

Helping pupils learn vocabulary

Based on an article on the Ministry's website co-authored by Penny Ur
Adapted for teaching BAND 1 vocabulary items

Teaching vocabulary is currently a priority at all levels for teaching English in Israeli schools. According to the updated English curriculum, at the end of 6th grade, pupils are expected *'to have knowledge of at least 1200 items including the core items in Band 1'* (Band 1 is an alphabetized list of vocabulary items).

As a tutor, you aren't expected to 'teach' these words, but teachers will give you lists of words to review. This document is intended to help you do that.

1. Background data

- The number of new vocabulary items to introduce per session is:
Elementary School: **12** Junior High: **20** High School: **30** (depending on level of the individual pupil.)
- According to research, pupils will only master a new item if they get **ten or more** opportunities to review (some say as much as 20.)
- It's acceptable to use Hebrew (L1) to explain the meaning of a word in English (L2).
- Vocabulary should be taught both within contexts and as single, decontextualized, items.

2. Making pupils responsible

- Tell pupils to keep vocabulary notebooks (could be on smartphones or tablets) to keep a record of new vocabulary learnt.
- Start every session by asking your pupil/s to mention 5 new words they remember from their last session.
TIP: If you have more than one pupil in a group ask others if they know all the words mentioned. If they don't, the pupil who 'remembered' should translate for those who didn't.
- Tell pupils to find a word or expression (from their textbook / from a TV program / from a computer game or any other source) that they didn't know before, find out what it means and share it in your next session with you (and other pupils if you are tutoring more than one).
- If you are tutoring more than one pupil, allocate to each pupil 5 words from the word list the teacher gives you to review. For homework they prepare a card (15cm x 20 cm), write the word on one side and draw or paste a picture on the other. Next session, in pairs, A shows the picture, B says the word and vice versa.

3. Brainstorming vocabulary items

- Brainstorm words from a topic: (weather/ colors / parts of the body/ animals/ family members etc.)
Build a short story linking these words.
- Give a **noun**, pupils suggest adjectives that might describe it (e.g. **road**: a long road, a busy road, a new road...).
- Give an **adjective**, pupils suggest nouns it might describe (e.g. **red**: a red shirt, a red sign, a red nose...).
- Give a **verb**, pupils suggest nouns that might be its object (e.g. **read**: a book, a newspaper, a sign,).
- Give an **adverb**, pupils suggest verbs it might describe (e.g. **slowly**: write, speak, walk)

4. Associating vocabulary items

- If you're reviewing a topic like **food / clothes** ask for examples of things they can **eat / cook / buy / wear** etc.
- Develop real world associations: clothes – weather / numbers – telephone numbers etc.

5. Develop listening skills

- Yes or No?**
 - Pupils write down the numbers 1-10 (or 1-5 if their level of English is very weak.)
 - You make a statement (true or false), including words or expressions that you've recently reviewed and want to review again.
 - Pupils write YES / NO next to each number.
 - Check their answers.
e.g.: *"The weather is cold and rainy. I need a swimsuit"* / *My brother is five years old. He's in grade 8"*

TIP: If you have more than one pupil, after you have made some statements, ask them to make up their own.

b. What did I just say?

There are some random expressions (or 'word-chunks') listed in Band 1. e.g.:

"Are you ready?" "Do you mind?" "Let's play a game" "Be careful" "Do it on your own" "Take care"
"I'm sorry" "What's the time?" "No problem" "Once upon a time" "Give me a call" "Call me"
"They called him David" "How much?" "How old are you?" "I'm x years old" "Which way to the ...?"
"Turn left" "Turn right" "You're welcome" "At the moment" "Come back"

Try to introduce these in some in a relevant context during your sessions e.g.: Asking for directions.

With more random chunks, use when appropriate and then ask: **"What did I just say?"**

(When they try to repeat it, they may only hear part of the chunk, so say it again.)

If you repeat this 'strategy' often enough, they may get used to listening carefully... and they'll be improving their own vocabulary.