

## Vocabulary Instruction for STAR/EBRI Volunteers

---

By Marn Frank, ATLAS Literacy & STAR Coordinator and Rob Podlasek, MLC Senior Training Manager

This handout describes what STAR/EBRI volunteers “need to know” about evidence-based and explicit vocabulary instruction. It also clarifies how they can build or expand students’ Tier Two or academic vocabulary knowledge and usage.

**What is vocabulary?** Vocabulary includes recognizing words used in speech or print materials and knowing their meanings. A strong vocabulary requires both **breadth and depth**. Breadth means having knowledge of different kinds of words (*quantity*). Reading experts have identified three word tiers: Tier One are concrete and of high frequency in spoken language and easier print materials; Tier Two are abstract and of high frequency in print materials at 4<sup>th</sup> grade and above; and Tier Three are content-specific and of high frequency in textbook materials. Depth means having deep and flexible knowledge of words (*quality*). An example of depth is recognizing and knowing reflect, reflects, reflected, reflector, reflection, and reflective as used in different sentences or contexts.

**Who are your vocabulary students?** Your vocabulary students are native or non-native English speakers who need to broaden and deepen their vocabulary knowledge. Intermediate ABE and Advanced ESL students are usually ready for Tier Two or academic word instruction. Some Intermediate ESL students may also be ready - if they can converse easily in English. Most Beginning ABE and ESL students need to focus on expanding their knowledge and usage of Tier One words.

**What is your volunteer role for explanation?** When you meet new vocabulary students, briefly explain the value and process of instruction. Example: “Good readers need to recognize and know many words. Together, we will practice reading and writing Tier Two words, which show up frequently in books, newspapers, tests, conversations, and online. Knowing more of them will help you understand more while reading, listening or talking, and using the Internet.

**What is your volunteer role for modeling?** Ideally, the STAR/EBRI teacher should provide modeling of academic vocabulary words with the entire group. However, if you work with students individually, here is the process: Teach 3-5 words over a week or two. Teach one word at a time by telling the pronunciation, part of speech, simple meaning, and personal examples. As you tell, have students fill out a blank or partially-completed word chart or map. Then ask questions for them to answer in sentences using the new words. Examples: *What did you do previous to reading class? How long is a brief phone call or conversation?* As needed, provide gentle correction on their pronunciation, usage, and sentence structure. This oral processing may take up to 30 minutes!

## Vocabulary Instruction for STAR/EBRI Volunteers

By Marn Frank, ATLAS Literacy & STAR Coordinator and Rob Podlasek, MLC Senior Training Manager

**What is your volunteer role for guided practice?** Your guidance moves students from oral to written practice, occurs over several lessons, and provides multiple exposures to the new words. Begin by reviewing the pronunciations and meanings of the 3-5 words. Then guide completion of simple written activities such as Matching or Fill in the Blanks. Do at least one example and check answers together. Next, guide completion of more complex activities such as Sentence Completions or Multiple Choice. Again, do at least one example and check or share answers together.

**What is your volunteer role for application and monitoring?** Generally, vocabulary application involves students in reading passages or answering questions that use the new words. Here are brief descriptions of four activities you might be asked to support:

- **Read and Respond:** You and the students read a passage that does not use the new words. However, you ask questions about the passage using 1-2 of the new words. Example: *What specific items do most birds use to build a nest?*
- **Yes/No/Why or True/False/Why:** You ask questions using 1-2 of the new words that students answer with yes/no or true/false and a reason. Examples: *Taking time to reflect on mistakes is helpful. A brief walk every day can improve mood and health.*
- **Reading Connection** (from *Words to Learn By* series): You and the students read a passage that uses the new words. They answer the questions below and if time allows, share their responses.
- **Writing Connection** (from *Words to Learn By* series): You and the students read writing prompts that use the new words. They write complete sentences and if time allows, share their responses.

Some STAR/EBRI teachers monitor students' progress with weekly or monthly vocabulary quizzes. Others have students redo a knowledge rating scale. Many create a word wall or word charts for reusing, reviewing, or referencing taught and learned words.

### Need or want to learn more?

- ✓ If you have questions about vocabulary instruction, the #1 person to ask is the STAR/EBRI teacher!
- ✓ You can also check out volunteer trainings and resources from the Minnesota Literacy Council at <http://mnliteracy.org>.
- ✓ If you want more information on vocabulary instruction, check out the ABE Teaching and Learning Advancement System (ATLAS) website at <http://atlasabe.org/resources/ebri/ebri-vocabulary>.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR VALUABLE TIME AND CONTRIBUTION!**