

VOCABULARY

Challenges	Possible Solutions
What do I need to remember as I plan and deliver STAR vocabulary lessons for the first time?	Keep the overall goal of STAR vocabulary instruction in mind: To build breadth and depth of Tier 2 (or academic vocabulary) knowledge and usage.
There are so many vocabulary words to teach! How do I choose words most appropriate for most students?	Vocabulary word tiers are based on utility and frequency within spoken and written English (Beck, I.L., McKeown M.G., & Omanson, R. 1987. <i>The nature of vocabulary acquisition</i> . Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum). These experts recommend providing Tier Two word instruction as soon as students can manage everyday or basic conversation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tier One words are of <i>high frequency</i>. These concrete words occur naturally in spoken language and appear in lower-level print materials (1st-3rd grade). • Tier Two words are of <i>middle frequency</i>. These abstract words appear in print (and testing) materials at 4th grade and above and should be taught explicitly. • Tier Three words are of <i>low frequency</i>. These subject-specific or more “scholarly” words appear in higher-level print materials (such as science, social studies, mathematics) and should be taught within these contexts.
Where do I start on Tier Two lists?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Remember that all STAR students between Vocabulary Instructional Levels 4-8 will benefit from Tier 2 instruction. They can be taught as a large group (up to 15-20 students). 2. There is not a recommended starting point and it will be impossible to teach all 570 academic ‘head words’ (or heads of word families). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think frequency; use the <i>Academic Word List</i> at http://www.academicvocabularyexercises.com, which presents 10 sublists from most to least frequent • Think friendly; use Merriam Webster at http://www.merriam-webster.com, which presents simpler definitions for ELLs and kids • Think focused; buy and use a comprehensive, academic word curriculum (see next pages for recommendations).
How can limit vocabulary lesson time? My students could go on forever!	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Post your STAR schedule on the board. Students can help keep the lessons (especially vocabulary) “on-time.” 2. Set the timer on your cell phone (or a student’s cell phone). The ring will break up the vocabulary conversation and remind everyone to move along. 3. Plan for the first day’s lesson, when you orally introduce (or model) new words, meanings, and contexts, to likely take more time. The next days’ lessons, when you review the words and guide students’ practice with them, will likely take less time.

<p>How many Tier Two words should I teach per week?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. STAR vocabulary instruction is focused on QUALITY, not quantity. Depending on the length and frequency of your STAR class or instruction, teach 2-5 words <i>deeply</i> (meaning well) a week. 2. Mastery of Tier Two words is accomplished with an explicit instruction model that offers multiple oral and written exposures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TELL or MODEL word pronunciations, parts of speech, meanings, synonyms/antonyms (optional), & teacher contexts • PROMPT and GUIDE student usage & contexts • Further GUIDE student written practice activities • APPLY word knowledge to text with independent or pair assignments, Yes/No/Why, or Read/Respond
<p>Most of the published vocabulary materials have too many words (10 rather than 5 words per unit or week).</p> <p>How do I determine the right level of <i>Words to Learn By</i>?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Go to http://atlasabe.org/resources/ebri/ebri-vocabulary to download FREE curricula based on 5 words/week or 1 word/day (which is effective when instruction is limited or attendance is irregular). 2. Purchase <i>Words to Learn By</i> from McGraw-Hill. Each lesson presents 5 words and many guided practice and application exercises. Orally present words, meanings, and contexts BEFORE assigning exercises. Consider having students download the app that provides additional practice and games. 3. According to the <i>Words to Learn By</i> website, <i>Building Academic Vocabulary</i> is appropriate for Levels 4–5; <i>Expanding Academic Vocabulary</i> for Levels 5–7; and <i>Advancing Academic Vocabulary</i> for Levels 7–9. Over the years, MN STAR trainers have found that many of their ABE STAR students already know the words from the <i>Building</i> level. However, this may not be true for ESL STAR students.
<p>Vocabulary lessons can turn into alphabetics, grammar, or even comprehension lessons. How can I keep to my vocabulary lesson time frame?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clearly explain the purpose and process of explicit vocabulary instruction; re-visit as needed. 2. Acknowledge questions with a quick answer (the student may be confused between two similar spelled or sounded words), but bring the focus back to the vocabulary word. 3. Recognize students’ needs to understand more, but as the “director” of explicit instruction, limit the time spent on decoding or grammar rules. 4. Remind them that you will be teaching alphabetics and comprehension too (as needed)!
<p>How many definitions for a word should I provide?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. On Day 1, focus on ONE word form and meaning, often the most common or frequent. Acknowledge there are other forms and meanings, but stay focused on the ONE word and meaning. 2. On Days 2-5, other forms of the word will naturally arise in teacher and student shared contexts and written assignments. 3. If appropriate, create a word map of the word from Day 1 and other family “members”. Look for the relationships between them.
<p>How many exposures are necessary for students to learn a new word?</p>	<p>According to a number of language and literacy experts, it takes 15-20 exposures over time -- not all at once -- to know a word well and in multiple contexts. The recommended vocabulary instructional materials will provide <i>at least</i> this many exposures.</p>

<p>Students are too shy to use words in context and teachers are reluctant to put students “on the spot.”</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create sentence prompts carefully; avoid personal prompts if your students are uncomfortable with sharing personal information. 2. Use yourself as context (as much as you’re willing to share) so that students can experience a safe level of sharing. 3. Institute a policy of “what is said in the STAR classroom stays in the STAR classroom.” 4. Have individual students or pairs write private sentences on quadrant charts, word maps, or flashcards.
<p>I don’t have enough time for application activities in my short STAR class.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cut back the number of words; build breadth and depth of 2-3 words per week. 2. Make a point of integrating taught words into classroom discussion and other instruction. 3. Ask students to share when and how they’ve heard or seen taught words outside the classroom. 4. Don’t hurry into application activities; students must be ready for this higher-level use of academic words in context.
<p>How do I catch students up when they miss vocabulary instruction?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be sure you are enforcing your attendance policies. Students can’t learn if they aren’t in class to receive instruction. 2. If you can’t set up attendance policies (often due to low class enrollment), consider using standalone, <i>Vocabulary Workouts</i> available at http://atlasabe.org/resources/ebri/ebri-vocabulary. 3. Use quadrant charts, word maps, or flashcards during instruction. Encourage students to get or make copies from each other. 4. Post taught words on the wall for students to copy and reference as needed. Revisit them occasionally to catch-up and refresh pronunciations and meanings. 5. Consider having absent students “sit out” temporarily (and work on other reading activities) until you introduce a new set of words. This temporary “sit-out” will likely not be more than a week. 6. Begin each day with a quick review of the week’s words and simple meanings.
<p>How do I get students to use new vocabulary words in speaking and writing?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Offer short, table conversation opportunities where students are expected to use a combination of taught Tier 2 words. 2. Assign sentence or paragraph writing activities after guided practice or for those students who already know the words. 3. Post taught and learned words on small posters or on a large word wall. Ask students to use any of the words in oral or written sentences.
<p>Should I be assigning vocabulary homework?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consider asking students to finish vocabulary workbook or worksheet exercises started in class at home. Plan to review (check and clarify) their answers at the start of the next class. 2. If homework completion is unreasonable, simply ask them to look, listen, and share use of taught words outside of class.