

## Engaging Vocabulary Games

In research, classroom teachers have taught us something about how to best use specific instructional strategies. Let's begin with a strategy for teaching vocabulary referred to as *the six-step process* (Marzano, 2004). It involves the following steps:

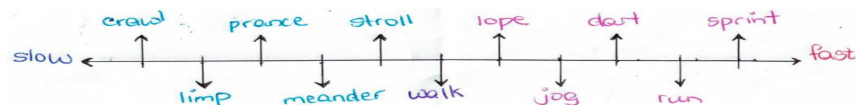
1. Provide a description, explanation, or example of the new term.
2. Ask students to restate the description, explanation, or example in their own words.
3. Ask students to construct a picture, pictograph, or symbolic representation of the term.
4. Engage students periodically in activities that help them add to their knowledge of the terms in their vocabulary notebooks.
5. Periodically ask students to discuss the terms with one another.
6. Involve students periodically in games that enable them to play with terms.



New vocabulary words are written up on the board at random. Two students are at the board, one on each side, with a fly swat. As the teacher calls out the word, the first student to "swat" it gets a point. When 1 student has 5 points, s/he is named champion and stays at the board while the loser hands their fly swat on to the next challenger.

### Partner Vocabulary Fly Swat in small group reading\*\*

Students make a word splash of the vocabulary on a file folder. Each student has a piece of paper (8 ½ X 11) folded twice lengthwise to use as a swatter. One student turns over a card and reads the word or definition as they both try to swat the word first. Then the opposite partner turns over a word or definition and calls out the word as they both try to swat the word first. (points do not seem to be necessary for students to enjoy swatting with a partner) To increase repetition, have the partners repeat the word the card turner reads from the card as it is turned over.



Semantic gradients are a way to broaden and deepen students' understanding of related words. Students consider a continuum of words by order of degree. Semantic gradients often begin with antonyms, or opposites, at each end of the continuum. This strategy helps students distinguish between shades of meaning.

By enhancing their vocabulary, students can be more precise and imaginative in their writing. It helps them understand how words are related to each other. It can be used before, during or after reading and can be done with the whole class, small groups, or individually. To use semantic gradients:

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1. Select a pair of polar opposite words.
2. Generate at least four to five synonyms for each of the opposite words.
3. Arrange the words in a way that makes a bridge from one opposite word to the other.  
Continuums can be done horizontal or vertical - in a ladder-like fashion. Have students discuss their rationale for placing certain words in certain locations. Encourage a conversation about the subtle differences among the words.



Teacher assigns a word from an agreed group such as unit terms or story vocabulary. Each student has 1-3 words. There will be 2-4 sets of the same word in the deck of cards used. One student in the center, is standing, calls out a word from the deck and all the students with that word have to change seats. The last one standing calls out the next word. "Fruit salad" means all have to change. There is always one less seat than students so one student is left standing to call the next word.

### Small group vocabulary practice:

Given 5-8 vocabulary words written on cards so there are three of each word card. Teacher passes out the cards to the students so each student has a variety of cards. As the teacher shows a word card, students read the word chorally and every student who has the word must get up and change seats with each other.



### Hiding game

This is a way to practice a list of new words orally. One student leaves the room and another student hides an object (koosh ball, soft toy, pen). When the first student comes back in, the class guides him/her to the hiding place by chanting the list of words, softly at first then getting louder as the searcher gets closer to the hidden object. Students may do this in a large group or small groups of three.



### **Connect Two**

Ten to sixteen words are listed on the board in two columns. Vocabulary terms are selected based on a unit of study or a vocabulary list from a story. One at a time, students must say a word from the left column and connect it with a word from the right column explaining how the two words were connected in the story or unit.



Deal out the cards (group size which allows each student to have 4 - 6 cards is good). The object of the game is to make pairs which are then put down face up on the table. If a student

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has one half of a pair (e.g. the word or the picture) in his/her hand, s/he can ask around the table for its pair. e.g. "James, have you got a dog?" This game encourages careful listening. The winner is either the person who gets rid of all their cards first, or the one who finishes with the most pairs.



Establishes a list of vocabulary words for the activity, perhaps by brainstorming a list of words needed for a test or most current vocabulary words (15 - 20 items is a good number). Then the student chooses 9 words to write on their grid. Place the words face down in between the two players, take turns calling out a word from the list. After saying the word, the opposite partner must give a definition or use the word in a sentence (depending on what is needed for learning). The first person who gets a Bingo or Black out is the winner.



### Concentration

Divide the class or small group into partners. Each partner group is given a set of cards which are spread out on the table face-down in straight lines. The sets are made up of two kinds of cards: word cards + definition/picture cards. Students in turn pick up a card, turn it over reading the word, and try matching it to its corresponding card. The partner repeats each word or definition read. If there's no match, the cards are returned to their original place on the table and play passes to the next student. If a match is made, the student keeps the pair and tries to make another match. Once all the cards are matched, the winner is the player who has matched the most number of cards.

**Variation:** Rather than using word + definition/picture cards, students can match the first and second half of common phrases, compounds, expressions, idioms or other multi-word lexical items; e.g. "have" on one card, "a good time" on the other card

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### ABC Graffiti

A	B	C
D	E	F

Provide students with a grid containing the letters of the alphabet in the top left corner of each box (one box for each letter of the alphabet). Students are to use the letter posted in the corner as the first letter in a word or phrase representing a vocabulary term or concept learned in a unit. This is used as a review. "ABC Brainstorming" can be a competition between small

groups or teams of students seeing who can remember the most key terms and concepts that have been studied.

## RIVET



**Rivet is a vocabulary strategy that can be used before, during, and after reading. It activates the recall of prior knowledge.**

**Before reading:** Provide students with the title and main idea of the text. Choose 5-6 important words, including names, places, and words likely to be difficult for your students. If you wish, draw lines on the board or overhead indicating the number of letters in each word. Give the students the first letter of the first word. Continue to write the letters, one at a time, pausing after each letter and encouraging students to guess the word. Ask students WHY they believe their guess might be correct. When a student correctly guesses a word, finish writing it. When all the words are written, you might have the students use the words to make predictions about the content of the text.

**During reading:** Have students read in whatever format is appropriate for your class. Encourage students to find the Rivet vocabulary in context and understand what the words mean. As they read they might highlight or place sticky notes on the page where they find the vocabulary terms. They might make notes to clarify the meaning of the words in context.

**After reading:** Review the Rivet words and have students refer back to the text to reread the sentences where they are found. Discuss the terms in context and clear up any confusion. Students can then draw a mind map of the vocabulary or write a summary of the reading using the terms.

## List-Group-Label: Word Sort



Student(s) are given a set of words that need to be learned and are asked to sort words into groups. Partner teams/students group words into categories and then label the groups as to why they are sorted in the categories. Encourage students to sort by how their teams see connections between the words. Then read through the lists sharing ideas with the other groups. (teachers may brainstorm a list of words around a concept to be learned or to review then allow students to follow the same steps: categorizing, labeling the reason or common connection)

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## Resource #1 Vocabulary Engagement Games



1. Divide the class into two teams.
2. Identify a location in the classroom for first, second, third base and home plate.
3. A batter from the visiting team comes up.
4. The batter is given a definition and he or she needs to give the corresponding word.
5. If the batter is wrong he is out. If he is right, he rolls the dice.
6. When you roll a 1 = First Base, 2= Second Base, 3= Third Base, 4 = is a Strike, 5 or 6 is a Home Run. Batter moves to the Base that was rolled on the dice.
7. The next batter comes up and attempts to move him over. After three outs, the other team is up.
8. This could be done with any type of vocabulary or subject information.

### Board Games

Students are given a deck of cards containing the definition or vocabulary terms or the terms. In order to play any board game the student must say the word providing the term or give a definition for the word drawn from the deck before they may roll the dice and move their game piece on the board game. This works well with any board game. There needs to be an answer key for each set of words used in a deck in play. (Most common games used for this are: Checkers, Sorry, Mouse Trap, Chutes and Ladders, any game with a board to travel around)

### Oops!

To play Oops! Students need a deck of cards containing 8-16 words on 32 cards with 4 cards with the word "Oops!" on them. Students play in teams of 2-3 students. The deck of cards is shuffled and dealt to each student until all the cards are given out and facing down on the table in front of each player. Students take turns drawing a card and saying the word on the card, using it in a sentence or telling a definition, as they lay the card in the center of the group. Once an Oops! Card is turned over, the student who turned it over must name all the words in the pile as quickly as they can and keep all the terms that were in the pile. At the end of the game, the student with the most cards 'Wins' the game.

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