



LANGUAGE IS A RESOURCE, LEARNING A RIGHT.

✧ *Bite-Sized PD*

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY ROUTINES

Targeting vocabulary instruction enhances mastery of academic content

Quick Take

Academic Vocabulary Routines are **structured, predictable practices** that help students *use* high-utility academic vocabulary in speaking and writing to **explain complex ideas and disciplinary thinking**.

Key ideas:

- **Vocabulary is foundational to comprehension**
- **Students need explicit, repeated exposure**
- **Words must be used in speaking, reading, and writing**

Research shows that multilingual learners who use structured vocabulary routines demonstrate **higher comprehension, stronger writing, and faster academic language growth**.

Classroom Snapshot

Science: Weather & Climate

Students learn key terms:

- precipitation, humidity, atmosphere, temperature

Vocabulary routine includes:

- Visuals and morphology to clarify meaning and form
- Sentence stems that support academic writing:
 - "Precipitation is..."

Polyglot Practice

Choose an antonym pair from your next unit. Give students simple definitions and a visual. Model correct usage in clear academic sentences. Have pairs practice making questions and answers using the new words, following your examples and supported with word/phrase banks.

- “Humidity increases when...”
- “The atmosphere affects...”

Students rehearse each stem orally with a partner , using target vocabulary in content-aligned sentences.

Partners build on each other’s ideas, adding details, transitions, and cause-and-effect language.

Teacher moves:

- Model pronunciation and academic phrasing
- Prompt students to expand partner talk using target terms
- Add student examples to the word wall and guide them to link stems into a coherent paragraph

Result:

Students produce accurate academic sentences orally, then structured paragraphs explaining scientific concepts.

AI + Digital Tools

1. Use AI to generate example sentences for targeted academic words
2. Use digital flashcards to support spaced repetition and retrieval practice
3. Use speech-to-text tools to rehearse and refine academic vocabulary orally

Implementation Notes

- Introduce **5–7 key terms** per unit, not long lists
- Pair each word with a **visual**
- Provide sentence stems for use in speaking and writing
- Build routines that **move from oral rehearsal to written sentences and paragraphs**

Try This Tomorrow

Provide a simple visual for each target word. Ask students to label the visual in any language(s) they choose. Ask students to orally share similarities, patterns, or connections they notice across languages.

Build predictable routines:

- “Write a new sentence using the stem.”
- “Share your sentence with a partner.”

Pro Tips

- **Color-code** parts of speech
- Have students **draw visuals**
- Add **student-generated examples** to the word wall
- Use vocabulary during **oral rehearsal** before writing

Pitfalls & Fixes

Pitfall: Teaching vocabulary as isolated terms

>>Fix: Embed words in **meaningful tasks** and routines

Pitfall: Students memorize but don’t use the words

>>Fix: Require use in **talk + writing**

Adaptations for ML Profiles

Newcomers

- Pair with simple frames for oral rehearsal and written response
- Provide access to bilingual word banks created for the unit

LTEs

- Focus on **precision** and **academic verbs**
- Elaborate ideas and explain

Advanced MLs

- Teach nuance, synonyms, and discipline-specific usage
 - Use vocabulary to support analytical writing
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What the Research Says

- Multilingual supports accelerate vocabulary acquisition (August & Shanahan, 2006).
 - Explicit teaching and repeated use strengthen academic language (Beck, McKeown & Kucan, 2013).
 - Vocabulary must be used in meaningful contexts to stick (Gibbons, 2015).
 - Explicit vocabulary routines increase achievement (Echevarría, Vogt & Short, 2017).
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Leadership Lens

Leaders should see...

- Vocabulary **routines** across the content
- Living word walls and glossaries visible
- Academic vocabulary in **talk + writing**
- Valuing **language as a tool for thinking**

Systems Impact

- Higher comprehension, stronger writing
- Increased academic vocabulary
- More equitable access to content
- Accelerated transition to Cognitive Academic Linguistic Proficiency (CALP)

Building Teacher Capacity

- Co-plan vocabulary routines for upcoming units
- Build **shared tools**: oral routines and models, sentence stems, paragraph frames, etc.
- Discuss how vocabulary supports content mastery + English development
- Celebrate classrooms where students use academic vocabulary confidently

Why This Matters

Using academic vocabulary empowers students to access complex ideas, participate with confidence, and express their thinking clearly.



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