

## Making choices about interventions: Intensive vocabulary instruction

Achievement Coaches, school champions and Year 6 staff can use the information on this page to help them decide whether this intervention can be used to meet the needs of their target pupils. It highlights key information from a study which aims to help pupils develop their vocabulary for writing through intensive instruction. The [Using the intervention](#) resource provides more detailed information if you decide to use the intervention with your pupils.

### What is the focus of this intervention?

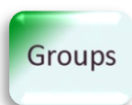
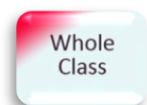


With this intervention, pupils develop their vocabulary through a combination of teacher led instruction, discussion and written exercises, focused on helping pupils to understand the precise meanings of more sophisticated words and make use of them in their writing.

### What was the age of the pupils involved?

The pupils involved in the study were aged 12-13 years (Year 8), but the intervention is relevant to Year 6 pupils.

### Which tiers could this intervention be applied to?



This was delivered as a whole-class intervention, making this a tier 1 intervention, but it could be adapted to be used with small groups at tier 2 or more intensively at tier 3.

### What is the likely impact?

In the study pupils significantly improved the quality of their writing, including grammar, sentence structure, organisation, as well as vocabulary. Besides using the target words for a specific writing task, pupils are also likely to make use of the words in other written work and to use them when talking. The intervention generates enthusiasm for learning and for learning new words.

## **Using the intervention: Intensive vocabulary**

### **What do teachers and learners do?**

#### **Overview of the intervention**

The intervention involves teachers using direct instruction to help pupils learn a set of new words they can use in a writing task. The teacher first chooses a topic that is of general interest to the pupils, e.g. space, then chooses around a dozen words that lend themselves to writing about the topic, but which can also be used in other contexts, e.g. *'accommodate'*, *'quest'* and *'feasible'* rather than *'lunar'* or *'interstellar.'* These could be selected by reading through different texts on the subject and selecting words that appear frequently. Teachers then create a set of short passages they can read to the pupils when introducing new words.

## Framework

The intervention comprises a number of activities spread over six (or more) days.

Day 1

Talk about the topic
Listen to passage about topic containing 5 new words
Answer question about 5 new words
Definitions of 5 new words
Complete sentences using the 5 new words

Day 2

Review 5 words –Matching activity
Answer oral questions using the 5 words
Answer comprehension questions about the topic
Share answers to comprehension activity

Day 3

Listen to passage containing 5 new words
Imagine scenario related to the topic
Discuss definitions and use 5 words in sentences
Complete sentences using the 5 words
Write about the topic using the new words

Day 4

Complete writing
Read and evaluate the writing
Listen to passage containing 3 new words
Complete sentences using the new words

Day 5

Review the 13 new words
Listen to illustrated presentation on the topic

Day 6

Write about presentation
Match words to definitions
Pick the most appropriate word to use
Write about the topic

Key

Listen

Answer questions

Definitions

Complete sentences

Review words

Write

### Day 1

- The teacher asks questions designed to encourage pupils to talk about what they already know about the topic (e.g. space)
- The teacher reads a short passage (around 600 words) on an aspect of the topic, such as space travel. As the teacher is reading, pupils record any new words, and then share the words with the rest of the class afterwards.
- The teacher introduces five particular new words by asking questions about the passage s/he read earlier. The questions should guide pupils to the meanings of the words and how they relate to each other. For example, questions can link the new words: *Is your **quest** possible? Could you successfully complete your **quest**? Is your quest **feasible**?*
- After each word has been introduced, the teacher writes the word on the board along with its definition, then invites the pupils to compare what they had first thought with the definition.
- The pupils complete a worksheet containing open-ended sentences that make use of the target words, then share their sentence endings with the rest of the class.

### Day 2

- The session begins with a quick review of the five words learned in the previous session. Pupils then carry out a matching activity involving those five words.
- Pupils are invited to respond to questions (not necessarily about the original topic e.g. space) containing the target five words, e.g. *Do you think this school could better **accommodate** disabled students?* The teacher encourages pupils to use the target word in their responses.
- The pupils complete a comprehension activity on the topic (e.g. 'An industrial astronaut'). The teacher begins by reading an introduction aloud, and pupils are given text to read with questions for them to answer after each paragraph.
- The teacher places five cards, each with one of the vocabulary words written on it, around the room. The pupils choose one word and go to the allocated area, then share their answers to the comprehension activity with the other pupils who have chosen the same word.

### Day 3

- The teacher introduces a new group of five vocabulary words, by reading from a short passage (around 300 words) on the topic (e.g. space stations) while the pupils look at accompanying illustrations.
- The teacher reads from another short passage containing questions that help pupils to imagine a scenario related to the topic e.g. being on a shuttle flight heading towards a space station. When the teacher reaches one of the new words, s/he explains what it means.
- Pupils then discuss each new word, write them down along with their definitions, and complete open-ended sentences which require the target words.

- Pupils complete an activity designed to help them understand the precise meaning of words by focusing on the differences between the new words and their synonyms, e.g. reading a paragraph that distinguishes between *retrieve* (one of the vocabulary words) and *return* (a synonym), then choosing one of two words close in meaning to complete a sentence.
- Working in groups of four, pupils write a short piece on the topic using some of the words they have already learned.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The dog will ..... the bone.</li> <li>• The woman wants to ..... her dress to the shop because it does not fit</li> </ul> |
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#### Day 4

- Pupils finish writing their piece on space. Each pupil in the group then chooses a job from four options: *judge*, *tallier*, *reader* and *monitor*. After the pupils had chosen a job, the teacher places them in new groups of four, where each group represents a different job:
  - the *judges* decide the criteria by which to judge the written work
  - the *talliers* write lists of words on the board in order to tally the number of times each word is used
  - the *readers* practise reading the texts and decide the order in which they would present them
  - the *monitors* review the definitions of the words and decide who will listen for correct and incorrect usage of those words.
- The *reader* for each group reads their group's piece of work to the class, and the *judges* work together to score the readings and announce the winning group.
- The pupils carry out a matching activity involving the ten words already learned.
- The teacher introduces the final three words by reading a short passage. This time the pupils read the passage silently as the teacher reads aloud. The teacher defines the new words, and the pupils write down the words together with their definitions, and use them in sentences.
- The final activity deals with all thirteen words. The teacher reads sentences that have gaps and the pupils write down the word they feel fits the sentence best, e.g. *If you have a table for four and you have five people that want to sit at the table, you need to make the table \_\_\_ [accommodate] the fifth person* . The teacher encourages pupils to use the new words when explaining their answers.

#### Day 5

- The teacher and pupils review the thirteen words learned.
- The pupils then listen to an illustrated presentation on the topic space.

#### Day 6

- The pupils begin the session by writing responses to the presentation from day 5.
- The pupils take part in an activity involving matching all the target words to their definition.
- The teacher then leads the pupils through a 'Pick-A-Word' activity, designed again to help pupils think about the precise meaning of words. E.g. pupils are asked to pick the more dramatic word out of *quest* and *dream*.
- The pupils work in groups of four to write their final reports on the topic, e.g. they could be asked to visualise themselves as a space station worker who has to write a report to their boss back on Earth that includes what they were doing and how their work was going. Once completed, the pupils share their reports with the rest of the class.

There are also two activities that can be carried out outside of the literacy session:

- **Payload activity** – The teacher selects a ‘secret word’ for each day. If a pupil guesses the word or uses it correctly in writing, they received a small prize relevant to the topic, e.g. a sticker.
- **Momentous Manoeuvres** – If a pupil hears, reads, sees or uses any of the new words outside of the literacy class and writes down when and how the word was used, the pupil’s name is placed next to that word on a chart or bulletin board. The pupil using the words the most can receive a prize relevant to the topic, such as a poster of a space shuttle.

### **What planning is involved?**

Teachers must first choose a topic of relevant interest for their class or group. Based on the chosen topic, teachers will need to develop a list of around a dozen vocabulary words that relate to the topic, but which can also be used in other contexts, through reading different texts on the subject and selecting words that occur frequently within them. Teachers could use such texts as a basis for creating short passages they can read to their pupils when introducing the new vocabulary words. Teachers may also find it helpful to plan questions about the passages. Work sheets comprising the various activities described in the intervention framework will also need to be designed.

### **What resources are involved?**

Teachers will need to prepare these resources:

- a list of target words and definitions
- 4 short passages about the chosen topic containing the target words to be introduced together with some illustrations for one of the passages
- worksheets comprising e.g. open-ended sentences which require use of the target words or synonyms
- a comprehension activity
- large cards, each displaying one of the target words, for display in the classroom
- small matching cards (words and their definitions)
- an illustrated presentation/external speaker
- display board for use in the ‘Momentous Manoeuvres’ activity, and
- prizes for the ‘out of literacy class’ activities.

### **What are the challenges?**

Teachers will need to be careful to ensure the vocabulary words they select are at an appropriate level for their pupils.

## **Implications for Achievement Coaches and School Champions**

### **School champions**

- The intervention was used with the whole class (tier 1) but could be adapted for small group or individual work. Could the [Close Case Analysis tool](#) help you and your colleagues to

decide whether the target pupils' needs would be best met by tier 1, tier 2 (small group) or tier 3 delivery of the approach? If you are planning to use it with small groups could you identify strategies for helping pupils to give each other appropriate feedback?

- The teachers in this study carried out the intervention over 6 days. You may want to use the [Determining Frequency/Duration of Interventions tool](#) to help you decide how many sessions your pupils should experience.
- This intervention focused on space, but could be applied to various subjects. Could you work with staff to decide on a suitable topic that reflects the pupils' interests? Can you connect the topic with the key quality text (e.g. Kensuke's Kingdom)?
- The intervention requires a list of vocabulary words that relate to the chosen topic but can be used in various contexts. Could you work with staff to develop a list of words that meet these requirements? Would staff benefit from working with you or other colleagues with specialist reading skills to develop worksheet activities designed to promote pupils' use and understanding of the target words?
- The intervention has two out of class activities. You may like to involve parents/carers in helping pupils to complete these. Could you work with staff to develop these activities for a home setting?

### **Achievement Coaches**

- This intervention relies on teachers having good questioning skills which lead pupils to understanding the meaning of words and using them in their answers. Could you work with the School Champion to run staff training designed to enable staff to deliver such question and answer sessions effectively (possibly including some modelling of questioning strategies)?
- Observing teachers delivering an intervention is likely to help ensure they deliver it as effectively as they can. Could you work with the School Champion to decide who could best provide supportive observation and feedback?
- The intervention may require a visitor to give a presentation on the chosen subject. Could you work with the School Champion to find a suitable speaker? Would it be possible to involve a Y7 teacher in talking about a topic related to their specialist curriculum area?

#### **Implications for Year 6 staff**

- Achievement for All 3As and CUREE are keen to work in collaboration with Achievement Coaches (AC) and School Champions (SC) to make this project as successful as possible. We invite School Champions and Achievement Coaches to add implications for Year 6 staff (and additional implications for AC and SC) that emerge as you work on the project. These will be captured and used in future resources. Please email Rebecca at [rebecca.raybould@curee.co.uk](mailto:rebecca.raybould@curee.co.uk) with your responses.

## **Reference**

Duin, A. and Graves, M. (1987) Intensive Vocabulary Instruction as a Prewriting Technique. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 22 (3) pp.311-330.