

All words can be put in one of three categories, or Tiers.

Tier 1 words are basic words that are commonly used in spoken language and appear in books and assessments at the elementary level. Many people think that these words do not need to be explicitly taught. They suggest this because they assume that these words are heard frequently in the home through conversation. BUT we know better. We know that these words are NOT heard frequently, because there is a *serious lack of conversation in our students' homes*. I am shocked at how many “Tier 1” words my students didn’t know (Ex: ladder, stump, etc). Yet, these are the words readers need, so that they can visualize and make inferences as they read (essential for reading comprehension).

If children are not learning these words incidentally, then they must be taught explicitly. When deciding which Tier 1 words to teach, see *The New Book of Knowledge, Family Learning Time, and The Illustrated Dictionary of Everyday Things*.

Tier 2 words are not considered to be “common” words. Young children encounter them less frequently as listeners. As a result, these words are unknown to many of our learners when seen in print. Knowledge and use of these words indicates a more mature command of language. Tier 2 words are more precise or complex forms of familiar words. They are vivid verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and specific nouns. When students use these words in their writing pieces, their scores improve because it makes their writing more interesting.

In deciding which Tier 2 words to teach, consider the following:

1. Will it be of use to students in describing their own experiences?
2. Is it likely to appear in a variety of texts?
3. Is it a word that is characteristic of mature language users?

Tier 3 words appear rarely in general vocabulary usage. These words tend to be limited to specific subject areas (medical terms, legal terms, biology terms, etc). Tier 3 words are central to building knowledge in the content areas.