

# Vocabulary Practice: Incorporating It in Your Classroom

The Renaissance Place® edition of Renaissance Accelerated Reader® promotes students' vocabulary development with special features: word lists and Vocabulary Practice Quizzes for Accelerated Reader books. Each word list includes between 5 and 15 vocabulary words that are significant to a book's meaning. Reviewing the list before reading helps students activate prior knowledge and make predictions. After students finish books, a Vocabulary Practice Quiz checks their understanding of these key vocabulary words. The vocabulary features of Accelerated Reader offer an innovative, research-based approach for accelerating vocabulary growth and heightening students' interest in words.

## Effective Vocabulary Practice: What the Research Says

Traditional vocabulary practice has centered on the use of definitions. Typically, students are told to look up, write down, and memorize the definitions for words on a list. Research shows, however, that this kind of practice is very limited. Definitions—even when combined with an example of the word used in a sentence—lead to only superficial understanding. Also, the number of words that can be taught in this way is small compared to the number of words students need to know to be good readers and communicators.

What is effective for promoting vocabulary development? Current research says:

- The most powerful way to promote vocabulary growth is through reading. Specifically, the most important goals should be to (1) increase students' exposure to new words by increasing the amount of reading they do, and (2) help them be able to learn the new words they encounter through reading.
- Vocabulary practice should focus on words that students are likely to need in conversation and general academic reading. Vocabulary activities should also take into account what students already know and not require everyone to practice the same words.
- Motivation is critical to learning new words, and students' interest in words has a huge impact on how many they learn. Also, having control over the learning process increases students' motivation and vocabulary growth.

## Effective Vocabulary Practice with Accelerated Reader

With Accelerated Reader, you can give students vocabulary practice that's based on the research-proven strategies that work. In an Accelerated Reader classroom, students spend lots of time reading and are naturally exposed to thousands of words in a rich and meaningful context. Accelerated Reader software provides vocabulary lists and Vocabulary Practice Quizzes that reinforce students' learning of words encountered in their independent reading. Each vocabulary list and quiz include useful words that appear frequently in a particular book and are essential to the meaning. Since students choose the books they want to read, they see words in a context that's interesting to them and have some control over the vocabulary-learning process. Also, because students read books within their zone of proximal development or ZPD (a level of difficulty that's neither too hard nor too easy), their vocabulary practice is appropriate for their individual abilities.

The experience is highly motivating. Students enjoy taking the Vocabulary Practice Quizzes on the computer and are encouraged by the immediate feedback they receive. Perhaps most importantly, the vocabulary lists and quizzes generate interest and excitement in words and make it easy for you to create a word-rich environment that will lead to genuine, large-scale vocabulary growth.

## **How Vocabulary Words Are Chosen**

We have identified 5, 10, or 15 vocabulary words for each of the most popular Accelerated Reader books. The number of words chosen varies because some books contain a richer vocabulary than others. To be selected, a word must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- At the reading level of the book or higher
- Used two or more times
- Significant to the meaning of the book
- Interesting and useful

## **Using Accelerated Reader Word Lists and Vocabulary Practice Quizzes**

### **What Students Do**

1. The student selects a book that is within her ZPD that she is interested in reading. She also receives and reads the list of vocabulary words for the book. The student can generate the list of words from the software.
2. The student reads the book. She may keep the vocabulary words in mind as she reads, but she doesn't read to find the words.
3. After the student finishes the book, she reviews the word list. She may look up any word she doesn't know in the dictionary, consult the list of definitions that can be printed from the software, or figure out the meaning in some other way. (The ability to print a list of definitions is a teacher-controlled preference.)
4. The student first takes and passes the Accelerated Reader Reading Practice Quiz and receives a Reading Practice TOPS Report. The student then takes the Vocabulary Practice Quiz and receives a Vocabulary Practice TOPS Report. If the student doesn't pass the Reading Practice Quiz, she shouldn't take the Vocabulary Practice Quiz.
5. If the student answers a question incorrectly, the question is repeated the next time she takes a Vocabulary Practice Quiz. In all, a student gets two tries to answer a question correctly. When she does, the vocabulary word appears on her Words Learned Report.

### **What Teachers Do**

Before adding vocabulary practice, be sure you have Accelerated Reader running efficiently. Next, set up routines for taking Vocabulary Practice Quizzes. Your classroom routine will include these steps:

1. Regularly monitor your students' vocabulary learning by reviewing TOPS Reports. We recommend that students take their Vocabulary Practice Quiz immediately after taking and passing the Reading Practice Quiz for the book. Thus, you can review the TOPS Reports for both quizzes at the same time.
2. Every week, run a Summary Diagnostic Report—Vocabulary Practice to keep track of how your students are doing and to see whether any students are having problems.
3. As needed, run a Student Performance Record Report, which provides detailed information on an individual student's performance.
4. Engage students regularly in activities that bolster vocabulary growth. For examples, see page 3.

Keep students focused on their Accelerated Reader goals. When students are reading books they choose at an appropriate ZPD, they will have the best opportunity to build a powerful vocabulary.

## **Individualize Vocabulary Practice**

You may be tempted to use Vocabulary Practice Quizzes in a traditional way—by having all students read the same book and quiz on the same vocabulary words. Please be aware that this practice would not promote vocabulary growth. Vocabulary Practice Quizzes work best when students choose books based on their specific interests and individual reading level or ZPD. Thus, different students will read different books and learn different vocabulary words. Because some students will be reading more books than others, the number of words each student learns will vary, too.

## Words Learned Report

Be sure to let students use their Words Learned Report throughout the school year. The report shows all of the words a student has learned and is a useful tool to support many vocabulary activities. It also helps increase motivation by showing students the variety of new words they have added to their vocabularies.

## Recommended Activities to Reinforce Learning

Vocabulary practice with Accelerated Reader gets students excited about words and fosters extensive vocabulary growth, but it is not a complete vocabulary program. Instructions and activities will also help your students develop a rich and varied vocabulary. Below we list activities that research suggests are most effective. Some of these activities reinforce your students' learning of words from vocabulary lists for the books they are reading. Some teach strategies for recognizing the meaning of any new word. Others are intended to create a motivating classroom environment.

**Help students associate words with real-life experiences.** Learning words that we encounter through real-life experiences is one of the most effective ways to increase vocabulary.

- Review and discuss key words whenever your class has taken a field trip, hosted a guest speaker, conducted an experiment, or taken part in any other group activity.
- Label items in your classroom, including special items you might bring in for a science or history lesson.
- Ask students to be on the lookout in real-life situations for the vocabulary words from their books. Ask them to report back to the class anytime they hear or see one of their words used.

**Help students understand how words are related to one another.** Associating new words with words and concepts students already know is an effective way to build vocabulary.

- Use semantic webs and other kinds of graphic organizers to make conceptual relationships visible. For example, select a word related to a topic or theme the class is studying, such as the word *friendship*. Have students individually brainstorm and compose a list of related words. Ask for responses and organize the students' suggestions into categories on the board, such as emotions, people or animals, places, and opposites. As students read a story or do other work on the theme, have them continue to identify related words. Make sure that discussion is part of the process. Research shows that simply constructing graphic organizers without discussion is not effective.
- Ask students who have read the same Accelerated Reader book and are studying some of the same vocabulary words to work together on a graphic organizer like the one described above.
- Similarly, use graphic organizers to show how words are related morphologically or by "family," for example, *forgive, forgiven, forgiveness, forgivable, and unforgiving*.

**Teach word structure.** Understanding how words are structured can help students figure out the meaning of new words they encounter.

- Select a word from something you have been reading as a class that is made up of a root word plus a prefix or suffix—*unleashed*, for example. Write the word on the board and discuss its meaning. Have students think of other words that begin with the prefix *un-* or ask them to contribute words from their individualized Words Learned Report. Point out that *un-* indicates *not*.
- Students can do a similar activity using the words on their Words Learned Report. Have them look for a group of words that have the same prefix, suffix, or root, and then ask them to speculate on what that word part indicates. Be sure to discuss their answers.

**Encourage students to use new words in meaningful ways.** If students use new vocabulary words in their own speech and writing, they are more likely to remember them.

- Encourage students to look over their Words Learned Report before doing a writing assignment to see if there are any words that might be just right for their topic.
- Acknowledge and celebrate any time a student correctly uses a new vocabulary word—whether from a class list or their Words Learned Report—in class discussion or a piece of writing.

**Promote the enjoyment of words.** Simple, fun activities can go a long way toward helping students pay attention to and take pleasure in words.

- Create a Word Wall. In addition to posting words related to what the class is studying, use your WordWall to collect words that are funny, have a nice sound, or are simply interesting.
- Give students time to do word puzzles and play word games.
- Read aloud books that are particularly rich in words, like the Harry Potter books, or that use word play as part of the story, such as the Amelia Bedelia books and *The King Who Rained*.
- Share riddles, jokes, and puns.

## Vocabulary Practice Reports

Report	Description
Vocabulary Practice TOPS Report	Summarizes a student’s performance on a quiz just taken. Also provides cumulative data.
Words Learned Report	Lists all the words answered correctly on Vocabulary Practice Quizzes for each selected student.
Summary Diagnostic Report – Vocabulary Practice	Summarizes student performance on assignments or quizzes, showing progress towards goals and potential problems.
Student Performance Record Report	Shows individual student performance on each assignment or quiz.