

## ABOUT WORDS



Words are not simple. There are so many different types of words, and students need to learn them all. A large and versatile vocabulary is directly related to listening comprehension, reading comprehension, oral expression, and writing.

Words vary according to how concrete or abstract they are. Some words can be easily depicted in a photo or illustration, whereas others are difficult to imagine in your mind. Words that give young students a challenge are those with more than one meaning.

Students need to know a lot of words (vocabulary breadth) and they need to know important words really well (vocabulary depth). Likewise, students need to have receptive and expressive understanding of challenging words to be successful in school.

The extent to which students learn new words has to do with the characteristics and definitions of the words as well as how they are taught. Every word cannot be taught the exact same way, so it is important to know the best ways to teach each type of word.

### Kindergarten students should...

- begin to use abstract words.
- begin to use non-imageable words.
- recognize that some words have more than one meaning.
- monitor their familiarity and knowledge of words.
- begin to use clues to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words.
- apply background knowledge to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words.
- understand and use words with prefixes and suffixes.
- begin to change the meaning of a word by adding/removing prefixes and suffixes.

### TYPES OF WORDS TO TEACH

- **General Academic Words** = challenging words that are useful across many topics and contexts
- **Domain-specific Words** = difficult words that are only needed for specific topics and contexts, such as in social studies, math, or science lessons
- **Multiple Meaning Words** = words that have more than one definition
- **Morphologically Complex Words** = words that have two or more morphemes (morphemes are word parts with meaning)
- **Abstract Words** = words that cannot be experienced through the senses
- **Non Imageable Words** = words for which a mental image cannot be easily formed

## EXAMPLES OF WORDS TO TEACH IN KINDERGARTEN

### General Academic Words

- clue
- copy
- detail
- sort
- explain
- near
- finish
- perform
- change
- act
- behind
- cover
- collect
- stack

### Domain-specific Words

- gas
- liquid
- energy
- weather
- seed
- shadow
- solid
- globe
- season
- symbol
- community
- balance
- equal
- whole

### Multiple Meaning Words

- ground
- group
- crop
- crowd
- fair
- record
- rest
- share
- trade
- sound
- track
- trip
- work
- practice

### Morphologically Complex Words

- redo
- reread
- unhappy
- prepay
- dishonest
- impolite
- inactive
- bins
- pushed
- careful
- fearless
- explorer
- faster
- strongest

### Abstract/Non Imageable Words

- differ
- appropriate
- ability
- confusion
- courage
- belief
- truth
- poor
- calm
- fear
- goal
- luck
- pain
- trust

## HOW TO TEACH WORDS TO KINDERGARTENERS

### General Academic Vocabulary

Attention to teaching general academic words should be prioritized because these words will help students learn other things. Often, these words are used during instruction and if students do not know them, they are less able to learn from that instruction. General academic words are common in literature and the more words students know the easier it will be to figure out the meaning of words they don't know.

Teach general academic words explicitly using these steps:

1. Introduce the word by saying it.
2. Students repeat the word.
3. Allow students to use clues from the text to figure out the meaning of the word.
4. Explain what the word means.
5. Students repeat the definition.
6. Model the use of the word in multiple contexts/sentences.
7. Students practice using the word in multiple contexts/sentences.
8. Provide extended opportunities for students to see/hear/use the word in many contexts across many days.

*\*Students should practice using the words in meaningful discourse level activities such as oral storytelling.*

### Domain-specific Words

Knowledge building is extremely important, even when students are young. Domain-specific words are learned within the specific contexts they are needed such as social studies, science, or math lessons. Keep in mind domain-specific words are often new concepts to young students too. That means students are learning new concepts and new words at the same time. As a result, domain-specific words are challenging to learn, and students are not naturally exposed to them across multiple contexts and over time. More attention should be given to explicitly preteaching and reteaching these words as often as possible.

To teach domain-specific words, use the explicit teaching steps described for general academic vocabulary. However, you may not be able to use step 3 because there are usually fewer clues in social studies, science, and math content to

support inferring the meaning of words. Because of the topic/content-specific nature of these words, create opportunities (e.g., read non-fiction books) for students to be exposed to the words outside of the initial teaching session.

## **Morphologically Complex Words**

It is never too early to teach about word parts. Start by segmenting compound words (e.g., dog-house, foot-ball), but then teach root words and affixes (i.e., prefixes and suffixes). Rely primarily on students' oral language because in kindergarten, they cannot yet decode complex words. However, supplementing with written words can be helpful. Once you teach the concept of word parts, bring attention to morphologically complex words when they are used in natural conversation or in other instructional contexts.

Explicitly teach root words:

1. Write 3-4 words on the board with the same root and underline the root.
2. Say each word and have the students repeat them with you.
3. Show students how each word on the board has the same root.
4. Say, "This is called a root word because many other words can be created from it depending on what gets added. Roots are the main parts of words."
5. Explain the meaning of the specific root word used.
6. Say, "(root) means (\_\_\_\_\_)" and have students repeat it.

Explicitly teach affixes:

1. Write 3-4 words on the board with the same affix.
2. Circle the affixes in the words.
3. Explain that this word part has meaning too, but that it gets added to the meaning of the root.
4. Explain the meaning of the affix.
5. Say, "(affix) means (\_\_\_\_\_)" and have students repeat it.
6. Say the definition of each root with the definition of the affix (e.g., review = look again), and have students repeat the meanings for each word.

## **Abstract/Non Imageable Words**

Because it is much easier to teach concrete words that can be pictured, it is important to give abstract and non-imageable words more explicit attention. Don't avoid them just because they are hard to teach. Students will need more exposures to abstract or non imageable words than those that are concrete or easily pictured. It might be helpful to role play these words or create many different stories in which the abstract/non imageable word is needed. Keep in mind that definitions of abstract words need to be more concrete and relatable to young students. If the definition is also abstract, students will not be able to understand it. Easier synonyms can be useful definitions.

Use the explicit teaching steps described for general academic vocabulary but use movement and several relatable scenarios to extend practice opportunities. Although abstract words may not be easily pictured, images can still support students' learning of the words. For example, a picture of a child not able to reach something they want could be a good context for learning the word frustrated.

## ABOUT SENTENCES



To fully engage in and learn from academic instruction in Kindergarten, students need to understand and be able to use a variety of sentence patterns. Sentences can be simple or complex.

Simple sentence types should be mastered. These include sentences with just one independent clause, sentences with prepositional phrases, and compound sentences with coordinating conjunctions.

Complex sentences have an independent clause and one or more dependent clauses. Because teachers naturally use complex sentences

when teaching, students who do not understand them may struggle to learn the content. It is important that, in Kindergarten, students understand complex sentences and begin to use them. Teachers should model complex sentences with causal (e.g., *because, so that, since*) or temporal (e.g., *when, after, before*) subordinate clauses and encourage students to use them when they talk. Causal and temporal subordinate clauses are common in narrative texts and in spoken narratives because they are needed to connect the main story events (e.g., problem, attempt, resolution) together into a plot. That makes oral storytelling activities perfectly suited for teaching and practicing complex sentences.

### Kindergarten students should...

- use proper subject-verb order in complete sentences.
- use prepositional phrases easily.
- use frequently occurring prepositions: *to, from, in, out, on, off, for, of, by* and *with*.
- use coordinating conjunctions in compound sentences: *and, but, or*, and *so*.
- use the word *because* in a causal subordination clause.
- begin to use other subordinating conjunctions: *when, after, before*, and *so that*.

### SENTENCES DEFINED

- **Simple Sentence** = group of words that express a complete thought; one clause with a subject and verb
- **Clause** = group of words that has a subject and a verb
- **Independent Clause** = clause that can stand alone as a sentence
- **Dependent Clause** = clause that cannot stand alone as a sentence; often begins with a subordinating conjunction
- **Subordinating Conjunction** = a word or words that connect a dependent clause to an independent clause
- **Prepositional Phrase** = group of words with a preposition, its object, and any words that modify it
- **Compound Sentence** = a sentence that connects two equally important independent clauses with a coordinating conjunction
- **Coordinating Conjunction** = a word that connects two independent clauses of equal importance

## EXAMPLES OF SENTENCE PATTERNS TO TEACH IN KINDERGARTEN

### Sentences with Prepositional Phrases

- The sun shines *brightly* on the rocks.
- I enjoy listening to music in my car.
- Sarah took the cookies out of the oven.
- He *quickly* made a card for his friend.
- The kitchen was filled with a delicious aroma.
- She painted a *beautiful* picture by using vibrant colors.
- They got their *new, winter* coats off the hangers.

### Compound Sentences with a Coordinating Conjunction

- I enjoy reading books, and I also love watching *scary* movies.
- She wanted to go to the party *extremely* bad, but she had to study for her exams.
- You can choose a burger or you can choose a salad for lunch.
- He studied hard for the test, so he was confident about his performance.
- The weather was hot, but we still went for a *long, adventurous* hike in the mountains.
- I want to travel the world, so I'm saving money for a *big* trip.
- The rain poured *heavily* and it would not stop.

### Complex Sentences with a Subordinating Conjunction

- The cat hid under the bed because it was afraid of the thunder.
- He got *soaking* wet in the rain because he forgot his umbrella.
- I will go for a *brisk* walk after I finish my homework.
- When she came down the stairs, she saw her sister playing with her *favorite, plush* toy.
- He was sad because he cut his finger.
- His mother gave him a *long, clean* bandage so that he could *tightly* wrap his finger.
- Before we leave the classroom, we need to clean up.

### Modifiers

Another way to make sentences complex is by adding modifiers. There are two main types of modifiers: 1) **adjectives** that modify a noun and 2) **adverbs** that modify verbs. In the example sentences, the italicized words are modifiers. In the sentence, "The weather was hot" the word *hot* is not a modifier. Instead, it is part of the verb phrase (was hot). Adjectives that come before the noun (*vibrant* colors) are usually modifiers and make the sentence complex. When two adjectives appear together before a noun (*new, winter* coat), the sentence is even more complex. Adverbs are complex before (*tightly* wrap) or after (poured *heavily*) the verb. They typically end with -ly. Kindergarteners should be able to use single adjectives and single adverbs.

## HOW TO TEACH COMPLEX SENTENCES TO KINDERGARTENERS

1. When a student is speaking, but they don't use a complex sentence, politely stop them.
2. Model the complex sentence the student should say (e.g., "Listen to me. Model complex sentence").
3. Have the student repeat the complex sentence (e.g., "Now you say it like I did.>").
4. Praise the student and encourage them to continue speaking.

Complex sentences are best learned while speaking. Explicit instruction should be minimized because telling students about complex sentences will not be very effective. Teachers can call the subordinate conjunctions **connection words** and explain these words help connect two complete ideas. But then, it is essential that teachers model complex sentences and encourage students to use them when speaking. In Kindergarten, one of the best ways to practice complex sentences is through oral storytelling. Students can retell a story or tell a peer a personal experience. Because causal and temporal relations exist naturally in narratives, storytelling activities present many opportunities for students to practice complex sentences.



## ABOUT DISCOURSE



Discourse is different from words and sentences. However, as a form of extended expression (i.e., anything larger than a sentence), discourse includes sentences, and sentences include words. All the academic language patterns are accessible in academic discourse because of the nested nature of words and sentences. Recognizing these patterns can help educators be more efficient with their academic language instruction. When students practice language at the discourse level, they automatically practice sentences and words.

There are three major types of discourse: conversation, narrative and exposition. Academic language is primarily found in narrative and expository discourse and to a lesser degree in conversation. Narrative discourse has a general pattern that works across most types of stories, and it is even similar (but not exactly the same) across dialects, languages and cultures. This pattern and the rules for how narrative discourse is organized is called Story Grammar. Expository discourse is more complicated because the organizational patterns depend on the purpose of the discourse. For example, the purpose could be to describe something, to argue for or against something, to explain a sequence, or to compare and contrast two or more things. In Kindergarten, however, students should primarily work on narrative discourse structures. Once those are established, they can learn the basic organization of expository discourse (i.e., main idea and key details to describe).

### Kindergarten students should...

- retell a short story heard only once (inclusive of character, setting, problem, feeling, attempt, consequence/ending, and end feeling).
- retell a longer, familiar story or fairytale including at least the beginning, the middle, and the end.
- generate personal experience narratives with a basic episode (i.e., problem, attempt, resolution).
- include specific emotion words in their stories that express basic emotions: sadness, anger, fear, happiness, surprise, and disgust.

### NARRATIVE DISCOURSE ELEMENTS

- **Character** = who the story is about
- **Setting** = where the story starts and what is happening at the beginning of the story
- **Initiating Event (Problem)** = the problem or main event that requires goal direction
- **Feeling** = emotion associated with the problem and/or resolution
- **Attempt (Action)** = what the main character does to try to solve their problem
- **Consequence (Resolution)** = how the problem is resolved or the direct result of the attempt
- **Ending** = what happens after the problem is resolved or how the character returns to their initial activities

## ENCOURAGE ORAL STORYTELLING IN YOUR CLASSROOM

1. Tell short stories with all the main discourse elements.
2. Give students practice retelling the model short stories.
3. Immediately prompt students to include any element they skip (and complex sentences you want them to use).
4. Encourage students to retell stories to a partner.
5. Give students opportunities to tell personal experience stories.
6. Identify the narrative discourse elements in books.

Oral storytelling is an extremely powerful mechanism for practicing all of the dimensions of academic language because words are nested in sentences and sentences are nested in discourse. Oral academic language is the foundation upon which reading and writing are based. Without it, acquiring receptive (i.e., reading comprehension) and expressive (i.e., writing composition) competence with text is very challenging. Beginning with stories that are **personally relevant** to young students gives them the language they need to talk about their everyday lives. When they have the skills to talk about personal experiences, they will practice the academic language naturally with their friends and family. This amplifies their learning with very little effort.

## SAMPLE PERSONALLY RELEVANT STORY FOR KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS

CHARACTER & SETTING	PROBLEM	FEELING	ACTION	CONSEQUENCE & ENDING
Last weekend, Alex was riding his scooter at the <b>massive</b> park near his house. He was <b>racing</b> up and down hills.	Alex loved <u>going fast</u> , but <b>when</b> he was coming down a hill, his shoelace got stuck in a wheel.	Alex was frustrated <b>because</b> his shoe flipped off and he had to stop <b>suddenly</b> .	He decided to sit down and <b>extract</b> his shoelace. Alex used a <b>long, strong</b> stick to <u>pull it out</u> of the wheel.	<b>After</b> Alex <b>finally</b> got the shoelace unstuck, he put his shoe back on. He was happy <b>because</b> he could keep riding his scooter.

**Green** words are subordinate conjunctions.  
**Blue** words are modifiers.

**Red** words are general academic vocabulary.  
Underlined words are clues to the meanings of the vocabulary words.

### Storybook Reading vs. Oral Storytelling

Storybook reading should be standard practice in every Kindergarten classroom. However, oral storytelling is also recommended to rapidly promote academic language. Storybooks do not always have the developmentally appropriate narrative discourse structures. For example, some books are a series of actions without goal direction or a problem to solve. Likewise, children's literature is often too long and written at a more advanced linguistic level than would be expected of Kindergarten students to use expressively. Storybooks are terrific for building listening comprehension, inferencing, and vocabulary skills, but shorter, carefully structured stories with general academic vocabulary and complex sentences can give students a meaningful boost in both comprehension and expression of academic language.

### Using Visuals to Support Teaching

Illustrations, photos, icons, roleplaying, and movement can all help support learning the narrative discourse elements. If you plan to use visual supports though, be sure to fade them systematically so that students don't become dependent on them. See a sample sequence of retelling with the visual supports faded.

