

Quick Guide for Building Academic Vocabulary Using Marzano’s Six Step Process

Academic vocabulary is the vocabulary critical to understanding the concepts being taught in class. Robert Marzano and Debra Pickering describe a six-step process in the instruction of vocabulary in his book, “Building Academic Vocabulary Teacher’s Manual”. The first three steps are to assist the teacher in direct instruction. The last three steps are for students to provide practice and reinforcement.

Step #1: Provide a description, explanation, or example of the new term.

Notice that some of these suggestions include providing images. Using both linguistic and nonlinguistic explanations of a new term will help students develop an initial understanding of the term, as well as help prepare them to create their own pictures or graphic representations in Step 3 of the process.

Tips:

- Tell a story using the term
- Use video or computer images as a source of information
- Use current events to connect the term to something familiar
- Describe their individual mental pictures of the term
- Find or create pictures that exemplify the term
- Ask a student to investigate the term and present the information to the class (skit, pantomime, poster, etc.)

Step #2: Ask students to restate the description, explanation, or example in their own words.

During the second step, the teacher asks students to restate the meaning of the term in their own words. It is critical that instead of simply copying what the teacher has said, the students “own” the new terms by constructing their own descriptions, explanations, or examples. Their constructions need not be comprehensive, but efforts should be made to ensure they do not contain major errors.

Tips:

- Monitor and correct misunderstandings
- Must be student’s original ideas, not parroting the teacher
- Allows the students to discuss the term with a partner or in a small group. The act of discussion may help some students formulate a description of the term.
- If they have the general idea but are struggling with stating what they are thinking, you may move on to step 3 and ask them to create a nonlinguistic representation first and then go back to the linguistic representation.

The diagram shows a worksheet with the following sections: 'Vocabulary Term' (with a blank line), 'My Understanding' (with a scale of 1, 2, 3, 4), '(Describe)' (with two blank lines), 'Draw' (a large empty box), and 'Other info.' (a smaller empty box). A blue arrow points to the '(Describe)' section.

Step #3: Ask students to construct a picture, symbol, or graphic representation of the term or phrase.

This step will force students to think of the term in a totally different way. Written or oral descriptions require students to process information in linguistic ways. Pictures, symbols, and graphic representations require students to process information in nonlinguistic ways. If students are not accustomed to creating pictures and graphics for ideas, they might initially need significant guidance and modeling. Even if they have experience with nonlinguistic representations, it is likely that they will still need help with terms that are difficult, new, or abstract.

Tips:

- Model, model, model
- Provide examples of students’ drawings (and your own) that are rough but that represent the ideas
- Play “Pictionary”. Allow students to share tips on “quick draws” needed to play the game
- Draw an example of the term
- If necessary, allow them to find a picture/image on the internet
- Create a comic of the term using speech bubbles if needed

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Step #4: Engage students in discussion activities that help them add to their knowledge of the terms.

During the fourth step, students are engaged in activities designed to help them discuss and review the new terms. These activities can include having students compare and contrast terms, classify terms, identify antonyms and synonyms, and create analogies and metaphors using the terms. During this time, students should be provided with opportunities to add to or revise the entries in their graphic organizer.

Tips:

- Highlight prefixes, suffixes, root words that will help students remember the meaning of the term
- Identify synonyms and antonyms for the term
- List related words
- Write brief cautions or reminders of common confusions
- Translate the term into another language for second language students
- Point out cognates to words in Spanish
- Write incomplete analogies for students to complete
- Allow students to write (or draw) their own analogies
- Compare similarities and differences

Step #5: Periodically ask students to discuss the terms with one another.

Both research and common sense suggest that interacting with other people about what we are learning deepens the understanding of everyone involved-particularly when we are learning new terms. Have students examine their vocabulary to make changes, deletions, and additions. The teacher could ask students to do this in pairs or small groups.

Tips:

- Have students compare their descriptions and/or pictures of the term with partners
- Explain to each other any new information they have learned or new thoughts they have had since the last time they reviewed the terms
- Identify areas of disagreement or confusion and assist with clarification

Invite students to share aloud with the whole class any new thoughts or understanding they have discussed in their pairs. This allows an opportunity for the teacher to make sure that confusions and misconceptions have been resolved accurately. At this time, students can make any additions and/or revisions to their graphic organizer.

Step #6: Involve students in games that allow them to “play” with the words or terms.

Games are one of the most underused instructional tools in education. Games can keep terms in the forefront of students’ thinking and allow students to reexamine their understanding of them. Set aside blocks of time throughout the week to play games or use them spontaneously throughout the day to energize students and guide them in review of the terms. For example, play a version of *Pictionary* that helps them not only review the words, but recreates images for the targeted terms

Tips:

- Teacher listens for any misconceptions while students are playing games
- Allow for collaborative learning while playing games
- Use tried and true games, or have students invent their own

Additional Step: “My Understanding”

At the top of the graphic organizer, students can rate and then adjust their knowledge level throughout the six-step process by marking the number. For example, students can mark their understanding after step #2 and then again after step #5. The key is for students to assess their own learning and adjust when their learning increases.

Knowledge Level	“My Understanding”
Level 4	I understand even more about the term than I was taught.
Level 3	I understand the term and I’m not confused about any part of what it means.
Level 2	I’m a little uncertain about what the term means, but I have a general idea.
Level 1	I’m very uncertain about the term. I really don’t understand what it means.



Name _____

Vocabulary Term _____

My Understanding 1 2 3 4

(Describe) _____

Draw	Other Info.
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Vocabulary Term _____

My Understanding 1 2 3 4

(Describe) _____

Draw	Other Info.
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Vocabulary Term _____

My Understanding 1 2 3 4

(Describe) _____

Draw	Other Info.
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