



# Tiers of Vocabulary

Vocabulary is important for all aspects of daily life such as during conversation, following instructions, reading and writing. Early language development is important for reading and academic success. Some students require vocabulary to be explicitly taught as it may be difficult to acquire vocabulary through incidental learning alone.

Three tiers of vocabulary words were developed by Beck, McKeown and Kucan to help in selecting vocabulary words for instruction.

**Keywords:** *vocabulary, language development, strategies, communication*

## Choosing Target Vocabulary Words

It is suggested that when choosing words, consider:

- Does the student know the word?
- How useful is the word for reading, writing or talking?
- Does the word appear often in other texts or with a high degree of frequency?

### Tier 1

- Consists of basic words used in everyday conversation.
- Most students are familiar with these words and rarely require explicit instruction.
- However, students who have difficulty with the basics of the English language should be taught Tier 1 words.
- For example, *run, sad, book, park, & big, etc.*

### Tier 2

- Consists of more complex words which are frequently used academically.
- These words are important for comprehension and students commonly require these words to be taught.
- For example, *exclaim, protested, exasperated, environment, severe, etc.*

### Tier 3

- Consists of content-specific words from academic topics such as Science and Mathematics. These words are not frequently found in conversation but are important for understanding the topics.
- These words are often explicitly taught in class.
- For example, *photosynthesis, respiration, chlorophyll, xylem and phloem, etc.*

## Teaching Vocabulary Words

It is suggested that five to seven words are prioritised and taught per week. Students are more likely to remember this vocabulary if they are using it consistently and across different contexts and activities. A student is able to demonstrate their understanding of vocabulary words when they are able to provide its meaning, talk about similarly related words and use it in conversation and writing.



### Want to learn more?

To learn more about Language Disorder and how to support children and young people for whom language is their primary disorder, please contact Speech and Language Development Australia (SALDA). SALDA provides holistic, innovative and effective therapy, education and support services and has a transdisciplinary team of speech pathologists, occupational therapists, educators, psychologists and physiotherapists.

Contact: 1300 881 763 or [hello@salda.org.au](mailto:hello@salda.org.au)

Website: [www.salda.org.au](http://www.salda.org.au)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/SALDAustralia](https://www.facebook.com/SALDAustralia)

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