



Strategies That Help Students Remember Vocabulary

All teachers teach vocabulary. The frustration is realizing that the students forget the words as soon as instruction or the test is completed. Marilee Sprenger (2017) suggests 3 stages of building long term memory to take into consideration when teaching vocabulary: Encoding, Storage and Retrieval.

Encoding is all about “piquing student’ interest” (page 21). In her book, *101 Strategies to Make Academic Vocabulary Stick*, she includes many activities for this stage.

Wear the Word

Write related vocabulary words (use synonyms if possible) on pieces of tape and stick them on your clothes. Don’t say anything about the words until students start to notice and talk about the words amongst themselves; their interest is piqued.

- Choose one of the words. Say the word and have students repeat it.
- Ask if anyone has heard the word before or knows what it means.
- Share examples of the word used in context.
- As a class, develop a kid-friendly definition of the word.
- Repeat with the other related words.
- Example of related words: frigid, freezing, bitter, bleak, bone-chilling, wintry, nippy

Word up!

Choose tier two words from the text you are about to read aloud and write them on index cards.

- Distribute the cards to the students.
- As you read the selection, students listen for the word on their card and hold it up each time the word is read.

Richek, M. A., & McTague, B. (2008).

Related Words

- Provide students with a list of vocabulary words.
- Students write sentences that relate two or more words using the format:
 - I would relate _____ and _____ because...

Storage is the next stage Sprenger mentions. Having to repeat the meaning of a word over and over for your students is a good indicator that it is time to work on the storage stage and strengthen the network for that word. To do that, students need many opportunities for repetition and rehearsal. Each time a student uses a rehearsal strategy the network builds more connections for that word.

“To store word knowledge, students must be able to recode the word— that is, to put everything they know about words (both written and spoken), including a description, synonym, antonyms, and sentences that absolutely show that they understand the term”. (Page 40)

Rehearsal Strategies

Picture This

After introducing the word the teacher or students search the internet or other resources for pictures that represent the word. This allows students to form personal connections between the word and their background knowledge.

Mystery Words

Arrange students in pairs. Partner A uses his/her finger to write the word partner B’s back. Partner B must determine which word was written and provide a definition for the work. They then switch roles. This requires students to visualize the word and reinforces spelling.

What? So what? Now what?

What word did you learn?

So what does it mean?

Now in what way can you use the word in your life?

And the Question is...

This activity works well with nouns. The teacher says a vocabulary word and the students must provide the definition in the form of a question. For example if the vocabulary word is *photosynthesis* the question might be, *How do plants make food?*



Retrieval

The final stage in Sprenger's process for storing words in long term memory is Retrieval. It is wonderful when students really own vocabulary words. The trick is recovering it from long term memory. This stage includes more review and rehearsal. Sprenger uses the adage, "Amateurs practice till they get it right; professionals practice till they can't get it wrong!"

Syllapuzzles

- Choose several words you would like to review.
- Divide the words into syllables or sections and write each part on an index card.
- Give each small group a set of cards that includes all the words and a list of the words' definitions.
- Have students assemble the word parts to make a word that matches a definition.

I write, you write

Select several vocabulary words and write a well-developed sentence for each word. End the sentence with a semicolon. Ask students to add another sentence that demonstrates their understanding of the word as it is used in the same context. For example, "I oppose the new hours at the bank; I don't like that they close so early."

