7

Assessing Vocabulary Knowledge

✔ PREPARE YOURSELF

Prepare yourself by evaluating your own knowledge. Rate your ability to answer some of the key questions for this chapter. Check the boxes that best describe your prereading knowledge.

Key Concept Questions	Well Informed	Aware	Need Ideas
1. How can you assess vocabulary learning **through instruction?**	❏	❏	❏
2. What can **standardized tests** tell us about vocabulary knowledge?	❏	❏	❏
3. How can we **pinpoint the special needs** a particular student might have for vocabulary learning?	❏	❏	❏

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ **STRATEGY OVERVIEW GUIDE**

This chapter presents background, ideas, and strategies to help you understand different ways in which vocabulary can be assessed. Ideas are given for assessing vocabulary in the context of instruction, for understanding and using standardized measures, and for thoroughly assessing individual children. The following chart can help you choose suitable forms of assessment for your classroom.

Instructional Strategy	Goal—Use when you want to . . .	Comments
Word set graphics (p. 132)	Look at prior knowledge about a topic.	Very useful in content classes.
Word maps (p. 132)	Examine depth of knowledge about a particular concept.	Can be used before or after reading.
Observation guide (p. 134)	Watch and record what a student does over time.	Good portfolio addition.
Word journals (p. 135)	Have students record the growth of their personal vocabularies.	Alternative to a standard notebook.
Word monitors (p. 135)	Put students in charge of assessment.	Useful cooperative group role.
3-minute meetings (p. 135)	Monitor vocabulary learning of cooperative groups.	Good way to keep in touch with literature circles.
Yea/nay (p. 136)	Assess rapid access to new meanings.	Can be a good game for class.
Think-alouds (p. 137)	Analyze one student more thoroughly.	Takes time.
Teacher-constructed tests (p. 139)	Make a quick assessment of specific learning.	Vary your approach.
Vocabulary record keeping (p. 142)	Show growth and change across time.	Choose the simplest to fit your class situation.
IRI probe (p. 151)	Analyze special needs of one student in a contextual situation.	Takes time.

Assessment is the gathering of information to answer specific questions. What type of information you gather and how you analyze it depend on the nature of the questions you are asking. For example, when you have a medical question, your doctor has different avenues for gathering information. Sometimes she will take a history and sketch out a health profile. At other times, she will gather data on your body and your health and compare the data with typical data from your age group to see

if your systems are operating normally. For other questions, she will have blood sam-
ples taken and analyzed. In still other instances, she will try a procedure or medica-
tion and watch how you respond over time.

Similarly, in schools, assessment varies depending on the question being
asked. In school settings, we frequently ask three types of questions that involve
vocabulary assessments. One set of questions, ordinarily asked by administrators,
focuses on how a school or district compares in broad performance with other
schools and districts. This type of assessment helps administrators track the long-
term performance of their schools and can signal changes and needs that must be
addressed. Within the classroom, teachers ask questions that help them with in-
struction. They want to know how their instruction is working—whether or not
students are learning particular concepts, words, and strategies. A third kind of
question is asked when students seem to be having problems. These are diagnos-
tic questions that try to pinpoint some aspect of a student's word knowledge or
word-learning strategies.

Like doctors, educators gather different types of data using different measures
based on the nature of the questions asked. For formal questions of broadscale per-
formance, standardized group measures are commonly used. These take samples of
performance and compare them with the typical performance data of larger groups
to look for trends. For inquiries centered on classroom instruction, teachers learn to
watch instruction closely and to do diagnostic teaching as part of their instruction.
They try procedures and see how their students perform over time. Teachers also
construct personalized measures to chart growth. For pinpointing problems, teach-
ers and specialists use a variety of individual measures, such as informal reading in-
ventories and some specialized diagnostic tools. Diagnosticians construct a history
of performance and sketch out an individual student's reading profile.

This chapter looks at these three types of questions and how they are commonly
answered. First we start with the classroom and examine the kinds of assessment
you can use in your classroom to answer some common questions about your stu-
dents. Most of these instructionally based assessments are related to instructional
ideas we presented earlier, with some additions concerning constructing teacher-
made tests and keeping records. Second, we focus on the type of wide-scale as-
sessment carried out in most schools. For the questions asked about district and
school performance, standardized measures are commonly used. We start with a
brief refresher on standardized measures and then focus on what the vocabulary
components of these measures can tell us. Lastly, we'll examine the type of diagno-
sis a teacher or specialist does when there is a question about a particular student's
word knowledge or word-learning strategies. This type of assessment typically
blends informal, instructional, and standardized information gathering.

■ ■ ■ ASSESSMENT FOR INSTRUCTION

As a classroom teacher, you ask many different types of questions about vo-
cabulary to help plan and evaluate instruction. Sometimes you might want to
know if students have a broad knowledge of a general topic you're studying,
with some general associations for new words. For example, in a unit on *crustaceans,*
would students recognize that *lobsters* and *crayfish* are related? At other times, you
might want to know if students have specific, detailed, deep understandings of do-
mains of knowledge and vocabulary. In a social studies unit on the Civil War, *Union*

and *Confederacy* are two words you would want to be well established and have a strong network of related concepts, meanings, and association. Other issues might be these: Can students use particular words flexibly and correctly? Can students use context to help them understand new words? Can students recognize common roots, prefixes, and suffixes for new words? Can students find information on new words to help extend their knowledge? Can students self-evaluate? Do students have a general idea of the meaning of some of the new words we have encountered in class?

Questions like these are best answered by ongoing instructional assessment and by teacher-constructed measures. Many of the techniques we have presented in earlier chapters are diagnostic as well as instructional; that is, the teacher discovers what students are learning as lessons progress.

Assessing Vocabulary Breadth: Word Set Graphics

One way to know what students have learned about a broad range of words is to use and analyze pre- and postinstruction graphic organizers that ask students to work with sets of related words. In earlier chapters, we presented knowledge rating, semantic mapping and webbing, Vocab-o-Grams, semantic feature analysis, and other graphic organizers that can reveal to a teacher what students have learned about groups of terms. For example, look at the knowledge rating constructed by a group of high school students before and after reading a text chapter about dwellings (see Figure 7.1). Before reading, the teacher asked students to rate their knowledge, a technique discussed in Chapter 3. After reading, she used a similar format for some of the more difficult vocabulary but also included some of the questions about dwellings generated in the prereading discussion: Where are they located? Who lives in them? What do they look like?

By looking at the before and after knowledge ratings, the teacher can see that the students topicalized the words—they started to make distinctions based on the key questions of locale, design, and inhabitants but still had a few misconceptions. She decided to use a map to show the students where the yurt-living nomadic tribes might be located and to find a better description of a Sardinian trullo. These became two research topics for her students. This type of group mapping activity can allow a teacher to keep tabs on word learning without testing and to plan further instruction.

Assessing Vocabulary Depth: Word Maps

Sometimes, rather than assessing breadth of knowledge, teachers want to analyze how deeply students understand central terms. Do they see a word in its relationship to other words and placed in a larger domain? Creating a word map for a central word or concept can reveal depth. For example, a teacher wants to know how deep students' knowledge is of the term *crustacean.* In earlier chapters, we discussed such processes as semantic mapping, PAVE, the Frayer concept model, and others. This teacher decided to try a concept of definition map (see Figure 7.2). Like other word mapping strategies, all concept of definition maps require that students look for a class, characteristics, and examples.

In their first concept of definition frame, the students had no knowledge of *crustacean.* When the teacher noted that a *lobster* was an example, they generated *pinchers* [*sic*] as a characteristic and *sea animal* as a class. After reading, the students had filled out the frame with a class (*arthropod*) and related some other types to this (*arachnid* and *insect*). They also had more examples and characteristics as well as

FIGURE 7.1   Before and After Knowledge Ratings

Before-Reading Knowledge Rating

Check your knowledge level for each of these terms:

Term	3 Can Define/Use	2 Heard It	1 Don't Know
tipi	✔		
villa		✔	
casa colonica			✔
apartment	✔		
high rise		✔	
dascha		✔	
trullo			✔
dishambe			✔
lean-to		✔	
yurt			✔

After-Reading Knowledge Rating

Term	Rating	Local	People	Describe	Questions
tipi	3	u.s.Plains	Native American	⌂	
villa	3	Mediterranean	Rich Romans, Italians	Large House	
dascha	3	Russia	Peasants-Rich	big house	
trullo	2	Sardinia	?	Not Sure	are they like tipis?
yurt	2	?	Nomads	⌒	How can it be felt?

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FIGURE 7.2
Concept Map
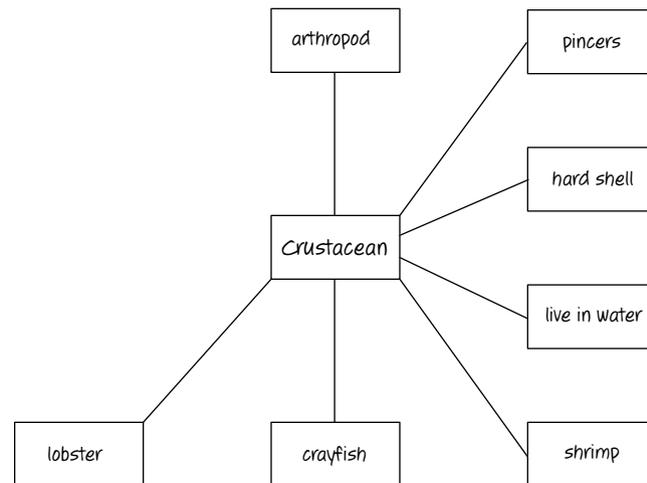
a comment about *crust* that turned out to be accurate when they checked the derivation of the word. The teacher felt this word map showed that her class had a well-established knowledge of the term *crustacean*. Later in this chapter, we see a word journal from one student to show how the teacher assessed individual learning.

Assessing Usage

When you want to know about your students' ability to use a new term correctly, flexibly, and richly, assessment through use is the only answer. Rather than a contrived method, such as, "See how many of this week's new words you can use in one story"—a technique sure to produce distorted and contrived usage—ask students to use vocabulary in meaningful ways in the context of some larger activities. The most direct way to do this is to ask students to incorporate particular words in their responses to questions and in their summaries and retellings. More specific ways to look at vocabulary might be to use an observation guide to record vocabulary learning in any facet of classwork. Some ways in which you might gather data to record on this type of guide, besides the obvious method of reviewing a student writing portfolio, are tracking usage in word journals, having student monitors collect usage information, using 3-minute meetings, or involving students in the yea/nay game. We describe each in the sections that follow.

Observation Guide. Observing students' uses of words in discussion, in lessons, and in writing is a means of evaluating their vocabulary usage in the most authentic way. Many teachers compose their own "rubrics," or structured ways of looking at vocabulary and rating usage. For example, you might construct an observation and evaluation sheet like the one in Figure 7.3.

When kept in a notebook with a page for each student, you can pull out sheets for a few students each day to make observations or enter information on the sheet when you notice something in your daily anecdotal records.

In addition to observing students in action in discussion and writing, you can observe word usage involved in different sorts of recording processes.

Discussion	Indicate Date, Relevant Vocabulary, and Comments
Demonstrates background knowledge	
Uses vocabulary to predict logically	
Uses vocabulary to reason	
Adds to knowledge of a word	
Uses vocabulary to discuss selection elements in summary, retelling, questions, and responses	
In General	
Offers reasonable word associations and word choices in writing	
Can classify words	
Can define words appropriately	
Can infer word meaning from context	
Uses appropriate vocabulary to clearly state ideas	

Note. Adapted and printed with permission. Rothstein, V., and R. Z. Goldberg. _Thinking Through Stories._ East Moline, IL: LinguiSystems, Inc., 1993, p. 64.

FIGURE 7.3
Vocabulary Observation

Word Journals. Students can keep lists of words that interest them and that they encounter in reading and use in writing in a journal that calls on them to tell about how the author used a word and how they might use it. For example, one student's journal page looked like this:

> **Shifty:**
>
> These shifty guys take advantage of many retired and elderly people.
>
> **What it means**: Not being honest; constantly changing
>
> **My use**: In my story about the kids who took my basketball when I was 7. The boy who asked to borrow my ball had a shifty look. I shouldn't have let him have it.

Specific words can be designated by the teacher as journal additions, and teacher review can serve as assessment.

Word Monitors for Discussion. A student in a discussion group can be designated as a "word monitor" to chart the number of times particular words are used. The monitor for that word can also be charged to survey each student in the group about the word's meaning and ask each to supply a usage for a designated word or words. Records turned in to the teacher can be used as assessment (see Figure 7.4).

3-Minute Meetings. Students can be assigned to construct a collection of new words in a word bank, list, or dictionary or on a word wall or bulletin board. A teacher can

FIGURE 7.4   Word Monitor Sheet

Name ___Paul___	Date Oct. 4
Class ___Social Studies___	
Chapter/ Book/ Story/ Topic _____ Ch. 3	

Words	Tally
1. Confederacy	⊦⊦⊦⊦ ⊦⊦⊦⊦ /
2. Union	⊦⊦⊦⊦ ⊦⊦⊦⊦ ///
3. abolition	///
4. Underground Railroad	//
5. carpetbaggers	⊦⊦⊦⊦ //
6. Reconstruction	⊦⊦⊦⊦ /
7. Emancipation Proclamation	//
8.	

Student	Word(s) enter #
Tyrone	OK, all but #7
Blair	OK, all but #5, #7
Jake	OK all
Dave	OK all

have periodic **3-minute meetings** in which she selects 10 words from the collections and asks students to use them in a meaningful way. A simple checklist such as the one in Figure 7.5 (p. 137) can record performance for an ongoing record of word learning. Teachers can choose a few students for meetings each day so that each can have a conference during a 1- to 2-week period. Students can also have 3-minute meetings with one another and work in groups to choose the vocabulary to be discussed.

Yea/Nay. A gamelike activity called yea/nay (Beck & McKeown, 1983) can be used for quick assessment of word knowledge. Students have two different cards, one that says *yes* and one that says *no*. Words are presented in pairs, and rapid questions are asked by the teacher.

FIGURE 7.5
3-Minute Meeting
Record

The list below shows the words you should have ready for your 3-minute meeting on
_____. Come prepared to use each word in our discussion
or show me how you used it in writing.

Words   **Comments**

1. Confederacy
2. Union
3. abolition
4. Underground Railroad
5. carpetbaggers
6. Reconstruction
7. Emancipation
    Proclamation
8.

Would a *corpse* be a good *conversationalist?*

Would a *crook* be commended for *honesty?*

After asking the question, the teacher gives students 15 seconds to think and
then asks, "Yea or nay? 1, 2, 3." On the count of 3, students put up their choices and
hold them up while a teacher calls on students to explain their choices. Recorders
can record initial responses if the teacher wants a formal record.

Assessing Independent Word-Learning Strategies

Besides wanting to know if our students have broad or deep meanings for new
words and can use them richly and flexibly, we also want to know if students have
effective independent word-learning strategies.

Think-Alouds. Earlier in this book, we discussed extensively the strategies of using
context, word parts, and references. In each of these chapters, the approach was a
strategic one that could also be used for assessment. What is central to the
assessment of most strategy development is some process that reveals the students'
thinking process. One such process is the *think-aloud* process (Davey, 1983), which
asks students to talk about what they are thinking and doing while they are thinking
and doing it. In Chapter 2, we used this example of a group thinking through context
with their teacher to figure out the term *cellar holes,* which was blanked out of a
passage.

> **T(eacher)**: Remember that for the last few weeks we have been talking about
> using context clues. Can anyone tell me why we do this?

> **S(tudent)1**: When there's a word you don't know, sometimes you can get an
> idea by looking at the rest of the story for clues.

> **S2**: You can think about what you already know and then see if you can figure
> out what the new word means or something about it from what the author
> says.

> **T**: How do we do that?

> **S3**: We look before the word, we look after the word, and we look *at* the word,
> too, for prefixes and roots and stuff, but we can't do that here because you
> took that all out (laughter).

T: That's right. I'm making it a real challenge for you. Can you tell me anything about the missing term?

S2: Well, she's outside, so it's something outside.

S5: It's something on the ground 'cause she's digging later on.

S1: It says, "Smooth little depressions they were, …" but I don't understand that because I know *depressed* and this doesn't make sense.

T: Anyone have anything to say about that? (Students make no response.)

T: Remember to look further on. Is there anything else about depressions?

S4: Later it says that "The shape of the depressions gave a clue," so it's not a feeling. It's something on the ground.

S5: She played in them, so they were holes or like where walls of old stones were left.

T: What made you think of walls?

S5: Well, they keep talking about the houses and said "houses had stood there … the doorways had been there," so I think she is somewhere where houses used to be. Like after an earthquake or tornado.

S1: "It looks as if the homes had sunk into the earth," so they must be holes.

T: Would (the *word*) *hole* make sense?

S4: Yeah, they could be depressions. She could play in them, and you could dig a spoon out of the hole.

S5: If it's the hole where a house was, then it could be the basement hole, like the hole they dig when they start to build a house.

S1: Basement makes sense; it's a hole for a house.

T: Well, what do you think?

S1: I think we should stop. We know enough.

T: Should we stop or keep thinking? (Students agree to stop and uncover the term *cellar holes*.)

S2: Well, they are holes.

S5: My gram has a fruit cellar in her house, and it's like, it's the same as a basement.

S4: OK, we figured it out. Let's see what this story is about.

T: Good idea.

Think-alouds can be used with groups or with individuals in a conference and provide ideas about independent word use strategy that can be recorded on the all-purpose file such as the one shared in Figure 7.6.

Self-Evaluation. Along with using teacher-observed introspective methods such as think-alouds to reveal student strategies, another facet of developing an independent word-learning strategy is developing the-process of self-evaluation. This type of metacognitive behavior is important to all learning. Currently, with the interest in self-evaluation in the portfolio process, this strategy is receiving major consideration in the assessment process as well. Literature circles often use role sheets for vocabulary directors such as those shared in Chapter 4 (see Figure 4.5). Role sheets ask students to become self-reflective about the words they need to learn and the ways they need to go about learning them.

Word Strategies-1

1. What strategy from the following list did you use today to figure out words that are difficult for you?

    –Thought about what would make sense

    –Went back for something the author said before

    –Read more for more information

    –Used parts of the word (prefix, suffix, root)

    –Used information from pictures and graphs

    –Used a reference (dictionary, encyclopedia glossary, another person, or other)

    –Other (Explain.)

    _____
    _____
    _____

2. Give one example of how you figured out a difficult word. Write the sentence the word was in and underline the word. Then tell how you figured it out. Be specific so someone else can see how you were thinking. Use the back if needed.

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

_____
Note. Based on Rhodes, 1993, p. 48.

FIGURE 7.6
Word Strategy Self-Evaluation

You might also like to have students include a word strategy evaluation in their word journals. One used by a seventh-grade teacher looked like the one shown in Figure 7.6.

Teaching Idea File 7.1 offers some ideas for assessing vocabulary in cooperative groups.

Teacher-Constructed Tests

Sometimes you want a quick assessment of your students' abilities to associate a new word with a synonym or general meaning. For this type of assessment, short teacher-made tests can work. Teacher-constructed tests can take many forms and usually test recognition (the ability to select an appropriate answer) rather than the more difficult recall (the ability to provide a word from memory). Typical teacher-made tests are types of recall assessment that involve defining a word by:

1. Giving/choosing a synonym (a *diadem* is a *crown*)
2. Giving/choosing a classification (a *shrimp* is a *crustacean*)
3. Giving/choosing examples (*flowers* are plants like daisy, rose, mum)
4. Giving/choosing an explanation of how something is used (a *shovel* is a *tool* used to dig holes)
5. Giving/choosing an opposite

> ### *Teaching Idea File 7.1*
>
> ## Vocabulary Assessment Ideas for Cooperative Groups
>
> 1. Assign the role of word monitor to one member of the group. Have that student use the chart shown in Figure 7.4.
> 2. With each group, have a 3-minute meeting in which students must quickly present the vocabulary for you.
> 3. Have students do word strategy assessments and add them to their portfolios after discussion.
> 4. Have members plan yea/nay questions and lead the game for another group.

From Blachowicz and Fisher, *Teaching Vocabulary in All Classrooms,* 1996, p. 139.

6. Giving/choosing a definition
7. Giving/choosing a picture
8. Giving/choosing a word to complete a context

Multiple-Choice Tests. **Multiple-choice tests** can involve picking a choice from a list of choices, matching a word to a synonym or opposite, or choosing a word to complete a larger cloze passage. For example, an item with a list of choices might look like this:

Pick the best synonym for the underlined word in the sentence:

She was a <u>synthesis</u> of the best qualities of her mother and father.

fake   combination   example   daughter

For effective multiple-choice questions, make sure students have to discriminate among choices that would fit the syntactic context of the sentence. In the example, all of the choices are nouns, although *daughter* would be an unusual choice for this construction.

Also, you may wish to put in distractors (incorrect choices) related to confusing terms. For example, *fake* might be chosen if *synthesis* is associated with *synthetic*. Just as these make the task more challenging, however, they can mask some constructive thinking on the part of the learner. Many teachers like to have students explain their choices as a way of debriefing exams. Also, the answers you get will be determined by your choice of distractors. Simple, easy-to-eliminate distractors will result in higher "correct" scores than choosing wrong answers that have some subtle or complicated relationship to the target word (Campion & Elley, 1971). Analyze your tests and debrief with students if your results seem perplexing.

Multiple-Choice Matching. **Matching tests** call on students to pair words with synonyms. For example,

---

Draw a line between synonyms:

1. paradigm   a. combination
2. synthesis   b. fake
3. synthetic   c. ruler
                               d. example
                               e. dynasty

As in the previous formats, the nature of the choices is important. The subtlety of the distinctions involved should be matched to the age and sophistication of the students. Matching is most appropriate when you are interested in the simple ability to associate a term with a suitable synonym. The list of choices should be longer than the number of items to be supplied. Students who are effective test takers will use the process of elimination for those words they are not sure of.

Multiple-Choice Cloze. In Chapter 2, we gave several examples of cloze used as a teaching technique. Cloze (in the form called "maze" because choices are given for each deletion) is used for standardized assessment in several standardized tests (e.g., *Degrees of Reading Power,* 1995; MacGinitie & MacGinitie, 1989). Reading a **cloze** passage requires readers to use their knowledge of context to supply appropriate words and concepts to create a meaningful passage. In a cloze used to test vocabulary, choices are supplied such as in the following example:

From the list, choose the best word to fit the context:

He was a _____ of the best qualities of his mother and father. He had his mother's ability to reach out to strangers and his father's habit of being a good listener. He was a genuine, honest human being, with many friends.

synthesis   synthetic   contradiction

When preparing a cloze passage for testing, make sure your students have not seen it before so they can be called on to use words in new contexts, which is a true test of vocabulary knowledge.

Guidelines for Teacher-Made Tests. Tests you make for the classroom should be easy and efficient to use. You will also want to ask these questions:

1. Do the items and the process call on students to do the same things you typically ask them to do in class? If your normal question in class is for students to supply a synonym, asking for an antonym on a test doesn't make much sense.

2. Will answering the item provide useful repetition of vocabulary or make students think more deeply about it? If the test item is an exact repetition of something you did earlier, it may be testing rote memory rather than more creative or extensive thinking.

3. Will the knowledge you draw on be useful and relevant to the course in which the assessment is taking place? If you are testing aspects of word knowledge not relevant to the topic, your efforts may be counterproductive.

4. Does your test format match your instructional format? If you have stressed usage in instruction, test for usage. If you have emphasized word recognition, test for recognition.

Keeping Vocabulary Records

An important part of all assessment is keeping records to show growth and change. Both students and teachers keep records in the classroom that can record change and growth. Some examples for each are discussed in the following sections.

Student Recording. Student work can be kept and recorded in many ways.

Word Files and Notebooks.   From word banks in the primary grades to notebooks kept in middle school and high school, a cumulative record of words encountered and learned can be kept. Here are some tips for maximizing word files:

1. Wherever the word is recorded, include a usage example. This can be from the author or from the student.

2. For easy management, when cards are used, use the front of the card for the word and the back for usage examples. Make sure the student's name or initials are on the card for the inevitable lost cards. Lastly, cards can most easily be kept on a slip ring that runs through the corner of the card. (Shower curtain rings are inexpensive and ideal for this purpose.) Ringed cards are easy to find and don't scatter when dropped like boxed cards do.

3. For word notebooks, use a loose-leaf format. This allows words to be alphabetized and sorted in different ways. A small loose-leaf notebook allows a word per page and gives plenty of room for illustration and examples.

Student Portfolio Self-Evaluation. A student portfolio is more than just a collection of work. The portfolio process involves students in selecting items to include and reflecting on their choices. Students can be involved in assessment prior to learning, during learning, and after learning. For example, besides the student word strategy of self-evaluation we presented in Figure 7.6, students can be asked to collect prereading, during-reading, and postreading vocabulary information on a particular word or group of words. One of the seventh graders who constructed the word map on *crustacean,* shown in Figure 7.2, constructed the reflection shown in Figure 7.7 to explain his learning and inclusion of the item in his portfolio. This type of self-reflection not only asks students to reflect on their own word learning but also gives them practice in using the terms in meaningful ways.

Teacher Records. Besides the typical records of test scores teachers might keep, there are other ways teachers can keep records of vocabulary. One of these is the checklist format. For example, the teacher working with the Civil War, described earlier, generated the checklist of important vocabulary shown in Figure 7.8. As she looked at the work of the children in her class, she kept tabs on the words they were learning as her assessment.

Anecdotal Records. Another form of recording is anecdotal records. Many teachers keep small notes or journals that they file in a daily log. These comments

> *Directions: Choose some item from this unit that shows your growth in vocabulary. Attach this sheet with your reflection and description of why you chose this piece.*
>
> What I chose to show my word learning in the unit on sea life is my word map on crustaceans. At first I had never heard of this word and then I found out that it's the name of a family of sea animals like crabs and lobsters. They all have pairs of legs that are jointed. They also have a hard shell, like a crust. Crust actually is related to the word crustacean (but I don't know which came first).
>
> I thought it was real interesting that crustaceans are related to insects too. When you think about it, an ant sort of looks like a lobster in the shape of its body. I never heard this word before even though I knew what a lobster was. Now I know a lot more.

FIGURE 7.7
Seventh Grader's
Portfolio Reflection on
the Word *Crustacean*

FIGURE 7.8   Teacher Checklist

Word	Paul	Jake	Dave
1. Confederacy	D W T	D W T	D W T
2. Union	D W T	D W T	D W T
3. abolition	D W T	D W T	
4. Underground Railroad	D W T		D W T
5. carpetbaggers	D W T	D W T	D W T
6. Reconstruction	D W T	D W T	D W T
7. Emancipation Proclamation	W	W	

D = used in discussion
W = used in writing
T = tested

can then be recorded on cumulative sheets for each student at the end of the day or week. For example, one teacher keeps a card file with a card for each student. Each day she picks out five cards and makes some notation about the vocabulary usage of each child. She may decide to have a 3-minute meeting or look at the student's work folder. By the end of the week, she has focused on each child and can start the cycle again.

Another teacher likes to keep notepads and pencils in each corner of his room. When he sees anything of interest during the day, he makes a note on the nearest pad. At the end of the day, he collects the pads, reflects on his notes, and files information in the appropriate place. Large self-stick notes may also be used for this purpose.

In this section, we have focused on the ways teachers do ongoing assessment to help structure instruction. These means were mainly informal and teacher made. Other types of instruments are used for formal large-scale assessment and for pinpointing learning needs in a diagnostic fashion.

■ ■ ■ STANDARDIZED MEASURES OF VOCABULARY

What Are Standardized Measures?

Five keywords can help you understand standardized measures: They relate performance to some **standard** measure of performance; they try to be **objective**; and they make conclusions from a **sample** of performance that is assumed to be a **valid** and **reliable** predictor of general performance. Let's look at each of these words in turn.

Standard. There are many different types of standardized measures, but they all share the quality of comparing performance to some **standard** of performance. Tests are called **norm referenced** when they compare the performance of one group with that of the standard performance of a norming group, a large group of test takers from a particular group thought to be typical. Norms help gauge performance in a way that raw scores and percentages do not. For example, a class average of 85% (22 out of 26 correct) on an exam sounds substantial until we learn that all the other classes scored 100% on the same measure. Other tests, called **criterion-referenced tests**, use a particular level of performance on a task as a standard. For example, if the task just noted involved naming the 26 letters of the alphabet, an 85% level of performance (22 letters named) might be very appropriate at first-grade entry with 100% expected at second grade. It's important that the norming group of any standardized measure chosen for a particular school match the school population to get accurate comparisons.

Objective. In an argument, when we look for someone **objective** to settle a dispute, we look for someone who will treat each person in the same way and not show favoritism. In the same sense, standardized measures try to be objective. That is, they try to treat each test taker in the same way by having specific guidelines for timing and administration, for dealing with questions, and for evaluating answers. Also, the content and questions are supposed to be equally comprehensible to all students in

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Teaching Idea File 7.2

Tips for Choosing Standardized Measures

1. Check to see that the norming group for the measure is like your school population.
2. Take the test before you give it. This will help you observe appropriate standardized procedure and will alert you to problem points.
3. Analyze the test items. Are they appropriate for your curriculum? How is the validity described and determined?
4. Check the manual. Is the reliability adequate? Are some levels and subtests less reliable?
5. Find out more about the measure in a professional journal or in the appropriate *Mental Measurements Yearbook* (Buros).

From Blachowicz and Fisher, *Teaching Vocabulary in All Classrooms,* 1996, p. 144.

terms of background knowledge, a point we will discuss further. Because tests are already "error prone," observing standardized procedure is essential when administering any standardized measure.

Sample. When you have your blood tested; you don't need to have all your blood removed and analyzed. The technician works from a small sample and assumes it will be representative of all the blood in your body. In the same way, standardized tests take a short **sample** of your performance and try to generalize about your larger performance. To do this, a test has to be **valid** (measure what it says it measures) and **reliable** (measure approximately the same way time after time). Reliability can be statistically calculated, but validity is harder to determine. Most standardized measures look for experts to attest to validity or to compare measurements with some other measure that experts have indicated is valid. Teachers and administrators carefully examine standardized measures chosen for their schools to make sure the tasks and items reflect a view of reading that shapes the school curriculum. See Teaching Idea File 7.2 (p. 144) for suggestions on how to choose standardized measures of vocabulary.

Problems with Standardized Tests

A clear understanding of the keywords *standard, objective, sample, valid,* and *reliable* will suggest to you some of the greatest problems with standardized measures. We've already noted that poor norming and nonstandardized procedures can give poor information. Further, the formats of many standardized tests have raised some major questions about task validity. The passages are generally short and unrelated, and the tasks are decontextualized and of dubious relationship to real reading (Valencia & Pearson, 1986). For vocabulary, for example, choosing a word to match another in a list of words has very little relationship to actual reading tasks. Because of the power of background knowledge, the question of objectivity can be raised when students of different backgrounds from norming groups take tests. Lastly, because error is inevitable in all assessment, small deviations, for example, a child's feeling unwell on a testing day, may produce a bad sample of a student's regular performance, or guessing may provide a too-optimistic sample. Because of all these possibilities for individual error, standardized measures are meant for large-scale comparisons—district to district, for example, where individual errors in measurement wash out when looking at groups composed of large numbers.

Standardized Group Vocabulary Tests

Most standardized group reading tests have sections devoted to vocabulary. Typically, the format involves a multiple-choice selection of a synonym to match a target word. For example,

From the group below, choose the word with the closest meaning to **discovered**

1. faded
2. concluded
3. found
4. unwrapped

For a majority of tests, the vocabulary selected is drawn from high-frequency graded word lists that represent textbook words from reading series and science and social studies books (Cooter, 1990). Although separate vocabulary and comprehension scores are given in tests of these types, there is normally a high correlation between the two because vocabulary is an excellent predictor of comprehension (Davis, 1968). In addition to being a general predictor of comprehension and an indicator of prior knowledge, these tests can provide a rough estimate of a student's ability to make broad associations to new words.

We've already noted that standardized measures are meant as group assessment and can have significant error in predicting individual performance. Here are some other issues to keep in mind about vocabulary measures:

1. Vocabulary tests are measures of prior knowledge, experience, and culture. For example, a *soda* in New York is a carbonated beverage. In the Midwest, it's an ice cream concoction. Similarly, tests of oral vocabulary using pictures can be most confusing. Look at Figure 7.9. What object is pictured? In parts of the country, this drawing could be a mailbox; in other areas, it's a trash can. In still others, it's a library book return. Often pictures are ambiguous and culture bound, which can cause error.

2. Vocabulary tests are measures of decoding. In any standardized tests where students must work silently, the students are responsible for analyzing the word before performing the task. Many students with poor decoding skills score poorly on tests of vocabulary even when they have those words in their oral vocabulary.

FIGURE 7.9   Example of Vocabulary
Test Item. What Would You Put in
This Box?
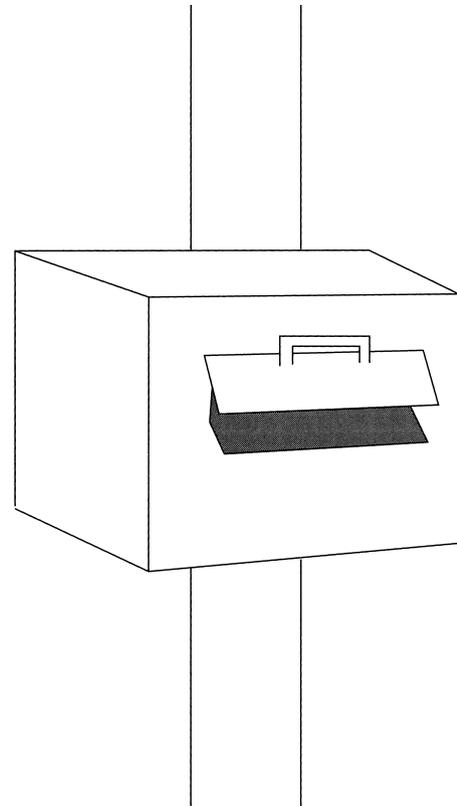
3. Students take tests in many ways. Analyzing score sheets will reveal that two students can have the same score, with one answering the first 50 of 100 questions correctly but not finishing and another student answering all 100 but getting 50 correct. Many tests are tests of speed rather than of power. Teachers can allow students to revisit a standardized test in an untimed format after the standardized data have been collected to give the teacher a better idea of the student's word power—the performance without time pressure.

4. All standardized tests measure test-taking skills. Students who know how to guess, how to eliminate answers, and how to make the best use of limited time will post scores well beyond their ability. Even measures such as the SAT, which once billed itself as "uncoachable," are now understood to be influenced by test-taking preparation.

5. Vocabulary tests measure the most superficial aspects of word learning. The ability to make an association or select a synonym is not the ability to use a word richly and flexibly. For bilingual students, in particular, standardized measures can overestimate or underestimate what they know about vocabulary in a second language.

In general, such measures can be used as rough screening devices to assess the general vocabulary levels of your students. Because they so often depend on prior knowledge, they can also be viewed as rough measures of exposure to topics and issues that different vocabulary represents. Later in this chapter, when looking at diagnosis related to vocabulary difficulty, we discuss ways in which teachers can probe with standardized tests to get more information about a specific student's performance. At that point, we talk about some specialized standardized vocabulary measures.

Specialized Tests

Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test–Third Ed. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised (PPVT-R) (Dunn & Dunn, 1997) is a standardized individual test of auditory vocabulary. Each item is pronounced by the examiner, and the examinee selects an appropriate representation from four black-and-white pictures. The PPVT-R is easy to administer, well designed, and standardized. It rules out decoding problems by being an oral test and is well standardized in the school-age versions. Used with probes ("Why did you pick that one?"), which are not part of the standardized procedure, it can be revealing of prior knowledge.

Stanford Diagnostic Reading Tests *(1995).* The Stanford Diagnostic Reading Tests are group instruments with interesting subtests that can provide specific types of information.

- *Auditory vocabulary* (Red, Green, and Brown levels). These early levels have auditory vocabulary tests in which the teacher reads the words for selection. The words include various parts of speech and represent three areas of content: reading and literature, mathematics and science, and social studies and the arts.

- *Structural analysis* (Green, Brown, and Blue levels). This subtest measures students' ability to use word parts such as syllables, affixes, and root words.

As with any group test, individual probing often gives a different picture of performance, as does analysis of the same items in contextual reading.

Brigance Diagnostic Comprehensive Inventory of Basic Skills (1999). The Reading Vocabulary Comprehension assessment consists of three lists of words for each grade level and is used as a rough placement device. Students are asked to indicate which word does not belong in each list. Again, this can be interesting if probed, but the test itself is too short to provide much useful information.

Durrell Analysis of Reading Difficulty (1980). This test (Durrell & Catterson, 1980) assesses listening vocabulary. The examiner reads a word and students must assign it to a category. For example, a student might hear the word *gigantic* and have to assign it to one of three categories—food, size, or color. The words used in this subtest also appear in a word analysis subtest so one can compare reading and listening vocabulary.

Woodcock-Johnson III Diagnostic Reading Battery (2005). The Woodcock-Johnson III Diagnostic Reading Battery is a comprehensive set of individually administered tests that measures important dimensions of phonological awareness, phonics knowledge, and reading achievement. In addition, the WJ III DRB includes two tests of oral language ability: oral vocabulary and oral comprehension.

The SAT and Other College Entrance Exams. The SAT (College Entrance Examination Board, 2005) and other college entrance tests are heavily weighted toward vocabulary knowledge. Because the SAT is the most widely administered, we use it as a prototype to discuss this type of test and the type of preparation students can do for it. It was once implied that these were tests of aptitude and, as such, were not influenced by preparation. Now, even the test constructors acknowledge they are tests of learning and achievement and that students can benefit from preparation (College Entrance Examination Board, 2005).

The verbal portion of the test includes verbal questions with one- or two-blank sentence completion items, verbal analogies, and vocabulary in the context of critical reading (see Figure 7.10 for examples). Although the test can be prepared for,

FIGURE 7.10   Examples of Verbal Questions from the SAT

1-Blank Vocabulary Item	Analogy
Ravens appear to behave_____, actively helping one another to find food.	ACT: Play
(A) mysteriously	(A) song: music
(B) warily	(B) rhyme: poem
(C) aggressively	(C) page: novel
(D) cooperatively	(D) chapter: book
(E) defensively	(E) scenery: performance
2-Blank Vocabulary Item	Vocabulary in Context
Both_____and_____, Wilson seldom spoke and never spent money.	In line 34, "legends" most nearly means
	(A) ancient folklore
(A) vociferous . . . generous	(B) obscure symbols
(B) garrulous . . . stingy	(C) history lessons
(C) effusive . . . frugal	(D) famous people
(D) taciturn . . . miserly	(E) common misconceptions
(E) reticent . . . munificent	

review authorities all suggest a long-term attention to vocabulary works best (Carris, 2001; CEEB, 2005; Robinson, 2001). They suggest keeping word cards on new vocabulary and doing the following:

1. When you meet a new word in your reading, try to figure it out from context. Write the word on a card and, on the back, write the usage.

2. Look the word up in a dictionary and add the definitions to your card.

3. Pay special attention to the usage sentences in the dictionary and add them to your card along with a sentence of your own. Draw a picture if that helps you with the meaning (see Figure 7.11).

4. When word histories are given, read through them.

5. Keep a list of common roots and affixes.

6. Keep a list of common abbreviations.

7. Do crossword puzzles whenever you can.

8. Play word games such as Scrabble and Boggle (see Appendix D) with a dictionary nearby. Ask about every word you don't know.

9. When learning new words, use mnemonics to help you remember. Create a visual image or a sentence to help fix the meaning and usage in your mind.

10. If you will be taking the new subject-area exams, you might want to keep a list of content terms for each of the subjects you might take. They are as follows:

Literature

History: American history and social studies, world history

Foreign Language: Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Latin, modern Hebrew, Spanish

Mathematics:
  Level I: Algebra and geometry
  Level II: Algebra, geometry, and precalculus or trigonometry

Science: Biology, chemistry, physics

Also, all the preparatory manuals and courses emphasize the need for wide reading and for becoming "word conscious."

You might like to add the excellent guides, shown in Teaching Idea File 7.3, to your student bookshelf if you are a high school teacher.
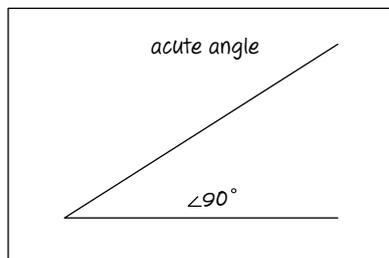

FIGURE 7.11   Drawing as a Memory Aid

Teaching Idea File 7.3

SAT Preparation Guides

Carris, J. D. (2005). *SAT word flash*. Princeton, NJ: Peterson's.

College Entrance Examination Board. (2005). *Introducing the new SAT: The College Board's official guide*. New York: College Board Publications.

Robinson, A. (2001). *Word smart: Building an educated vocabulary*. New York: Villard Books.

From Blachowicz and Fisher, *Teaching Vocabulary in All Classrooms,* 1996, p. 150.

■ ■ ■ DIAGNOSIS FOR SPECIAL NEEDS

When a particular student seems to have trouble with vocabulary, you will sometimes want to do an individual diagnosis to help clarify and plan instruction. You have several avenues to pursue. The first frequently involves an **informal reading inventory** (IRI), an individual assessment using passages that reflect the type of work this student is called on to read. Second, you can probe the responses from that inventory and from other standardized measures. Third, you can use some of the specialized measures noted earlier if you still need the type of information they could provide.

Vocabulary Assessment with Informal Reading Inventories

The most commonly used informal diagnostic measure used by teachers is the informal reading inventory. These inventories may be commercially published, produced by the publishers of commercial reading materials, or constructed by teachers. IRIs consist of passages for oral and silent reading, passages to measure listening comprehension, and sets of words used for decoding assessment. Their use is widely described and discussed in books on reading instruction and diagnosis (Barr, Blachowicz, Katz, & Kaufman, 2001). For vocabulary assessment in IRIs, students read a passage and are asked questions that involve interpretation of preselected words or are sometimes asked direct questions about the meaning of a word in the passage context. Because the assessment is individual, you can probe a student's response in a way that cannot be done in a group measure.

In a high school social studies class, a teacher wondered if Louisa's poor performance might be due to problems with vocabulary. She constructed an informal reading inventory with passages from some of the chapters in the textbooks they would be using. For example, look at the passage about housing shown in Figure 7.12.

Louisa made the responses shown in Figure 7.13. She had no problem decoding any of the words in the selection. Of the comprehension questions, she got partial credit on two (items 1 and 9) and missed two items (6 and 8). In her partially correct answers, she gave examples rather than a more classical definition, and she could not define *sophisticated* and *determines*. She was unable to infer that *sophisticated* had to be contrasted with *crude,* perhaps because she did not know what *crude* meant. Because Louisa's difficulty on the comprehension questions seemed to be caused by her limited understanding of some of the vocabulary, her teacher

FIGURE 7.12   Reading Passage and Questions about Kinds of Housing

Passage

With a few exceptions, environment determines the kinds of shelter people choose. So, houses are usually built from materials that are most readily available in the surrounding areas.

The temporary dwelling, as its name suggests, is not built to last. Nomads, people who are always on the move, build temporary dwellings. For example, Native Americans of the plains developed the tipi, made of buffalo hides. When buffalo were plentiful, they were an important food source. To avoid waste, Native Americans found a practical use for the hides of the animals. When the tribe moved on, the tipis were left behind.

The grass lean-to is favored by the Bush people of the Kalahari Desert. It is made from grasses and sticks found in the area in which they live.

There are two kinds of permanent housing: crude and sophisticated. Igloos, log cabins, and adobe huts are crude permanent housing. They are built to last. The surfaces, however, are rough and unfinished.

The igloo is a dome made of blocks of hard-packed snow. The snow acts as an insulator. It makes the igloo surprisingly warm.

Log cabins were common during America's westward expansion. As settlers headed west, the thick forests provided timber for housing.

Adobe is sun-dried mud. Adobe huts are found in warm, dry areas, such as parts of Mexico and the American Southwest.

Sophisticated permanent housing can be made from many materials. Homes with concrete foundations are built to last from owner to owner. The location of steel mills and ironworks often determines the areas where this housing is found.

Comprehension Questions

1. a. What determines the kind of shelter people choose?
   b. Where do we usually get the materials from which we build houses?

2. What is temporary dwelling?
3. What are the people called who build temporary dwellings?
4. Why do some people build temporary dwellings?
5. What are the two types of permanent housing?
6. What is the difference between crude and sophisticated permanent housing?
7. Name some types of crude permanent housing.
8. What are some materials from which sophisticated permanent housing is made?
9. What determines where sophisticated permanent houses are built?
10. *If you had the choice between living in an igloo, a log cabin, or an adobe hut, which would you choose and why?
11. *Of all the types of housing mentioned in the passage—temporary and permanent, crude permanent, and sophisticated permanent— which type do you live in?
12. *Do climate and environment still govern what materials we use to build houses today?

Vocabulary Knowledge
Key Concept Words

1. environment
2. determines
3. available
4. temporary
5. permanent
6. sophisticated

Contextually Explained

7. insulator
8. adobe
9. igloo
10. nomad

Note. *These questions require the student to go beyond the information presented in the reading passage.

decided to go back and probe her understanding of some of the vocabulary, specifically *sophisticated, crude, determines, plentiful, readily,* and *insulator.*

Probing IRI Responses

The next day Louisa's teacher had Louisa reread the passage, and then the teacher asked her what *crude* meant. She replied that *crude* was a "kind of housing" and gave the three examples from the text. Further probing indicated that she had never

FIGURE 7.13   Louisa's Responses to Questions about the Passage on Housing

1. a. What determines the kind of shelter people choose? (environment; available materials) RESPONSE: It can be the ground, maybe grass or sand; and like if it's cold or sunny.
   b. Where do we usually get the materials from which we build houses? (environment; surrounding area). RESPONSE: Sometimes we can make it. Like the log cabins, you could get it from the trees around you. The igloos you could pack the snow yourself.
2. What is a temporary dwelling? (one that is not built to last). RESPONSE: It's not built to stay long.
3. What are the people called who build temporary dwellings? (nomads). RESPONSE: Nomads.
4. Why do some people build temporary dwellings? (they are always on the move). RESPONSE: They are always moving around.
5. What are the two types of permanent housing? (crude and sophisticated). RESPONSE: Crude and sophisticated.
6. What is the difference between crude and sophisticated permanent housing? (crude are rough and unfinished; sophisticated are made from modern materials). RESPONSE: Not sure—crude are built to stay longer and sophisticated is not that long.
7. Name some types of crude permanent housing. (igloo, adobe, log cabin). RESPONSE: Log cabin, adobe hut, igloo.
8. What are some materials from which sophisticated permanent housing is made? (wood, iron, steel). RESPONSE: I think one of the houses are igloos made out of snow—or I think wood. [Anything else?] Steel.
9. What determines where sophisticated, permanent houses are built? (location of materials). RESPONSE: Well, if they were wood, they would be by a forest.
10. *If you had the choice between living in an igloo, a log cabin, or an adobe hut, which would you choose and why? (discuss climate and comfort). RESPONSE: Igloo, or log cabin . . . Well, I would choose an igloo because it keeps you warm. Maybe a log cabin; it was built like a house—and that's what we mostly live in, like in cabins in the woods. [So which would you choose?] Log cabin 'cause it's built like a house.
11. *Of all the types of housing mentioned in the passage—temporary and permanent, crude permanent, and sophisticated permanent—which type do you live in? (permanent sophisticated). RESPONSE: I think sophisticated. [Is it permanent or temporary?] Permanent.
12. *Do climate and environment still govern what materials we use to build houses today? (discuss climate, environment, today's construction). RESPONSE: Not sure. [Do you think people can build any kind of house no matter what the climate is?] Well, not exactly—don't know how to explain it.

Louisa's Responses

1. environment
   RESPONSE: The things around you.

2. determines
   RESPONSE: They . . . say it, they predict.
   TEACHER: Can you use the word *determine* in a sentence?
   RESPONSE: He determined that the number was gonna be five.

3. available
   RESPONSE: That it's . . . I can't explain it.
   TEACHER: Then use it in a sentence.
   RESPONSE: This pen is available for anybody that wants to use it.

4. temporary
   RESPONSE: It's not built to stay long.

5. permanent
   RESPONSE: That it stays there . . . the house stays up longer.

6. sophisticated
   RESPONSE: I don't know the meaning of that word from the other thing, but I think I know another meaning.
   TEACHER: OK. Tell me the meaning you know.
   RESPONSE: Well, I don't know how to explain it.
   TEACHER: Could you put it in a sentence?
   RESPONSE: This is a sophisticated truck.
   TEACHER: What does that mean about the truck?

FIGURE 7.13   Continued

RESPONSE: That it's in a kind of motion of something. A kind of way.	(Reinspected context and figured out that it was "some stuff to build with.")
7. insulator	**9. igloo**
RESPONSE: Some sort of machine to make things hot. (Could not clarify when reviewing context, "The snow acts as an insulator.")	RESPONSE: A snow house for eskimo . . . like made of snow blocks.
	10. nomad
8. adobe	RESPONSE: Don't know.
RESPONSE: Don't know.	(Reinspected the context and corrected to "Someone who moves around a lot.")

Note. *These questions require the student to go beyond the information presented in the reading passage.

heard the words *crude* and *sophisticated*. In the case of *determines,* Louisa seemed to know what it would mean in the context of people making decisions or predicting outcomes, but she seemed unable to grasp the idea that conditions could *determine* something.

> **Teacher**: The passage states that environment *determines* the kinds of housing people choose. What does *determine* mean?
>
> **Louisa**: If they lived in a cold place, that would show that they lived in an igloo. If it was hot, that would say that they would live in a hut maybe.
>
> **Teacher**: OK, then. What would it mean that the environment determined where people would live?
>
> **Louisa**: Well, like it would mean they could choose to live in an apartment in the city.
>
> **Teacher**: So what do you think *determine* means?
>
> **Louisa**: Like a choice. He determined that he wanted to live in a wood house.

So it was not so much the word itself that gave Louisa difficulty but an underlying concept that conditions could set limits on people's choices.

The teacher asked Louisa several other words. She knew *plentiful* meant "a lot." For *readily,* she said, "That it's done, well, … I'm not sure." As for *insulator,* she thought it was some sort of machine to keep things hot and could not modify that view when rereading the sentence "The snow acts as an insulator" or discussing the fact that a machine of snow didn't make much sense. Louisa knew the word *igloo* but couldn't define *nomad* or *adobe.* She could go back and look at the context and figure out that a nomad was someone who moved around a lot and that adobe was a building material. So, with respect to strategies, when Louisa was allowed to look back and was coached to do so, she could find out the meanings of words that were explicitly cued, but she had trouble when the context was less explicit or when it required her to reason across the selection.

This probing of Louisa's vocabulary knowledge indicated that she is able to read with good understanding when the vocabulary is familiar or well defined in context. However, when the selection or questions used to discuss the selection are unfamiliar and not explicitly defined in the text, she had more difficulty. Her teacher decided that specific vocabulary should be addressed in prereading and Louisa should receive systematic instruction in inferring word meanings from context.

Further Exploration

When students' comprehension seems affected by vocabulary knowledge, you can further explore aspects of their vocabulary knowledge by probing with both standardized and informal assessment tools. You might choose to do this after having given a screening device, such as a group test, and selecting the bottom-stanine students to probe further. With standardized tests, if the standardized scores are going to be calculated, you must use the administration guidelines for giving the test. However, you can return the test to the student at a later time, after the scores have been registered, to use it for probing. What is important is to keep the two administrations and the data gained from them separate and to make sure the standardized data are gathered before any probing takes place.

Probing Power or Speed. If you administer a standardized test with vocabulary subtests, you can probe deeper into a student's understanding by doing some of the following probing after the test has been administered using the standardized procedures. As with all standardized tests, you need to look at a student's answer sheet. Does a raw score of 50 out of 100 represent 50 correct out of 100 answered? Or did a student get all of the first 50 correct but only finish half the test? This can tell you something about a student's working style and ability to access vocabulary quickly. Many students have been classified as having vocabulary problems when their real problem is slow and careful work. To probe on this hunch, return the test to the student along with the answer sheet and a colored pencil. Then rescore after the student has had ample time for completion. For this type of student, test-taking skills development might be more beneficial than special work on vocabulary.

Decoding Problem or Vocabulary Problem. Sometimes students miss items on standardized vocabulary tests because they cannot decode the words. Administering missed test items orally, with the students reading aloud to you, will help you figure out if this is the real source of a low vocabulary score. If they are unable to decode a word correctly, you pronounce it and see if they can then choose a correct synonym.

Lack of Prior Knowledge Versus Lack of Vocabulary Knowledge. Once the student can decode or hears the word and still can't provide a correct meaning or association, try to find out if the incorrect response is due to lack of prior knowledge of specific vocabulary. For example, a student who misses *igloo* can be asked what she knows about the Arctic. This can be done by asking the student to free-associate by telling you all she knows. If her associations are limited, this can be an indicator of lack of prior knowledge. A student with limited conceptual knowledge can't be expected to know specific vocabulary.

Sometimes, however, you will find a student who has the concepts but not the specific vocabulary. For example, after telling about the Arctic and the Inuit, the student was talking about their houses:

> You know, they're those round ones made out of snow blocks. You see them on Eskimo pies.

For this student, some direct specific vocabulary instruction might be in order.

Lack of Use of Context. Many times, in a testing situation, students will not answer questions about vocabulary items that are explicitly explained in the text. Check to see if they can use the context by asking them to locate the word in the text, read the sentences before and after it, and then try the question a second time. For words

that are implicitly defined in the context, try a questioning probe such as was done with Louisa.

Language or Concepts: Potentially English Proficient Students. With students for whom English is not their first language, you may wish to probe whether or not the vocabulary is the problem or the concepts are not well established. Using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test—Revised (Dunn & Dunn, 1997), where students can respond in their native languages, will help you get a sense of their level of oral vocabulary. If you are not a fluent speaker of their language, ask an adult speaker or foreign language teacher to help you translate for scoring. That person can also tell you when the picture or item is a cultural unknown so you can correct the scoring.

Pulling It All Together

Once individual assessment and probing are completed, you can plan mini-lessons or corrective instruction based on your findings. An example of a vocabulary diagnosis profile sheet is shown in Figure 7.14.

FIGURE 7.14   Vocabulary Diagnostic Profile Sheet

Name:_____   **Date:**_____

Grade:_____

Initial Observation:
Louisa seems at sea in social studies class, yet she is bright and capable in discussions after lectures. I need to look at her vocabulary knowledge.

Profile

Measure	Results	Observation/Probe
Standardized test	*verbal:* 1st percentile *math:* 5th percentile	Test sheet shows she finished; not a speed problem.
Decoding	95% of words decoded correctly	Used standardized test for reread and also IRI.
Concepts	On IRI, had problem with *sophisticated, crude*—missed questions related to terminology and vocabulary	Probed with IRI on second day. Had no knowledge of terms. Could go back and use context for explicit one, not for implicit one.
Oral vocabulary	PPVT-R: 5th percentile	Has good general oral vocabulary.

Plan:
Louisa has a good, everyday general vocabulary but lacks literary and textbook vocabulary. She also has a problem inferring meaning from the text, perhaps because there are too many words she doesn't know. Also, she is involved in learning English and often has a superficial knowledge of words even when she seems to have a deeper knowledge.

Goals

1. Make sure that prereading work establishes some of the critical vocabulary and concepts.
2. Make sure that postreading work clarifies sophisticated connections.
3. Do mini-lessons on inferring meaning from context.

■ ■ ■ LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING AHEAD

In this chapter, we presented several different ways of thinking about assessment. The type of assessment you use depends on your goal. If you want information that will directly inform your instruction, you can choose from many instructional activities that contain an assessment option, do structured or informal observation, have students do their own self-evaluations, or construct your own test. For large-scale assessment or for specific diagnostic needs, a standardized measure or probed informal reading inventory can be used. And for all of these, thoughtful record keeping is an added dimension. We hope, at this point, you are looking ahead to your own interpretation and use of some of the ideas we have presented in this book. Use the appendixes, which appear later in the book, to find book, game, dictionary, and media resources for your classroom.

For Further Learning

Barr, R., Blachowicz, C. L. Z., Katz, C., & Kaufman, B. (2001). *Reading diagnosis for teachers: An instructional approach.* White Plains, NY: Longman. (Includes useful chapter on individual assessment of vocabulary)

Cooter, R. B. (1990). *The teacher's guide to reading tests.* Scottsdale, AZ: Gorsuch. (A concise guide to commercial and standardized assessment tools)

Johnson, D. D. (2000). *Vocabulary in the elementary and middle school.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.