified by Perera, 1994)

- The presentation of the subject material will impact on a student's ability to engage with the text. For example, issues with poor copies, small print size, inappropriate use of colour etc.
- Subject matter which is out with a student's knowledge and experience may cause them to have difficulty accessing the written materials.
- As previously discussed, materials which contain a large amount of unfamiliar vocabulary may be a significant barrier to reading comprehension.
- Materials which contain difficult grammar and complex grammatical structures may mean that materials are less accessible for some students. Sentence structures which are frequently used and familiar will be easier to process than unfamiliar sentence structures.
- Written materials which contain text which is organised in an unclear or unfamiliar way can cause barriers to understanding.

The examples contained in this section have been selected as snapshots of the language used in classroom materials and literature. We are acutely aware that classroom materials are used in conjunction with a wide variety of other supports. These examples are only being used to highlight grammatical issues within text. They are designed to act as a reference for members of staff who are keen to look at the accessibility of the language used in their materials and for those who are considering differentiating the language of their materials for less able students.

This section will deal with some grammatical issues in text and provide some guidance on organisation on text.

'If unfamiliar subject matter is combined with demanding sentence structure, the chances of full comprehension are reduced' (Perera, 1994).

When creating new worksheets and written materials it is important to carefully consider the overall structure and the language used so that pupils with language difficulties are not disadvantaged unnecessarily. For more able students, the language used in the classroom may not impact on their ability to access the curriculum but rather it can support the development of their language skills.

Of course there will be many occasions when it is necessary to introduce less able students to more challenging grammar. One helpful way of doing this may be to read materials aloud to students first so that they hear the more unfamiliar structures and then introduce the written form. Students often find text more difficult to understand because it lacks the prosodic features of speech, i.e. a teacher talking to students will use his/her voice, gesture, stress patterns, intonation etc to emphasise and group information (Perera, 1994). Therefore reading aloud may reduce the impact of some of the grammatical issues contained in written materials.

Please note that for less able students, difficulties with the comprehension of the complex concepts of a subject area may be compounded by difficulties with understanding complex language. For this group of pupils it is important to use more accessible language to help them engage with the topic and then, where appropriate, increase the complexity of the language. This may be necessary, for example, for examinations.

The following pages highlight some grammatical constructions which can be challenging for less able students. We offer some examples and recommendations for making the language more accessible without altering the content.

1. Complex sentences

Sentences may be complex for a number of reasons. Some students experience difficulty making links between sentences which causes misunderstanding. Some students find it difficult to know which word refers to which item when reading a paragraph. For example a pronoun may be used to refer to a previously mentioned item and there may be distance between it and the word it refers to. This can cause comprehension difficulties. If in doubt, make the links explicit!

– Think about the words you use in place of the subject, e.g. pronouns, especially if there is more than one noun/subject in the sentence.

a) Example

When making food products it is vital to measure all the ingredients accurately. This ensures that the correct amount of each is present and that they are in the right proportions to one another. If this does not happen, the mixture will not be successful.

b) Re-write as

*When making food products it is vital to measure all the ingredients accurately. **Accurate measuring** ensures that the correct amount of each of the **ingredients** is present and that they are in the right proportions to one another. If **accurate measuring of ingredients** does not happen, the mixture will not be successful.*

c) Example

When Piers' eldest son, Mark, showed him the lumps under his arms which had quickly grown to the size of apples, he knew it was the Black Death. His son's body was soon covered in purple spots. Some of the neighbours had fled to the town but to Piers this made no real sense... It was only a matter of time before it spread to the rest of the family.

(The first 'it' is not changed as there is only one thing that 'it' can refer to, i.e. 'the lumps'. The final sentence uses 'it' in two different ways. The first time 'it' is used to fill a place in the sentence whereas the second time 'it' is used it act as a pronoun. There is quite a distance between the pronoun and the subject referred to, it would therefore be advisable to repeat the subject.)

d) Re-write

*...It was only a matter of time before **the Black Death** spread to the rest of the family.*

2. Order of mention

Some students may have difficulty understanding grammatical markers such as 'before', 'first', 'unless' etc. These words may be difficult for students to extract and process the meaning. These words often alter the meaning of the sentence, i.e. the order of mention is not the order of execution. Additionally the student may simply follow instructions in the order they are placed in the text and this may lead to misunderstanding or error.

– **Think about the order in which you place items in your sentences so that students read them in the order they are required to carry them out.**

a) Example

Before you start the experiment, write the method into your jotter.

b) Rewrite as;

*Write the method into your jotter then **start the experiment.***

c) Example

You are going to complete a fun activity on the computer to test your knowledge. You will each take a turn & the person with the highest score will win a prize! First read section 4 of your green booklet.

d) Re-write as

Read section 4 of your green booklet.

When you have finished section 4 you are going to complete a fun activity on the computer to test your knowledge etc.

3. Think carefully about the style you choose to write your sentences (i.e. the use of passive sentences). Some students may misunderstand the emphasis of the sentence and therefore misinterpret the meaning.

The passive is often used to make the style of writing seem more impersonal or formal. For example, '*Hydrogen and oxygen were mixed during the experiment*' (passive), '*We mixed hydrogen and oxygen during the experiment*' (active).

Students can find passive constructions difficult to understand because they tend to occur very infrequently in spoken language. Additionally the passive can be difficult to process as the student may not be clear who or what is the main subject of the sentence. For example, '*The First Minister was welcomed by the Councillor*' (passive), '*The Councillor welcomed the First Minister*' (active). Students are more familiar with sentences where the subject comes early/first in the sentence. Plain English campaigns recommend that all writers avoid using the passive where possible!

a) Example;

A product can be produced by selecting an appropriate fabric based on its comfort, suitability, durability, attractiveness and purpose.

b) Re-write as;

We select an appropriate fabric based on comfort, suitability, durability, attractiveness and purpose to produce a product.

c) Example

Estimates suggest that over 7 million homes have been destroyed by the heaviest rains in living memory.

d) Re-write as

The heaviest rains in living memory have destroyed over 7 million homes.

4. Interrupting constructions

This is a technical term for words which interrupt the flow of a sentence. These are often found in brackets or in between commas. This feature is quite challenging as students need to hold the first part of the sentence in their short term memory, process the middle part (the bit which interrupts), read the final part and link it back to the initial part!

a) Example

The aorta takes blood to all the organs of the body, which use up the oxygen as the blood passes through, making it become deoxygenated.

b) Rewrite as;

The aorta takes blood to all the organs of the body. The organs use up the oxygen as the blood passes through them and the blood becomes deoxygenated.

c) Example

The Bible, used by many Christians as their main source of learning in life, has a special authority for them. Find out more about this phenomenon by completing the 'New Steps in 'Religious Education' Unit 3.1.

d) Re-write as;

Many Christians use the Bible as their main source of learning in life. The Bible has a special authority for Christians etc

e) Example

The first farmers discovered that keeping and breeding animals meant they could kill animals whenever they wanted. They discovered that when trees and stones were cleared away, seeds could be sown to grow crops which provided more grain for throughout the year.

f) Re-write as (there are various options)

...The farmers cleared the trees and stones from the land. They discovered that seed could be sown to grow crops which provided more grain for throughout the year.

5. Ellipsis

This is a commonly used construction in written language. Ellipsis occurs where words which are not necessarily required to make a complete sentence are omitted. Difficulty occurs when students find it challenging to recover the 'missing' words from the text. Some students may find it difficult to 'mentally reinsert' the words and therefore may lose the sense of the sentence.

a) Example;

Euglena viridis uses its contractile vacuole to discharge unwanted water into the reservoir and then outside of the cell.

b) Rewrite as;

*Euglena viridis uses its contractile vacuole to discharge unwanted water into the reservoir and then **discharge the unwanted water** outside of the cell.*

c) Example;

Science has given us a much wider range of materials to use when constructing our homes and the machines which today do so much of the hard work. (Perera, 1994)

d) Re-write as;

*Science has given us a much wider range of materials to use when constructing our homes and **it has given us** the machines which ...*

e) Example;

Bradford is the chief town for the marketing of the cloth and Leeds for the manufacture of ready made clothing. (Perera, 1994)

f) Re-write as;

*Bradford is the chief town for the marketing of the cloth and Leeds **is the chief town** for the manufacture...*

6. Complex vocabulary in worksheets

As previously mentioned, it may be necessary to use or expose pupils to more challenging or less familiar vocabulary. In this instance, think about putting the more familiar word in brackets after the target word. It is helpful to expose students to more complex vocabulary to support their vocabulary development but they may need support with learning the word meaning.

It may be useful to agree how you are going to address this as a Department. This would enable pupils to become familiar with your style & know that they can look in the brackets for a more familiar word. For example, as a Department you may agree to use (X) for definitions and use {ABC} or [ABC] for other information you need to include in brackets.

a) Example;

We will project the white light through a combination of two coloured filters. Can you predict what will happen?

b) Rewrite as;

We will project the white light through a combination of two coloured filters. Can you predict (guess) what will happen?

c) Example;

King John ruled like a puppet whose strings were being pulled by King Edward I of England. John was often summoned to Edward's court in London...

d) Re-write as;

King John ruled like a puppet whose strings were being pulled by King Edward I of England. John was often summoned (called) to Edward's court in London...

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