

Effective Use of Context Vocabulary

Step 1: Locate useful and important vocabulary words

Vocabulary words are most useful to students when they recognize them in their reading and can use them in their writing. Therefore, it is important to introduce students to unfamiliar words before they are exposed to them in a text. If students come across an unfamiliar word while reading, they are more likely to wonder about its meaning if they have at least seen or heard it before.

To find vocabulary words for students to learn, turn to any of the following sources:

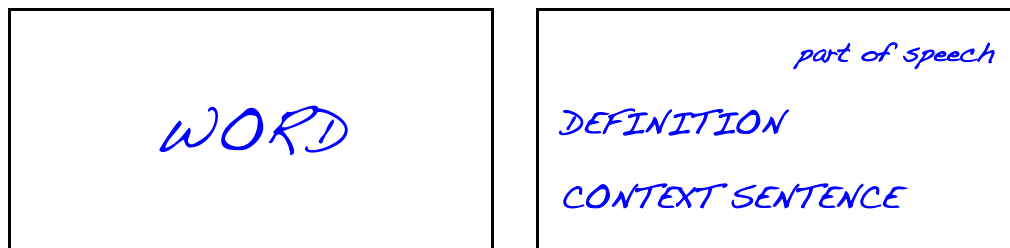
1. **Textbooks:** use boldfaced words
2. **Novels and short stories:** read ahead and write down a few of them from the reading assignment that your students are about to complete.
3. **Vocabulary workbooks and guides:** these have useful lists of important vocabulary words to know

Step 2: Help students create a set of personal vocabulary cards

1. Choose one or two vocabulary words each day and put them on the board.

More than 2 words can be overwhelming and detract from a student's ability to recall and use them.

2. Using one note card per word, have students write the word on one side, then the definition, part of speech, and a context sentence on the other side



3. Make sure that your students keep their vocabulary cards together somewhere in the classroom where they will not get lost and can be accessed easily during class time.

Step 3: Help students learn the words by using cards

Once each student has a collection of at least 10 word cards, start using them in review activities to reinforce meaning and use. This reinforcement can take many forms, and it is usually more helpful when it taps into the student's creativity and/or personal learning style. Try the following activities as context vocabulary practice:

1. **Creative Writing:** Ask students to choose 3-5 of their words (at random or deliberately) and use those words to write a story, descriptive paragraph, etc.
2. **Word Drawings:** Ask students to choose a difficult word to illustrate. This works well with visual learners because they can associate the definition of the word with an image.
3. **Synonyms & Antonyms:** Ask students to choose a word from their collections (or have them all use the same word). Hand out paper and ask them to write that word on the top of the page then fold it lengthwise. In one column have the write synonyms for that word, and then fill the other with antonyms.

<i>Melancholy</i>	
<i>Synonyms:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ <i>sad</i>▪ <i>depressed</i>▪ <i>gloomy</i>	<i>Antonyms:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ <i>happy</i>▪ <i>cheerful</i>

This can be turned into a timed activity, a competition, or reference sheet, depending on the personality and needs of your class.

1. **Formal Writing:** When students have a composition or summary to write for class, have them choose words to incorporate into that writing assignment.
2. **Structured Pull-outs:** Ask students to pull specific words out of their collection and ask them to tell you what they have in common.

Example: Take out the words “revolutionary,” “original,” and “innovative.” Without looking at the back, what do they have in common? What is something that they could all describe?

3. **Independent Pull-Outs:** Give the class a category ask students to choose 3 words from their collections that could fit into that category.

Example: Find 3 words that could describe a happy moment.

(when students are done) What words did you choose? How do they fit this category?

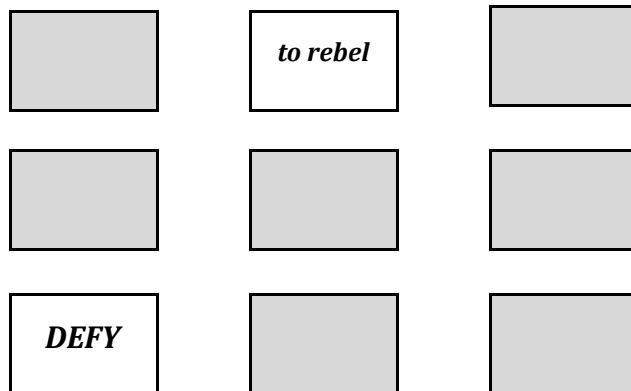
4. **Word Chains:** take a vocabulary word that you can manipulate and make a chain out of it, changing part of speech, prefixes, suffixes, etc.

Example:

original word	=	important
make it an adverb	=	importantly
make it a noun	=	importance
opposite of "important"	=	unimportant

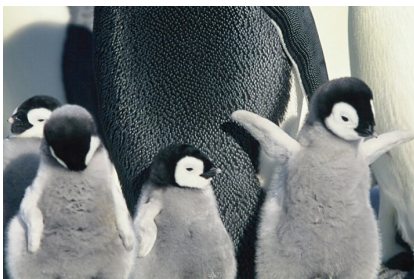
5. **Card Games:** play go-fish, memory, etc., to match words to definitions, match words with similar meanings, etc.

EXAMPLE: make a memory game



6. **Picture Writing:** show your students a photo or piece of artwork to describe using 3 vocabulary words.

Example: Describe this photo using "ecstatic," "frolic," and "cautious."



A STUDENT MIGHT WRITE: *The baby penguins frolic together on a cold day. At least one of them is ecstatic to be with his friends, since his wings are raised happily in the air. However, the mother penguin's cautious protection of them keeps the babies close by.*

Step 4: Ensure individual student mastery

Once students have **25 vocabulary words** in their collection and have had adequate practice with them, quiz them on the meanings of these words. This can be done with a written quiz or a one-on-one oral drill. Words that they definitely know can be placed aside, while those that still pose a challenge to the student should be kept in active use as they increase the number of words in their collections. Come back to the familiar words every once in a while so that students don't forget them, but focus your activities on allowing them to learn the words that they still struggle to use or define correctly.

Note: At this point, each student's collection will start to look different, depending in how quickly they individually master new vocabulary words.