

Tiered Vocabulary in the Writing Workshop

A Proactive Approach to Lifting Word Choice in Writing

Even young writers know that when they repeat words throughout their writing it's boring. However, in the midst of trying to organize, compose, and encode (remembering how to spell words) while writing, it's often too big of a stretch to think up many variations for a word that is the focus of a piece. One way to preempt writing from becoming boring, and support students' broader word choice is to engage in **Tiered Vocabulary** activities prior to drafting an essay.

Here's How:

Examine the writing prompt with the students to identify the key concepts.

Example from Grade 5 Opinion Writing:

http://www.knoxeducation.com/sites/main/files/file-attachments/grade_5_opinion_wpt_zoos_update_9-2015.pdf

After reading about the pros and cons of zoos, make a claim about the following question: **Are zoos beneficial to wild animals?**

Write an opinion essay stating your claim and using evidence from the text to support your point of view.

Key Concepts: beneficial, wild animals, zoos

Next, "Tier" the key concepts on a chart with the students. Students may use a Thesaurus with your guidance to find as many appropriate synonyms for the words they will be using throughout their essays prior to reading.

Here is what it might look like:

Key Concept: "beneficial"

I	II	III	
(EVERYBODY)	(EDUCATED PEOPLE)	(EXPERTS):	word
good, helpful, fun	beneficial, supportive, enjoyable, wholesome, favorable, educational, informative	<i>Zoologist, Scientist, Zoo Keeper</i>	serviceable, constructive, educational, profitable, environmentally sound, benign

Key Concept: "wild animals"

1	II	III	
(EVERYBODY)	(EDUCATED PEOPLE)	(EXPERTS):	word
animals, critters, wild things	wild animals, living creatures, wild beasts, living things	<i>Zoologist, Scientist, Zookeeper</i>	invertebrates, vertebrates, mammals, predators and prey, primates, undomesticated animals, indigenous animals

Key Concept: "zoos"

1	II	III	
(EVERYBODY)	(EDUCATED PEOPLE)	(EXPERTS):	word
zoo, animal park	wildlife park, menagerie of animals	<i>Zoologist, Scientist, Zoo Keeper</i>	zoological garden of undomesticated and indigenous animals

Post these charts and leave them up for reference throughout the writing process for any given prompt.

Overused and Repeated Words:

At any point in a writing process, if you notice that students are overusing a word, you can take that as a teachable moment and "tier" the word. For example when younger students are doing opinion writing they often overuse the word "like". Here's what that tiered words might look like:

Example from Grade 1 Opinion Writing:

http://www.knoxeducation.com/sites/main/files/file-attachments/grade_1_opinion_wpt_fruit_9-2015.pdf

Overused Word: "like"

1	II	III	
(EVERYBODY)	(EDUCATED PEOPLE)	(EXPERTS):	word
like, love, eat up, cotton to, dig, flip over	prefer, enjoy, choose, fancy, fond of, well seasoned, savory and succulent	<i>Professional Chef</i>	culinary delight, appreciative complexity, zestful presentation, profound essence, piquant flavor

Tiered Vocabulary for:

I	II	III	
(EVERYBODY)	(EDUCATED PEOPLE)	(EXPERTS):	word

Kimberly Tyson

<http://www.learningunlimitedllc.com/2013/05/tiered-vocabulary/>

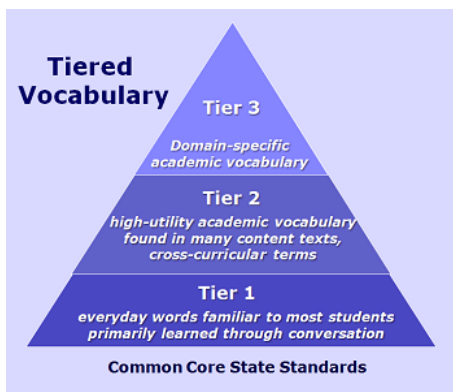
No Tears for Tiers: Common Core Tiered Vocabulary Made Simple

May 26, 2013 By [Kimberly](#)



The Common Core State Standards place an importance on academic vocabulary. In addition to developing an advanced vocabulary, the CCSS calls for increasing the amount of nonfiction and informational text in classrooms. We know that vocabulary knowledge influences fluency, comprehension, and student achievement. And, vocabulary plays an even more important role in understanding nonfiction and informational text. **It has been estimated that 80% of comprehension in nonfiction is dependent upon understanding the vocabulary.**

In Appendix A of the Standards, the Tiered Vocabulary framework by Isabel Beck is summarized. To many educators, the idea of tiered vocabulary is rather new. **In this post, I'll define Tiered Vocabulary and lay out a simple framework for thinking about the tiers, including examples for each tier, and provide implications for instruction.**



Tiered Vocabulary: *Definitions and Examples*

Definition: Tiered Vocabulary is an organizational framework for categorizing words and suggests implications for instruction. (The three-tier framework was developed by Isabel Beck and Margaret McKeown.)

Tier 1: Common, Known Words

Examples: *big, small, house, table, family*

Tier 1 words are basic, everyday words that are a part of most children's vocabulary. These are words used every day in conversation, and most of them are learned by hearing family, peers, and teachers use them when speaking. These words are especially

important for English language learners who may not be familiar with them.

Tier 2: High-Frequency Words (aka Cross-Curricular Vocabulary)

Examples: *justify, explain, expand, predict, summarize, maintain*

Tier 2 words include frequently occurring words that appear in various contexts and topics and play an important role in verbal functioning across a variety of content areas. These are general academic words and have high utility across a wide range of topics and contexts.

Another way to think of Tier 2 vocabulary is as cross-curricular terms. For example, the term "*justify*" and "*predict*" frequently appear in Science, Social Studies, and English texts.

Tier 3: Low-Frequency, Domain-Specific words

Examples: *isotope, tectonic plates, carcinogens, mitosis, lithosphere*

Tier 3 words are domain specific vocabulary. Words in this category are low frequency, specialized words that appear in specific fields or content areas. We anticipate that students will be unfamiliar with Tier 3 words. Beck suggests teaching these words as the need arises for comprehension in specific content areas.

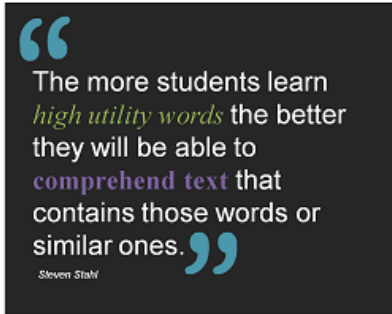
Instructional Implications

Understanding tiered vocabulary has practical applications for the Common Core and classroom instruction.

Listed below are several instructional implications.

1. Content Vocabulary Lists

First, as teachers work through content units to create key vocabulary lists, **understanding the three tiers can help separate the “should-know words (Tier 3)” from the “must-knows (Tier 2)” and the “already-known words (Tier 1).”** Too frequently, vocabulary lists are unnecessarily long. That leads to just-in-time cramming and promptly forgetting the words following the quiz or test.



1. Focus for Instruction

There isn't enough time in the day for teachers to teach all words with the same amount of emphasis. Multiple exposures and practice are [key characteristics of effective vocabulary instruction](#).

Tier 2 words are important for students to master and understand deeply. Why? Because academic words such as *justify*, *expand*, *maximum*, and *barren* are found in many content area texts such as social studies, Science, Mathematics, English, and History texts. Understanding these terms greatly increases comprehension of academic texts.

Creating a streamlined list of words helps teachers focus their instructional efforts and use strategies that help students master these terms. There are many evidenced-based vocabulary strategies. One of my favorites is [Marzano's 6-Step Vocabulary Process](#) which includes multiple exposures, linguistic and nonlinguistic definitions, and games to reinforce word learning.

3. District-wide K-12 Core Vocabulary Lists

Many districts we work with create K-12 vocabulary lists. While including other terms, these K-12 core vocabulary lists often focus on the broad-based Tier 2 words. Not only are these terms important for reading and comprehending in a cross-curricular sense, **Tier 2 terms also frequently appear on standardized assessments.**

4. Digital Tools to Support Word Learning

In today's 21st century classrooms, **digital tools must coexist alongside more traditional tools to help students increase their word learning and master academic terms.** Online tools, compared to their more traditional counterparts, provide a broader array of information about words and word meanings. In addition, some tools allow teachers to easily customize words so that students can practice, review, and play games with content or unit-specific words.

I've reviewed 21 digital tools that may help you plan and organize vocabulary activities. Students, too, can benefit by using online reference tools and various apps for practicing and reviewing terms.



Final Thoughts

Tiered vocabulary doesn't have to be complicated.

To start, review key terms from one unit and sorting them into Tier 2 and Tier 3 words which make up academic vocabulary.

Then, you need to think about how you will teach some of those words, particularly Tier 2 vocabulary. Check out [5 Simple Steps to Effective Vocabulary Instruction](#) – you'll get a few solid ideas and strategies there.

Put simply, creating tiered vocabulary lists and effective vocabulary instruction support student learning, achievement, and the Common Core State Standards.

No Tears for Tiers: Common Core Vocabulary Made Simple @tysonkimberly

Kimberly Tyson

<http://www.learningunlimitedllc.com/2013/02/20-digital-tools-for-vocabulary/>

21 Digital Tools to Build Vocabulary

February 10, 2013 By [Kimberly](#)



If you follow this blog, you know that I believe effective vocabulary instruction is just about the most important instructional activity for teachers to get right. For lots of reasons. Vocabulary influences fluency, comprehension, and student achievement. How's that for starters?

In addition, a broad vocabulary is important for effective speaking, listening, reading and writing. Vocabulary is a foundational component of an effective K-12 comprehensive literacy framework. And, vocabulary plays an important role in the Common Core State Standards.

I write frequently about the importance of effective vocabulary instruction and my recent infographic – the [10 Do's and Don'ts of Effective Vocabulary Instruction](#) – has proved very popular having been Pinned over 31,000 times. Since a broad vocabulary program includes both direct and indirect word learning strategies, **the following online tools can be easily integrated to support word learning.**

In today's 21st century classrooms, digital tools must coexist alongside more traditional tools. Online tools, compared to their more traditional counterparts, provide a broader array of information about words and word meanings. In addition, some tools allow teachers to easily customize words so that students can practice, review, and play games with content or unit-specific words.

Digital tools have advantages. For example, many allow students to:

- hear pronunciations;
- read words in a variety of authentic examples;
- view photos and images related to words (important for English language learners);
- reinforce word learning through interactive games;
- play with and manipulate language;
- discover rhyming words; and
- collaborate with classmates to create virtual words walls.

The following digital tools show promise to support word learning, review, and playing with language. I've grouped these tools into four categories: Reference Tools, Word Clouds, Games and Review, Word Walls and Virtual Field Trips. They're not listed in any particular order, so check out the entire list. Like other digital tools, they're not all created equal. Choose tools carefully to support standards and learning goals.

21 Digital Tools to Build Vocabulary

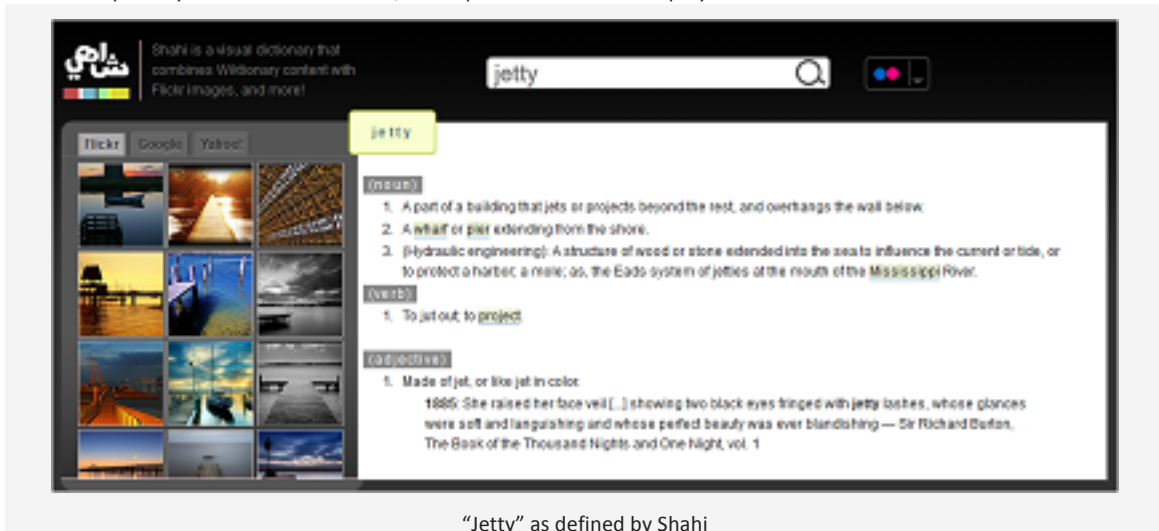
Reference Tools

1. [Lingro](#)

Lingro is a cool tool for both the “wow” factor and for its usefulness. Simply type in a website address on the Lingro website and it instantly turns the website into a clickable dictionary that translates text in 12 languages. Lingro hides in the background until students need it. To use, students simply click on any word and several definitions of the word are instantly displayed. I could see this as very useful tool for just-in-time support for **English language learners**.

2. [Lexipedia](#)

Looking for a visual thesaurus? Then Lexipedia is for you. Simple to use. Just type in any word and Lexipedia instantly displays the target word along with other words. It also color-codes the words by both parts of speech and relationships. As you hover over a word, a complete definition is displayed.



“Jetty” as defined by Shahi

3. [Shahi](#)

Shahi, as described on the website, is a visual dictionary that combines Wiktionary content with Flickr images, and more! An absolute new favorite for me. Besides serving as a [nonlinguistic tool](#), I can also see this as a very useful tool for English language learners.

4. [Snappy Words](#)

Similar to Lexipedia, Snappy Words is another visual thesaurus. Teachers may want to introduce several of the thesaurus tools and allow students to select which works best for them. The visually sparse, cleaner display of Lexipedia works better for me.

5. [Visual Dictionary Online](#)

Check out Webster’s visual dictionary which is simple to use. Type in a single word or choose a theme that also includes many sub-categories from which to choose. Even though Webster’s is simple to use, there is a downside to this tool. After typing in a word search, 4 or 5 Google ads quickly appear above the definitions. Distracting. Yuk. It’s so clunky I almost didn’t include this tool.

6. [Word Hippo](#)

An all-in-one reference tool, Word Hippo does the following: defines a word, provides a meaning, provides a word that is opposite, pronounces a word, provides rhyming words, places the word in many different contexts, and translates the word. Whew! That’s a lot.

7. [Wordnik.com](#)

Wordnik has the look and feel of a traditional dictionary with a twist. Along with the definition, students can see images related to the word, hear related sounds, and even see tweets with the target word highlighted. The “related words” feature is particularly helpful. Wordnik also features a “Word of the Day,” “Random Words,” and pronunciations of words.

8. [Your Dictionary](#)

Your Dictionary bills itself as providing *simple, straightforward definitions* and the *easiest-to-use online dictionary*. That's about right. Sometimes simple is good. In addition to providing a definition, Your Dictionary also includes a thesaurus and places the word in varied sentence examples.

9. [MathWords](#)

Math Words is a simple-to-use online dictionary specifically for **math terms and formulas**. This dictionary appears most appropriate for intermediate and secondary students.



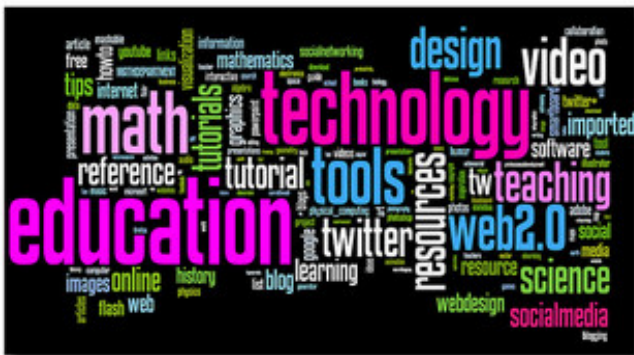
10. [A Math Dictionary for Kids](#)

A kid-friendly math dictionary. I like the simple, bright appearance that includes visual examples of each term. This math dictionary seems to be appropriate for elementary students.

Word Clouds

11. [Wordle](#)

Type (or copy & paste) in a chunk of text or individual words and Wordle generates a word cloud of the key vocabulary based on word frequency. Wordle can also be used for many varied purposes – check out these [52 ideas for using Wordle to support learning](#).



12. [WordSift](#)

Similar to Wordle, students type (or copy & paste) in a piece of text and WordSift sorts the text based on word frequency. **The visual thesaurus that displays beneath the words is a nice addition in WordSift.** With the visual thesaurus, students immediately see how words are grouped semantically. A useful addition, I think.

13. [Tagxedo](#)

Tagxedo is a word cloud app with style! Tagxedo provides a good deal of customization for users.

For example, if teachers or students want to create a word cloud in a shape such as the apple shown above, then Tagxedo is the right tool for the job. For younger students, Wordle is much more straightforward to use; however, older students will love the customization Tagxedo provides which includes colors, shapes, fonts, and themes.

Games and Review

14. [Flashcard Stash](#)

While I think that flash cards are sometimes poor practice, students can benefit from instant recognition. Fluency, if you will, with a specific set of words. Now, if understanding doesn't go deeper than instant recognition, students are in trouble. **Teachers can sign up for a free account and create flashcards to coordinate with units of study.**

15. [Vocabulary Games](#)

While I'm not a fan of word searches for review or "seatwork," this website also includes a wide assortment of other vocabulary games that can be used on a SmartBoard for review purposes. **To make a tool like this more effective, be certain to review the meaning of words as students play games.**

16. [Vocabulary Spelling City](#)

A beefed-up version of vocabulary games, Vocabulary Spelling City includes many more game-like activities useful for reviewing words. A number of teacher-made lists are included such as analogies, compound words, math words, and many more. The free version seems to include about 5 activities and teachers can save lists. “Teach Me” pronounces words and uses each word in context. Teachers can use pre-selected sentences or create their own. Vocabulary Spelling City is a useful tool for students, teachers, and parents. While there is both a free and paid version, Vocabulary Spelling City seems like a natural for PTA funding. The classroom paid version allows students to practice in school and at home as well.

17. [VocabAhead](#)

VocabAhead is a useful tool for secondary students and teachers. **Short videos – 30 to 60 seconds – accompany each word and make this tool stand out among others for secondary students.** The Study Lounge, for students, features leveled word lists (grades 6-12) and SAT word lists. Students can view videos, hear pronunciations, practice, take quizzes, play games, track performance, and more. In addition, teachers can create their own word lists for students. Custom word lists can be embedded in a blog or class website which makes integration and review a snap. Apple and Android apps are also available for free download.



18. [Free Rice](#)

At Free Rice, students can practice matching words to the correct definition, and donate rice at the same time. For each correct answer, the United Nations World Food Programme donates 10 grains of rice to a country in need. How’s that for combining word learning with social goodness? When a student plays, there is a visual display of rice (see image) which is added to a bowl each time the student makes a correct response. Free Rice includes subject area lists in Geography,

Science, Math, and others. It is leveled so students can play at just the right level of challenge for them. Note of caution: Free Rice may be addicting to you *and* your students.

Word Walls & Virtual Field Trips

19. [Padlet](#)

Padlet is an online space to create a collaborative, digital word wall. Getting a leg up on the more traditional word wall, Padlet allows users to create sticky notes that can include text, images, links and videos. Teachers can embed this into a classroom website or blog which makes it a go-to collaborative space for students. For primary students, teachers will probably want to create the wall with words and links for students. Older students will get the hang of it fairly quickly. A great, collaborative tool and virtual classroom space to build online references and key vocabulary for content units.

20. [ThingLink](#)

ThingLink is a tool for making images interactive. To use, simply upload an image, identify hot spots on specific parts of the image, and add text or web links to the image. In the classroom, teachers could use ThingLink to launch a unit by introducing students to key vocabulary or students could design interactive images as they become more familiar with vocabulary. There are many possibilities; I’d love to know how you use ThingLink to extend and deepen student learning.

21. [Trackstar](#)

TrackStar, a free online program, allows teachers to collect a series of websites and annotate them so that students can follow an online journey. With a little work, teachers can create a visual vocabulary field trip for students. Teachers determine topics which support units of study. TrackStar is a great way for students to experience multiple exposures to words in varied contexts ([a characteristic of effective vocabulary instruction](#))