

Academic Vocabulary

Name _____

Term:	
In my own words:	
Draw:	New info:

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Educational Leadership: Teaching for the 21st Century: Six Steps to Better Vocabulary Instruction

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In their research, classroom teachers have taught us something about how to best use specific instructional strategies. Let's begin with a strategy for teaching vocabulary referred to as *the six-step process* (Marzano, 2004). It involves the following steps:

- 1. Provide a description, explanation, or example of the new term.**
- 2. Ask students to restate the description, explanation, or example in their own words.**
- 3. Ask students to construct a picture, pictograph, or symbolic representation of the term.**
- 4. Engage students periodically in activities that help them add to their knowledge of the terms in their vocabulary notebooks.**
- 5. Periodically ask students to discuss the terms with one another.**
- 6. Involve students periodically in games that enable them to play with terms.**

Teachers use the first three steps when introducing a term to students. A few days later, the teacher reviews the new term using Steps 4, 5, and 6, which needn't be executed in sequence. The teacher might have students compare the meaning with another previously studied term (Step 4). Students might pair up and compare their entries on the term in their vocabulary notebooks (Step 5), or the teacher might craft a game that students play using these terms (Step 6).

What Teacher Research Found

Over the last five years, I have been involved in more than 50 studies that involve this strategy. In all these studies, teachers used the strategy with one class but did not use it with another. Then they compared the results.

These studies have taught us several things about this six-step strategy. First, the strategy works at every grade level, from kindergarten to high school. Second, it works better if you use all the steps without leaving any out. In one middle school study, teachers found that the *whole* process enhanced students' achievement much more than the parts of the process in isolation did. Third, although the majority of studies indicate that the process enhances student achievement, some studies indicate that it doesn't.

Happily, the research is also beginning to tell us what does or doesn't make the strategy work. Here's what we've learned so far:

- When students copy the teacher's explanation or description of a term instead of generating their own explanation, the results are not as strong. Ideally, student explanations should come from their own lives.
- The third step in the process is crucial—having students represent their understanding of a new term by drawing a picture, pictograph, or symbolic representation. When students do this step well, achievement soars.
- Games seem to engage students at a high level and have a powerful effect on students' recall of the terms. Games not only add a bit of fun to the teaching and learning process, but also provide an opportunity to review the terms in a nonthreatening way. After the class has played a vocabulary game, the teacher should invite students to identify difficult terms and go over the crucial aspects of those terms in a whole-class discussion.