

# GCSE English

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Spring hub

Empowering students through vocabulary part two: writing

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# Vocabulary quiz

What do you already know about vocabulary?

1. What percentage of words in a text does a student need to understand to be able to access a text?

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2. A vocabulary poor child is how many months behind by the age of five years?

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3. What proportion of students are not meeting age-related vocabulary expectations in pre-school?

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4. What does tier 2 vocabulary refer to?

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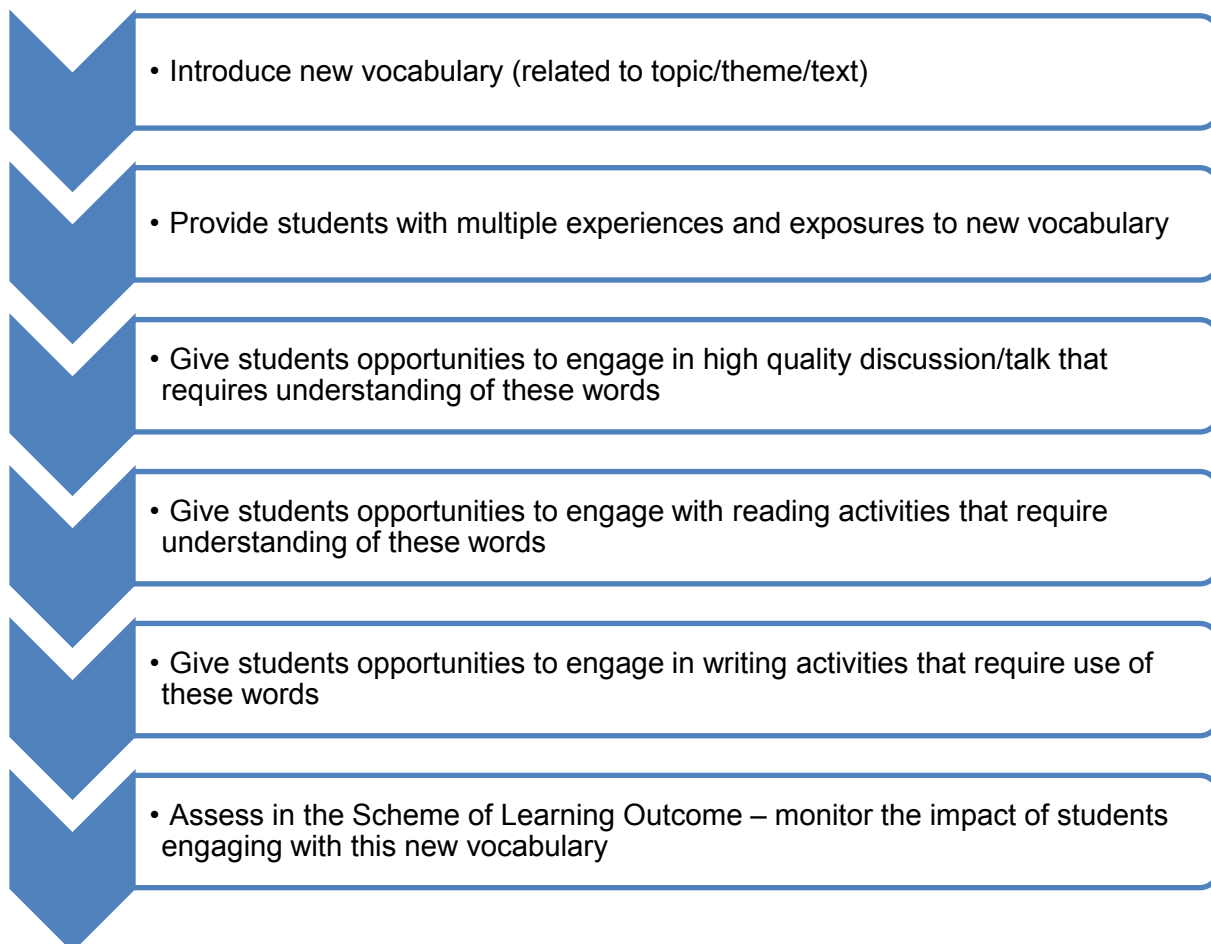
5. How is tier 3 vocabulary different to this?

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# Sequence of planning and delivery for successful vocabulary instruction

This is one suggested teaching sequence you could try with your students.




## Example: *Macbeth*


Below is an example of how you might use this model, using one of the set texts for GCSE English Literature Paper 1 Section A: Shakespeare. Note that stages 3, 4 and 5 do not need to be followed in this sequence and can be interchanged.




• Suggestions of new vocabulary to introduce related to *Macbeth*: tragedy; character; monarchy; regicide; destiny; supernatural; deceitful; hallucinate; paradox; decline; deviate; ambition; sceptical; hierarchy; patriarchy; usurp.




• Expose students to new vocab via a variety of activities. Some suggestions: Frayer models; definition match; dual-coding (draw an image to help you to remember each of the key words); use the words in sentences; create word maps to make links between the key words.




• Embed new vocab through talk, including: group discussions around key characters/themes; presentations on key subjects – challenge them to use key vocabulary; model key vocabulary through teacher talk; display vocabulary during discussions and collaborative learning; play Taboo to check that students can explain the meanings of these words (plus keep a pile of words they can't explain and teach these words explicitly again); engage in 'think pair share' where students have to explain the meanings to each other.



• Suggested reading activities: 1. Select a variety of non-fiction texts which make use of these words. (The British library and Royal Shakespeare Company provide free resources and audio visual content.) 2. Provide comprehension, synthesis and summary activities which require students to engage with the key vocabulary. 3. Set reading homeworks which enable students to consolidate this vocabulary.



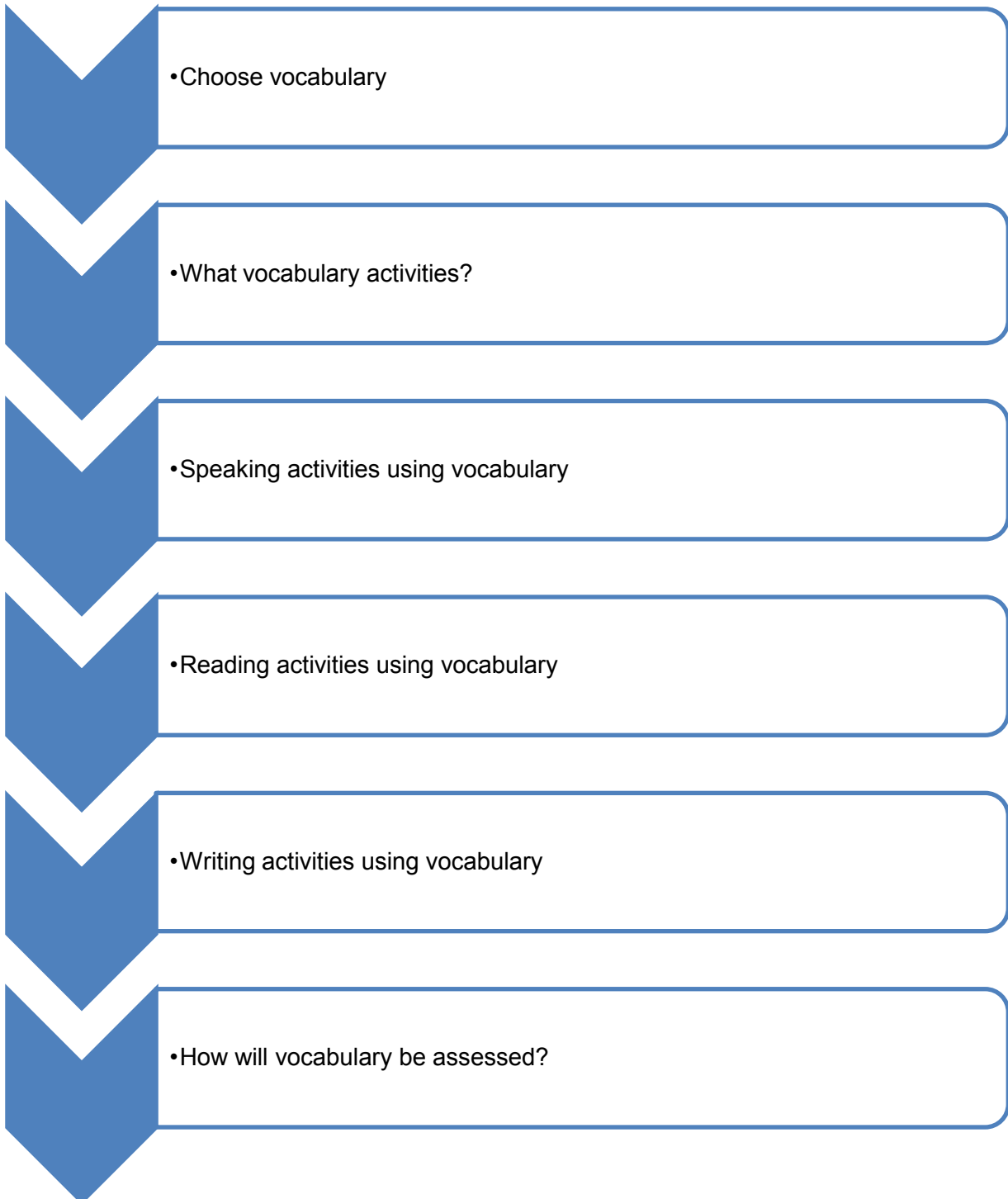
• Plan opportunities for students to use this vocab in their writing: 'do now' tasks where students use certain words in sentences; cloze activities, where students use the key vocab to complete the sentences; summary activities; non-fiction writing tasks; writing essay responses etc.



• Assessment opportunity and feedback: It's important to monitor whether students are using the key vocab – identifying which words they are/not using and using this to inform future teaching.

## Now you try:

Choose a text or topic you're currently teaching and map out how you might trial this suggested approach.



- Choose vocabulary
- What vocabulary activities?
- Speaking activities using vocabulary
- Reading activities using vocabulary
- Writing activities using vocabulary
- How will vocabulary be assessed?

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# How can we link the delivery of reading and writing?

Try to focus on vocabulary instruction

1. How are reading and writing linked?

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2. How do you use reading texts to support the teaching of writing?

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3. How do you use reading texts as a source of vocabulary for writing?

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4. What knowledge and skills are required of readers and writers?

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## The links between reading and writing

**Fitzgerald and Shanahan** (2000: *Reading and writing relations and their development*) identify the relationship between reading and writing via four types of knowledge readers and writers share:

1. Meta-knowledge about written language: knowing functions and purposes of reading and writing; awareness that a reader interacts with a text to understand it and a writer interacts with ideas to create a text; monitoring your own meaning making.
2. Linguistic features of written language: phonemes, orthography, morphology, lexemes, semantics and pragmatics, syntax and discourse. We focus on different features depending on the age and stage of the learners we engage with.
3. Procedural knowledge: knowing how to access and use knowledge during reading and writing by employing different reading strategies, questioning and summarising.
4. Domain knowledge and semantics: background knowledge or content knowledge; what the reader already knows about a topic, including vocabulary.

We know that background knowledge affects children's ability to comprehend reading texts, but in writing it also has a major impact.

# Extracts from mark schemes

## GCSE English Language

<b>AO5 Content and Organisation</b>		
Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively; selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences.		
Organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts.		
Level		Skills descriptors
Level 4	Upper level	<b>Extensive and ambitious</b> vocabulary with sustained crafting of linguistic devices.
	Lower level	<b>Extensive</b> vocabulary with conscious crafting of linguistic devices.
Level 3	Upper level	<b>Increasingly sophisticated</b> vocabulary and phrasing, chosen for effect with a range of successful linguistic devices.
	Lower level	Vocabulary <b>clearly chosen for effect</b> and appropriate use of linguistic devices.
Level 2	Upper level	<b>Conscious use of</b> vocabulary with some use of linguistic devices.
	Lower level	<b>Begins to vary</b> vocabulary with some use of linguistic devices.
Level 1	Upper level	<b>Simple</b> vocabulary; simple linguistic devices.
	Lower level	<b>Simple</b> vocabulary.

<b>AO6 Technical Accuracy</b> Students must use a <b>range of vocabulary</b> and sentence structures <b>for clarity, purpose and effect</b> , with accurate spelling and punctuation. (This requirement must constitute 20% of the marks for each specification as a whole.)	
Level	Skills descriptors
Level 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High level of accuracy in spelling, including ambitious vocabulary.</li> <li><b>Extensive and ambitious</b> use of vocabulary.</li> </ul>
Level 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Generally accurate spelling, including complex and irregular words.</li> <li><b>Increasingly sophisticated</b> use of vocabulary.</li> </ul>
Level 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some accurate spelling of more complex words.</li> <li><b>Varied</b> use of vocabulary.</li> </ul>
Level 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accurate basic spelling.</li> <li><b>Simple</b> use of vocabulary.</li> </ul>

## GCSE English Literature

AO4 will be assessed on **Section A** only. The performance descriptors are provided below.

Performance descriptor	Marks awarded
High performance: In the context of the level of demand of the question, learners spell and punctuate with <b>consistent accuracy</b> , and <b>consistently use vocabulary</b> and sentence structures to achieve <b>effective control of meaning</b> .	4 marks
Intermediate performance: In the context of the level of demand of the question, learners spell and punctuate with <b>considerable accuracy</b> , and use a <b>considerable range of vocabulary</b> and sentence structures to achieve <b>general control of meaning</b> .	2-3 marks
Threshold performance: In the context of the level of demand of the question, learners spell and punctuate with reasonable accuracy, and use a <b>reasonable range of vocabulary</b> and sentence structures; any <b>errors do not hinder meaning</b> in the response.	1 mark

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## Overview of vocabulary skills identified in the mark scheme:

From the mark scheme, it is clear that:

- students need to be taught how to use vocabulary **to create meanings and effects**
- students need to be taught to **select and choose** their vocabulary to create **precise** meanings
- we need to **increase the range** of vocabulary our students are familiar with
- students need to be taught to **check that they are using vocabulary accurately and appropriately** for audience and purpose.

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# Teaching activity

To help students in their selection of vocabulary and precise use of vocabulary

1. You have been given the following description with a number of words missing.
2. You've also been given an atmosphere in an envelope.
3. Select words and fill the gaps in order to create the atmosphere you've been given.

Chosen atmosphere \_\_\_\_\_

From the top of the [insert adj.] \_\_\_\_\_ hill,

the [insert adj.] \_\_\_\_\_ town appeared [insert adj.] \_\_\_\_\_.

Down a street, a child [insert V.] \_\_\_\_\_ [insert adv.] \_\_\_\_\_ly.

The day was [insert adj.] \_\_\_\_\_ and [insert adj.] \_\_\_\_\_.

The child headed towards a gate; it was [insert adj.] \_\_\_\_\_.

Beyond the gate grew many [insert N.] \_\_\_\_\_ and the [insert N.] \_\_\_\_\_

[insert synonym for 'appeared'] \_\_\_\_\_ behind them.

4. Discuss this with a partner and consider the impact your choices make.

Guess the atmosphere in each of these examples.

## Example 1:

From the top of the soft (adj) hill, the chocolate box (adj) town appeared quaint (adj).

Down a street, a child (V) skipped (adv) joyfully. The day was warm (adj) and summery (adj). The child headed towards a gate; it was open (adj). Beyond the gate grew many wildflowers (N) and the farmhouse (N) warmly emerged (V- synonym appeared) behind them.

## Example 2:

From the top of the jagged (adj) hill, the crooked (adj) town appeared shadowed (adj). Down a street, a child (V) hid (adv) unsuccessfully. The day was icy (adj) and dark (adj). The child headed towards a gate; it was rotting (adj). Beyond the gate grew many brambles (N) and the castle (N) loomed over the village (V- synonym appeared) behind them.

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# Feedback from examiners

Extracts from the reports on the exams: comments linked to students' use of vocabulary

## Feedback on Paper 1 Q5, June 2019

More able students were able to develop imaginative and descriptive scenes from details in the picture or other markets, perhaps using contrast or focusing on smaller, less obvious details. There was evidence of conscious crafting...

There were a significant number of responses that were hindered by contrived and ill-applied 'wow' words. Students should be advised that 'advanced' vocabulary does not add quality unless the words are used sparingly and with understanding. For example, 'plethora', 'incandescent' and 'azure' were used often, but not always with success. Students would be able to write more clearly with fewer such words and more detailed observations.

## June 2018

...there are still areas for improvement. Some students continue to produce formulaic responses with a contrived use of senses: I can see/I can hear/I can smell. Others continue to include over-ambitious vocabulary that is misused and obscures meaning. Writing skills obviously need to be taught, but there is also an argument for not over-preparing students with formulaic methods, especially for creative writing. There is much to be said for an honest response where the student's voice can be heard, rather than an artificial, contrived construction.

## Feedback on Paper 2 Q5, June 2019

Many students also took advantage of the topic to adopt a lively and individual voice, selecting an engagingly bold tone, often using humour, irony and hyperbole to good effect.

Another area where teaching has clearly had an impact is in the level of vocabulary seen in many responses. At its best, the rise in more complex and sophisticated vocabulary enhances and enriches the student's response; at its worst, the result is counter-productive. Ideas, and an argument which might have been judged clear, risk being swamped by the imprecise use of an inappropriate selection of vocabulary. The words themselves obfuscate the meaning and all clarity is lost. Whilst there is no desire to inhibit a student's ambition in using more complex words, it is worth reminding teachers that vocabulary must be broadened in a contextualised way if it is to have the desired effect in the exam.

## June 2018

Students occasionally fell into some of the familiar traps that have been identified in previous series: over-use of linguistic devices; imprecise use of more sophisticated vocabulary; a failure to

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signpost the direction of the response; and an inability to sustain an appropriate tone or style for the given audience, tending towards the colloquial or over-familiar.

Some students whose basic spelling was generally accurate were unable to qualify for a mark in Level 2 as they simply did not use the complex vocabulary required to demonstrate a more advanced level of spelling.

## **GCSE English Literature**

Examiners continue to see a lot of spurious and inaccurate use of language terminology that does not add to the effectiveness of a student's analysis of the texts. Students who reach the top level of the mark scheme, and indeed achieve full marks on a question, generally write with great clarity and precision about their ideas and understanding. One hallmark of this is often a confident general vocabulary, which allows them to engage fully with concepts and ideas.

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# What does effective vocabulary use look like?

## Student response 1: Paper 1 Writing

Paper 1 Question 5 (2019)

Describe a market place as suggested by [picture of market place - see page 23]

A market place isn't like an ordinary market. Day in, day out; from sun rise until sunset, plethora people overcrowd food stalls and make the market look like it's invaded by an army of ants.

But not every market place is like this.

Vans parked in front of shops full of abstract fruit and vegetables. The atmosphere deafened me each time I approached nearer and nearer: children screaming with hostility, vans beeping around me, and sellers loudly shouting at people to buy their food.

Market places are not as idyllic as a few people assume them to be. In fact, they are the most disturbing places to go to. A few market stalls sell raw meat which are sometimes hung, raw fish are sold, which smell horrendous, especially when it's warm and busy, these are quite disturbing as you can sense the smell of decaying flesh; flies buzzing around and landing on animal flesh.

The ghastly smell of decaying meat surround each person leaving them suffer. Vile.

The gruesome environment, which was over-crowded with people made the place look like a horror movie for the younger children as they are prone for wandering off and becoming missing.

Suggested activities to use with students:

1. Identify ambitious vocabulary.
2. Tick or cross where ambitious vocabulary is used appropriately/inappropriately.
3. Model re-drafting the sentences so that the vocabulary makes sense in the context.
4. Give pupils sections of the response to redraft and improve using vocabulary precisely.



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## Student response 2: Paper 1 Writing

Paper 1 Question 5 (2019)

Describe a market place as suggested by [picture of market place - see page 23]

Every town has its heart. Every town has a pinpoint of life and community, and in this small town the market place was exactly that. Dozens of brightly decorated, organized stalls were scattered along the streets, smothering the town centre with colour and life. People bounced contently from stall to stall, never more than a couple of yards apart, but [completely?] distant in character. Butchers, greengrocers, fish mongers alike all hustling in an attempt to sell their finest produce; causing a scene of mass mayhem, yet somehow calming and loveable. The sense of community really thrived amongst the carnage.

To the left, bright, vibrant fruits were stacked impossibly upon one another, grasping and holding the consumers attention in an effort to tempt them into spending some loose change. To the right, half a hog. Half a hog, hanging down from the market [illegible] along with chickens, and freshly cut sections of beef; as fresh as the seller [illegible] them to be. The hog guarded the butchers stall, whilst looking down upon the range of eggs and meat that were slapped amongst the market stall. It did not fit in, but nothing really did in this place.

Further along, through the busy, bustling streets, fumes of delight filled the air. Wheels of cheese were particularly potent in the summers atmosphere, maybe a war with the perfect flowers and roses dazzling amongst a stall, attracting nature and customers hand in hand. A waft of shrimp and crayfish bought back memories of the sea, whilst fighting away the glorious scent of the bakery filling the air.

The people were just as animated. Stall owners who had a lifetime of experience drew in the public with an enticing smile or a unique deal only for them. Children stood in awe trying to decipher which ice cream to pick or what candy bar would be their favourite today. Coins clinked as cash exchanged hands throughout the community, and everyone felt a winner.

The market was crucial, the market was the heart of this town, and this small stretch of food and flowers and products meant more than just money, or sales.

Suggested activities to use with students:

1. How does this student use vocabulary effectively?
2. How is the student's vocabulary linked to their structural choices?
3. Make a list of the words that this student uses well.
4. What semantic fields (topics) are the words linked to?
5. Deconstruct how vocabulary is used well in this text. Make a list of the ways this student uses vocabulary well in this text.
6. Students try to create their own piece of writing which uses vocabulary this way.

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## Student response 3: Paper 2 Writing

Paper 2 Question 5 (2019)

'It is people who have extraordinary skill, courage and determination who deserve to be famous, not those who have good looks or lots of money or behave badly.'

Write a letter to the editor of a newspaper in which you argue your point of view in response to this statement.

Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2019

Dear Sir/Madame,

It has come to my attention that people have been stating "It is people who have extraordinary skill, courage and determination who deserve to be famous not those who have good looks or lots of money or behave badly." I completely agree as a young, 16 year old girl from [redacted], this is a very important topic for me. I would like to take this opportunity to express why I agree with this statement.

During a child's life they are constantly taught at school to have self confidence, that it does not matter what you look like. [illegible] life is about your determination to get where you would like. This is a crucial message that is being displayed. However, society completely disregards this message, portraying the idea money and good looks is what matters. This is not right! Children should not be worrying about their looks and wealth, but should be focussing on their education and aims in life. But, having a goal that is not achievable is simply unfair, disencouraging and not right!

People who do not have a lot of money should not be at a disadvantage in the challenge to become famous. If skill, courage and determination is present, money should not matter! Furthermore, nobody can decide what they look like, meaning it is extremely unfair to judge somebody from the outside without exploring their true talent or bravery. Being famous should be a goal that a person has to work for, not something that is handed to those who are good looking or wealthy. As I am sure you will agree?

In addition, this situation causes bad role models for society, building up the idea people must follow their behaviour and actions. Do you want your children to be following in the footsteps of a bad behaved famous person? Imagine what the world will become. Something must change.

In conclusion, I have no doubt that an intelligent person like you will understand my point of view and take it into consideration. Together we can change society!

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

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## Student response 4: Paper 2 Writing

### Paper 2 Question 5 (2019)

'It is people who have extraordinary skill, courage and determination who deserve to be famous, not those who have good looks or lots of money or behave badly.'

Write a letter to the editor of a newspaper in which you argue your point of view in response to this statement.

Dear Sir or Madam,

Let me ask you a question; why is it that those who are famous are never those who work hard? This might seem paradoxical in nature to you, and indeed to many others, however have you ever stopped to consider those who really work hard? The cleaners, the teachers, the examiners – there are millions who work without cease or pause but are not recognised properly for their actions. This is wrong.

Seemingly illogically, those who are rich and famous and in the public eye are those who did not work arduous hours getting a university degree; those who did not spend years slaving on a training course at minimum pay. Those who are rich and famous are those with mountains of money in the first place; those who won the genetic lottery. We have a whole society built on luck and money. If this does not seem wrong to you then I do not know what would!

What is often forgotten is that our society needs the council workers, the receptionists, the drivers. Without them, how would those who are famous be able to check into their resplendent hotels or be driven to their next extravagant restaurant? I jokes, but what remains true is that these workers are unappreciated for what they do in our society. The [illegible] hours spent on allowing society to run is an unassailable fact. Soy why is it that those who are rich and famous are those who do not contribute to society in the slightest?

Of course, you might argue that those who are famous and rich contribute to society through the entertainment they provide and the music they pump out. Millions of us listen to such music every day, for example. I know I would not be able to survive a shift without my favourite Lady Gaga album! However, the truth is that this banality fails to realise the plethora of bad behaviour and bad influence that these celebrities have on our society. Drunk driving and illegal drugs are increasingly popular amongst today's celebrities – surely you can see that these are not the people who should be given such positions of power.

We can fix this. As a society, we need to give more appreciation to those who really deserve it; the nurses, the invigilators, the academics. This problem is not insolvable. We can all work for a more equal and appreciative society, a future utopia where nobody is underappreciated for their extraordinary efforts and skill. But this is not today's society. In today's society, why is it that those who are famous are never those who work hard?

Yours faithfully, [redacted]

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## Ways of using student responses in teaching vocabulary

Below are some suggestions of how you might use the student responses here to increase the range and accurate/appropriate use of vocabulary.

### Student responses 1 and 3:

- Guide students in reading and identifying the ambitious vocabulary in the response.
- Guide students in critiquing – where is vocabulary used well or not?
- Model how to re-draft or improve the writing.
- Give students a selection of sentences where the vocabulary is used imprecisely – they edit and improve.

### Student response 2 and 4:

- Students identify the ambitious vocabulary.
- Students check they understand the meaning(s) of the vocabulary.
- Students attempt to use the word(s) in their own sentences.
- Guide students to explore how the vocabulary is used successfully.
- Look at how the stronger students use tier 2 and 3 vocabulary to write successfully.
- Students develop glossaries and word banks to gather vocabulary to inform their own writing.
- The teacher deconstructs how these learners have used vocabulary successfully. Build tier 2 vocabulary banks that would support the tier 3 (subject specific vocabulary) in students' writing.

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## Student responses

For reference, find below the levels and marks that were awarded for each of the student responses.

### Student response 1: Paper 1

AO5	Upper Level 2 – 12 marks
AO6	Low Level 3 – 9 marks
Total/40	<b>21 marks</b>

### Student response 2: Paper 1

AO5	Upper Level 4 – 22 marks
AO6	Low Level 4 – 13 marks
Total/40	<b>35 marks</b>

### Student response 3: Paper 2

AO5	Lower – Level 3 – 15 marks
AO6	Mid – Level 3 - 11 marks
Total/40	<b>26 marks</b>

### Student response 4: Paper 2

AO5	Upper Level 4 – 22 marks
AO6	Mid Level 4 – 15 marks
Total/40	<b>37 marks</b>

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# Teaching vocabulary for Paper 1

Suggested scaffold/planning model for descriptive and narrative writing tasks:

Read the question; extract key information;  
'brain dump' first ideas and words.

**Choose an atmosphere, an extended metaphor or a character quality that you wish to communicate.**

Spider diagram words or phrases that will help you to create this atmosphere/extended metaphor/character quality.

Write the atmosphere/extended metaphor/character quality you've selected at the top of your page.

Teach students how to use this as a monitoring tool during writing –  
*Does this word/image add to my atmosphere/mood/central idea?*

Teach students to use it as an evaluation tool when finished –  
*Are there any words that do not match with my atmosphere/mood/central idea?*

Describe a market place as suggested by this picture:



© Gianni Muratone/Alamy Stock Photo

(Paper 1 Q5 June 2019)

**Brain dump: first ideas**

A large, empty rounded rectangular box intended for students to write their first ideas for describing the market place.

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Choose an atmosphere, extended metaphor or character quality: \_\_\_\_\_

Word bank for atmosphere / extended metaphor / character quality:

Plan:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Write:

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Stop! Monitor – have you used words that match your atmosphere / extended metaphor / character quality?



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# Teaching vocabulary for Paper 2

Suggested scaffold/planning model for non-fiction viewpoint writing:

Linking the vocabulary of the question with cross-curricular vocabulary.

Read the question – identify the topic/focus.

Guide students to list other subjects/experiences that they have which could be linked to this question.

Students list/spider diagram/record this vocabulary.

Teach students to use their word list as a part of their monitoring and evaluation.

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'People protest about the cruelty of keeping animals in captivity, but they seem happy enough to eat meat, keep pets and visit zoos. All animals should be free!'

Write an article for a magazine in which you explain your point of view on this statement.

(24 marks for content and organisation  
16 marks for technical accuracy)  
**[40 marks]**

**(Paper 2 Q5 November 2019)**

Read the question: what is the topic? \_\_\_\_\_

Does this link to other subjects that you study?

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What words can you use from your study, life, the news?

Plan:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



# Closing the word gap: English

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## Section 2: Vocabulary to improve your students' writing

Here are Annabel Wall's suggestions for effective classroom strategies to develop students' ability and confidence in using key vocabulary in their written work.

In English lessons, students face the challenge of writing a wide range of fiction and non-fiction texts. A limited vocabulary can stifle their written voice, so how do we help students improve their own written vocabulary?

### 1. Good readers make better writers

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All English teachers know that good readers make better writers, so encouraging reading for pleasure should underpin any approach to improving students' written vocabulary.

In an ideal world, all year 7 students would arrive at secondary school with a love of reading books. However, for some students reading is not a pleasure. So how can we get students to read more?

- Encourage them to read comics, magazines, game reviews, graphic novels, or the *Guinness Book of World Records* (often the most popular and dog-eared books in the school library).
- Sneak in some wider reading during lessons, but don't worry about always having to 'do' something with a text – sometimes it's enough to just read something and let them think and enjoy.
- Set students the optional challenge of joining the local library and bringing in their library card to class as evidence. This works well if offered as an alternative to doing that week's homework!
- Set up group reading challenges. For example, at my last school all the year 7 tutor groups competed to see who could exceed their average height in books. The spines of each book were photocopied, and a pile was created on the wall for each tutor group to chart their progress. There are several Teachit English resources with a competitive element, including the [Great reading race \(12842\)](#) and [Reading bingo challenge \(26565\)](#).
- Encourage talk about reading throughout the school, and not just in the English classroom – ask other departments to share their favourite books too. Have displays celebrating a variety of readers and their love of books.

### 2. Taking the fear out of reading aloud

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Reading aloud has fallen out of fashion in a lot of English classrooms, and even confident students can find the prospect of reading aloud daunting. However, reading aloud can provide some of the most useful opportunities to focus on and discuss unfamiliar vocabulary. Students are more likely to use a word in conversation if they know how to pronounce it. If they use the word in their talk, they are more likely to use it in their writing.

Here are some strategies for making reading aloud less intimidating:

- Give students time to prepare what they will be reading aloud, or try learning some [Poetry By Heart](#).
- Allow students to choose what they read to the class – perhaps having a slot once a week when a few students can share an article they've found or a text they are interested in.
- Organise for students to read aloud in small groups (just as they do at key stage 2 in guided reading).

Model a growth mindset to your students: explain that many adults find reading aloud a challenge and that sometimes a real effort is needed to overcome this fear and anxiety.

### 3. Students taking the lead

It's important that students see the connection between their own reading and their writing.

Ask students to create bookmarks with spaces for words. During reading, encourage them to keep a record of interesting words they find. Devote regular slots during the week to reviewing and talking about these words, and ask students to give definitions in their own words.

These bookmarks can then be shared and used during writing tasks. They could also lead to 'Word of the day' or 'Word of the week', or contribute to a class word bank of interesting words.

Ask students to think about how words they have learned in other subjects could be used in their English writing. For example, find out what they are studying in history, and ask the students to draft a piece of creative writing set in that period, including some of the words they've recently learned in history to give their writing an authentic feel.

### 4. Playing with words

Give students the space to play with words in their writing. An effective approach is to pick a genre like science fiction or fantasy and encourage students to create their own word banks as part of their story planning.

These word banks could be generated in groups, with students inventing some words through various means. For example:

- **portmanteaux words** (words created by blending two words together) such as *mimsy*, which is a combination of *miserable* and *flimsy*
- **compound words** (words created by joining two words together) such as *moonlight*
- **neologisms** (newly coined words) such as *saturning*.

Use fun digital tools to inspire students, such as [Word Generator](#).

### 5. Using academic vocabulary in their own writing

Students with a limited vocabulary often struggle to write in an analytical style. One effective approach is to teach them academic vocabulary using a topic that is relevant to their everyday lives. Then get students to use academic vocabulary to write about their interests. For example, one of my students wrote a formal essay on skateboarding, starting with his own word bank of specialist terms and imagining he was writing for a knowledgeable audience.

Conjunctions are useful building blocks for formal writing. Students will sometimes use conjunctions in the wrong place, dropping them into a sentence without a real understanding of how the word affects the structure, meaning, and clarity of a sentence. There are various strategies for supporting students in their use of conjunctions:

- Ask students to sort conjunctions into groups – subordinating conjunctions, coordinating conjunctions, and conjunctive adverbs. Explicitly teach the purpose and function of each type of conjunction. The Teachit English [Connectives writing placemat \(20352\)](#) is a useful guide.
- Be aware of students overusing conjunctions, especially complicated conjunctions. Remind them that *and*, *but* or *so* are often the most suitable words to use. Clarity is always more important than sophistication.

Be careful of just teaching formulas for formal, literature essays (whether it be PEE, PEEL, WET RATS, or similar). These can be useful, especially for students who are struggling, but there is a danger that teaching this kind of formal analysis can become overly prescriptive – ‘follow this and you will get it right’. Allow for creative thinking and a variety of structures within formal essays.

Make a note of common sentence stems that students are using in your class, and then model some alternatives. For example:

The writer uses ...	<b>Instead write ...</b>	The writer <b>employs</b> ...
Lots of different ...		A <b>variety</b> of ...
This shows me that ...		This <b>suggests</b> to the <b>reader</b> that ...
This means that ...		This <b>reveals</b> that ...
The people watching the play feel ...		The <b>audience</b> feel ...
Like when ...		<b>For example</b> ...
Also, the writer uses ...		<b>In addition</b> , the writer uses ...
The play is about love ...		The play <b>deals</b> with the <b>theme</b> of love ...
The book ...		The <b>text/novel</b> ...
The good use of ...		The <b>effective use</b> of ...

## 6. Using words to describe effects

Although specialist terminology is essential in the English classroom, it's important to avoid feature spotting in analysis, as this can limit the scope of a student's response.

Remind students that the learning of specialist vocabulary is about acquiring a **language** to talk about literature. Model how to make the specialist term the subject of the sentence. For example:

The *alliteration* in the opening paragraph, ‘the dense mist drifted’, creates a sense of unease.

Having a wider vocabulary allows students to write about the **effect** of the writer's choices. This is often an area that students struggle with in English because they cannot draw on a bank of subtle words to describe the exact effect.

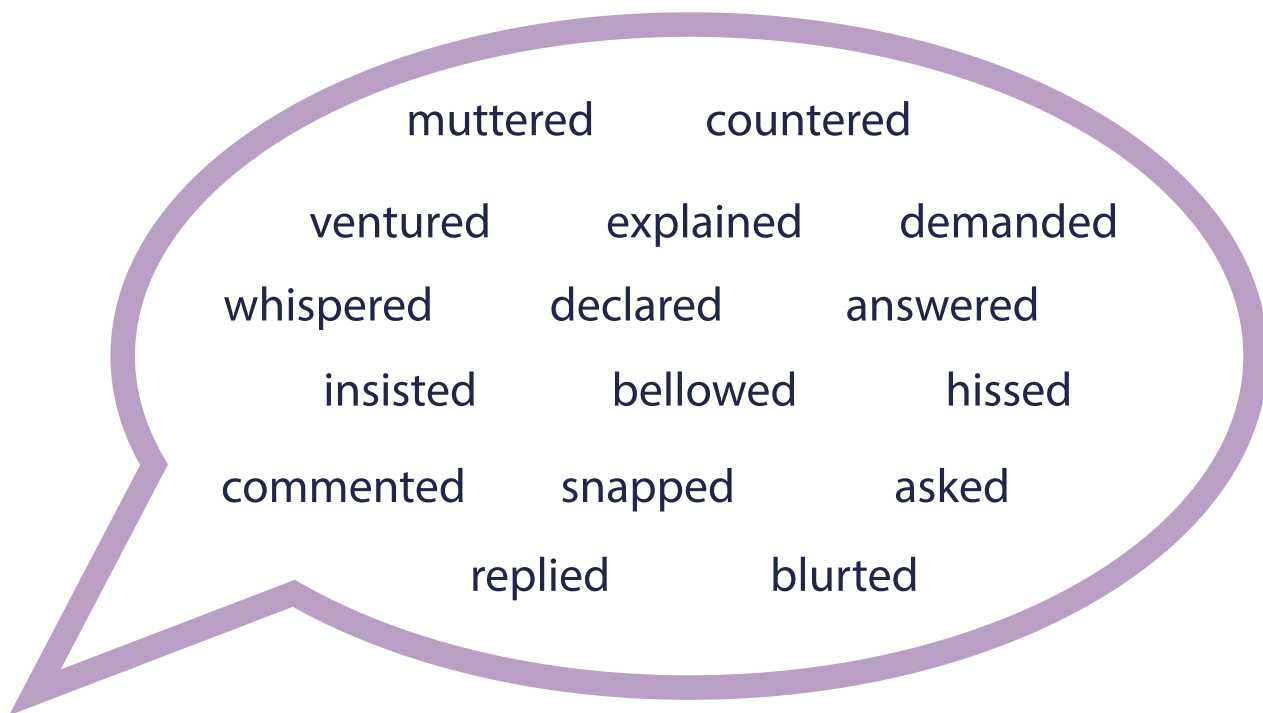
The following list may be a useful starting point for students:

... this creates a feeling of ...	amazement anticipation apathy consternation disbelief
... establishes a sense of ...	dissonance empathy freedom harmony shock
... this choice of ... provokes feelings of ...	sympathy tranquillity trepidation unease

## 7. Building a rich, creative written vocabulary

We often encourage students to build up a knowledge of descriptive words, such as using varied adjectives and adverbs during creative writing. However, it's useful to remember that a rich, creative vocabulary also needs a variety of verb choices.

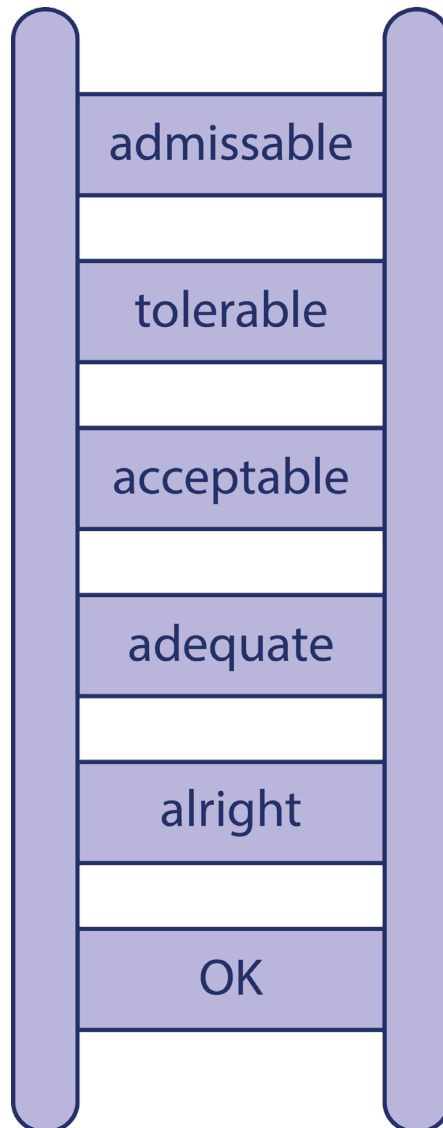
A particularly useful way to demonstrate this is to ask students to think of alternatives to 'he said / she said'. For example:



A school thesaurus can be very useful, but difficult to access for some students. Introduce students to a simplified online thesaurus such as [power thesaurus](#).

Encourage students to explore the subtleties of meaning within synonyms. For example, although the following adjectives are all broadly synonyms, each has different connotations: *old* man / *elderly* man / *ancient* man / *decrepit* man.

Give key stage 3 students 'word ladders' to upgrade their word choice. For example, during a writing task they could consider and discuss the effect of the following word choices:



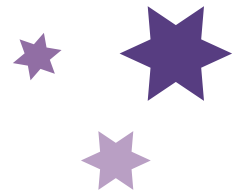
Remind students that sometimes the most complex or unusual vocabulary choices are not the most effective. Most English teachers have encountered an overly enthusiastic student who has been heavy-handed with a thesaurus!

## 8. Getting students to read aloud

Involve parents/carers, and set homework that involves reading aloud at home. To support the reader and listener with this task, you could use the following template:



# Classroom resource: Reading aloud template



Dear Listener,

I'd like to read aloud to you for five minutes. You can be doing something else while I do this, such as cooking a meal, as long as you are listening. After I've read, we will then have a quick chat about what I've read to you. If there are any tricky words, we will work these out together.

<b>What did I read aloud?</b>	<b>Who was listening?</b>	<b>List of words that were tricky to say out loud:</b>
<b>List of words that I found tricky to understand:</b>		
<b>Questions I have about what I've read:</b>		
<b>Questions my listener had about what I read:</b>		
<b>Words I found interesting:</b>		

## Topic: Creative writing

Materials required: Short story openings, A3 sheets, highlighters or coloured pens.

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### Lesson idea:

## The fiction vocab swap

### Activity

Explain to students that today they will work as magazine editors. They have been given a manuscript of a short story for publication, but the writer's choice of vocabulary needs some work. Today they will work on the opening section of the short story and make some changes to improve the vocabulary and its effect.

- Start by asking students to stick the opening in the middle of an A3 sheet. They will work individually first, reading the opening and highlighting in different colours the words they would change or remove. Remind them that their focus is **only** on word choice – they can change, add, or remove individual words, but they cannot alter the basic narrative structure of the story.
- Then they will work with a partner, comparing and discussing their choices and possible replacements. At this point, they could experiment with using a thesaurus. To differentiate, you could also provide students with a small word bank with definitions and encourage them to swap in some of the vocabulary.
- The pairs will then swap their A3 sheets with another pair and discuss the differences.
- Ask for volunteers to read out the changes they have made and discuss the effect of these vocabulary swaps.
- Show students the second draft version of the opening, and discuss with the whole class how the changes compare to their own choices.

### Teaching tips

- Remind students that writers can be verbose (using more words than are needed) in a text. They may need to simplify word choices too.
- Explain the meaning of tautology (saying the same thing again, just in a different way) and see if students can find an example in the text.
- Focus on subtle changes to the text in the two versions, such as the change from *sobbing* to *crying*. What is the effect of this change? Why has the editor chosen *torso* in the second sentence? What do they think of the choice of adverb in *fiercely cold*? Do they disagree with any of the edits? Remind students that small changes to vocabulary choice can really lift a piece of writing, and encourage them to make links to their own writing.



### Independent learning tasks

- After these activities, students should draft and edit their own work using some of the insights they have gained from the activity.
- Students could use the poem 'Stealing' by Carol Ann Duffy as inspiration for their own writing and then draft their work with a focus on vocabulary choices.

## Classroom resource:

### Short story openings

#### 1 Short story opening

*The white snowman's head sat on the front seat. The white bottom bit of the snowman was in the back seat contained by the seatbelt. There was already some wet water on the floor with the cans and crisp packets.*

*A big scratch ran along the length of the shiny red car.*

*He didn't know why he'd stolen it. It wouldn't last long in the car, it perhaps wouldn't last the car journey. It was really very cold, but he didn't want to put on the heating. His fingers were freezing cold.*

*He imagined children sobbing in the morning when they saw it had gone. Or perhaps they would imagine it had escaped into the snowy landscape.*

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#### 2 Short story opening – second draft

*The snowman's head rested on the front passenger seat. The torso was in the back seat secured by the seatbelt. There was already a puddle of water growing on the floor amongst the squashed coke cans and faded crisp packets.*

*A long, disjointed scratch ran along the length of the otherwise pristine car.*

*He didn't know why he'd taken the snowman. It wouldn't last long, perhaps it wouldn't last the journey. It was fiercely cold but he didn't want to risk the heating. His fingers were numb.*

*He imagined kids crying in the morning when they saw it had gone. Or maybe they would think it had come to life and escaped into the snowy landscape.*

## Lesson idea:

## Word frames

### Topic: Exploring vocabulary choices

Materials required: Word frames photocopied on an A4 sheet (see attached resource) and examples of students' own essay writing on an A4 sheet.

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#### Activity

Tell students that they will be working on improving their use of academic vocabulary in their literature essays. You can use this activity during or after writing an essay.

Put the students into pairs, and allocate each student a word frame with formal vocabulary choices. The example here uses alternatives for the word *shows* in a literature essay, but the frames can be adapted to focus on any element of academic vocabulary.

Students place the frame over their writing so that their essay sits in the centre of the frame. Using the frame as a guide, they must then make at least four changes to their word choices in the essay. They are aiming to give their writing a more academic tone. The students then swap their work and discuss their choices – would their partner make any different changes?

Alternatively, the word frame could be used at the start of writing to encourage the use of a variety of academic vocabulary.

#### Teaching tips

- This activity hinges on a gimmick, but it can be enough to spark a student's interest in their vocabulary choices.
- Laminate the frames to make them more durable or reusable. Alternatively, they can be made from old cereal boxes.
- The word focus of the frames can change depending on the needs of the class. For example, the frame could be filled with formal conjunctions or specialist terminology. These frames also work well for unseen poetry analysis, with the poetic terms giving a focus for the annotations of the poem.



#### Independent learning tasks

- Set students the challenge of creating their own bespoke word frames. Give prizes for the most creative, and then turn them into a moveable display.
- Ask students to create specialist word frames for different tasks, for example, a Shakespeare essay or a poetry essay.

The writer ...

suggests

challenges

reveals

explores

implies

portrays

develops

hints

highlights

emphasises

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For more ideas and to find out about the work that Oxford University Press has been undertaking on the word gap, please visit <https://global.oup.com/education/content/dictionaries/key-issues/word-gap/?region=uk>

# Approaches to delivering key vocabulary skills

Note in the table below teaching approaches that could be used to develop the vocabulary skills identified in the mark scheme.

Skill	Teaching approach
Students need to be taught how to use vocabulary <b>to create meanings and effects</b> .	
Students need to be taught <b>to select and choose</b> their vocabulary to create <b>precise</b> meanings.	
We need to increase the <b>range of vocabulary</b> our students are familiar with.	
Students need to be taught to <b>check</b> that they are using vocabulary <b>accurately and appropriately</b> , for audience and purpose.	

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# Further reading and resources

AQA command words for English

<https://www.aqa.org.uk/resources/english/gcse/english-language-8700/teach/command-words>

Education Endowment Foundation, *Improving Literacy in Secondary school: Seven recommendations related to reading, writing, talk, vocabulary development and supporting struggling students*

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/tools/guidance-reports/improving-literacy-in-secondary-schools/>

Education Endowment Foundation Metacognition and Self-regulated Learning: Seven recommendations for teaching self-regulated learning & metacognition

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/tools/guidance-reports/metacognition-and-self-regulated-learning/>

Fitzgerald J., and Shanahan, T. (2000) 'Reading and writing relations and their development'. *Educational Psychologist*, 35(1), 39-50

[https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/S15326985EP3501\\_5](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/S15326985EP3501_5)

*The Literacy Trust, Ready to Read: Closing the gap in early language skills so that every child in England can read well*

[https://cdn.literacytrust.org.uk/media/documents/Ready\\_to\\_Read\\_-\\_England\\_June\\_2015.pdf](https://cdn.literacytrust.org.uk/media/documents/Ready_to_Read_-_England_June_2015.pdf)

Mezynski, K (1983) 'Issues concerning the acquisition of Knowledge. Effects of vocabulary training on reading comprehension'. *Review of Educational search*, 53(2), 253-279

*Why Closing the Word Gap Matters: Oxford Language Report*, OUP, 2018

[global.oup.com/education/content/dictionaries/key-issues/word-gap/?region=uk](https://global.oup.com/education/content/dictionaries/key-issues/word-gap/?region=uk)

*Closing the word gap: activities for the classroom, from Teachit in partnership with Oxford University Press*

<https://www.teachitenglish.co.uk/wordgap-activities>

Quigley A, *Closing the Vocabulary Gap*, 2018

Former English teacher and Senior Associate at the Education Endowment Foundation

[theconfidentteacher.com/category/closing-the-gap/](https://theconfidentteacher.com/category/closing-the-gap/)

Quigley A, *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction (Solving Problems in the Teaching of Literacy)*, 2002

Quigley A, The Confident Teacher (blog) <https://www.theconfidentteacher.com>

Quigley A, *Mr Barton Maths Podcast*, 9 March 2019

[mrbartonmaths.com/blog/alex-quigley-closing-the-vocabulary-gap/](https://mrbartonmaths.com/blog/alex-quigley-closing-the-vocabulary-gap/)





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