



# ESOL Insights

February 2008

Greetings from Halla Jmourko, ESOL Teacher Coach  
 Contact Information: [Jmourko@pgcps.org](mailto:Jmourko@pgcps.org)  
 301- 445-8450, ext.228

## Academic Vocabulary

Research shows that strong academic vocabulary and background knowledge lead to high academic achievement. High-achieving students have a lexicon of 4, 500 to 5, 400 words more than their low-achieving peers (Nagy & Herman, 1984). Mastery of academic vocabulary is a key characteristic of school and later life accomplishments of English language learners (ELLs). Teachers are often challenged by the multiple needs of ELLs, particularly in the area of word and academic background knowledge. Frey and Fisher (2006) developed criteria to assist teachers in selecting vocabulary words that should be taught.

Criteria for Selecting Vocabulary	Questions to Ask
Representation	Is the concept represented by the word essential for understanding text?
Usage	Will the word be used again in other units? Will the word be used in other content areas?
Contextual Analysis	Can students use context clues to define the word?
Structural Analysis	Can students use structural analysis to determine the meaning?

## Six Steps to Effective Academic Vocabulary Instruction

- Step 1: Teacher describes, explains, and provides examples of the new term or word along with a non-linguistic representation (pictures, pantomime)
- Step 2: Students restate the explanation of the new term or word in their own words
- Step 3: Students create a non-linguistic representation of the new term or word
- Step 4: Students engage in meaningful activities, for example, comparing, categorizing, classifying, and generating analogies in order to add to their vocabulary capacity
- Step 5: Students discuss familiar and new terms with one another
- Step 6: Students practice new and previously learned terms or words by playing games

Robert J. Marzano & Debra J. Pickering. (2005). *Building Academic Vocabulary: Teacher's Manual*

Robert J. Marzano & Debra J. Pickering. (2004). *Building Background Knowledge for Academic Achievement.*

**Vocabulary enables us to interpret and to express. If you have a limited vocabulary, you will also have a limited vision and a limited future.**

--Jim Rohn