

Guidelines for Using the Three-Tier System

Tier 1 Words

Ask Yourself...

- Is it a basic word whose meaning students are likely to know?
- Is it on the Dale-Chall List (Chall and Dale 1995)?

Examples: between, daddy, food, night, some, walk

Instructional Recommendation: These words rarely require instruction, except for English-language learners and students who are word impoverished.

Tier 2 Words

Ask Yourself...

- Is it a word whose meaning students are unlikely to know?
- Is it a word generally useful – a “general-purpose word” that students are likely to encounter across a wide variety of domains?
- Can the meaning of the word be explained in everyday language, using words and concepts that are familiar to students?
- What is the word’s instructional potential? Is its meaning necessary for comprehension of the text being read?

Examples: balcony, murmur, splendid

Instructional Recommendation: These words are candidates for explicit instruction.

Tier 3 Words

Ask Yourself...

- Is it a word whose meaning students are unlikely to know?
- Is it a specialized word that does not appear frequently in written or oral language?
- Is the word specific to a particular content area or subject matter?

Examples: anthracite, mycelium, shoal

Instructional Recommendation: These words are explained at point of contact or as the need arises.