

TIPS FOR SELECTING VOCABULARY TERMS

- 1. Before instruction, preview the text, even when using text that has pre-selected vocabulary words.**
 - ☐ Read the passage and identify vocabulary words you think students will find unfamiliar. Ask yourself: “How difficult is this passage to understand?” Follow the *Rule of Five* when you are selecting the text – if there are more than 5 words a student won’t understand in the paragraph, it is above their independent reading level – you will need to modify the reading passage or provide significant reading support.
 - ☐ Select words that are important to understanding the content or text. Determine which words are adequately defined in the text. Some may be defined by direct definition and other through context clues.
 - ☐ List words you predict will be challenging for your students. You may not be able to teach all of these words. Research supports teaching no more than 8 terms before reading.
 - ☐ Determine the importance of the word. Ask yourself: “Does the word appear again and again? Is the word important to comprehending the content? Will knowledge of the word help in the next grade level?”
- 2. Identify words students may know based on their prefixes, suffixes and base or root words.**
 - ☐ If structural elements help students determine words’ meanings, help your students identify these elements.
 - ☐ Consider students’ prior knowledge. Words can be discussed as you activate and build prior knowledge.
- 3. The vocabulary words you choose should include:**
 - ☐ Words that will be frequently encountered in your unit or course.
 - ☐ Words that are important to understanding the main idea.
 - ☐ Words that are not a part of your student’ prior knowledge.
 - ☐ Words unlikely to be learned independently through the use of context clues.
- 4. Use Beck's three tiers to sort your terms.** This well-known framework divides vocabulary into three levels. Begin your year with your Tier 2 words, because they pay off across many texts and lessons and then teach the Tier 3 words essential for unit understanding.
 - ☐ Tier 1 is everyday words most students already know (*house, run*), but if you teach EB students, don’t assume they know these terms.
 - ☐ Tier 2 is high-frequency academic words that show up across many subjects (*analyze, contrast, significant*);
 - ☐ Tier 3 is specialized, content-specific terms (*foreign, diplomacy, seige*). Your richest targets are usually Tier 2 words, because they pay off across many texts and lessons, plus the Tier 3 words central to that particular unit.