VOCABULARY ACQUISITION ACTIVITIES

Elizabeth L. Squires
Linda J. Reetz

Presents instructions for the use of vocabulary flash cards and 10 practice activities.

Word meaning may account for up to 70% of the variability between students who do and do not score well on comprehension tests (Howell & Morehead, 1987). Vocabulary is best learned in a natural reading and speaking environment. However, learning disabled students characteristically lack the skills to derive meanings from context without direct and explicit vocabulary instruction. Effective vocabulary instruction requires careful planning, a focus on context, and structured opportunities for repeated practice. Because a learning disabled student needs the continual repetition of facts in order to reach a point of mastery (having both accuracy and rate), flash card activities have been effective in teaching content area vocabulary.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how flash cards can be used in a variety of ways to reinforce vocabulary development in content areas. Ten options will be provided.

Procedure

To prepare for this type of independent instruction, the vocabulary terms for each chapter are typed on one side of a 3-in. by

5-in. index card. On the opposite side, the definition is typed in a cloze format, leaving a space for the needed vocabulary term. This also assists the student in developing an innate sense of appropriate syntactic use of the term as a part of speech. The following is an example of the vocabulary cards:

Side 1—"Nucleus"
Side 2—"The central core is called the _____ of the atom."

The following steps are used in the introduction of new vocabulary terms.

1. Four new terms are chosen.
2. The student reads the first vocabulary term.
3. The student then asks himself or herself the definition of the term. If the student knows the definition, he or she may go on to the next term.
4. If the student does not know the definition, he or she should turn over the card and read the definition.
5. If the meaning is still unclear, teacher instruction is requested for that term by writing the term in a vocabulary notebook.

The same procedure is repeated for the next three cards. After studying four new cards in this manner, the student goes back to the first card again, reviewing and reciting the definitions. When all cards have been studied in this manner, the student reverses the cards, attempting to read the cloze definitions and supplying the missing terms. Known and unknown terms are separated into piles, with repeated drill of unknown terms.

After these initial acquisition activities are completed, various options exist for mastery and review of these terms along with previously introduced terms. There are a multitude of commercial gameboards that lend themselves to this type of practice. Here are 10 options that may be used for this practice.

1. *Trivia Games*—Use the cards as question cards for commercial trivia games. Re-label the categories to suit the chapters of the texts being studied. The cloze definitions may be read as the questions, and the student responds with the term.
2. *Tic-Tac-Toe Gameboards*—Flash cards are placed in pockets of clear plastic. If the student answers the term or definition,

he or she marks an *X* or *O* on the plastic. Regular game rules apply.

3. *Football Field Gameboard*—Place flash cards of terms on the sidelines of a typical football field marked off on a piece of

---

"Because a learning disabled student needs the continual repetition of facts in order to reach a point of mastery (having both accuracy and rate), flash card activities have been effective in teaching content area vocabulary."

---

oaktag. The student moves 5 or 10 yards for each question answered correctly.

4. *Jeopardy*—Arrange the terms into categories. Divide the students into teams. Have them write questions for each term to earn points for their team.
5. *Illustrate Terms*—Have students make an illustration of the term, combining the meaning with the symbol. This will help students recall the term through a memory strategy of visual imagery.
6. *Monopoly Gameboard*—Follow the general rules, but have the student define one term whenever a player lands on real estate. If the student owns the real estate, he or she may receive one house if the term is identified or defined correctly.
7. *Timed Independent Drill*—Have the student test himself or herself on a stack of terms by turning them all definition side up. The student times himself or herself for 1 minute, reading the definitions and identifying the missing terms. He or she records progress daily.
8. *Checkers Gameboard*—Each student has a set of flash cards. The player applies regular Checkers rules, but must define the term shown by the opponent before he or she can move. The student may move only if the definition is correct.
9. *Concentration*—Two players use one set of flash cards with terms only and one set of flash cards with definitions only. Shuffle all cards together and place them face down on table. Students play according to Concentration game rules. A match

is made when a student matches the term with the correct definition.

10. *Name That Term*—Use two players and one judge. Players each have the term flash cards in front of them. One player says, "I can name the term in one word, two words, three words," and so forth. The judge then reads one, two, or three words of the definition, and players must name the term in 5/10 seconds. If the player cannot, the other player is given the chance. The player with the most correct definitions is the winner.

Conclusion

Independent instruction in content area vocabulary terms is important. Following a systematic format to introduce the vocabulary terms and providing options for drill and mastery will help students increase their receptive and expressive vocabulary skills. The 10 options for drill and practice that were presented here provide motivating means to encourage learning beyond the acquisition stage. It's a method of instruction that has worked for our students and will work for you.

References

Howell, K.W., & Morehead, M.K. (1987). *Curriculum-based evaluation for special remedial education.* Columbus, OH: Merrill.

Elizabeth L. Squires, BS, is currently a teacher of high school students with learning disabilities in Clear Lake, South Dakota. **Linda J. Reetz**, EdD, is an assistant professor of special education in learning disabilities at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion, South Dakota. Address: Elizabeth L. Squires, Box 667, Clear Lake School District 19–2; Clear Lake, SD 57226.