



## Guide to Tier 2 and 3 Vocabulary

*“But words are things, and a small drop of ink, falling like dew, upon a thought, produces that which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think.” Lord Byron*

**Within our teaching it is crucial that we increase the level of exposure of Tier 2 vocabulary for students, thus improving their overall literacy understanding. Tier 3 vocabulary allows students to ‘talk’ like their subject area – and will help within teaching and the understanding subject based content.**

**Therefore, within Pool Hayes lessons we aim to use clear Tier 3 vocabulary throughout our lessons by giving students clear Tier 3 words that a lesson will focus on. We shall also model our concepts and understanding of Tier 2 vocabulary via explanation throughout a lesson, and this can be done by using extended pieces of literacy where possible.**

Beck and McKeown’s ‘Tier 2’ and ‘Tier 3’ are commonly used terms when describing ambitious or subject-specific vocabulary. Here, we explore where they fit in the wider vocabulary tier system and how they can help you improve learners’ literacy.

### What are the vocabulary tiers?

Created by education researchers Isabel Beck and Margaret McKeown, the idea of categorising words into three tiers came as a response to a particular conundrum: out of the countless words in the English language, which are the most useful to teach our learners?

To answer this question, Beck and McKeown identified how words have “different levels of utility.” They created the three tiers, with each tier characterising a different ‘type’ of word with different practical applications.

Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
The simplest tier – these are words that most learners will pick up through natural, everyday conversation. They include common nouns like ‘clock’, ‘chair’ or ‘house’, verbs like ‘walk’ and ‘run’, or adjectives like ‘sad’ and ‘happy.’ These words don’t normally require explicit teaching.	<p>To improve learners’ literacy, Tier 2 words are the words you want to focus on. They are ambitious words, such as ‘emerge’, ‘analyse’, ‘peculiar’ and ‘context’, that learners are likely to come across in a variety of contexts and across all subjects, but aren’t used much in everyday conversation. As Beck and McKeown say, these words “are not the most basic or common ways of expressing ideas, but they are familiar to mature language users as ordinary as opposed to specialised language.”</p> <p>For example, the Tier 2 word ‘soar’ can add more sophistication and specificity to a learner’s understanding of the word ‘fly’. They will be able to understand that soaring isn’t just flying, but flying very high in the air.</p>	Tier 3 words are subject-specific, used within a particular field. This is the language of scientists, mathematicians, historians, and literary critics. For maths, this includes words like ‘denominator’, while science lessons might require learners to understand ‘homeostasis’. Often, these words are integral to teaching content for certain subjects.

We don't need to worry about tier 1 – pupils usually arrive knowing the basics and if not they will quickly pick them up in conversation with their peers and put interventions in place.

## Using Tier 2 and 3 words within the classroom

### Tier 3

As an Academy we are good at recognising pupils won't know Tier 3 words – these are our subject-specific key words, and these become our key vocabulary words within our lessons. These words are integral to teaching content for certain subjects.

At present this can be delivered as part of key vocabulary given at the beginning of the lesson, words that are used throughout the lesson in the context of that learning. To maximise understanding, and retention, you need no more than 5 words here to focus on.

**How good was Medieval surgery?**

**Learning Outcomes:**

1. To **know** that medieval surgery was
2. To **describe** who did surgery in Western Europe and the Islamic Empire
3. To **explain** what types of surgery could be done at the time
4. To **evaluate** the medical progress achieved in surgery.

**Key Objective:**

To identify surgical practice, and to see if progress occurred with gained knowledge

Islam and medicine → Medieval surgery from gained ideas → Public health and medicine

**Today's Key Words:** Trepanning, Anaesthetic, Cauterisation, Anatomy

**Key Vocab**

To **know** that medieval surgery was

**Key Revision Words**

Trepanning
Anaesthetic
Cauterisation
Anatomy

**TASK:**

As a class lets create a definition for each word

**DISCUSSION:**

How do these words link to the idea of the medieval surgery and medicine?

Here students are given four clear Tier 3 words for the lesson, and one of the first tasks is to acquire a definition for each word. This therefore assists the remainder of the lesson as these words would be used throughout.

Alternatively, a list of Key Vocabulary can be used within KO's, or given on handouts at the beginning of new topics.

### Tier 2

Tier 2 vocabulary presents a problem – because we read these words that are so familiar to us that we don't notice pupils won't know them. But these are usually words that pupils will already have a conceptual understand of, even though they're unfamiliar with the vocabulary.

**Tier 2 words are vital for students when it comes to improved outcomes. This allows students access to exam language, questions, and content – by being able to understand this.**

Using extended texts, and increasing the literacy a student is exposed to within a lesson will lead to an improvement on Tier 2 vocabulary. This allows for more opportunity for explaining and modelling of vocabulary meaning, not just on a single word, but within its context. Tier 2 words are relatively straightforward to teach: all we have to do is provide a synonym. If you explain that benevolent means kind, few children will struggle to understand kindness as a concept. Within lessons, it is crucial to provide these synonyms within conversation, discussion, and modelling of texts.

Consider this text:

Johnny Harrington was a kind master who treated his servants fairly. He was also a successful wool **merchant**, and his business **required** that he travel often. In his absence, his servants would **tend** to the fields and cattle and **maintain** the upkeep of his mansion. They **performed** their duties happily, for they felt **fortunate** to have such a **benevolent** and trusting master.

The words in red might well be unfamiliar to non-readers but they will certainly know the underlying concepts:

- Merchant – shop keeper
- Required – have to
- Tend – look after
- Maintain – keep going
- Performed – did
- Fortunate – lucky
- Benevolent – kind

In her book *Bringing Words to Life*, Isabelle Beck suggests there are 7,000 word families which are very high frequency in written texts and very low-frequency in speech. These are words that feature heavily in textbooks and exam papers. They are part of the language of academic success; if you're familiar with the likelihood that you will be academically successful is so much greater.

As a classroom teacher giving pupils access to challenging texts will expose them to much more Tier 2 vocabulary than they will encounter in dumbed down, 'student friendly' texts. But just giving pupils challenging texts isn't enough. If we want to make sure pupils learn this vocabulary we should concentrate on the 'golden triangle' of recognition, pronunciation and definition.

- **Recognition** – how is the word spelt? The ability to use phonics to decode new vocabulary and then to be able to reproduce the spelling makes a big difference.
- **Pronunciation** – how is the word said? Making pupils say it aloud and use it in a sentence increases the likelihood they'll remember it.
- **Definition** – what does the word mean? It might sound obvious, but if you know the meaning of a word, you're much more likely to remember the word.

