

# BACK TO BASICS

## FOR FLORIDA ADULT BASIC EDUCATION PRACTITIONERS

### VOCABULARY

Every person has command of vocabulary, and many people command both a speaking vocabulary and a reading vocabulary. Partnership for Reading says that “our vocabulary consists of the individual words we understand or know the meanings of.” We may recognize and understand words when we hear them that we do not yet recognize in print. We may also have words that we recognize but do not know the meaning of. However, being able to quickly and accurately assess the meaning of a word in context is a major component of fluency in reading, the necessary step for comprehension and retention of what is read. How do we master more words? How do we move words from our oral vocabulary to our reading vocabulary? What helps us do more than just recognize the sound of a word?

The National Reading Panel has identified five main methods for teaching vocabulary: explicit instruction; implicit instruction; multimedia methods; capacity methods; and association methods. All work well with adult learners.

Explicit instruction occurs when students are given definitions of words to be learned. This learning works best if the words relate to something in the student’s life: family, work, hobbies, medical history, religious practice. Explicit instruction can occur with both student-initiated words and with teacher initiated words. For example, the teacher may assign a reading passage and prepare the student for that reading by explicit instruction of key words. However, the student may be asked to bring in a church bulletin, a work newsletter, a child’s homework assignment, a doctor’s report, a newspaper – anything important to the student – and identify words that need defining. Explicit instruction about the identified word is effective because the student has a need to know.

Implicit instruction occurs when a student is exposed to words in context. Giving the student abundant reading time and multiple sources; reading new material aloud with the whole class; posting lists of words grouped by topic; and asking students to list adjectives describing a picture displayed in the classroom all are ways to provide implicit instruction in vocabulary. Students may also be exposed to words orally. Have students listen to a different kind of music than they would normally choose and then ask them if the language is as foreign to them as the music was. What new words did they notice? Have students listen to a public radio talk show and list words they do not know. Based on the content of the show, what would they guess the words they listed mean? Have students read newsletters specific to different professions.

What job specific words do they notice? Implicit vocabulary instruction is really going on all the time, because it is going on every time a student is exposed to words.

Multimedia methods for teaching vocabulary involve a move beyond the printed or oral text. Graphic representations of the meaning of words, hypertext explaining definitions, pantomime and sign language are ways to imprint meanings of words without relying on other words. Students may be asked to design graphic designs of five new words and then to share their designs with other students to see how “readable” their designs are. Writing about a word can help flesh out meaning and acting out the definition of a word can help develop the importance of context. For example, students might write a hypertext about the meaning of freedom and then act out their definitions. It will become immediately apparent that every student has a different definition of freedom that makes freedom hard to define out of context, or in the abstract. Still, the similarities between definitions will remind students that definitions are never entirely personal.

Capacity Methods for teaching vocabulary involve practice. Much like developing fluency, words are learned through repetition. Not only does the repetition help learners remember, the repetition also helps readers see nuances in meaning and their connection to context. So practice reading until reading becomes automatic, fluent, and vocabulary will be mastered as well.

Association Methods for mastering vocabulary draws connections between the new word and a previously mastered word. Having students identify both an associated word and an association method anchors the new word to an old word and speeds mastery. Association methods for teaching vocabulary can also teach sorting and logical thinking as words are logically associated or even grouped together.

It is really hard NOT to teach vocabulary. As highly literate adults we are constantly defining and redefining terms during our conversations with each other. Advertising defines terms; sports define words; doctors define words. There are abundant instances of all levels of readers defining or clarifying the definition of words. Emerging readers’ work to develop vocabulary helps them see that they are already readers.



## Federal Budget Proposal Endangers ABE

On May 3, National Public Radio reported that the proposed federal budget aimed to cut funding to Adult Education programs by 75%. This cut would affect ABE, GED, and ESOL programs. Though each state contributes funding to adult education programs, the federal contribution is significant and all programs would feel a 75% cut in federal funds.

Todd Jones with DOE reports that the results of a one-year-long federal study of adult education programs showed no direct link between the education programs and getting a job. Jones reported that not many students were immediately employed after earning their GED and it was not clear that those who were employed got hired because of skills gained in adult education programs. Jones says the federal government cannot justify funding a program with tax dollars if it cannot prove the program works.

John Tyler, a professor at Brown University, has spent much time doing his own research about the effectiveness of adult education. According to

Tyler, it takes an average of 5 years for the positive effects of a GED to be felt by the student, either through a job, a better job, or a promotion. Tyler's research does show that students earning GEDs through adult education programs have a greater chance of being offered a job and earn higher wages.

It is evident that adult education programs must market their success. Legislators and even the DOE need to know how our students are benefiting from our programs. Teachers and administrators and students need to be vocal about the importance of funding for adult education. Do write your legislator, but also consider inviting that legislator to your classroom to see what adult education is doing in Florida. They won't see our success until we show it to them!



## Check Out These Sites!



### **ResumeTutor!** <http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/ecep/resume/>

At ResumeTutor! students are led through the step-by-step creation of a resume. Described as an "on-line resume workbook," this site gives lots of information about the different types of resumes, how to write resumes, and how to evaluate the resume you've written. The emphasis is on making the resume fit the student. Many examples of strong resumes and sections of resumes are given. ResumeTutor! won't write the resume or edit the resume. It also does not save the resume-in-progress on the web, but it does remind you to save the resume to your hard drive. This site should be very helpful for adults seeking promotion or a new job, but it could also be used to create a description of themselves as students to track their progress and to give to their next ABE teacher.

### **Yahooligans! Ask Earl** [http://yahooligans.yahoo.com/content/ask\\_earl/](http://yahooligans.yahoo.com/content/ask_earl/)

Yahooligans! Ask Earl does what it suggests: it allows users to ask Earl questions and Earl answers. Standard categories are Around the World; Arts and Entertainment; Computers and Internet; School Bell; Science and Nature; and Sports and Recreation.

When you submit a question, Earl asks for a first name and age. The highest age is >17. The answers come in the form of a letter addressed to the person who asked and the age of the person is displayed. This makes it obvious that children use this site, but the questions and answers are in no way childlike. Even the graphics have a teen feel about them. Answers also include links to more information about key terms.

Each category displays questions asked by previous users and the answers Earl gave. The School Bell category displays questions and answers about Language Arts, Math, Reference, and Social Studies. There is also a Today's Question on the home page, as well as Recent Questions and a Spotlight section focused on one subject.

This site should be usable for adult learners. It could be helpful for them to see how many answers they already know and it is a place to get beginning answers to difficult research questions. It might also serve as a site adults could review to consider how effectively children and adults can learn together.

## New Resources Available

June may mark the end of the school year, moderate temperatures and low humidity, but it also marks the beginning of a new day for Adult Educators. In June everyone on the *Back to Basics* mailing list will receive a CD full of updated and revised resources for Adult Education, a workshop you don't have to leave home for. Included are new and updated learning activities, each correlated to the current frameworks; guidance in how to teach reading, math and language using TABE test results; explanations of the five blocks of reading; and information on multiple intelligences in an adult classroom. On top of that, there are pages of tips from top teachers on how to organize the ABE classroom, how to retain students, and how to market the successes of your program.

These new resources were written by teachers and for teachers with student success in mind. They are full of information that is easily implemented and proven successful. So spread the word – in June, help is coming for ABE teachers. Practitioners not on the *Back to Basics* mailing list can find the resources on [www.ABEFlorida.org](http://www.ABEFlorida.org) for the 2005-2006 school year.

## GOLD FROM THE GUIDES

Here is another sampling of the GOLDEN material you'll find in the Resource Guides at [www.ABEFlorida.org](http://www.ABEFlorida.org). Recently expanded and updated, each Guide is full of sparkling gems. Take a look!

### MATH (ABE Resource Guide, 2004; p. 28)

**Benchmark:** 01.03    **Level:** 0.0 – 1.9

Before class, paste a food label on the inside of each file folder. On the outside of each file folder, write 3 – 5 questions about the information on the food label that requires the student to read and interpret numbers. Have a sample label and question on the overhead transparency or computer screen. Go over the sample question as a group to familiarize students with the terminology.

Have students answer questions from an individual folder either verbally or in writing on a separate sheet of paper (so you can use the folders again).

After all the questions have been answered, the students should arrange the answers in sequence from the smallest number to the largest number or vice versa.

Folders can also be used to collect other work from other activities build around the food label information (writing samples, graphs, advertisement analysis, etc.).

Sample Questions: How many ounces are in a package? How many servings are in the package? How many calories are in each serving? How much sodium is in each serving?

### READING (ABE Resource Guide, 2004; p. 587)

**Benchmark:** 24.03    **Level:** 6.0 – 8.9

Materials: Science, Literature, or Social Studies selection from a pre-GED level text, 3 X 5 cards, board.

Preview the text, selecting at least 5 challenging words. Write these words on the board at the beginning of the session.

Direct the student to write each of the challenge words on its own 3 X 5 card.

Direct students to read the text silently, noting the challenge words.

Conduct an oral reading of the text, looking for clues to the meaning of the challenge words.

On the board, develop a definition of each of the challenge words. Have the students copy the definition on the back of the card.

Divide the students into groups of 3. Ask each group to write a sentence for each of the challenge words reflecting the word's meaning.

### LANGUAGE (ABE Resource Guide, 2004; p. 205)

**Benchmark:** 21.09    **Level:** 4.0-5.9

Materials: Scrap paper, board, a clear glass globe (or an upside down bowl), a colorful scarf, newspapers.

Spread the scarf on a desk and place the glass globe on it. Ask the students what they think it might be used for (*fortune telling*). Briefly discuss what a fortune teller talks about (*the past and the future*).

Provide one section of the newspaper to each student.

Ask each student to read the first sentence of any article in the paper and to find the verb(s) in that sentence. Write the verb on the board.

Decide, with input of other students, whether that verb is past, present, or future. Annotate the verb on the board with the P for past, N for now, or F for future.

**BONUS:** Consider having students write a about the past or future of a particular event in the paper. They could do research to make their histories or predictions reasonable and accurate, or they could write creatively, making inferences from the article only.

# PARENT AND CHILD ACTIVITY

## IMAGINATION



It is easy to build your child's imagination no matter where you are. Try some of these activities with your children as you wait out the long, warm days of summer.

Using a favorite stuffed animal, develop verbal skills by having your child tell about the toy. What is its name? How old is it? What does it like to eat? What does it do while your child is away from it? What scares the toy? What makes the toy laugh?

This same game can be done with people. If you are caught waiting with your child, people-watch and story tell. Choose an interesting looking person and ask your child to make up a story about where that person has been and where he is going. Is he happy or sad? Does he have a family or live alone? What is his job? You could make up the story along with your child, or make up your own and compare the two stories.

If your child has a more scientific interest, consider asking why and how questions to inspire imaginative thinking. Why do you think the traffic has stopped on this interstate highway? How many cars do you think are ahead of us? How will the emergency vehicles get by us if they need to? If we don't see the emergency vehicles, what could that mean?

A bonus for all these activities is that they could easily lead to the library. Perhaps a why question will lead to a research trip to the public library, or an inspired story about a lost bear will lead to a search for a book about Corduroy.

Ask questions, and enjoy the highly unconventional answers you are bound to get!

## BACK TO BASICS

**Back to Basics** is always looking for good ideas. If you have an article or activity you believe would be helpful to other adult educators, please e-mail it to Lynn Cunill at [cunill@ACE-Leon.org](mailto:cunill@ACE-Leon.org) or mail it to Lynn Cunill, 283 Trojan Trail, Tallahassee, FL 32311. We look forward to hearing from you.

Leon County Schools

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