

What strategies should I use for teaching Academic Vocabulary?

When teaching academic vocabulary, Baker et al. (2014) recommend the use of student-friendly definitions, examples and nonexamples, and concrete representations to support students in gaining an in-depth understanding of the new words.

1. Provide student-friendly definitions.

It is important when learning new vocabulary that ELs have a clear and concrete definition of each new vocabulary word that aligns with the meaning of the word as it is used in the text. Student-friendly definitions will most likely need to be adapted from traditional dictionary definitions. For example, *Merriam-Webster* online provides the following definitions for the word *survive*: "(1) to remain alive: to continue to live; (2) to continue to exist; (3) to remain alive after the death of (someone)." If you were teaching the meaning of the word *survive* using the earlier text, you would want to focus on definitions one and two. However, words such as *remain*, *alive*, and *exist* may present obstacles to ELs being able to understand the meaning. So the most student-friendly definition for the word *survive* would be "to continue to live." Student-friendly definitions should be accompanied by visuals, examples, and translations of the word in students' home languages (as appropriate). The "Tools and Resources" section of this chapter on page 171 provides an online tool that can be helpful in developing student-friendly definitions.

Figure 6.4 provides an example of how a teacher might introduce a new vocabulary word. In this example, taken from a curricular unit focused on the book *Dreaming in Cuban* (García, 1992), the teacher can present a new vocabulary word by showing two pictures, providing the Spanish translation and an explanation of the word, and making a connection to the story. Notice that the teacher provides a student-friendly definition of

FIGURE 6.4 Introducing a New Vocabulary Word

Profits



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ganancias



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The customers pay money

The store owners make profits

Picture : Look at the picture. The customers pay money to buy something at the store. The person who owns the store collects the money. Some of this money is profits.

Explanation : Let's talk about the word profits. Profits are money that a business earns. After the business pays the workers and pays all the bills, the money left over is called profits. All types of business can make profits—a big company, supermarket, and even a lemonade stand.

Partner talk : If you had a store and earned profits what would you do with your profits? Use this sentence frame: If my business earned profits I would _____. (Call on one or two students to share their responses.)

Story connection : In the text, Abuela tells Pilar about life in Cuba before the revolution. Abuela says, "There was one product, sugar, and all the profits went to a few Cubans, and, of course, to the Americans."

Source: August, D., Golden, L., & Pook, D. (2015). *Secondary curricular units for New York City Department of Education* (p. 18). Reprinted with permission of American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/ronlyres/0A89D8C6-8B99-426A-B2CF-D7426ABF75C4/0/DreaminginCubanHSUnit.pdf>

the word in her explanation: "Profits are the money that a business earns."
In addition, students have an opportunity to practice the word through the "Partner Talk" activity.

APPLICATION ACTIVITY 6.3

Writing Student-Friendly Definitions

Return to the work that you did in Application Activity 6.1. Write student-friendly definitions for five of the words that you selected.

- 1.
- 2.

struction and

- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

2. Use examples, nonexamples, and concrete representations

In addition to student-friendly definitions, during explicit instruction of vocabulary it is also important to provide students with examples, nonexamples, and concrete representations of the word. For example, in the Frayer Model in Figure 6.5, you can see both examples and nonexamples of an *equation*. Similarly, in the word map in Figure 6.6, students have provided examples, nonexamples, synonyms, and antonyms of the word *enormous*. Concrete representations, such as pictures, gestures, and actions, can also help reinforce the meaning of a word.

As explained in the introduction to this chapter, abstract words are frequently more challenging to explain and teach than objects that can be easily exemplified by pictures. Let's take another example from the *Where Do Polar Bears Live?* reading used earlier in the chapter to complete Application Activity 6.4.

FIGURE 6.5 Example of Frayer Model

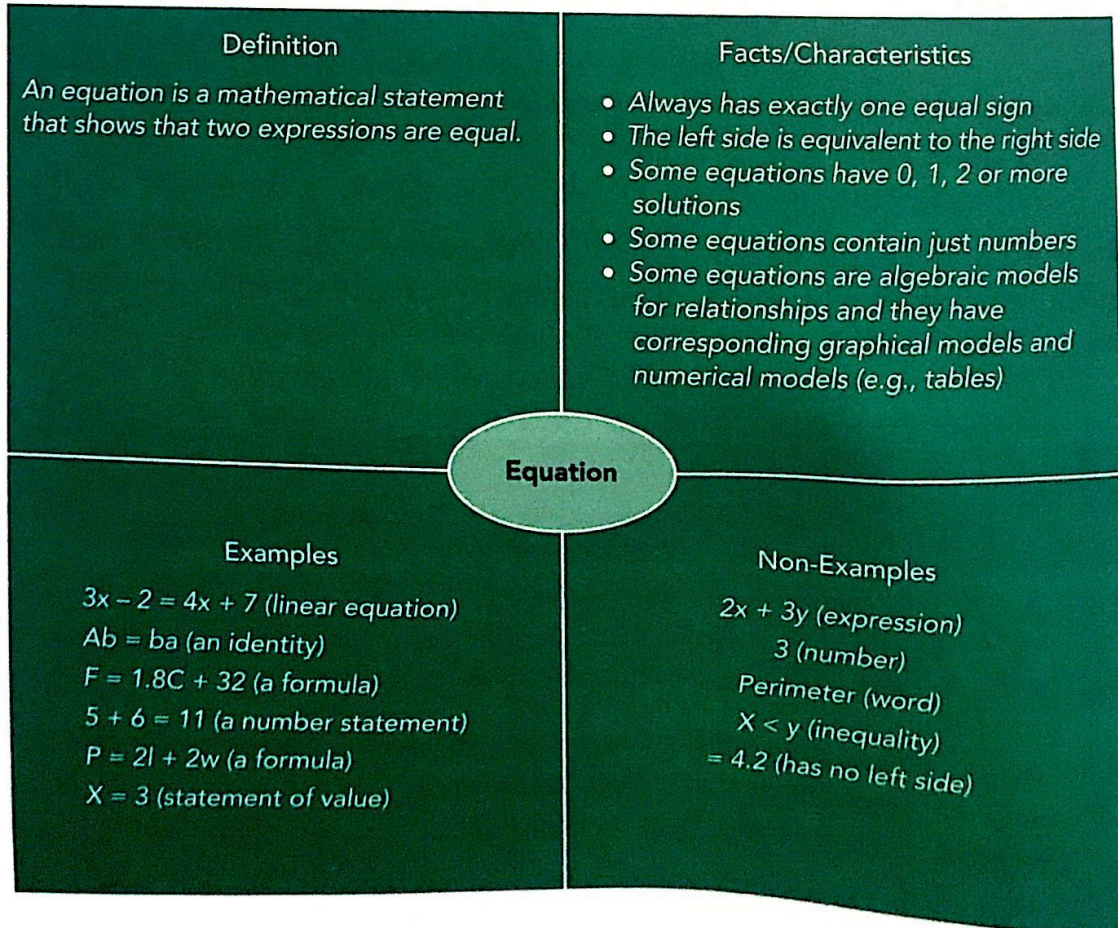
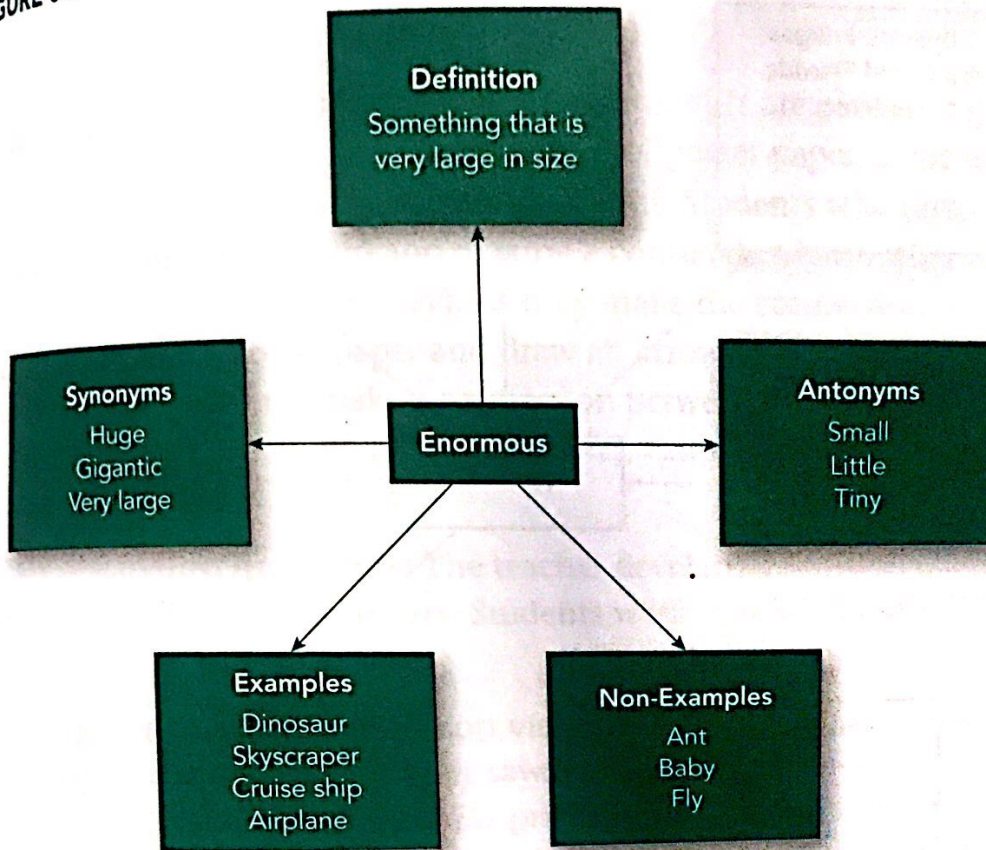


FIGURE 6.6 Example of Word Map

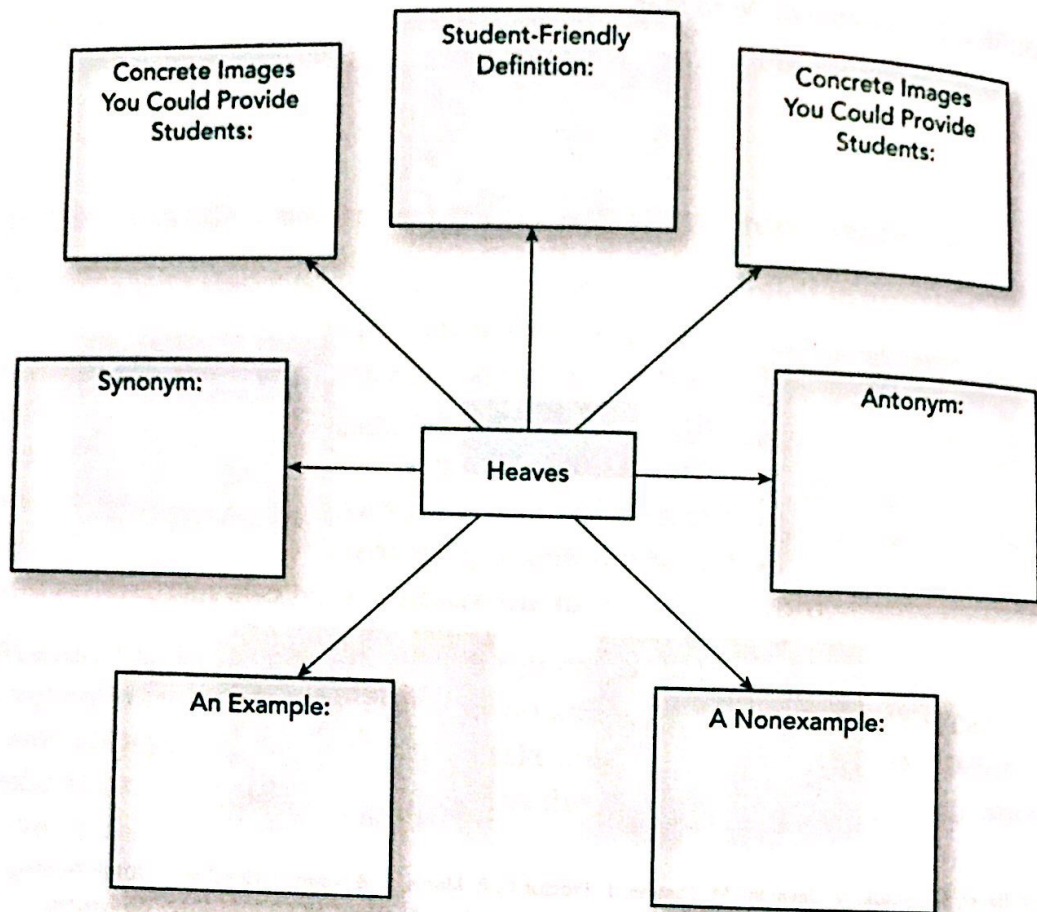


Source: Baker, S., Lesaux, N., Jayanthi, M., Dimino, J., Proctor, C. P., Morris, J., & Newman-Gonchar, R. (2014). *Teaching academic content and literacy to English learners in elementary and middle school* (NCEE 2014-4012). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute for Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. Retrieved from http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/www/pdf/practice_guides/english_learners_pg_040114.pdf

APPLICATION ACTIVITY 6.4

Vocabulary Practice. Reread this excerpt from the text: *A mother polar bear heaves herself out of her den. A cub scrambles after her. What does heaves mean in this sentence? Using context clues, a dictionary, and a bilingual dictionary, complete the following:*

- Student-friendly definition:
- Synonym:
- Antonym:
- An example:
- A nonexample:
- Concrete images you could provide students:
- Other meanings:



What Activities Can I Use to Help My ELs Practice New Vocabulary?

It is important that ELs have focused opportunities to practice the new vocabulary that they have been taught through a variety of listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities (Baker et al., 2014). In other words, once new vocabulary has been introduced through an engaging, content-specific text, students will need to test their understanding of the words over the course of several days in order to really cement their knowledge of the word. It is important to create a classroom culture in which trying out new academic words in speech and writing is encouraged and students are not expected to use words correctly the first time. There are many different activities that teachers can use to practice new vocabulary, but we have included descriptions of a few of our favorites. Some of these activities may be more appropriate for students in certain grade levels than others. The vignette on page 161, "Mr. Bellow's Classroom," provides an example of what vocabulary instruction might look like in a kindergarten classroom. The list of "Additional Tools and Resources" at the end of the chapter offers some tools for developing these activities.

Listening and Speaking Activities to Develop ELs' Vocabulary

- **Interactive word wall:** For this activity, students are placed in groups of three or four. Each group is given a piece of poster paper, some tape, markers, and vocabulary words on index cards. Students take turns choosing a vocabulary word and making a connection to another word (e.g., *A predator hunts for its prey*). As they make the connection, they tape both words to the poster paper and draw an arrow between them. The next student then must make a connection between one of those words and a new word (e.g., *A predator is carnivore*). Connections can be made to more than one word.
- **Pair discussion questions:** The teacher develops discussion questions that include the new vocabulary. Students work in pairs to discuss the questions and write an answer.
- **Video clips:** Students watch short video clips that include the new vocabulary and discuss what they saw. Teachers should preview the video discussion questions with their ELs prior to watching the video. ELs may also benefit from sentence stems, sentence frames, and a word bank to support their discussion.
- **Word experts:** Students (or pairs of students) are assigned to present on a new vocabulary word that the teacher assigns them. Students should provide a student-friendly definition, the part of speech, an image to help remember the word, any suffixes or prefixes that can help in understanding the word, and the use of new word. If you only have a small number of words, you could have students present in small groups. You could also incorporate technology into this activity by having students make a short PowerPoint presentation about their word. ELs will need to have this activity modeled for them and could also benefit from the use of bilingual dictionaries, if appropriate.
- **Information gap:** Students are paired and given information involving new vocabulary words, but within the pair, Student A has information that Student B doesn't have and vice versa. They need to use new vocabulary words and exchange information in order to complete the information gap activity. ELs could benefit from the use of sentence stems or sentence frames during this activity.
- **Dramatic representations:** Students work individually, in pairs, or in groups to act out new words. For example, if the new word is *revolve*, the person acting as the Earth would revolve around the person acting as the Sun. ELs would benefit from having this activity modeled and may also benefit from working with a partner that speaks their same home language.

Reading and Writing Activities to Develop ELs' Vocabulary

- **Responding to a content-related prompt using a word bank:** Students can be given a prompt connected to the content they are studying and be asked to write a response using the vocabulary words in the word bank. ELs may need sentence frames or paragraph frames as additional support.
- **Glossary:** Students can be asked to create a glossary to support their understanding of new content. The glossary can include a student-friendly definition, the use of the word in the text, an image to represent the word, whether or not the word is a cognate in their home language, and another example of how the word could be used in a sentence. For an example of a glossary, see page 63.
- **Text-dependent questions:** Text-dependent questions are an excellent way for ELs to practice their understanding of new words using a text. A teacher might develop a question such as the following: Sentence 2 says, "Like a snug blanket, this blubber keeps in the heat of the bear's body." What do you think *blubber* means in this sentence? Students can be given sentence frames, sentence stems, and word banks to support their work. For more on creating text-dependent questions for ELs, see Chapter 8.
- **Gallery walk:** Students or pairs of students can be assigned one aspect of the content that they are studying. They should create a poster that explains their topic. Students can also be asked to use a certain number of vocabulary words from a word bank on their poster as well as images that help explain both the topic and the vocabulary. When students are finished, they can move around the room, looking at others' posters. They can write comments or questions on sticky notes, and these can be discussed with the large group. ELs may benefit from such scaffolds as a word bank, sentence stems, and working with students that speak their home language.

Games and Activities to Develop ELs' Vocabulary

- **Memory:** For this game, vocabulary words can be written on one card, and a definition, picture, or example can be written on another. Students play memory to match the vocabulary word with its pair. As students play the game, they should say the vocabulary word aloud for the pictures and definitions to reinforce their understanding and practice with the words.
- **Vocab Jeopardy!** In a modified version of the game show *Jeopardy!*, students are given a clue and need to determine the correct vocabulary word based on the clue given. Clues can be placed in a grid of different categories

(e.g., definitions, examples, and antonyms). Students can be grouped in teams. When it is their turn, each team can select which category they want and for how many points (e.g., "Definitions" for 300). The team is given the clue and tries to figure out the answer. ELs may benefit from having a word bank or bilingual glossary to refer to during the game.

- **Vocab jigsaw:** For this activity, students are placed in groups of four. Each person on the team gets one clue about the word (e.g., what letter the word starts with, the number of syllables in the word, an antonym, or definition). Students take turns reading their clues, and as a group, they try to figure out the mystery vocabulary word.
- **Vocabulary bingo:** Students write or glue their vocabulary words on bingo cards. The teacher or a student reads a definition or provides an example of the word, and students put a marker on their bingo card if they have that word. A student wins when he or she has marked five vocabulary words in a row.
- **What's my word?:** Students have a vocabulary word on their back, and they have to figure out what their word is by asking yes/no questions (e.g., *Is my word a noun? Does my word mean "to live"?*). ELs may benefit from having sentence stems or sentence frames to refer to.

What other strategies do you use to practice key vocabulary? Does your practice include opportunities for students to use the new vocabulary when speaking, reading, writing, and listening?