

## Teaching Vocabulary

**By Liam Milne**

Developing language and vocabulary is critical in a pupil's ability to succeed across the curriculum. English is both a subject in its own right and often the medium for teaching within many lessons. As such, developing language and vocabulary has a profound effect on whether a pupil is able to access all areas of the curriculum. Without developing language and vocabulary in lessons, pupils can struggle to access content and even exam and assessment questions, so it is vital, when considering the impact it may have upon their attainment. In addition, it can give pupils more confidence to discuss topics and consequently deepen their knowledge.

At the beginning of a year I usually have around 30 key terms that my pupils need to learn in order to gain a deep understanding of the topics I teach in a year. I want them to be able to use this vocabulary both during discussions inside and outside of the classroom, and when answering assessed questions.

I stagger the learning and application of these terms over the course of a unit. For example, in Year 9 we teach a module on Judaism, so at the beginning of this unit, the pupils are presented with 8 key terms which centre around Jewish festivals, rituals and places of worship.

At home, pupils are asked to revise and prepare to be tested on these key terms. Formative testing is used to strengthen recall and assess whether pupils have improved their understanding of the vocabulary. This usually takes the form of a basic quiz where I read the key term and the pupils write down what they think the definition is.

Once pupils have mastered their knowledge and understanding of the key terms and definitions, I set formative exam questions which assess a pupil's knowledge on a topic and their ability to apply key terms and definitions in their extended writing. I encourage pupils to use key vocabulary by making the link between using it and their attainment explicit. For example, in our Judaism module, pupils are aware that if they don't use key Jewish terminology, they are unable to achieve the highest bands and the top marks.

Pupils are given verbal feedback on their exam essays and are encouraged to discuss the feedback given and how it could be implemented in their answers – giving them greater scope to use and apply subject specific terms, therefore building their vocabulary.

'Learning talk' is also a powerful tool for building language and vocabulary and is something I regularly build into my lessons. 'Learning talk' is when pupils verbalise what they understand about certain terms, topics or issues. For example, I have, in the past, placed the word 'Synagogue' or 'Bar Mitzvah' onto the white board and set a timer of three minutes, asking pupils to discuss what they know about these key terms and consider how these words link to their own lives. This gives pupils a chance to explore vocabulary in a safe space where they can share their ideas and learn from their peers, which helps to build their more general and subject specific vocabulary. (3:00)

