

of choosing candidate words for direct vocabulary instruction (Beck et al. 2002). This can be done by a process of elimination: first eliminate the Tier-One words, then the Tier-Three words, and you are likely to arrive at the Tier-Two words.

Guidelines for Using the Three-Tier System

TIER ONE	<p>Ask Yourself . . .</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Is it a basic word whose meaning students are likely to know? ▶ Is it on the Dale-Chall List (Chall and Dale 1995)? <hr/> <p>Examples: between, daddy, food, night, some, walk</p> <hr/> <p>Instructional Recommendation These words rarely require instruction, except for English-language learners and students who are word impoverished.</p>
TIER TWO	<p>Ask Yourself . . .</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Is it a word whose meaning students are unlikely to know? ▶ Is it a word that is 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? <hr/> <p>Examples: balcony, murmur, splendid</p> <hr/> <p>Instructional Recommendation These words are candidates for explicit instruction.</p>
TIER THREE	<p>Ask Yourself . . .</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 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? <hr/> <p>Examples: anthracite, mycelium, shoal</p> <hr/> <p>Instructional Recommendation These words are explained at point of contact or as the need arises.</p>

Based on Beck et al. 2002; Biemiller 2004.

Categories of Word Knowledge (Average Second-Grade Student)

Category of Word Knowledge	Examples	Instructional Recommendation
Words Known Well (known by more than 80 percent of students)	café, drop, fish, flood, spread, listen, loop, match, mask, swing, throat	No need to teach
Words Likely to Be Learned (known by 40 to 80 percent of students)	blab, cancel, distant, drama, possess, raw, shingle, tangle, thump, transfer	Teach
Word Unlikely to Be Learned (known by less than 40 percent of students)	abrasive, alias, cartilage, chaperone, destitute, franchise, junction, mammoth, polo, sequence, valor	Teach in upper grades

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Based on Biemiller, forthcoming.

Words are learned in approximately the same order.

—BIEMILLER, 2005a

Sequence of Word Acquisition

According to Andrew Biemiller (2005a), students acquire vocabulary in a relatively well-defined sequence that is ordered by vocabulary size rather than by grade level. For the most part, acquisition of a challenging word is built upon having the knowledge of certain more basic words first (Biemiller and Slonim 2001). For example, a word designated as Tier Two, such as *benevolent* or *leisurely*, may be too advanced in the sequence of word acquisition to be readily learned by a first- or second-grade student (Biemiller 2005b).

Within the sequence of word acquisition, students (regardless of their grade level) know certain word meanings well, partially know others, and are unlikely to learn some (Biemiller 2005a). Biemiller suggests focusing instruction on words that are partially known because they are “likely to be learned.” Above is an example from his forthcoming *Words Worth Teaching*.