

Choosing key vocabulary for your lessons

Vocabulary is the raw material with which language proficiency is built.

A sufficiently large vocabulary (made up of words, phrases, grammatical chunks, idioms, collocations, etc.) aids with listening and reading comprehension, application of grammar rules, and beyond.

When authoring lessons, vocabulary should be chosen strategically.

Watch the video at the bottom to join Orsi Gall, our Director of Content, to explore our three key considerations when choosing lesson vocabulary in more detail. 🙌

1. Scope

What vocabulary is most useful for your learners?

That may depend on their proficiency level: beginners benefit most from higher-frequency words, while more advanced learners are ready for lower-frequency words, extended meaning senses, etc.

That may also depend on the text. When working with authentic sources, we choose a series of scenario-based words and phrases so learners can understand the text.

2. Sequence

What is the most useful order of vocabulary?

We present vocabulary to paint a scene from its logical start to finish, including the key elements that are most readily reusable.

Instead of semantically linking our vocabulary, we present vocabulary in thematic clusters, or under specific themes or scenarios. This models the way in which we learned our native vocabulary. For example, naturally we did not learn all vocabulary for clothes at once, but rather we learned these words gradually, through various situations.

This also helps to avoid '**semantic interference**' which studies have shown happens to adult learners as their semantically-linked vocabulary interferes with one another and thus causes problems with , as well as recall. (1)

3. Form

What is the most useful form in which to present the vocabulary?

When you introduce yourself to someone, do you say "I to be..." or do you say "I am..."? Think about how much "I am..." is used in everyday life! In this case, you would want to teach students "I am" (the inflected form of the verb in context), so students can begin speaking the language more fluently right away. The same goes for many other words, be they verbs, adjectives, and more.

There are even cases where you would want to teach an abbreviated form or acronym instead

of the whole word, depending how frequently it is used. This is the case with GPS. Can you imagine going to rent a car and asking if it comes with a “global positioning system”? The person behind the counter would have no idea what you are talking about.

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1. (Baddeley, 1990; Hoshino, 2010; Papathanasiou, 2009; Tinkham, 1993, 1997; Waring, 1997).