

High Frequency Word Practice

Why and How?

Pikulski (1997) states, —Indeed, fluent word identification appears to be a prerequisite for comprehending text. If a reader must slowly analyze many of the words in a text, memory and attention needed for comprehension are drained by word analysis. Therefore, we must consider what teaching implications will best serve student's learning and transfer of automatic recognition of high frequency words.

Instant recognition of words, especially high-frequency words, develops best when students read large amounts of text, particularly text that is relatively easy for the reader (Cunningham, 1995; Allington, 2000). This meets the criterion of providing a great deal of reading that facilitates enough practice reading HF words that a student can achieve the automatic recognition of high frequency words.

1. Students who are beginning to learn high frequency words and strugglers having difficulty building a set of known words often do not know how to look at the distinctive features in words. The same principles and practices that were used in teaching unknown letters can be used to teach high frequency words to mastery. Particularly, Marie Clay's (1985) three ways of remembering is critical to developing automatic word recognition of high frequency words.

a. Seeing unknown word in print (Printing the word on a card)

b. Talking about what the unknown word looks like

(1). Spell the word saying the names of the letters in sequence.

(2). Talk about tall and short letters in the word (e.g. —andl has two short letters and one tall letter).

(3). Name the letter that comes first in an unknown word; the second letter; the last letter; the middle letters.

c. Learning the unknown word using movement

(1). Write the unknown word in various ways saying the word (NOT spelling the word) as it is written.

(a). Saying the word while it is written allows students to make letter/sound matches when appropriate.

(b). Saying the word when it is written allows students to notice irregularities in letter sound matches. Writing "find" while saying it lets the student know that even though the little word "in" appears in the word, it does not have the sound of "in".

(2). In fact, over learning and massed practice are necessary for a student to master unknown information. Therefore, asking students to do the following will aid learning:

(a). Write the unknown word once saying the word as it is written. Ask what letter sound matches the student identified.

b). Write it again saying the letter patterns (e.g. Student writes the "a" in "and" and says "short letter"; writes the "n" and says "short letter"; writes the "d" and says "tall letter".

(c). Write the word again saying the name of each letter.