Closing the word gap: activities for the classroom

History
Closing the word gap: history

Section 1: Vocabulary for your subject

Lindsay Bruce is a history teacher and lead practitioner in a secondary school in the Midlands. She writes KS3 and GCSE history textbooks and blogs for Oxford University Press.

She shares her practical classroom ideas for closing the word gap with strategies to develop students’ understanding of the words we read, hear, and speak.

Using word banks

Advice for teachers

A word bank can be so much more than words on the wall; it can be a way to consolidate, test, apply, and revisit knowledge. Research supports the idea that you need to teach vocabulary in the context of students’ learning rather than in isolation.

Start with your KS3 syllabus or GCSE specification, where you will find key words, terms, people, and factors, and try to group the words into themes such as academic words, question words, or words that feature across units and even exam papers. Try to avoid producing word banks with far too many words as this can be overwhelming for students.

My school has adopted a knowledge-rich approach, and we are using knowledge organisers to embed and revisit key words. The knowledge organisers function as word banks which relate to the bigger picture – what students need to learn. We were mindful that knowledge organisers could be a ‘fad’, as Christine Counsell (2017) has observed, when we adopted them; we did not expect or want them to be the full extent of students’ learning, but to support their learning. Students use them at home to support their online homework or in class during different lesson phases.

Word banks can be a wonderful tool if students play a part when they are being collated. This will help you to address any misconceptions students have about key terms and provides an opportunity for students to hear the words spoken aloud, which can help to embed new vocabulary. Research suggests that students need to hear a word 10 times before they become confident in understanding and applying it to different contexts (Schmitt, 2008).
Word banks

Using the template below, students can test themselves or friends by folding the page over. Encouraging students to use the concept/term will help to push their responses into higher bands in the GCSE exam.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Concept/term I expect to see</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hitler’s foreign policy</td>
<td>Grossdeutschland/Lebensraum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abyssinia</td>
<td>Hoare–Laval/self-interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stopping Hitler</td>
<td>appeasement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anschluss</td>
<td>plebiscite</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This word bank could be used to introduce new vocabulary or as part of a knowledge organiser. Encourage students to write their own definitions or annotate existing definitions so that the words are meaningful on a personal level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>housecarls</td>
<td>Warriors who fought using a battleaxe. They had large round shields and chainmail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>witan</td>
<td>The meeting of the most important bishops and earls in England. They advised the king.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fyrd</td>
<td>They supported the housecarls. They could have swords and javelins but most used farming tools.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Suggested strategies for using word banks

- **Highlight key words.** Use word banks to help students to assess their own written responses by highlighting key vocabulary in their work. This is a powerful visual tool to enable them to see how often they use key words, and to track their learning as they work.

- **Collaborate and compete.** Break a unit down into three parts and have three teams of students compete with each other to collate the most comprehensive word bank. For example, a unit such as *Conflict and tension 1918–1939* could be broken into the Treaty of Versailles, the League of Nations, and Hitler’s foreign ambitions. These word banks could then be evaluated and adapted by everyone. Consider using window crayons for easy reference when writing or discussing.

- **Elicit student responses.** Try using call and response techniques to consolidate new vocabulary and key concepts across topics and key stages. For example, use counting to elicit whole-class responses simultaneously (‘on the count of three: one, two …’) or use non-verbal gestures such as using a looping motion with the finger. Alternatively, use changes in your tone or volume to signal that you are asking a question and to elicit a class response. You will need to work with students to find techniques that work in your classroom.

**Independent learning tasks**

- ** Chunking and revising.** Get students to chunk knowledge organisers and word banks onto flash cards. This way they can use them to revise, quiz friends, and match key words to content.

- **Grouping words.** Subcategorising word banks is a good way to get students thinking about how they can group content and how questions may be asked in an assessment or exam.
Making links between key terms

Advice for teachers

Using word banks will be fruitful only if students understand how words fit into their background knowledge, building on something they already know. This is what Jean Gross was referring to when she used a ‘football net’ analogy to describe how some students are able to connect new words to their existing word net, whereas others struggle to do this (OUP, 2018). By knowing the key terms and how they fit into the wider context, students are better able to make meaningful links between them.

Students should also be making links between key concepts. Can they show, for example, that revolutions can have the same aim – which is to enable change – but that they come in different forms and use different methods for different reasons, or understand the different authority that exists throughout history?

Understanding the changing definitions in key concepts is vital for vocabulary and knowledge development.

Suggested strategies for making links between key terms

- **Stringing things together.** Write key events on pieces of paper, and have each student hold one while standing in a circle. After discussing each event/person/date, get a ball of string, and ask students to throw the ball (while still holding on to the string) to someone else, who has to create a link with a key term/concept such as religion, power, democracy, foreign policy, supremacy, etc. This task is also useful for monitoring how developed each student’s vocabulary is.

- **Timelines.** Concept timelines are a great tool for showing links between words and will help students to explain key words in context. Using symbols is a valid form of vocabulary too and can be used to show visually how one event leads to another or links to key terms.

- **Full house.** Concept Bingo is a great activity for revisiting or testing vocabulary and links between concepts. Once full house has been called, students can either annotate the Bingo card to show all relevant links or explain the links to their class (with the teacher recasting their words to boost their vocabulary if appropriate).
Independent learning tasks

- Students can track their vocabulary development throughout the year, key stage, or course:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key term/concept</th>
<th>Topics linked to the key concept</th>
<th>Further definitions of the key concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empire</td>
<td>Norman Conquest, Crusades, British Empire, slavery, Elizabethan voyages of discovery, Windrush etc.</td>
<td>Religious empires …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revolution</td>
<td>French Revolution, slave rebellions, Industrial Revolution, American Revolution, Spartacist uprisings, etc.</td>
<td>Revolution of ideas, physical revolution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exploring etymology and morphology

Advice for teachers

Understanding the history of words can help students to make sense of the new vocabulary and ‘can greatly enrich our understanding of our own language’ (J. & D. Murphy, 2018) too. Here are some useful root words which you could share with students and/or display in your classroom:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Root word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ana</td>
<td>up, back, again</td>
<td>analysis, anachronism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arch</td>
<td>chief, principal, superior</td>
<td>archbishop, patriarch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bell</td>
<td>war</td>
<td>bellicose, belligerent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chron</td>
<td>time</td>
<td>chronological, synchronise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dem/demo</td>
<td>people</td>
<td>democracy, epidemic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tempor</td>
<td>time</td>
<td>contemporary, temporary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Knowing more about how prefixes and suffixes can change a word could potentially help students to decipher the different demand and command words of exam questions. Students need to feel confident enough to break words down, put them in the context of the question, and give them a go. A few years ago, there was an exam question where events in Berlin were referred to as a flashpoint. Many students didn’t answer the question – which was a straightforward question – because they had never encountered the word before. If they had been able to break down the word, and consider the meaning and connotations of flash, they might have been able to attempt the question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prefix</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>con-</td>
<td>with</td>
<td>conjunction, conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>auto-</td>
<td>self</td>
<td>autocrat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pre-</td>
<td>earlier, before, in front of</td>
<td>pre-WW2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Suffix | Meaning | Examples
--- | --- | ---
-cracy | rule, government, power | aristocracy, democracy
-crat | someone who has power | autocrat
-ism | action, system of belief or practice | communism, nationalism

### Suggested strategies for teaching etymology and morphology

- **Regular practice.** Introduce a new root word every month, and get students to link it to their learning.
- **Decode.** Build on students’ understanding of root words, prefixes, and suffixes by decoding new vocabulary in a challenging documentary. For example, a colleague and I planned a session where year 7s watched a clip from *Civilisation* and were then given a transcript of the documentary. Using their knowledge about root words, prefixes and suffixes, they were able to break down the meaning of some of the most complex new words and explain them to peers.

### Independent learning tasks

- **History of words.** Ask students to research the particular etymology of a word – there are lots of excellent etymological dictionaries online. Students can present their findings in a visual way or even record audio observations. You could divide students into groups, for example, some focusing on words of Latin origin and others on Greek words. You could use Teachit’s [History etymology posters (24765)](https://www.teachithistory.org.uk/etymology_posters) as a springboard for students’ own poster work.
- **Root word maps.** Students could create root word mind maps that show all the key terms and concepts that the root word links to. The mind maps could then be added to literacy displays to give students ownership of the words.

### Using talk to widen vocabulary

#### Advice for teachers
Research tells us that it helps students with their vocabulary development to hear their teacher or another adult read a word aloud and to use the words themselves. They need to hear the inflection and emphasis used; this is what helps to consolidate the meaning.

#### Suggested strategies for using talk to widen vocabulary

- **Talk like a historian.** Use lessons as a time to encourage students to talk like historians. Recast vocabulary and explanations to model new words, and expect students to offer subject-specific language in their answers to questions. Build on students’ understanding of different types of historical vocabulary, and make this as challenging as you feel is appropriate.
- **Make time for talk.** Give students a speaking and listening exercise that focuses on key terms and concepts or play word games such as Taboo, Just a Minute, or word tennis.
- **Use role-play.** Market place activities can be used to focus on key vocabulary. For example, you could give each student a card with a short explanation for why someone voted for Hitler in 1932, ensuring you have covered all relevant groups in society. Students revise their cards and then have to introduce themselves to the class in role. Not only will they have a well-rounded idea of who voted for the Nazis and why, but they will also have practised new vocabulary and key words.
Call and response. Use call and response activities to encourage students to chant key words back to you. For example, give students the definition, and they have to say the key word in unison, or ask students to link concepts. This approach is proving very effective in my school with students retaining and recalling vocabulary more effectively.

Independent learning tasks

- **Assembly presentation.** Ask students to prepare an assembly for their year group, explaining one key event they are studying using as many key words as possible.
- **Video commentary.** Students could watch a short YouTube documentary without sound. They should narrate the clip using key words and linking second-order concepts (change, continuity, causation, etc.).

Avoiding common mistakes and misunderstandings

Advice for teachers

In my school, we use a feedback log to record misconceptions during lessons and after, when we are also checking books for SPaG errors. This log, which takes just a couple of minutes to fill in, helps to structure the next lesson as we can address any misconceptions before we move on to new content or apply content from a previous lesson. Find your own way to track to common mistakes and misunderstandings.

In her book *Learning to Read*, Margaret Meeks notes that errors can increase as students ‘move into a more complex stage of thinking’ and have to find the language to match (Meeks, 1982). In writing tasks, use the first draft for students to sort their ideas, vocabulary, links, and argument. Use the second draft as an opportunity to address misconceptions and errors, and to organise their argument. This will also help to secure as many SPaG marks as possible in exams.

Students commonly make mistakes by not explicitly answering the question, by confusing key terms that are similar in time and feature, such as Abyssinia and Manchuria, or by confusing factors with isolated causes or consequences. Work with students to identify explicitly the mistakes that they commonly make.

Suggested strategies for correcting these mistakes and misunderstandings

- **Sequencing.** Cut up a text or a sample exam question response, and get students to put it in order. This will help with making sure content and evidence are focused on the question and will show students a range of ways to link back to the question.
- **Visual signposting.** After an extended piece of writing, give students three highlighters: one for key words for the question, another for evidence and key terms, and the third colour for information that now seems irrelevant and they don't know why it is there. This visual signposting will help students to excavate their written work for errors.
- **Share misconceptions.** Use a visualiser to share feedback on misconceptions promptly and in front of the whole class. It can have a massive impact when used in the revisiting phase of the lesson.

Independent learning tasks

- **Bookmarking.** Encourage students to use a bookmark to make a note of any words they are unfamiliar with while reading textbooks or to record their own common spelling mistakes.
- **Reflect.** Encourage students to read and reread their work for errors and to reflect on their learning.
  - Have you checked your bookmark for common spelling errors?
  - Have you used the new vocabulary you have learned?
  - Write a checklist to help you to review your work before your teacher looks at it.
Understanding vocabulary for exams/assessments

Advice for teachers

The increased content demands of the current History GCSE has left us scrabbling for time to get students through the different units, and some schools have started to teach the course over three years to do this more effectively. In this context, it is easy to forget that students need time to practise applying this content. We have all taught students who instinctively understand the demands of a question, but they are not in the majority. We must help students to access the examination questions by making them fluent in the command words of the exam and by using the strategies outlined above to give them the confidence to break down unfamiliar vocabulary.

Consult with your exam board's examiner reports for more detail about the key words which specifically pose difficulties for students.

Specialist word bank

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words used in GCSE History</th>
<th>AQA</th>
<th>Edexcel</th>
<th>OCR A</th>
<th>OCR B</th>
<th>WJEC Eduqas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>account*</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accurate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>analyse</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>change and continuity</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>compare*</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>connection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>convincing*</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>describe</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enquiry</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evaluate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>explain</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>how far do you agree?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identify</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>impact/change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>importance*</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>infer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>investigate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>judgement</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>outline</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>purpose</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>significance</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>similar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>summary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>useful*</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Words identified in recent examiner reports as posing difficulties for students.
Encourage students to engage with exam key words by creating their own annotated summary table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Does it give a good/accurate account?</th>
<th>similar</th>
<th>Can you find any things in methods, outcomes, aims, causes, etc. that are the same despite the time difference?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>convincing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>critical/opposes</td>
<td>Against something.</td>
<td>supports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>change</td>
<td>What impact did it have?</td>
<td>account</td>
<td>A narrative, which usually flows chronologically.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You could create a similar template to check students' confidence in using key words, using a scale from 1 to 5 (5 is most confident). Record the dates they use the words verbally or in their written work to show how their confidence rating changes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Confidence rating 1 to 5</th>
<th>Date used</th>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Confidence rating 1 to 5</th>
<th>Date used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>autobahn</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10/12/18</td>
<td>censorship</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9/1/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9/1/19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communism</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1/11/18</td>
<td>Führer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20/1/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20/1/19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Suggested strategies for teaching vocabulary for exams/assessments**

- **End the fear.** Prevent the exam paper from being something scary. Pass one round after the summer exams with year 10 students and look at how the questions are written. For each section of the paper, print all the different samples and past papers. For example, you may teach a depth study on Germany, but by looking at the stems and tails of the same question in every content option you will be able to explore all possible variations of the question.

- **Mnemonics.** If you use any mnemonics such as PEE or PEEL to help students with paragraph structures, you can also use these to help students to focus on question demands. Here's a structure that we've used effectively in my school:
  - **W:** What is your point? (This has to answer the question directly using the words from the question.)
  - **E:** Explain this point using evidence that can be linked directly to the demands of the question.
  - **L:** Link back to show how everything you have written answers the question (using the wording from the question).

- **Model exam words.** A straightforward approach is to use the language of exams all of the time. Ask students to provide definitions for the whole class when they use a key command word, and be explicit about their meanings when you use them too.

**Independent learning tasks**

- **Rewriting tasks.** Ask students to rewrite textbook questions or activities to look like exam questions. This will help students to understand the demands of exam questions and test their ability to use the key words correctly.

- **Collaborate.** Encourage students to work in a group, answering an exam question on a piece of A3 paper. Each time someone writes a line, they pass it to the next person. This can be a challenging exercise in thinking about command words, so you will want to consider how to differentiate it, perhaps by providing a range of sentence starters or relevant key words.
Closing the word gap: history

Section 2: Vocabulary to improve your students’ writing

Here are Lindsay Bruce’s suggestions for effective classroom strategies to develop students’ ability and confidence in using key vocabulary in their written work.

1. Model key vocabulary to all abilities

As teachers, we differentiate for our classes. I had considered myself reasonably good at it: I stretched those who needed challenge and supplied extra information for those needing more support. I later spoke to a friend who is developing literacy in his school, and he mentioned the Matthew effect (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001). A little research revealed that I had not been helping the students who needed the most support: I had instead been depriving them of key words, concepts, and themes. I had been depriving them of literacy and knowledge.

To interrogate how you model key vocabulary, record yourself teaching the same content to different ability levels. I found that I gave rich explanations to my higher-attaining students but simple, generic explanations to my lower-attaining students. The word-poor were getting poorer while the word-rich continued to get richer. I was in fact widening the word gap!

I now make a concerted effort to expose lower-attaining students to concepts and more advanced vocabulary in advanced texts and sources. I can emphasise and explain these as I read. Here are some suggestions for how to explore key vocabulary:

- Annotate Big Questions (open-ended for exploratory discussion) to break down language without dumbing it down.
- Allow students to highlight and explore tier 2 words (skills words, many of which are command words) and tier 3 words (subject-specific, academic words), and use root words to decode meanings.
- Give students access to background knowledge and substantive knowledge, allowing them to build understanding.

2. Knowledge-rich: the football net of words

To engage with the knowledge-rich approach to teaching, you can use the philosophy of building substantive knowledge over the course of your curriculum, giving students the chance to build on their subject knowledge and develop their vocabulary. A sensible departmental approach would include mapping out what key concepts, knowledge, and vocabulary students need to know by year 11, and where this can be taught and revisited, starting from year 7.

In Why Closing the Word Gap Matters, Jean Gross’s football net analogy shows the importance of this in relation to vocabulary: some students can connect new words with words in their existing word net, whereas others struggle to do this because they have far fewer words available to them (OUP, 2018).

It is so important that first-order concepts (such as empire, parliament, war, monarchy, revolution) are taught and revisited to show that words/concepts can have multiple meanings. Giving time to building an understanding of concepts through knowledge should prevent students from feeling that they are repeatedly starting again.
· Expect students to make links and recall content from the previous unit, year, or key stage. By continually revisiting substantive knowledge, students will be able to retain a word’s meaning.
· Allow students to discuss differences in key concepts and terms. Help them to make sense of how a word can mean the same thing in different contexts, but also to realise that this is not always the case.

3. Create the right environment

We can expose students to varied vocabulary and employ the strategies and techniques outlined earlier, but to do this, the right climate for this learning is vital. Students need an environment where they feel safe to say the words, discuss the words, and write the words so that they know they are important and relevant for them. As teachers, we have to show students that we also value vocabulary by spending whole lessons incorporating key vocabulary into students’ written work.

I was starting a unit on the Industrial Revolution with a year 7 class. They wanted to know how the word *revolution* was relevant to our new unit about factories, given that they had previously studied the French Revolution, and had some prior understanding. After questioning them and, importantly, listening to their understanding of the word and the events, they realised that there was a *revolution* of ideas, people, and things. We agreed that TIP (things, ideas, and people) would be our way to remember this. The confidence they displayed in their writing about the factory system was hands down the best thing they had ever written for me. Without time for discussion, this would never have happened.

· Allow time for and give importance to building an understanding of terms and then applying them to writing activities.
· Make knowledge organisers freely available in the classroom as a checklist for vocabulary. This self-assessment will help students when it comes to GCSE as they will know what to look for as they proofread responses.
· Use Lemov’s *Teach Like a Champion* techniques like Cold Call (asking students their answer regardless of whose hands are up) and No Opt Out (getting a student to revisit an incomplete or incorrect answer they have given, following some support from other students, and improving on their original answer in order to practise getting it right). These methods encourage all students to be ready to use key words in their talk and subsequently incorporate them into their writing (Lemov, 2015).

4. Time to read

Both academic and anecdotal research shows that for young people to develop their vocabulary and understand how to apply new vocabulary to their writing, they need time to read.

To promote reading in your classroom, gather different articles and books about the topic. My recommendations for higher-tier vocabulary are *BBC History* magazine, the Historical Association’s articles, and *History Today*.

· Reading to students allows you to emphasise meaning and model how words can be used.
· Reading with students can lead to discussions about how vocabulary can be applied in their writing. This is a good exercise for identifying more advanced connecting words.
5. Organised writing

When analysing the demands of GCSE mark schemes, the top band always requires a clear, organised response with sustained judgements throughout. Some students will require writing frames and paragraph structures as a starting point for learning how to do this, while for others it is a skill they already have, partly as a result of having a wide vocabulary.

Modelling the use of connecting words such as conjunctions and tier 3 vocabulary (subject-specific academic words) can help students to incorporate more sophisticated language into their written work. Using a visualiser, you can quickly model good language use before, during, and after writing tasks. I annotate articles with my students to show where connections have been made, judgements given, and comparisons explained. When students have done this in their work, I have used it as a model of good practice.

- Gradually remove essay-writing structures as students develop confidence in their own vocabulary range and writing style.
- Use academic texts to show students how tier 3 language can be incorporated into their written work.
- Use feedback logs to track students' work during lessons. This will help you to determine which students' work could be used as models in the next lesson.
Lesson idea: Mining academic texts

Activity

Academic texts can be used to help extend students' vocabulary choices. I have used academic texts such as Hobsbawm’s *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* to teach how to compare arguments and to help students to widen their use of connectives to introduce new ideas.

Students highlighted vocabulary used to compare historical concepts. They then presented the vocabulary they had chosen and explained what they thought of Hobsbawm’s analysis, using his vocabulary. Their exam responses have since shown that the students are more able to compare arguments and ideas.

Teaching tips

- Give students a number of texts: A-level, academic, or review articles. Give them a mind map template like the one below, and ask them to complete the mind map in groups.
- Allow students to repeatedly mind map ideas, vocabulary, and connections with prior vocabulary knowledge from academic texts before you expect to see any new vocabulary in their writing. In the football net analogy, they are working on attaching this tier 3 vocabulary to their pre-existing vocabulary.
- Share good examples of new vocabulary to agree on ways that words, a turn of phrase, or style in general can be applied, and then get students to redraft their work.

Independent learning tasks

- Develop low-stakes quizzes for matching definitions to new advanced vocabulary.
- As an alternative to classroom texts, share details of interesting broadsheet newspaper articles or satirical TV shows with your students.
- Key stage 3 students might find the Teachit History resource *Handling challenging texts in history (19517)* a helpful starting point for looking at academic texts.
Here is an example of a mind map using an extract about fascism from Hobsbawm’s *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991*.
Use this mind map template to help you to find useful academic vocabulary in a historical text or to help you to plan your own writing.

**Historical text**

- Presenting evidence
- Linking back to the original point
- Words/phrases which introduce new ideas or build an argument
- Words/phrases which signify a counterargument
- New, useful academic vocabulary
**Lesson idea:**
**Building knowledge-rich vocabulary across year groups**

**Activity**

Plan how you will teach key concepts and build them over time. Decide what students need to know by the end of year 11, and work backwards to inform how you teach throughout key stages 3 and 4. Substantive knowledge and second-order concepts can therefore be planned throughout the five years. Here’s an example from my department (Moreton School, 2019):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 7</th>
<th>Year 8</th>
<th>GCSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monarch – Norman invasion and medieval monarchs</td>
<td>Introduce the concept of Empire and how this had an effect on the monarchy in Victorian Britain.</td>
<td>Power and the people – challenges to royal authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in Tudor and Stuart periods</td>
<td>Use the Reformation for the context of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.</td>
<td>Elizabethan systems of government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church – medieval England</td>
<td>Apply the definition to a completely different kind of revolution – Industrial Revolution.</td>
<td>Elizabethan Church and religious change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reformation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Germany in revolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revolution – English Civil War</td>
<td></td>
<td>American Revolution (context)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Revolution</td>
<td></td>
<td>Revolution in 19th-century policing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This activity can be done as a department or with your classes. Share the bigger picture of what students are learning across the key stages – what is it leading to? Then try to break it down into big questions and then small questions. The learning is then mutually agreed, and students understand the context of their written work, which is more coherent and sustained as a result.

Our experience as a school of sharing knowledge-rich, big-picture planning with students is that it helps to democratise the learning process. Students are more comfortable making links across and between time periods and more able to compare events using key terms and concepts, reinforcing new vocabulary. They are increasingly confident when articulating their ideas, and their developing historical vocabulary is evident in their speaking, listening, and writing.

Use the zone of relevance template to encourage students to join in with the process of charting and owning their learning. At the end of each topic, students could fill in the template, using the three different zones to summarise core content and vocabulary in order of relevance/importance, with the central zone being the most relevant.

This flexible template can be adapted to work in a range of other ways too:

- Use only two zones – the zone of relevance and the zone of irrelevance – and you have a useful template for quickly sorting, assessing, and analysing key information.
- Change the headings in the zones, and you could use it for peer or self-assessment following an extended piece of writing to summarise key strengths, areas for development, and use of key vocabulary. Alternatively, use it for planning extended writing, with each zone being used for key evidence, useful terms, and exam command words, for example.

**Teaching tips**

- Check your long-term planning is effective by using feedback logs (see example below) to track students’ understanding of key concepts. Use insights from these feedback logs to inform lesson planning, to track students’ use and understanding of new vocabulary, and to reflect on and share teachers’ strengths in embedding key vocabulary and links.
- Give students a big-picture checklist of periods, people, themes, and events studied from year 7 onwards.
- Plan what writing tasks you will use to answer the big questions.
- Share big and small questions to let students see the direction their learning is taking.

Example of a feedback log:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Big question:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small question/s:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous learning that feeds into this lesson:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key vocabulary:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positives:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Independent learning tasks**

- Get students to write a key stage 3 or GCSE textbook entry for each topic to highlight key vocabulary and how it feeds into the bigger picture.


Moreton School, part of the Amethyst Trust (2019) Extract from whole school CPD map for knowledge-rich curriculum.

Murphy, D. & J. (2018) Thinking Reading: what every secondary teacher needs to know about reading. Woodbridge: John Catt Education Ltd.


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