Key messages to develop vocabulary for English language learners

**Why should we be interested in developing vocabulary size?**

In order to make progress in both oral and written language students need to learn new words. There is a strong correlation between vocabulary size and academic performance. The vocabulary size of students can enable teachers to answer questions such as:

- What is the average vocabulary size of native speaker secondary school students?
- What vocabulary size do students need to read and listen to different types of texts?

**What is the average vocabulary size of native speaker and fluent bilingual secondary school students?**

On average 13 year olds have a vocabulary size of 10,500 word families*, 14 year olds around 11,000 word families, and 16 and 17 year olds around 13,000 and 14,000 word families (Nation 2012).

**What vocabulary size do students need to read and listen to different types of texts?**

For any text that students encounter they need to have a minimum 95% coverage and ideally 98% coverage (Nation 2012) for adequate independent comprehension.

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<th>95% coverage</th>
<th>98% coverage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Novels</td>
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<td>Conversation</td>
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For English language learners who already have a working knowledge of high frequency English vocabulary i.e. the first 2000 words, the most important words to learn are the academic words as well as the topic words see [http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/staff/Averil-Coxhead/awl/](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/staff/Averil-Coxhead/awl/)

The rate at which English language learners need to learn vocabulary increases as they get older.

**How can my students increase their vocabulary? How do I help?**

- Important vocabulary (specialist vocabulary related to the subject/topic and the general academic vocabulary) needs to be taught explicitly
- Focus on strategies to develop vocabulary learning. Go to ESOL Online Click on ‘Pedagogy’ and then on the ‘Vocabulary’ link for access to Vocabulary strategies and the ESOL Principles on which they are based [http://esolonline.tki.org.nz/ESOL-Online/Teacher-needs/Pedagogy/ESOL-teaching-strategies/Vocabulary](http://esolonline.tki.org.nz/ESOL-Online/Teacher-needs/Pedagogy/ESOL-teaching-strategies/Vocabulary)
- Provide multiple opportunities for students to encounter new words in both receptive and productive contexts. A student needs to meet a word somewhere between 5 -16 times to learn it
- Encourage students to read a range extended texts (7-8 pages per subject per week)

*Word families are words that have a common base to which different prefixes and suffixes can be attached e.g. produce, producer, productive, unproductive, production

**Receptive vocabulary** is all of the words that one recognizes and understands upon hearing or reading them.

References: A World of Words, Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, Ontario, Canada. [www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/); Paul Nation & Averil Coxhead, Victoria University of Wellington