



STOP GIVING BIGGER WORD LISTS

Depth before breadth. Quality over quantity.



THE IDEA

Long word lists overwhelm EAL learners and lead to shallow learning.

Fewer words, learned deeply, lead to better understanding, use and retention.

Fewer words.

Deeper learning.

Stronger outcomes.



IN THE CLASSROOM

- Choose a small set of high-impact words.
- Explore multiple meanings, examples and contexts.
- Use the words in speaking, reading and writing.
- Revisit the same words often in different ways.
- Encourage students to use the words accurately and independently.
- Add new words only when they are needed.

THE 4 STEPS

1

CHOOSE LESS

Select a small number of key words.

- Choose 5–10 words that matter most for the topic.
- Focus on essential academic or subject vocabulary.
- Remove low-value or rarely used words.

Example: Instead of 30 words, choose 6: impact, evidence, solution, adapt, reduce, system.

2

TEACH DEEPLY

Teach the words deeply.

- Explore meanings, synonyms and related words.
- Provide examples and non-examples.
- Connect to visuals, real-life contexts and prior knowledge.
- Discuss and use the words in meaningful ways.

*Ask: What does this word really mean?
How does it connect to other ideas?*

3

USE OFTEN

Use the words in many ways.

- Build activities that require the words.
- Use them in reading, writing, speaking and listening.
- Encourage students to use the words independently.
- Provide feedback on accuracy and depth of use.

Try: Sentence stems, debates, explanations, paragraphs, presentations.

4

REVISIT & RETAIN

Revisit the words regularly.

- Recycle the same words across lessons and topics.
- Use retrieval, games and spaced practice.
- Celebrate when students use the words well.
- Add new words only when needed.

Remember: Repetition builds retention and confidence.



WHY IT WORKS

Deep learning leads to better recall and accurate use.
It reduces cognitive overload and confusion.
It builds confidence, fluency and academic success.



EAL UPGRADE

- Teach word families and collocations.
- Use visual maps and semantic webs.
- Help students personalise words with examples.



TRY IT TOMORROW

- Choose 6 key words for your next topic.
- Plan one activity for each mode (read, write, speak, listen).
- Revisit them in the next 3 lessons.



TEACHER LANGUAGE

"Let's focus on fewer words and learn them well."

"How would you use this word in your own sentence?"

"Why does this word matter in this context?"

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