# Guide for selecting vocabulary for explicit instruction

It is not possible to directly teach the meaning of every single word that a student will encounter when reading or writing. It is therefore important to know how to think about words and their power for communicating ideas. This understanding will support teachers to choose the best words to explicitly teach.

The three-tiered model of vocabulary development, described by Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013) is a framework to classify words. The framework identifies explicit teaching of **Tier 2 words** as having the highest impact on student vocabulary development and impact on reading comprehension. The following guide supports teachers to identify the Tier 2 words that are essential for student vocabulary development and require explicit instruction and assessment across all subject areas.

Tier 3 vocabulary refers to the more subject specific words that are limited to a specific domain or curriculum area (for example, words like 'photosynthesis' and 'nucleus'). As students begin to study more specific subjects, they will need to be explicitly taught these subject specific words.

Tier 2 vocabulary refers to the academic words commonly found in written texts and across curriculum areas. These words are less commonly used in everyday talk. They are precise or more sophisticated words, often having multiple layers of meaning (for example, words like 'scrutinize', 'survey' or 'peer' are all alternatives for the tier 1 word 'look', each with its own subtle shade of meaning). Focussing on the similarities, differences and overlapping meanings of Tier 2 words promotes high expectations and supports the development of student's own precise use of language in speaking and their understanding of vocabulary to support reading comprehension.

Tier 1 words are the basic words of everyday talk (for example, words like 'look' or 'make'). These words are usually learnt implicitly and often do not require explicit teaching. The exception is for students who are learning Standard Australian English as an additional language.
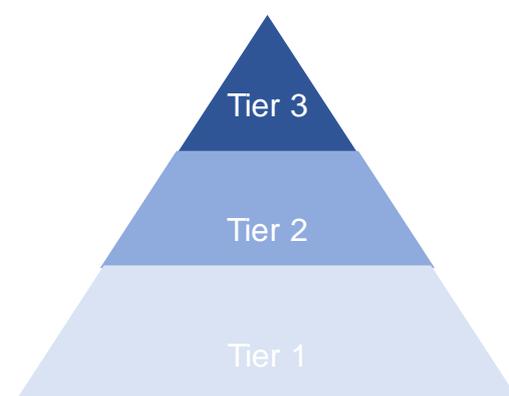
Planning and programming
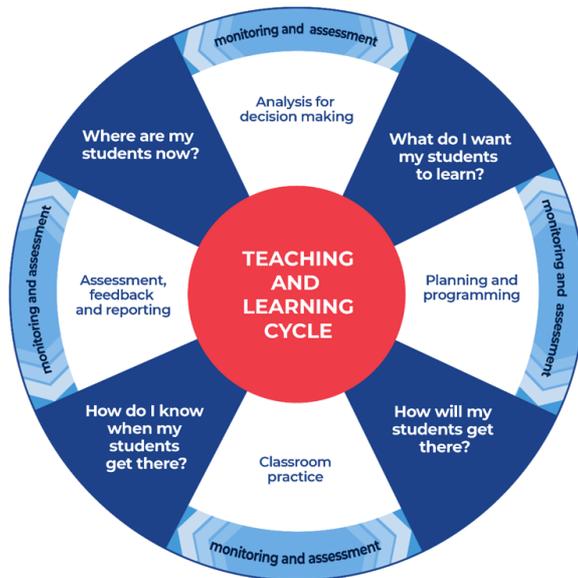
What tier 2 words will support student development of more precise and sophisticated vocabulary?

What tier 3 words are intregal to students learning concepts within specific learning areas?

Questions to guide vocabulary selection

Which words:

- are most important for the topic?

- are unlikely to be part of the student's prior knowledge?

- can't be easily defined from the context of a focus text?

- appear repeatedly in focus texts?

- are interrelated?

- appear in other learning areas?

Adapted from Quigley (2018). Closing the vocabulary gap, Routledge Publications, New York.

Sample focus vocabulary

The following vocabulary has been selected as part of a Stage 3 learning sequence for the Science and Technology unit 'Earth and space'.

Learning area	Tier 2 focus vocabulary	Tier 3 focus vocabulary
Science and technology: Earth and space	distance rotation orbit interrelation system representation prototype infographic inquiry investigation data	planet comet asteroid meteorite gravitational solar

Further information

Use the following links for more information and resources for teaching and assessing vocabulary:

- A video explaining the three tier framework for vocabulary
- A video explaining morphology
- Effective reading: Vocabulary PL
- Effective reading in the early years of school- Vocabulary page
- Focus on vocabulary PL
- Podcast- Vocabulary for reading

References

Quiqley, A. (2018) *Closing the vocabulary gap*. Routledge Publications, New York.

Beck, I., McKeown, M., & Kucan, L. (2013). *Bringing words to life*. Guilford Publications, New York.

Stage 3 Science and technology learning sequence resource