

Words, Words, Words: Learning and Using New Vocabulary

Overview

Description

This assignment asks students to predict and confirm meanings of words, reflect upon appropriate contexts in which to use their new words, and construct brief passages in which the words are used appropriately. The assignment assesses and improves students' ability to infer and confirm meanings of words using context, word parts (roots and affixes), and dictionaries. It also assesses students' ability to use new words correctly.

Final Product: Students will write a reflective essay describing contexts in which they are likely to use three of their new vocabulary words and provide imaginative examples of each word's appropriate use.

Subject

English I-IV

Task Level

Grade 9-12

Objectives

Students will:

- Select 10 unknown words from their previous or current reading.
- Predict the meanings of these 10 words based on context, roots, and affixes.
- Confirm the accuracy of their predictions using online or hard copy dictionaries.
- Write and revise a reflective essay, imagining three real situations, spoken or written, in which one or more of their new words might come in handy, and provide sample sentences for each situation.

Preparation

- Prepare student copies of the Student Notes pages and the *Unfamiliar Words: Interpreting the Clues* handout.
- Distribute a list of common Greek and Latin root words and affixes for students to use as the basis for this assignment. (See Scaffolding/Instructional Support for advice on how to obtain such a list if it is not already included in your textbook.)

- Initiate class discussion about meaningful ways to acquire new words and why a larger vocabulary is beneficial. Emphasize that words are added to a person's vocabulary only by being used. Students should also understand that one does not learn new words merely for their own sake or to "sound smart" but, instead, to express oneself with more precision in a variety of contexts as well as to improve one's ability to understand a wider range of texts. Hence, students should pay attention to the slight variations in meaning that can make one word more appropriate than another. An improved vocabulary expands the options among which a speaker or writer can choose, but choosing the *right* word is always more important than choosing an "impressive" word. Be precise!

Prior Knowledge

- Knowledge of the most common Greek and Latin root words (such as "pseudo" and "graph").
- Knowledge of common prefixes and suffixes (such as "un-," "pre-," "-ism," and "-ly").
- Ability to use a dictionary in hard copy and/or online.
- Ability to write an essay using conventional grammar and punctuation.
- Students should be comfortable using word processing software and have prior understanding of and practice in all parts of the writing process, including invention, drafting, revision, and proofreading.

Key Concepts and Terms

- Affix
- Contextual clue
- Familiarity
- Prefix
- Root word
- Suffix

Time Frame

This assignment should take 2-3 days. Introduce the assignment in class and discuss some methods of and reasons for expanding one's vocabulary (approximately 30 minutes of class time). Students will then complete a worksheet outside of class requiring them to find 10 examples of unfamiliar words culled from readings/assignments from this or other classes. Students will predict and confirm the meaning of each word, writing a short definition for words whose meaning they did not predict correctly (approximately 90 minutes outside of class). Finally, students will write a reflective essay (200-300 words long), imagining three specific situations, spoken or written, in which they would find one or more of the new words on their list useful; for each situation, students should include a brief sample passage of two or

three sentences that appropriately uses at least one of the new words (approximately 90 minutes outside of class for writing and revision). If time permits, students can share their favorite of the sample situations and passages they've created with the class, using either the board or an overhead projector. The class will then offer suggestions for improving the shared examples.

Instructional Plan

Getting Started

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Learn reasons for and methods of expanding their vocabularies.
- Understand how contextual clues and knowledge of Greek and Latin roots and affixes can be used to predict the meaning of unfamiliar words.
- Review Greek and Latin roots and affixes.

Procedure

1. Review with students how an expanded vocabulary will improve both their range and their precision as readers, writers, speakers, and listeners.
2. Explain to students that the meaning of new words can often be predicted by focusing on contextual clues, recognizing Greek and Latin root words or affixes, or a combination of these methods. A dictionary should then be used to confirm or correct initial predictions of a word's meaning. Share with students that once we ascertain the meaning of a new word, the best way to make it part of our own vocabulary is to use it in writing or conversation.
3. Instruct students to review Greek and Latin word roots and meanings of prefixes and suffixes using an online or hard copy resource that you will provide (see Preparation).
4. Distribute the worksheet *Unfamiliar Words: Interpreting the Clues*, and explain to students that they will be selecting 10 unfamiliar vocabulary words they have encountered in their reading (whether for a class or independently). For the purposes of this assignment, “unfamiliar” means the student either does not know the word or has only a fuzzy sense of its meaning. Students should select words they would not ordinarily use in writing or conversation. Make sure students understand the other questions on the worksheet. (See Scaffolding/Instructional Support for an idea about keying this assignment to a particularly difficult text already being read and discussed in class.)

Investigating

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Review their recent reading (whether reading done for a class or reading done independently) and locate 10 words that are unfamiliar to them.

- Use contextual clues and their knowledge of roots and affixes to predict the meanings of the 10 unfamiliar words they have selected.
- Explain how they arrived at their predictions.
- Use a dictionary to confirm or correct their predictions.

Procedure

Distribute copies of the worksheet *Unfamiliar Words: Interpreting the Clues* and review the instructions. Make sure students understand that they should:

1. Begin by locating 10 unfamiliar words from their recent reading.
2. Predict the meaning of each of the 10 selected words by analyzing its context, root word, and/or affixes.
3. Use a dictionary to check the accuracy of their predictions of each word's meaning. If they find that any of their predicted meanings were inaccurate, students should write the correct definition on their worksheet.

Drawing Conclusions

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Write and revise a reflective essay in which they imagine three real situations, spoken or written, in which one or more of their new words might come in handy.
- For each imagined situation, compose a brief passage (two to three sentences long) that appropriately uses at least one of the new words.

Procedure

1. Instruct students to write a reflective essay (200-300 words or 1-2 pages), imagining three real situations, spoken or written, in which one or more of their new words might come in handy. For each situation, students should include a brief sample passage of two to three sentences that appropriately uses at least one of the new words. You may also give your students the option of choosing to write a short story in which the narrator or a character uses at least three of the student's new vocabulary words.
2. If feasible, hold a conference with each student to provide feedback on content, organization, audience accommodation, and style. Remind students to take notes during this conference.
3. Allow the students to share their work with peers.
4. After students have made final revisions and edits, have them turn in the draft they presented at the conference, the notes they took at the conference, and a formatted, clean copy of their finished work.

Scaffolding/Instructional Support

The goal of scaffolding is to provide support to encourage student success, independence, and self-management. Instructors can use these suggestions, in part or all together, to meet diverse student needs. The more skilled the student, however, the less scaffolding that he or she will need. Some examples of scaffolding that could apply to this assignment include:

- Instead of requiring students to develop lists of new vocabulary words from their own previous reading, provide them with words that you have derived from shared class readings, along with the context in which you located each word. If your list encompasses more than 10 new words, students may choose the 10 words on which they wish to focus.
- Instead of merely distributing a list of roots and affixes for students' reference as they complete the worksheet, take class time to go over the list in detail.
- Have students practice breaking sample words down into distinct parts (prefixes, roots, suffixes) to build confidence before they embark on the actual assignment.
- Allow use of dictionaries earlier in the assignment if students are having trouble predicting meanings.
- Use peer review groups at any or all stages of the assignment. For instance, students might work at interpreting context clues together (the instructor may also use some examples to model this process for the class). Or, after students have completed their worksheets but before they write their essays, a peer group might brainstorm together about the contexts in which each group member's favorite new word might be useful.

The suggestions provided here are intended to address problems you may encounter when using this assignment or when evaluating student work associated with it.

- The following factors may be considered when assessing students' performance on this assignment. All assessment factors should be made clear to students at the beginning of the lesson:
 - On the worksheet, the process by which students arrive at their prediction of a new word's meaning is more important than the accuracy of the prediction itself. When attempting to predict the meaning of a word, does the student consider all relevant roots and affixes on the list you have provided? Does the student consider the word's context? How thoroughly does the student explain their prediction of a word's meaning? Does the student correct inaccuracies in their initial predictions?
 - On the essay, has the student devoted thought and imagination to devising three different situations where one or more of her new vocabulary words would come in handy? Do the students' sample passages set up an appropriate context for correct use of each of the words in question?

- If students claim that they cannot locate 10 words with which they are “unfamiliar” in their recent reading, instructors may wish to refer them to texts by classic writers known for employing a wide vocabulary, such as Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne. For the purposes of this assignment, students should be instructed to read short portions of the texts with an eye to complex vocabulary, rather than to larger meanings. Possible examples include:
 - Chapter 43 of Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, titled “The Whiteness of the Whale” and available online at <http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/Mel2Mob.html>.
 - Chapters 1-3 of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, available online at <http://www.bartleby.com/83/>.

A related option would be to key this assignment to a difficult text already on your class syllabus. Among other advantages, using a text the class is already studying would allow for more real-world discussions of why an author chooses a given word for a particular context over other possible words whose meanings and connotations might be similar but are not precisely the same.

- If your textbook does not contain a list of Greek and Latin root words and affixes, several such lists are available online, some more extensive than others. Sites include the following:
 - <http://www.takeourword.com/theory.html>
 - https://www.msu.edu/~defores1/gre/roots/gre_rts_afx1.htm.

Alternatively, your school librarian may be able to provide you with an appropriate list of root words and affixes.

- If time permits, instructors can ask students to create words of their own, based on prefixes, suffixes, and roots—by playing with words and making words up, students begin to pay special attention to the different parts. This habit will be especially useful when they come across unfamiliar vocabulary in the college classroom or on college placement exams.

TCCRS Cross-Disciplinary Standards Addressed

Performance Expectation	Getting Started	Investigating	Drawing Conclusions
<i>I. Key Cognitive Skills</i>			
B.1. Consider arguments and conclusions of self and others.		✓	✓
B.3. Gather evidence to support arguments, findings, or lines of reasoning.	✓	✓	✓
B.4 Support or modify claims based on the results of an inquiry.	✓	✓	✓
D.3. Strive for accuracy and precision.	✓	✓	✓
<i>II. Foundational Skills</i>			
A.2. Use a variety of strategies to understand the meanings of new words.	✓	✓	✓

TCCRS English/Language Arts Standards Addressed

Performance Expectation	Getting Started	Investigating	Drawing Conclusions
<i>I. Writing</i>			
A.1. Determine effective approaches, forms, and rhetorical techniques that demonstrate understanding of the writer's purpose and audience.	✓	✓	✓
A.2. Generate ideas and gather information relevant to the topic and purpose, keeping careful records of outside sources.	✓	✓	✓
A.3. Evaluate relevance, quality, sufficiency, and depth of preliminary ideas and information, organize material generated, and formulate a thesis.		✓	✓
A.4. Recognize the importance of revision as the key to effective writing. Each draft should refine key ideas and organize them more logically and fluidly, use language more precisely and effectively, and draw the reader to the author's purpose.		✓	✓

A.5. Edit writing for proper voice, tense, and syntax, assuring that it conforms to standard English, when appropriate.		✓	✓
II. Reading			
B.1. Identify new words and concepts acquired through study of their relationships to other words and concepts. a. Describe meanings of words read in texts based on context clues (e.g., definitions, examples, comparison, contrast, cause and effect, details provided in surrounding text).	✓	✓	✓
B.2. Apply knowledge of roots and affixes to infer the meaning of new words. a. Identify word meanings based on their Greek or Latin roots.	✓	✓	✓
B.3. Use reference guides to confirm the meaning of new words or concepts. a. Consult dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses, or other guides to confirm word or phrase meaning.	✓	✓	✓

TEKS Standards Addressed

Words, Words, Words - Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS): English Language Arts and Reading
110.34.b.1. Reading/Vocabulary Development. Students understand new vocabulary and use it when reading and writing. Students are expected to: 110.34.b.1.A. Determine the meaning of technical academic English words in multiple content areas (e.g., science, mathematics, social studies, the arts) derived from Latin, Greek, or other linguistic roots and affixes. 110.34.b.1.B. Analyze textual context (within a sentence and in larger sections of text) to draw conclusions about the nuance in word meanings. 110.34.b.1.E. Use general and specialized dictionaries, thesauri, histories of language, books of quotations, and other related references (printed or electronic) as needed.
110.34.b.13. Writing/Writing Process. Students use elements of the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) to compose text. Students are expected to: 110.34.b.13.A. Plan a first draft by selecting the correct genre for conveying the intended meaning to multiple audiences, determining appropriate topics through a range of strategies (e.g., discussion, background reading, personal interests, interviews), and developing a thesis or controlling idea. 110.34.b.7.B. Structure ideas in a sustained and persuasive way (e.g., using outlines, note taking, graphic organizers, lists) and develop drafts in timed and open-ended situations that include transitions and the rhetorical devices to convey meaning. 110.34.b.7.C. Revise drafts to clarify meaning and achieve specific rhetorical purposes, consistency of tone, and logical organization by rearranging the words, sentences, and paragraphs to employ tropes (e.g., metaphors, similes, analogies, hyperbole, understatement,

Words, Words, Words - Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS): English Language Arts and Reading

rhetorical questions, irony), schemes (e.g., parallelism, antithesis, inverted word order, repetition, reversed structures), and by adding transitional words and phrases.

110.34.b.7.D. Edit drafts for grammar, mechanics, and spelling.

110.34.b.7.E. Revise final draft in response to feedback from peers and teacher and publish written work for appropriate audiences.

110.34.b.18. Oral and Written Conventions/Handwriting, Capitalization, and Punctuation. Students write legibly and use appropriate capitalization and punctuation conventions in their compositions. Students are expected to correctly and consistently use conventions of punctuation and capitalization.

110.34.b.19. Oral and Written Conventions/Spelling. Students spell correctly. Students are expected to spell correctly, including using various resources to determine and check correct spellings.

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Introduction

In this assignment, you will discover the meanings of unfamiliar vocabulary words by finding words you do not know, predicting their meanings, and confirming (or correcting) your predictions using a dictionary. You will then write a brief essay exploring appropriate uses for your new words. The assignment teaches you an effective technique for expanding your vocabulary, which will help you become a better listener, reader, and writer.

Directions

Getting Started

1. Review Greek and Latin word roots and affixes (affixes include both prefixes and suffixes).
2. Select 10 unfamiliar vocabulary words from reading you have done this semester (or are doing currently), whether for a class or on your own. Choose words that you would not ordinarily use in writing or conversation and whose meanings you are unsure of.
3. Write down each word and both the text and the specific sentence in which you found the word, on your worksheet, *Unfamiliar Words: Interpreting the Clues*.

Investigating

1. Predict the meaning of each of the 10 words by analyzing its context, root words, and affixes.
2. Write your prediction on your worksheet.
3. Use a dictionary (online or hard copy) to check your prediction of the word's meaning. Write down the dictionary definition that seems best to fit the context in which you found the word. How close was your prediction?

Drawing Conclusions

1. Write an essay, imagining three situations, spoken or written, in which one or more of your new words might come in handy. For each situation, include a brief sample passage (two to three sentences long) that appropriately uses at

least one of the new words. If you wish, you may instead write a short story in which the narrator or a character uses at least three of your new words.

2. Revise the essay according to your teacher's instructions.

Unfamiliar Words: Interpreting the Clues

Look back over the reading you have done this semester (either for a class or on your own) to find 10 vocabulary words that are unfamiliar to you. Choose words that you would not ordinarily use in writing or conversation and whose meanings you either do not know or have only a vague sense of. For each unfamiliar word you select, fill in answers to the questions listed.

1. **Word:** _____

- A. In which text and on what page did you find this word?

- B. Please copy down the sentence from the text in which the word appears.

- C. What do you predict the word means?

- D. How did you arrive at your prediction? Did you use Greek or Latin roots? If you used context clues, identify the specific clues you used and how they helped you.

- E. Use a dictionary (online or hard-copy) to check your prediction of the word's meaning. Write down the dictionary definition that seems best to fit the context in which you found the word.

- F. If your prediction was incorrect, what do you think misled you? What clues can you use to remember the correct definition in the future?

- G. How does the correct definition change your understanding of the sentence?

2. Word: _____

- A. In which text and on what page did you find this word?

- B. Please copy down the sentence from the text in which the word appears.

- C. What do you predict the word means?

- D. How did you arrive at your prediction? Did you use Greek or Latin roots? If you used context clues, identify the specific clues you used and how they helped you.

- E. Use a dictionary (online or hard-copy) to check your prediction of the word's meaning. Write down the dictionary definition that seems best to fit the context in which you found the word.

- F. If your prediction was incorrect, what do you think misled you? What clues can you use to remember the correct definition in the future?

- G. How does the correct definition change your understanding of the sentence?

3. Word: _____

- A. In which text and on what page did you find this word?

- B. Please copy down the sentence from the text in which the word appears.
- C. What do you predict the word means?
- D. How did you arrive at your prediction? Did you use Greek or Latin roots? If you used context clues, identify the specific clues you used and how they helped you.
- E. Use a dictionary (online or hard-copy) to check your prediction of the word's meaning. Write down the dictionary definition that seems best to fit the context in which you found the word.
- F. If your prediction was incorrect, what do you think misled you? What clues can you use to remember the correct definition in the future?
- G. How does the correct definition change your understanding of the sentence?

4. Word: _____

- A. In which text and on what page did you find this word?
- B. Please copy down the sentence from the text in which the word appears.
- C. What do you predict the word means?

- D. How did you arrive at your prediction? Did you use Greek or Latin roots? If you used context clues, identify the specific clues you used and how they helped you.
- E. Use a dictionary (online or hard-copy) to check your prediction of the word's meaning. Write down the dictionary definition that seems best to fit the context in which you found the word.
- F. If your prediction was incorrect, what do you think misled you? What clues can you use to remember the correct definition in the future?
- G. How does the correct definition change your understanding of the sentence?

5. Word: _____

- A. In which text and on what page did you find this word?
- B. Please copy down the sentence from the text in which the word appears.
- C. What do you predict the word means?
- D. How did you arrive at your prediction? Did you use Greek or Latin roots? If you used context clues, identify the specific clues you used and how they helped you.

- E. Use a dictionary (online or hard-copy) to check your prediction of the word's meaning. Write down the dictionary definition that seems best to fit the context in which you found the word.

- F. If your prediction was incorrect, what do you think misled you? What clues can you use to remember the correct definition in the future?

- G. How does the correct definition change your understanding of the sentence?

6. Word: _____

- A. In which text and on what page did you find this word?

- B. Please copy down the sentence from the text in which the word appears.

- C. What do you predict the word means?

- D. How did you arrive at your prediction? Did you use Greek or Latin roots? If you used context clues, identify the specific clues you used and how they helped you.

- E. Use a dictionary (online or hard-copy) to check your prediction of the word's meaning. Write down the dictionary definition that seems best to fit the context in which you found the word.

F. If your prediction was incorrect, what do you think misled you? What clues can you use to remember the correct definition in the future?

G. How does the correct definition change your understanding of the sentence?

7. Word: _____

A. In which text and on what page did you find this word?

B. Please copy down the sentence from the text in which the word appears.

C. What do you predict the word means?

D. How did you arrive at your prediction? Did you use Greek or Latin roots? If you used context clues, identify the specific clues you used and how they helped you.

E. Use a dictionary (online or hard-copy) to check your prediction of the word's meaning. Write down the dictionary definition that seems best to fit the context in which you found the word.

F. If your prediction was incorrect, what do you think misled you? What clues can you use to remember the correct definition in the future?

G. How does the correct definition change your understanding of the sentence?

8. Word: _____

- A. In which text and on what page did you find this word?

- B. Please copy down the sentence from the text in which the word appears.

- C. What do you predict the word means?

- D. How did you arrive at your prediction? Did you use Greek or Latin roots? If you used context clues, identify the specific clues you used and how they helped you.

- E. Use a dictionary (online or hard-copy) to check your prediction of the word's meaning. Write down the dictionary definition that seems best to fit the context in which you found the word.

- F. If your prediction was incorrect, what do you think misled you? What clues can you use to remember the correct definition in the future?

- G. How does the correct definition change your understanding of the sentence?

9. Word: _____

- A. In which text and on what page did you find this word?

- B. Please copy down the sentence from the text in which the word appears.
- C. What do you predict the word means?
- D. How did you arrive at your prediction? Did you use Greek or Latin roots? If you used context clues, identify the specific clues you used and how they helped you.
- E. Use a dictionary (online or hard-copy) to check your prediction of the word's meaning. Write down the dictionary definition that seems best to fit the context in which you found the word.
- F. If your prediction was incorrect, what do you think misled you? What clues can you use to remember the correct definition in the future?
- G. How does the correct definition change your understanding of the sentence?

10. Word: _____

- A. In which text and on what page did you find this word?
- B. Please copy down the sentence from the text in which the word appears.
- C. What do you predict the word means?

- D. How did you arrive at your prediction? Did you use Greek or Latin roots? If you used context clues, identify the specific clues you used and how they helped you.
- E. Use a dictionary (online or hard-copy) to check your prediction of the word's meaning. Write down the dictionary definition that seems best to fit the context in which you found the word.
- F. If your prediction was incorrect, what do you think misled you? What clues can you use to remember the correct definition in the future?
- G. How does the correct definition change your understanding of the sentence?