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## What Effect Does Vocabulary Have on Understanding?

Knowledge of this vocabulary will not guarantee success, but lack of knowledge of vocabulary can ensure failure. (Biemiller 1999).

Words, reason, and understanding are intertwined. The Greek word *logos* means “word” but also “reason,” “thought,” and “speech.” The Greek *-log* is used as a root in *logic*, *analogy*, *geology*, and *anthropology*. To know what a word means, helps define the thought or concept behind the word and develops understanding. Vocabulary is critical to reading comprehension.

Vocabulary knowledge is involved in a reciprocal relationship with reading ability...the



## Effective Vocabulary Learning Strategies

If simply having students look up vocabulary words in a dictionary and write the definitions is not an effective teaching strategy, what is? Below are basic strategies that have been identified as effective for acquiring vocabulary (M. F. Graves 2006).

1. Use context to unlock the meanings of unknown words.
  - a. Read carefully and ask yourself, "Does this make sense?"
  - b. Notice when you don't know the meaning of a word and slow down.
  - c. If necessary, reread the preceding sentence looking for clues to the word's meaning.
  - d. Substitute your meaning for the unknown word to see if it makes sense. If not, go back again.
  
2. Use word parts (prefixes, suffixes and roots to unlock the meanings of words.
  - a. More than 60% of new words can be broken down into parts. Then students can use their word parts to figure out their meanings.
  
3. Use dictionaries and related reference tools. Learn to use an appropriate dictionary.
  - a. Find the word and read the whole definition.
  - b. Think about multiple meanings.
  - c. Decide which definition makes sense in the passage you read.
  
4. Develop strategies for dealing with unknown words.
  - a. Recognize unknown words.
  - b. Decide if you need to understand it to understand the passage.
  - c. Attempt to infer the meaning from context.
  - d. Attempt to infer the meaning from word parts.
  - e. Attempt to sound out the words to see if it is familiar.
  - f. Use the dictionary or other resource.
  
5. Adopt a personal approach to building vocabulary and to developing word consciousness.

Multiple exposures to a word, particularly in different contexts, are also important to securing vocabulary (Laflamme 1997).

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