

Unit 2 • Module 2:

Pronouncing and Defining Words

Section 1

Slide 1—Title Slide

Welcome to the second module in the Vocabulary Instructional Routines unit, Pronouncing and Defining Words.

Slide 2—Vocabulary Instructional Routines

The first vocabulary module focused on selecting vocabulary words to teach before students read text. This module will focus on supporting students as they learn to pronounce and acquire a basic understanding of unfamiliar multisyllable words. The final module in this unit will introduce a routine for generating examples and nonexamples of unfamiliar words.

And remember, if you are doing an investigative lesson, you might move the introduction of and instruction in vocabulary to the end of that lesson. However, avoid having students encounter the terms in text until you have provided appropriate support for them to do so.

Please locate **Handout 1: TEKS Connections**. Take a moment to learn how this routine will assist students in meeting specific subject area expectations of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), the English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS), and the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS).

Section 2

Slide 3—Objectives

The objectives for this module are to: understand characteristics of struggling middle school readers, the characteristics of text at this level, and the role of fluent and accurate reading at the secondary level; recognize the importance of providing students with clear, understandable definitions for unfamiliar words; identify or write student-friendly definitions for vocabulary words that will be taught in upcoming lessons; and apply an instructional routine to teach a strategy for pronouncing unfamiliar multisyllable words and providing student-friendly definitions.

The instructional routine covered in this section aims to make students more comfortable in approaching long and unusual terms that often appear in content area textbooks.

As we begin the module, you may hear or see terms with which you are unfamiliar. These will be explained as we work through the slides.

Slide 4—Texts Above the Fifth Grade

Texts above the fifth grade collectively contain thousands of words that students have never encountered before. Not only are most of these new words longer and multisyllabic, but these unfamiliar multisyllabic words tend to carry the weight of the content of the text.

Please have a pen and paper ready. To get a sense of what it feels like to read a passage with so many unfamiliar words, I will read a passage, substituting the word *blank* for each word with six or more letters. As I read, jot down notes detailing what you think this passage is about.

Why did it take _____ so many years to find North _____? _____ the _____ is _____ by water! The _____, _____, and _____ lie to the north, east, and west of North _____. The Gulf of _____ lies to the south. From any _____, North _____ was _____ to reach. The _____ not only kept early _____ away, but also _____ of plants and _____ to _____. The _____, _____ trees, _____ sumac, wild yam, and _____ are all _____ to North _____. _____ the _____, _____, wild _____, bald eagle, _____, and _____. The _____ of North _____ kept some _____ of _____ and _____ from _____ to other _____. The water and _____ have been both a _____ and a form of _____ for _____ of North _____. As _____ as World War I and World War II, other _____ had a _____ time _____ North _____ the vast _____.

Handout 2: “Physical Location of North America” contains the full text and can be used to see whether you guessed correctly. Take a moment to see how you did.

This exercise shows us the challenges that struggling readers face. If we do not have access to words that are longer or multisyllabic, we miss out on important content within the text, which is why struggling readers also struggle to learn in science, math, and social studies classes.

Slide 5—The Importance of Quick and Accurate Word Recognition

Although we would like to think students have mastered the ability to recognize and pronounce words by the time they are in middle school, we know many students continue to experience challenges. If we don’t address word recognition in all content areas, these students will find it exceedingly difficult to comprehend their assigned textbooks. Too much of their working memories will be taken up by efforts to read the letters printed on the page.

Slide 6—The Importance of Quick and Accurate Word Recognition (cont.)

In a study of students who were already identified as struggling readers, the ability to identify and pronounce words quickly and accurately accounted for 28% of the difference between high and low achieving students on a state assessment of reading comprehension. Helping students quickly and accurately identify long words appears to improve reading achievement.

It is important to remember that not all difficulties with pronunciation are due to poor word recognition skills. English language learners and speakers of nonstandard dialects may struggle to understand or produce standard pronunciations of English words. This does not necessarily mean they do not know the meanings of the words.

Slide 7—Making Definitions Useful to Students

Fluency involves more than word identification. It also relates to a student's working knowledge of vocabulary, which means helping students understand word meaning is just as important as helping them pronounce the words.

The most common method of vocabulary instruction—looking up words in a dictionary—is actually the least effective way to promote authentic vocabulary building. This is because dictionaries use a format and style for presenting definitions that can actually cause further confusion. Initially, it is more helpful to offer a contextualized explanation of the term in language that is easy for students to understand.

Slide 8—Making Definitions Useful to Students (cont.)

Keep in mind that while conventional, sophisticated, precise definitions are sometimes useful, the challenge is to know when providing those definitions will be effective for actually learning the word.

It is more useful to explain the vocabulary words in simplified, natural English terms before a reading...and to use formal dictionary definitions after the word has been encountered in text.

Slide 9—Brief vs. Expanded Instructional Routine for Vocabulary

Pronouncing and defining words is the second step in both the brief and expanded instructional routines for vocabulary. In the previous module, we learned to identify academic and content-specific words that should be pretaught to students. Now we will concentrate on helping students quickly and accurately pronounce these words and acquire a basic understanding of the words' meanings.

Slide 10—Planning to Apply the Routine for Pronouncing Multisyllable Words

Let's review how we learned to select words to preteach.

In the last module, we began by previewing the chapter or passage, looking for challenging words that students must know in order to comprehend the text. For English language learners, this may include common words, because easy or familiar words to native English speakers may not be known to students still learning the language.

When narrowing our list, we selected both academic and content-specific words. These words are critically important for comprehension, encountered regularly, and/or have multiple meanings in various contexts. Keep in mind that some words, such as proper nouns or Latin names for biological organisms, may not actually interfere with students' comprehension. Although you would not use instructional time to study these terms in depth, you may want to help students to pronounce them.

Now, you want to prepare to pronounce multisyllable words by carefully identifying the word parts. Words should be divided so that one vowel sound is present in each part. Feel free to use a dictionary to verify the pronunciation or syllables if needed.

Slide 11—Routine for Pronouncing and Defining Multisyllable Words, Part 1

When introducing vocabulary words, always present the words visually: on the board, through an electronic display, or using chart paper, for example. Use spaces or underlining to mark separate syllables. Each syllable has one vowel sound, although it may be spelled with several vowels. You can check a dictionary to verify pronunciation or use an online dictionary with audio. Remember that preparing before class is critical to making this part of the routine go smoothly.

The first step is to say the word to the class, enunciating each syllable and stressing the accented syllable. Have students repeat the word.

Next, ask students to say the word with you two or three times at a normal rate of speech. Words spoken quickly sometimes sound like different words to English learners. Pointing this out will help English learners recognize the word in the context of your classroom discussions.

Slide 12—Pronouncing and Defining Words: Modeling Phase: / Do

Let's practice introducing a word. You might start by saying, "Here is our first vocabulary word, *mercury*. Let's say it slowly together: MER-cu-ry."

Notice how I emphasized the first syllable. If students struggle, have them "tap out" the syl-

lables with you, giving more emphasis to the first syllable. Let's try that now.

The speaker taps out:

“MER-cu-ry.”

Continuing the introduction, we might say, “Great. Here is what it sounds like altogether: *mercury*. Let's say it as a group: *mercury*.”

It's helpful to repeat the word a few times. Then continue to part 2 of the routine, involving the student-friendly definition. Remember to keep the pronunciation part quick and fun.

Students who need additional support in Tier II receive instruction on decoding different syllable types. Participating in this practice and repetition exercise reinforces those skills, giving Tier II students an opportunity to be successful with the content words you have selected.

Section 3

Slide 13—Routine for Pronouncing and Defining Multisyllable Words, Part 2

Immediately after pronouncing the word, tell students what it means and how it will be used in the lesson.

To assist students in learning new terms, create student-friendly definitions that use everyday language to explain the meaning of the word. To do this you should:

One, compose the definition using words that students know and understand. Avoid using explanations that require additional vocabulary development to be understood.

And two, provide a contextualized explanation of the word. Give students practical applications that show how and when the word can be used appropriately. This is particularly important for words with multiple meanings because the context of the word's use actually determines the relevant definition.

Teachers should create these definitions in advance. As you identify the challenging words in each lesson and prepare to help students pronounce them, you should also prepare to explain words in a way that your students can easily understand. The definitions should support students' ability to use the words in learning the content of the lesson.

Slide 14—Pronouncing and Defining Words: Modeling Phase: / Do

On the slide, we have two definitions for the scientific term *mercury*. The one on the left is the student-friendly version, and on the right is the traditional definition.

Notice that the traditional definition is not very long, but it includes complex terminology and sentence structure. The definition on the left provides information in simpler language, making it more student-friendly. It also uses short, clear sentences, familiar words, and connects with possible experience by including a picture of a thermostat.

Slide 15—Web Sites

If you need assistance when planning and composing the simplified explanations of words, you can refer to the Web sites listed on this slide. Many online dictionaries also provide audio clips that demonstrate correct pronunciation.

You might also consider using a bound dictionary specifically designed for English language learners. These tend to provide more complete information about pronunciation and grammatical structure. In addition, they often contain idioms, sample sentences or phrases, and definitions aligned to tests of English proficiency. These dictionaries are a great resource but should not replace the teacher's explanations and examples that connect to students' lives.

These resources may also be helpful for Tier II students to use in building independent vocabulary and decoding skills.

Section 4

Slide 16—Scaffolding Pronunciation

Please locate **Handout 4: Scaffolding Pronunciation and the Definition of Words**. This handout lists the scaffolding steps we will learn in this section.

Always pronounce content-specific words when introducing vocabulary.

Frequently remind students to use the routine.

It is imperative that educators be respectful of English language learners and speakers of non-standard dialects. Please remember, English language learners may find it difficult to produce certain sounds that are not used in their native language. Students need encouragement and support in their attempts, so they will continue to practice their pronunciation. We often take it for granted, but English has many difficult rules that take time and practice to learn.

Slide 17—Scaffolding the Definition of Words

To support students in acquiring challenging vocabulary, you should:

Always provide a student-friendly definition for any new academic or content-specific word. Feel free to use illustrations or diagrams when appropriate. And remember, providing student-friendly definitions is not something you phase out over the year. Unfamiliar or easily confused words will always need scaffolding. You should also provide at least one sentence using the word in context. Some students will require three examples if the word takes different forms, like *father*, *fatherly*, *fathered*, etc.

Be sure to check students' understanding of the word. Options for doing this include asking partners to use the word in a sentence or to give examples of the word. Support students who struggle, and reword the student-friendly definition, if necessary. You may need to provide several different contexts for the word usage.

Gradually increase the precision and technicality of the definition. After developing a basic understanding of the word, it is appropriate to use reference materials, like dictionaries or glossaries, to show students that words can have multiple meanings. The more precise and technical we can make a definition, the more we are able to understand the word in a given context.

Although we start with a student-friendly definition, we want to bring students to an understanding of the formal definition as it would be used in the discipline. Therefore, you should scaffold that growth by gradually refining the definition. Take the word *hypothesis*, for example. You might first use a student-friendly definition like the following: “*Hypothesis*: something you think is true, but you are not sure.”

Then increase the level of technicality, so the definition reads something like this: “*Hypothesis*: an unproven answer to a question.” And finally, provide them with a formal definition, such as the following: “*Hypothesis*: an untested theory about something unknown.”

To assist English language learners, point out cognates and false cognates, which we will discuss further on the following slides.

Slide 18—Cognates

English language learners can benefit greatly from similarities between their native language and English. Take a moment to review the information on the slide about cognates.

Note that the pronunciation of cognates may not be identical in both languages, particularly with regard to which syllable takes an accent. For example, *academy* in English is pronounced *academia* in Spanish. It is necessary to exaggerate the syllable where emphasis is placed when

introducing a word or discussing its cognate.

Estimates indicate that one-third to one-half of the average educated person’s vocabulary is composed of cognates. This amounts to 10,000–15,000 words.

Increasing students’ ability to recognize and use cognates facilitates second language development as well as comprehension.

Middle school has been shown to be a significant time in which students’ recognition of cognates expands.

Although some students intuit cognates, explicitly teaching how to identify cognates and use them will enhance vocabulary learning and comprehension. You should point out cognates whenever possible or, at least, remind students to look for them. Even if you do not speak the native language of your students, you can ask students to make the connection. Prompt them by asking, “How do you say *biology* (for example) in Spanish?” Comment on the similarity with the English pronunciation.

Because some English learners come to Texas schools with gaps in their native language schooling, we cannot assume that all students know the content words in their first language. It is always better to ask the students and build on what they know.

Slide 19—False Cognates

Sometimes words that seem to be cognates are not. Rather than facilitating word learning and comprehension, false cognates, also called “false friends,” can cause greater confusion if you are not aware of them.

For example, in Spanish, the word *billón* doesn’t mean the same as its seeming English cognate *billion*; *billón* means “trillion.” And though it sounds like the English word *inconsequential*, the Spanish word *inconsecuente* means “contradictory.”

Before teaching that a word is a cognate, ask a bilingual colleague or consult a false cognate dictionary, or visit the Spanish-English false cognate Web site presented on the slide.

Slide 20—Summary

We have reached the end of the module.

You should now be able to: understand characteristics of struggling middle school readers, the characteristics of text at this level, and the role of fluent and accurate reading at the secondary level; recognize the importance of providing students with clear, understandable definitions for unfamiliar words; identify or write student-friendly definitions for vocabulary

words that will be taught in upcoming lessons; and apply an instructional routine to teach a strategy for pronouncing unfamiliar multisyllable words and providing student-friendly definitions.