

## Implications of a Prefix

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At-risk readers and writers benefit the most from explicit vocabulary instruction in every subject area (Baumann and Kame'enui, 2006). What makes a lesson explicit? Consider the implications of one prefix in particular: Originating from Latin, the prefix *pre-* means 'before or prior to, in advance of or coming beforehand' (Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary, 2003). This prefix implies sequence.

For example, consider the implied sequence in words like *pretest*, *preview*, and *preteach*. Many words used to communicate performance expectations for teaching and learning begin with the prefix *pre-*, including *predetermine* and *prerequisite*. These words suggest that something comes BEFORE something else. For effective learning, that something is meaningful word study that enhances the acquisition of reading skills (Graves, M. 2009).

Consider the words *preschool* and *prekindergarten*. These prefixed words suggest that prerequisite skills should be taught and practiced before young children face academically challenging instruction in elementary school. An orderly and coherent curriculum helps to ensure successful teaching and learning from preschool to high school.

The prefix *pre-* is integral to explicit instruction. Words beginning with this prefix are used frequently when discussing principles of effective instruction and assessment. Analyze the implications of the prefix *pre-* in the following statements:

- *pretest* to determine student strengths and needs
- *preview* to ensure materials or activity choices are age/grade appropriate
- *predetermine* skills students need prior to learning new information
- *prepare* lessons and gather materials in advance
- *preteach* vocabulary and oral language
- *precondition* by linking new information to background knowledge
- *pre-read* text to introduce big ideas and locate new words in text
- *pre-practice* methods of modeling to clarify expectations
- *predict* student mastery by providing sequential yet reflective instruction

Preteaching vocabulary and developing oral language skills are essential aspects of explicit instruction in all subject areas. Providing pre-skill instruction that begins with words and concepts already mastered and then builds on prior knowledge will enhance development of vocabularies, listening comprehension and oral language (Lonigan,

Anthony, Phillips, Purpura, Wilson, & McQueen, 2009). Engaging students in interactive guided practice will strengthen word use in social cooperative communications. Encouraging students to express their ideas, relate personal experiences, and ask questions improves comprehension. Bottom line, preteaching vocabulary and engaging in dialogue are critical to reading success (Baumann and Kame'enui, 2006).

Opportunities for understanding and using language are natural prerequisites that should occur in classrooms before students are expected to perform. Understanding word meanings affects how students follow directions, retell a story, read, and write. The younger the learner and the more challenging the text, the more important it becomes for teaching emergent literacy skills to enhance reading acquisition (Anthony, Lonigan, Burgess, Driscoll, Philips, & Cantor, 2002). Practically speaking, early learning, for students in all grades, not just preschool, should begin with explicit training in phonological awareness and vocabulary instruction (Anthony & Lonigan, 2004; Burgess & Lonigan, 1998; Graves, 2006).

Understanding the implications of the prefix *pre-* presumes that we understand that something beneficial, like meaningful instruction and practice, *precedes* something even better, learning. We know the reverse is true: Unclear instruction often predicts student failure. Prevent failure by preteaching important words. This is a proactive, affordable intervention that can be implemented in every classroom. Presenting content and teaching prerequisite skills has an order:

1. Preteaching vocabulary to develop listening comprehension
2. Interacting and following directions using receptive vocabulary
3. Modeling to clarify expectations for performance
4. Providing feedback in collaborative guided practice
5. Linking background knowledge to new information
6. Connecting language with performance expectations
7. Teaching, talking, telling, reading print to/with children
8. Monitoring progress toward mastery

Intentional, interactive vocabulary instruction must precede guided and independent practice and assessment of student achievement. This instructional sequence is essential to any discussion of *prevention* and the development of *prerequisite* skills. It all begins with planning and *preparation*. Enhancing students' success involves following the implications of the prefix *pre-* and providing orderly, meaningful instruction at a pace students can tolerate.

References

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