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# Research

The goal of this notebook, *Strategies for Building Academic Vocabulary in Language Arts*, is to assist content teachers in helping students develop effective strategies that support vocabulary knowledge and conceptual understanding in language arts. Vocabulary knowledge has been proven to be a key component of reading comprehension, as well as being strongly related to general academic achievement (Feldman and Kinsella 2005). Similarly, vocabulary deficiencies have been linked to academic failure among students (Becker 1977, as cited in Baker, Simmons, and Kame'enui 1995). Students need to understand key vocabulary words specific to the language arts topic they are studying in order to fully comprehend the concepts. Students also need a strong understanding of general academic vocabulary that crosses all content areas.

## What Is Vocabulary Knowledge?

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Simply put, *vocabulary knowledge* means having an awareness of words and word meanings. Yet, vocabulary skills are much more complicated than simply reciting key terms and their definitions. In addition, vocabulary words may be presented orally or in print, so learning new words often means considering both oral and printed contexts. *Oral vocabulary* includes terms that students are able to identify and use in listening and speaking, while *print vocabulary* includes terms that students are able to identify and use in reading and writing.

Furthermore, vocabulary knowledge is often described as *receptive* or *expressive*. *Receptive vocabulary* includes words that we recognize when we hear or see them. *Expressive vocabulary* includes words that we use when we speak or write. Students typically have a larger receptive vocabulary than expressive vocabulary (Lehr, Osborn, and Hiebert 2004). This is because students are familiar with many words but may not fully understand their multiple definitions or uses. Students may have had some exposure to a word, but they don't know the deeper nuances of how that word is used in oral and written language. These may be terms that students would not use in speaking or writing because of limited understanding.

So, then, what does it mean for a student to truly know a word? Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002) state that word knowledge is not black and white, and understanding vocabulary is not as simple as either knowing a word or not knowing it. They argue that the process by which students learn new words is rather complex and often occurs in progression. Word knowledge may fall on a continuum, ranging from students never having heard of a word, to students understanding all there is to know about a word, to some level of understanding that lies between these two extremes. Understanding the complexity of what it means to know a word helps educators develop a vocabulary program that addresses these unique learning processes. Likewise, when teachers create assessments related to vocabulary, they must keep in mind that certain types of assessments—multiple-choice tests, for example—may not reflect the way in which students develop and process new information about words.

## Research *(cont.)*

### What Is Academic Vocabulary?

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Some educators differentiate between general academic vocabulary and specialized content vocabulary when discussing academic vocabulary. What is the difference? Yopp, Yopp, and Bishop (2009) have developed definitions for each category. *General academic vocabulary* includes high-utility words found across content areas. These words are those that students will likely find throughout their academic reading and writing experiences and use in academic speech. Words such as *features*, *attributes*, *principle*, *perspective*, *compatible*, and *influence* are examples of general academic vocabulary. *Specialized content vocabulary* includes words that are specific to a particular content area and represent important concepts or ideas for students to learn. Examples of specialized content vocabulary include *democracy* (social studies), *forensic* (science), *numerator* (mathematics), and *protagonist* (language arts). In this notebook, all specialized content vocabulary is related to language arts topics that are covered in grades 1–8. Students will learn specialized content words such as *alliteration*, *genre*, *preposition*, and *simile*. Specialized content vocabulary is considered a part of academic vocabulary.

### Why Teach Academic Vocabulary?

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Yopp, Yopp, and Bishop (2009) have synthesized the importance of teaching academic vocabulary. Educators and educational researchers have known for years that vocabulary knowledge plays a significant role in reading comprehension. Reading involves making sense of written language. In order to read successfully, we need to understand the words the author has chosen to use. A large body of research confirms that vocabulary knowledge is positively related to a student's ability to comprehend text (Lehr, Osborn, and Hiebert 2004). Although much remains to be learned, the relationship between word knowledge and comprehension is unequivocal. Further, there is evidence that instruction in vocabulary positively affects reading comprehension (Baumann, Kame'enui, and Ash 2003).

Vocabulary knowledge is clearly crucial for success in reading. However, its influence does not stop with reading. Vocabulary knowledge also plays a significant role in overall academic success (Lehr, Osborn, and Hiebert 2004). Students' knowledge of words impacts their achievement in all areas of the curriculum because words are necessary for communicating the content. As classroom teachers know, students have difficulty understanding and expressing the concepts and principles of the content areas if they do not know the specialized vocabulary that represents those concepts and principles.

Indeed, Marzano (2004) maintains that there is a strong relationship between vocabulary knowledge and background knowledge. Therefore, by building students' vocabulary, we can increase their background knowledge, thereby providing more opportunities for learning new concepts.

# Keyword Method

## Standards

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Grades 1–2 (McREL Language Arts Standard 8.5)

Grades 3–5 (McREL Language Arts Standard 8.6)

Grades 6–8 (McREL Language Arts Standard 8.5)

## Background Information

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### What Is It?

The Keyword Method (Baker, Simmons, and Kame'enui 1995) is a strategy that helps students learn and remember word meanings for new vocabulary words. Students learn to associate a new language arts word with a familiar word and a related visual image. For example, in the word *personification*, which means nonhuman things taking on characteristics of people, the keyword *person* might be used to have students consider the image of a person in place of what is being described.

### When Do I Use It? Why Do I Use It?

The Keyword Method should be used before a lesson or unit as a strategy for relating visual images to specialized content or general academic words. This strategy encourages students to use their oral language to discuss ideas about new vocabulary with their peers and to share connections they have made about words. In addition, students see alternate ways that classmates represent vocabulary visually, which provides them with multiple images on which to rely as they develop an understanding of new vocabulary.

### Materials

- + copies of the Keyword Method resource page (p. 152)
- + drawing materials

### Directions for the Teacher

1. Read the strategy steps for your grade span (grades 1–2, grades 3–5, or grades 6–8).
2. Refer to the example provided for your grade span. You may also refer to the examples from other grade spans to see how the strategy can be used with different vocabulary words, grade levels, and units of study.
3. Choose the specialized content and/or general academic word you want to focus on in your language arts lesson. You can refer to your content standards or textbook as a guide. Or, refer to the appendices for lists of suggested specialized content and general academic words to help you plan your lessons.
4. Teach the strategy as outlined, using the word you have chosen. Refer to the Differentiation section for strategies for meeting the needs of all learners.

# Grades 1–2

## Unit of Study: Writing Tools

McREL Language Arts Standard 1.3

### Strategy in Action: How Does It Work?

1. Before using this strategy, decide which language arts vocabulary word to use. You can use a general academic or specialized content word. This should be a word that students are learning for the first time.

In this sample lesson, the teacher selects the following specialized content (SC) word that students will learn during the unit:

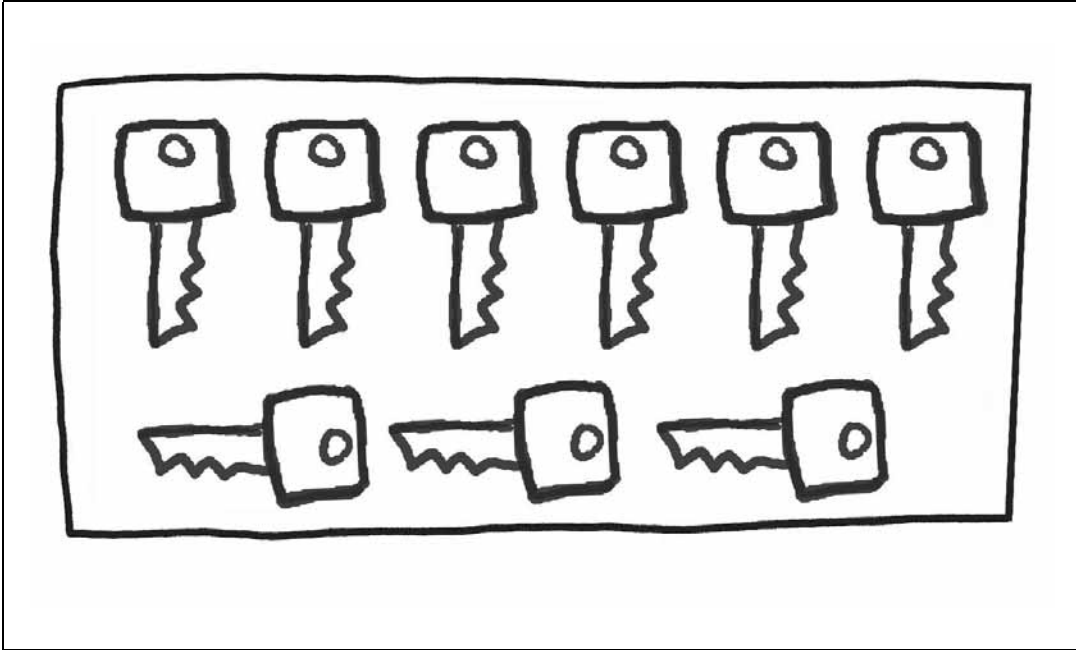
SC	<i>keyboard</i>
----	-----------------

2. To begin the lesson, introduce the vocabulary word to students. Pronounce it aloud and have students repeat your pronunciation. Share the definition of the word. Show pictures, use gestures, or use the word in context.  
In this sample lesson, the teacher points to the computers in the classroom and shows students a *keyboard*.
3. Explain to students that they will create a visual image to help them remember this new word. Model doing this by sharing a familiar vocabulary word and discussing a relevant, visual image with students. Draw a simple sketch of your image while students observe. Talk about the connections you make between the word and the visual image.  
In this sample lesson, the teacher chooses to model the term *picture book*. She draws a book filled with pictures and explains that a *picture book* is a book that uses pictures to tell a story.
4. Distribute copies of the Keyword Method resource page and drawing materials to students. Ask each student to draw an image that relates to the vocabulary word. Have students label their pictures with the vocabulary word and describe the picture.
5. After students are finished, have them share their work in small groups or with the whole class. Ask each student to share both the image and its connection to the vocabulary word. This strategy allows students to learn more about new words by considering different visuals and the various ways the new words are connected to those visuals.  
In this sample lesson, students represent the word *keyboard* in different ways. One student draws a keyboard that has house keys instead of buttons with letters.

6. In conclusion, have students share how making connections between a vocabulary word and visual images helped them better understand the word.

### Example

Vocabulary Word: *keyboard*



**Keyword Statement:** This picture reminds us that a *keyboard* has buttons, or keys, in rows that are used to type letters and symbols.

## Differentiation

### Above-Level Learners

Have students practice this strategy with another vocabulary word. Ask students to draw more than one image for the vocabulary word. Have them write about their multiple visual connections to the same word.

### English Language Learners

After students draw the visuals associated with the new vocabulary word, have them first share their work in pairs. This gives students an opportunity to discuss vocabulary before sharing their ideas with the whole class.

### Below-Level Learners

Assist students as they come up with visuals for new vocabulary. Suggest examples of images for students to consider. Show them examples using books and other reference materials.

# Grades 3–5

## Unit of Study: Writing Process

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McREL Language Arts Standard 1.1

### Strategy in Action: How Does It Work?

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1. Before using this strategy, decide which language arts vocabulary word to use. You can use a general academic or specialized content word. This should be a word that students are learning for the first time.

In this sample lesson, the teacher selects the following specialized content (SC) word that students will learn during the unit:

SC	<i>brainstorm</i>
----	-------------------

2. To begin the lesson, introduce the vocabulary word to students. Pronounce it and have students repeat your pronunciation. Share the definition of the word. Show pictures, use gestures, or use the word in context.

In this sample lesson, the teacher points to a graphic organizer that can be used for brainstorming ideas.

3. Explain to students that they will create a visual image to help them remember this new word. Model doing this by sharing a familiar vocabulary word and discussing a relevant visual image with students. Draw a simple sketch of your image while students observe. Talk about the connections you make between the word and the visual image.

In this sample lesson, the teacher chooses to model the term *story map*. She draws a map with parts of a story labeled on it.

4. Distribute copies of the Keyword Method resource page and drawing materials to students. Ask each student to draw an image that relates to the vocabulary word. Have students label their pictures with the vocabulary word and write a description of the visual image.

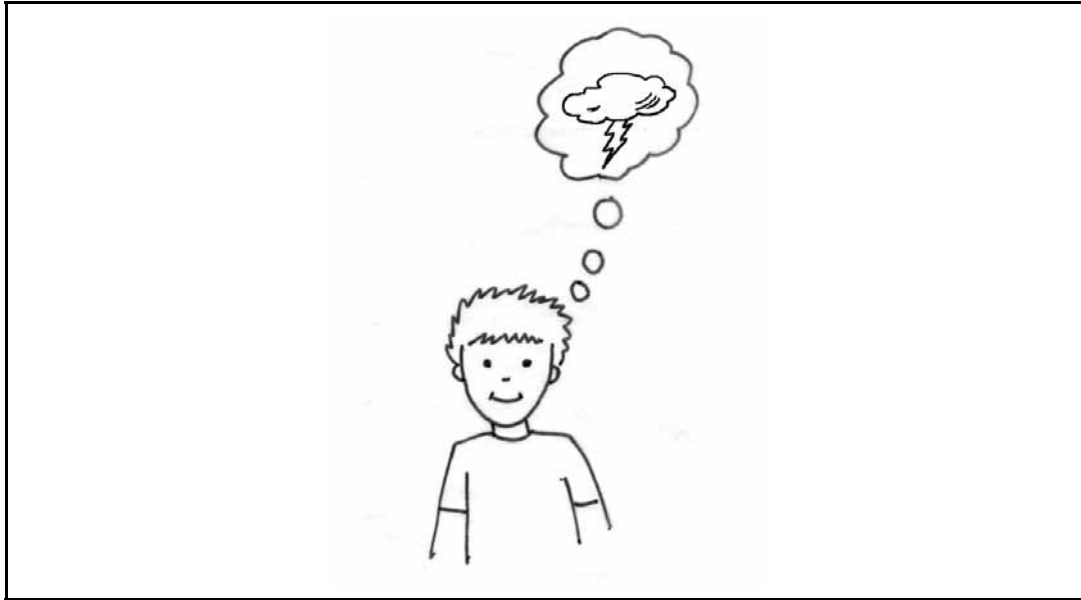
5. After students are finished, have them share their work in small groups or with the whole class. Ask each student to share both the image and its connection to the vocabulary word. This strategy allows students to learn more about new words by considering different visuals and the various ways that the new words are connected to those visuals.

In this sample lesson, students represent the word *brainstorm* in different ways. One student draws a student writing ideas before drafting a story; another student draws a boy with a thinking bubble that contains a storm.

6. In conclusion, have students share how making connections between a vocabulary word and visual images helped them better understand the word.

### Example

**Vocabulary Word:** *brainstorm*



**Keyword Statement:** *Brainstorm* is like a storm of ideas in your brain. This picture reminds us that *brainstorm* means to think of ideas before writing.

## Differentiation

### Above-Level Learners

Have students practice this strategy with another vocabulary word. Ask students to draw more than one image for the vocabulary word. Have them write about their multiple visual connections for that word.

### English Language Learners

After students draw the visuals associated with the new vocabulary word, have them first share their work in pairs. This gives students an opportunity to discuss vocabulary before sharing their ideas with the whole class.

### Below-Level Learners

Assist students as they come up with visuals for new vocabulary. Suggest examples of images for students to consider. Show them examples using books and other reference materials.



# Grades 6–8

## Unit of Study: Author's Style

McREL Language Arts Standard 6.7

### Strategy in Action: How Does It Work?

1. Before using this strategy, decide which language arts vocabulary word to use. You can use a general academic or specialized content word. This should be a word that students are learning for the first time.

In this sample lesson, the teacher selects the following specialized content (SC) word that students will learn during the unit:

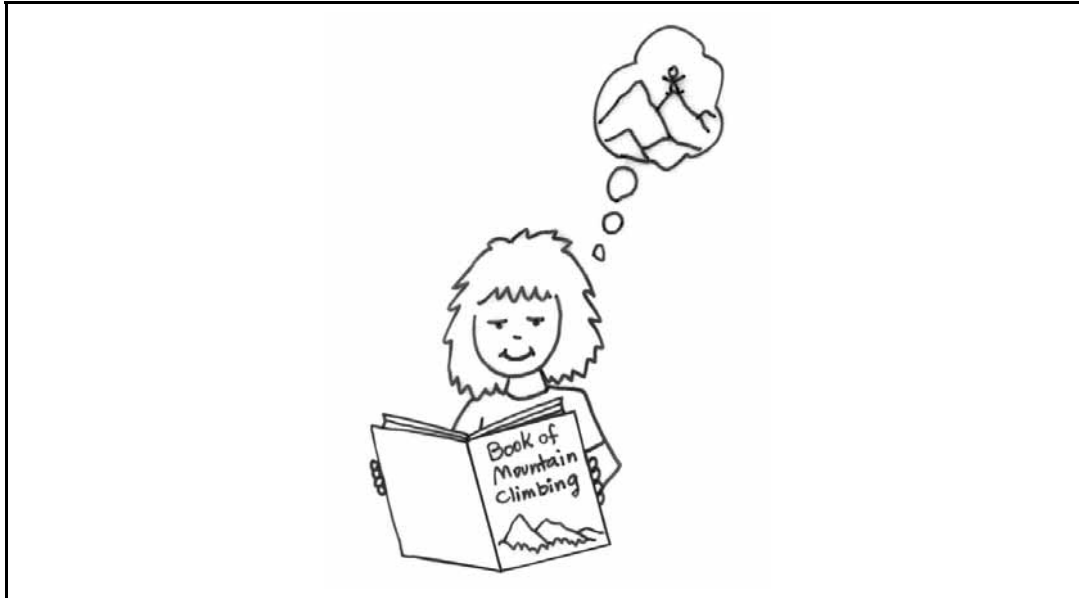
SC	<i>imagery</i>
----	----------------

2. To begin the lesson, introduce the vocabulary word to students. Pronounce it and have students repeat your pronunciation. Share the definition of the word. Show pictures, use gestures, or use the word in context.  
In this sample lesson, the teacher reads an example of *imagery* from a familiar text and tells students that the author's descriptions create vivid pictures for readers.
3. Explain to students that they will create a visual image to help them remember this new word. Model doing this by sharing a familiar vocabulary word and discussing a relevant visual image with students. Draw a simple sketch of your image while students observe. Talk about the connections you make between the word and the visual image.  
In this sample lesson, the teacher chooses to model the term *body language*. He acts out several emotions without using words but by showing how he feels with his body.
4. Distribute copies of the Keyword Method resource page and drawing materials to students. Ask each student to draw an image that relates to the vocabulary word. Have students label their pictures with the vocabulary word and a description of the visual image.
5. After students are finished, have them share their work in small groups or with the whole class. Ask each student to share both the image and its connection to the vocabulary word. This strategy allows students to learn more about new words by considering different visuals and the various ways that the new words are connected to those visuals.  
In this sample lesson, students represent the word *imagery* in different ways. One student draws a picture of a snowy landscape and writes an example of imagery: The snow blanketed the mountain and covered the pine trees.

6. In conclusion, have students share how making connections between a vocabulary word and visual images helped them better understand the word.

### Example

**Vocabulary Word:** *imagery*



**Keyword Statement:** *Imagery* is an author's use of descriptive language to create vivid images and help readers visualize a text. This picture reminds me that *imagery* is related to imagining what authors are describing in their writing.

## Differentiation

### Above-Level Learners

Have students practice this strategy with another vocabulary word. Ask students to draw more than one image for the vocabulary word. Have them write about their multiple visual connections for that word.

### English Language Learners

After students draw the visuals associated with the new vocabulary word, have them first share their work in pairs. This gives students an opportunity to discuss vocabulary before sharing their ideas with the whole class.

### Below-Level Learners

Assist students as they come up with visuals for new vocabulary. Suggest examples of images for students to consider. Show them examples using books and other reference materials.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# Keyword Method

**Directions:** Write the vocabulary word below. In the box, draw a picture that shows the meaning of the word. At the bottom of the page, describe how the picture represents the word.

**Vocabulary Word:** \_\_\_\_\_



**Keyword Statement:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# Personal Examples

## Background Information

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### What Is It?

The Personal Examples assessment asks students to connect what they know about learned vocabulary words with their own personal experiences and backgrounds. These connections show the level of students' vocabulary knowledge. This format also requires students to show deeper and more comprehensive knowledge of a new word because they need to apply their knowledge of the word to a context that may be new or different from what was discussed in class.

### How Do I Use It Effectively?

It is important to create personal example prompts that encourage students to create these connections. This method of assessment can be used with both specialized content and general academic vocabulary words.

### How Do I Use the Resource Page?

On the Personal Examples resource page (p. 2), fill in the vocabulary words and create personal example prompts. The resource page is available as a Word document on the Teacher Resource CD. It can be modified to meet the needs of your students. You may wish to use the following sentence starters to create your assessment prompts:

- Describe a place/an event/an example/a person...
- When/Who/What/How/Why might you...
- Who/What is someone/something you might describe as...
- Name a place/an event you might describe as...
- Share a time when you might/were...

## Examples

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### Grades 1–2 Example

Prompt: Tell about a time when you had a *conversation* with someone.

Personal example: Yesterday, I had a conversation with my mom about school.

### Grades 3–5 Example

Prompt: Describe a time when you watched an *animation*.

Personal example: On Saturday, my family went to the movie theater to watch a new animation.

### Grades 6–8 Example

Prompt: When might you hear or use the word *conclusion* at school.

Personal example: I used the word *conclusion* in an oral report when I described the ending of the book that I just finished.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# Personal Examples

**Directions:** Read each prompt. Then write a personal example for your response.

1. Prompt: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Personal example: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Prompt: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Personal example: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Prompt: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Personal example: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Prompt: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Personal example: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Prompt: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Personal example: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_