Differentiation

ACTIVITIES FOR DISTINGUISHING HOW WORDS ARE USED

This Bulletin describes five activities for helping students understand and discuss word usage while learning content.

SEMANTIC FEATURE ANALYSIS
A way to distinguish word usage is to place featured common word partners in rows and columns by meaning and grammar categories. Students check off +, -, ? to indicate correct or incorrect usage in these partnerships.

Example: Adverb + Adjective partners

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hilariously - - - - -
immensely - - - - -
inordinately - - - - -
relatively - - - - -
tremendously - - - - -
rather - - - - -

Some word combinations fit only in specific contexts. For example, 'high-rise' can only be used to describe buildings and apartments, not other dwellings. An excellent source for word partners is Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English.

Example: Adjective + Noun partners

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temporary - - - - -
rambling - - - - -
comfortable - - - - -
high-rise + - - - -
lavish ? - - - - -
dilapidated + + + + -

SPAGHETTI TECHNIQUE
This activity features taking collected strong word combinations, mixing them up, and arranging them randomly in columns. Students draw lines connecting
words which have strong partnerships.

Example:

- heavy
- serious
- cold
- sour
- rough
- light
- strong
- water
- seas
- grapes
- sleeper
- rain
- accent
- illness

Word combinations can be highlighted as students read content texts, then collected periodically and randomly placed in columns for quick review.

LEXICAL SET DISCRIMINATION

Teacher reads a familiar text orally that is based on a topic which has several associated words. Students listen to and write down only the words related to the topic.

Example: Shapes

(Teacher reads the following: students write [underlined] words related to shapes)

If you could take a trip around the world, you could see different shapes of houses. Inuit and Mongols have round homes. In the Amazon jungle there are square platforms built high up in rainforest trees. You would also see huts with pyramid-shaped roofs. In the Sahara of North Africa you will see Bedouin nomads living in tents with flat rectangular roofs. And in many parts of coastal Asia people live in boats with semi-circular coverings. In Europe many rural cottages are shaped like cubes.

PARAGRAPH/ESSAY PREPARATION

As preparation for engaging students in writing on a given topic, brainstorm new words that they can use. Then expand their knowledge and use of these words by listing common pairings which can occur with these selections.

Example: Friendship

Sample key words: friend, friendship, caring, honest, truthful, etc.

Friend: best, bosom, close, dear, good, great, intimate, real, special, etc.
Friendship: beautiful, close, intimate, deep, firm, great, warm, etc.
Caring: deeply, genuinely, passionately, really, truly, hardly, etc.
Honest: extremely, scrupulously, truly, absolutely, completely, perfectly, quite, totally, etc.
Truth: admit, speak, tell, establish, discover, accept, face up to, etc.

WHAT IS IT?

After having been taught specific vocabulary, students listen to and/or write down dictated words referring to a specific word. Students try to guess the referenced word.

Examples: (answer in parenthesis)

1. magic, flying, worn, threadbare, thick, soft, deep-pile (carpet).
2. toy, lap, pedigree, mongrel, stray, wild, pet, family, domestic (dog).
3. muffled, violent, tremendous, powerful, massive, major, deafening (explosion).
4. delicate, routine, emergency, vital, life-saving, small, minor, major (operation).
5. dangerous, tough, exhausting, exacting, difficult, demanding, monumental, Herculean, formidable, enormous, daunting, challenging, awesome (task).

The above activities invite discussions about words and their use, an important process in helping students become more aware of language in shaping meaning in learning. These activities serve importantly to expand the amount of vocabulary students need to demonstrate academic language proficiency.

SOURCES:

