

## Word Walls

A **word wall** is an ongoing, organized display of key words that provides visual reference for students throughout a unit of study or a term. These words are used continually by teachers and students during a variety of activities.

Word walls serve multiple purposes. Effective word walls:

- support the teaching of key words and subject-specific terminology.
- promote independence in reading and writing by building vocabulary.
- provide visual clues and reference for language learners.
- help students remember connections between words and concepts

Building a word wall can be easily integrated into daily activities. Key words and/or terminologies that relate to the lesson or unit of study can be added gradually as they are introduced. A word wall should be organized in a way that is useful to students with additions reflecting the skills or concepts being taught.

Often, word walls are organized alphabetically, with words printed on card stock, and taped or pinned to the wall/board. Teachers are encouraged to be creative in designing a word wall so that it engages the students and enhances their learning.

Some possible variations:

- Using different-coloured card stock helps to distinguish concepts/terms belonging to different units of study
- A picture or photograph adds further clarification for visual learners or English language learners.
- Words can be accompanied by their definitions.
- The back of the word card can be used to display both verbal and visual word associations, graphics, definitions, and characteristics of the word.

## Research Tells Us ...

"Students' comprehension will increase by 33 percentile points when vocabulary instruction focuses on specific words important to the content they are reading as opposed to words from high-frequency lists [teaching frequently-occurring words out of context]. To illustrate, ... consider Students A and B, who have been asked to read and understand new content. Student B, who has not received systematic vocabulary instruction, scores at the 50th percentile. Student A, who has received such instruction, scores at the 83rd percentile.

In summary, the case for direct vocabulary instruction is strong. From a number of perspectives, the research indicates that wide reading probably is not sufficient in itself to ensure that students will develop the necessary vocabulary and consequently the necessary academic background knowledge to do well in school. In contrast, direct vocabulary instruction has an impressive track record of improving students' background knowledge and the comprehension of academic content."

Marzano, Robert J. *Building Background Knowledge for Academic Achievement: Research on What Works in Schools*. Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2004. (pages 68 and 69) ISBN 0-87120-972-1

## Think Literacy Library

Examples of subject-specific word walls are included in the following documents:

- Think Literacy Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7–12
- Business Studies: Introduction to Business, Grades 9–10
- Business Studies: Introduction to Information Technology in Business, Grades 9–10
- Business Studies: The Enterprising Person, Grade 11
- Canadian History Since World War I and Grade 10 Civics, Grade 10
- Career Studies, Grade 10
- Classical Languages (Latin) Levels 1, 2, 3 and Classical Civilization, Grade 12
- Cooperative Education, Grades 11–12
- Core French, Grades 7–12
- English, Grades 10–12
- The Environment and Resource Management, Grade 12
- Family Studies, Grades 9–10
- Family Studies: Managing Personal Resources, Grade 11
- French as a Second Language, Intermediate Core
- Health and Physical Education, Grades 7–9
- Healthy Active Living, Grades 11-12
- History, Grades 7–8
- Hospitality and Tourism, Grades 10–12
- Hospitality and Tourism, Grades 10–12 (Part II)
- Language/English, Grades 7–9
- Learning Strategies 1, Grade 9
- Mathematics, Grades 7–9
- Mathematics, Grades 10–12
- Music, Grades 7–9
- Music, Grades 10–12
- Science & Technology, Grades 7–8 and Science, Grade 9 Applied
- Technological Education, Grades 9–12

### An Invitation ...

Visit the [Word Wall Gallery](#) to see examples of effective classroom word walls.

If you would like to share a word wall, please email a description and photos to [Wendy.Schmidt@edu.gov.on.ca](mailto:Wendy.Schmidt@edu.gov.on.ca)

The description should include the subject area, grade level, and a brief explanation of how the word wall supported learners.