

Developing language in Primary and Secondary settings

Vocabulary in the English language is extremely complex; one word can carry many meanings which are context and subject specific. For example, the word 'prime' in maths has a different meaning to the word 'prime' in English, which is why developing pupils' disciplinary literacy is incredibly important. Pupils need to be explicitly taught the meaning of words in different contexts and subject disciplines. Therefore, every teacher is responsible for developing pupils' literacy, including the teaching of vocabulary. This can be done by ensuring pupils have the opportunity to learn *new* words and explore ways to use *familiar* words in *new* contexts.

Vocabulary should be taught to pupils both implicitly, through modelling high-quality oral language, and explicitly, via the direct teaching of new words.

When explicitly teaching new words, it is important that you do so in a meaningful way. If you provide pupils with a long list of words without attaching meaning to them, they are unlikely to understand or use those terms at a later stage (Quigley, 2019). Instead, to make words more memorable, you should help pupils to attach meaning to them. This can be done in many ways, but this session will focus on teaching the morphology (parts) and etymology (origins) of words.

Morphology

Morphology is the study of the structure and parts of words. Words can be broken down into their parts (morphemes) and each carries a meaning. By asking pupils to study morphemes, you can help them to attach meaning to abstract words.

The common morphemes pupils will learn about are:

- **root:** the primary part of a word which conveys most of a word's meaning
- **prefix:** a morpheme added before the root of a word
- **suffix:** a morpheme added after the root of a word

Why teach morphology?

Teaching pupils the meaning of different roots, suffixes and prefixes enables them to expand their vocabulary repertoire significantly. They will also develop an understanding of word-building, which they can apply to other vocabulary. Understanding word building helps pupils to decode unfamiliar words when reading, as they can infer what the word might mean if they understand a part of it, such as the root, prefix or suffix.

In the primary setting, you might teach pupils that the prefix 'in' can mean 'in', 'on' or 'not'. After teaching this, you might ask pupils to explore the prefix in different words such as, 'inject', 'influx' and 'insane'.

This develops pupils' receptive and expressive language, as they gain an understanding of what the prefix 'in' means and how to use it in their own speech.

In the Secondary setting, you might combine morphology with etymology.

Etymology

Etymology is the study of the origin of words. Many academic, subject-specific words have Latin or Greek origins (Nagy & Townsend, 2012). Pupils may find them trickier to understand as they are less frequently encountered in everyday language. You can teach these abstract words by helping pupils to attach meaning to them. This can be done by teaching the origins of their constituent morphemes. The example below helps to illustrate this:

Example: To help pupils understand what photosynthesis means, you might teach them the morphology (photo-synthesis) and etymology (light- with- setting) of the word:



Open image in new tab: [The morphology of Photosynthesis](#)

'The morphology of Photosynthesis', taken from [Improving Literacy in Secondary School](#) (EEF, 2019)

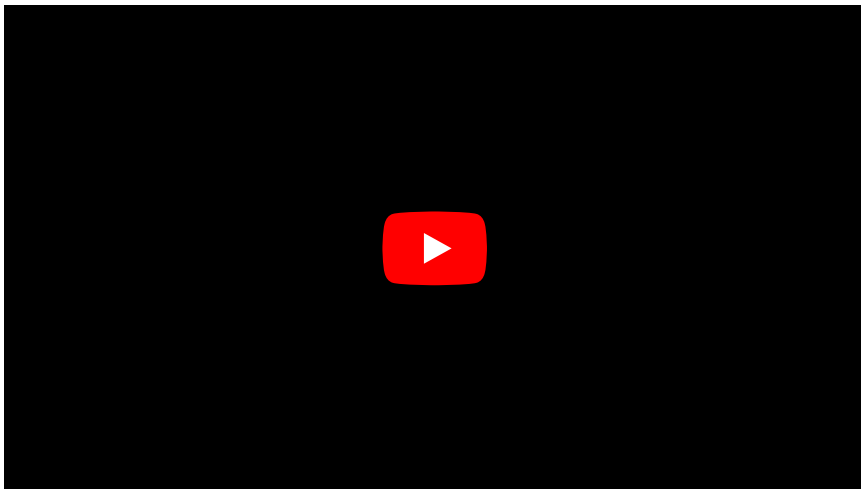
Teaching vocabulary in action

When teaching any vocabulary, it is helpful to ensure that it is related to the topic that pupils are learning about (EEF, 2020). Teaching word meanings at the start of a topic and revisiting them throughout means pupils are more likely to comprehend the content being taught during lessons. It also means they are regularly exposed to the vocabulary throughout the topic, making it more memorable. They can hear it being used in context and have multiple opportunities to apply it during speaking and listening, reading, and writing.

There are many ways that vocabulary can be explicitly and implicitly taught. Choose one of the videos below to watch

this in practice.

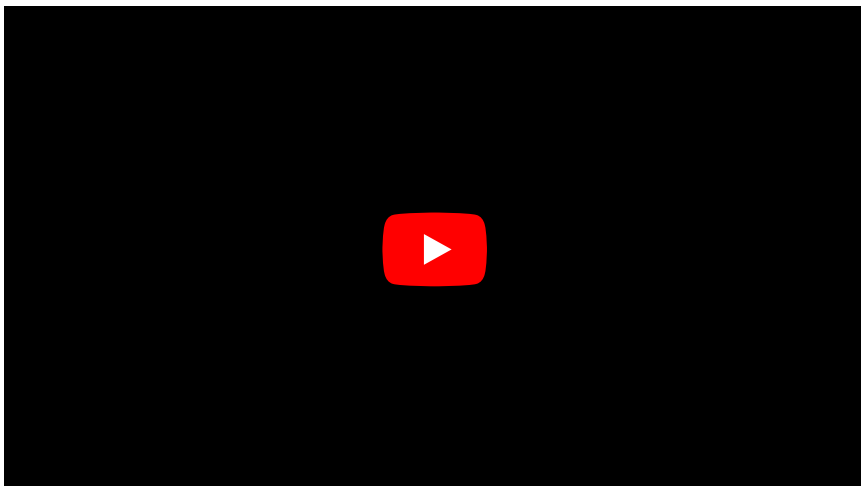
Primary



Direct Link: [Teaching vocabulary - Primary at Reach Academy](#)

Direct Link to an audio described version of this video: [Teaching vocabulary - Primary at Reach Academy](#)
([this link opens in a new window/tab](#))

Secondary



Direct link to: [Teaching vocabulary - Harpreet Dhillon at Reach Academy](#)

Direct Link to an audio described version of this video: [Teaching vocabulary - Harpreet Dhillon at Reach Academy](#)([this link opens in a new window/tab](#))

Hear from a teacher

Identifying key vocabulary to teach, and planning how you will do so, can be tricky. Listen to Liam Milne from St Anthony's Academy as he discusses his approach to this.



Direct Link: [Teaching vocabulary](#)

Transcript: [Teaching vocabulary](#)

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