# Word Walls

Word walls are interactive displays used to learn and practice language conventions and spelling in the context of authentic reading and writing activities. They evolve over time and provide support and references for students. Word walls can include a variety of words (e.g., high frequency words, word families, names, academic language, and content-specific words). They serve as an important reference for students and a record of their language learning.

Individualized

Targeted
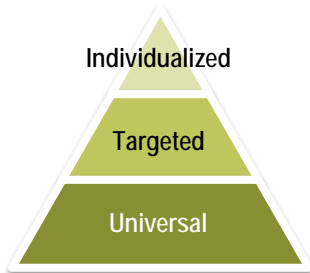
Universal

A teacher's understanding of their students' learning needs helps determine when to provide universal, targeted, or individualized instructional strategies. For some students, universal instructional strategies may be enough to meet their learning needs. For others, more targeted instructional strategies are the starting point for implementing the curriculum. The strategy described is a guideline that teachers can use depending on the learning context.

Why use this strategy in an inclusive learning environment

- Encourages student independence while reading or writing.
- Supports students as they make connections between words and word patterns.
- Provides visual cues for students.
- Reinforces the teaching of key words and subject-specific vocabulary.
- Relationships between words become more explicit when students actively construct the word wall.
- Encourages student discussion about new words with peers, providing additional opportunities to learn new vocabulary.

How this strategy could be used in an inclusive learning environment

1. Establish a purpose for the word wall. Word walls can be used to help students learn high-frequency words, develop vocabulary around a theme, or develop academic vocabulary or specialized words in content areas. Share this purpose with the students.

2. Select the words that are targeted for instruction. Ensure the words are on display where every student can see them and that the words are not overcrowded. Words can be organized alphabetically, by concept or theme, or by a subject-/content-specific area.

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3. Decide how many words to introduce weekly. Vocabulary instruction that focuses on a small number of targeted words is essential to student success. Add new words to the word wall as new skills and/or concepts are taught. Include words that students use most commonly in their writing.

   As a guideline, add five words per week. Consider removing words as the unit progresses when students no longer need them and replacing them with key words for new concepts. In addition, consider having student-generated content as a part of the wall.

4. Make using the word wall a regular part of the classroom routine. For example, word walls can be used as a natural class opener or closer activity. Consider teaching students the meanings of the words before reading and allowing them to select words (and their meanings) to post on the word wall after reading. Encourage students to think of a context or situation to use a word from the word wall.

Examples

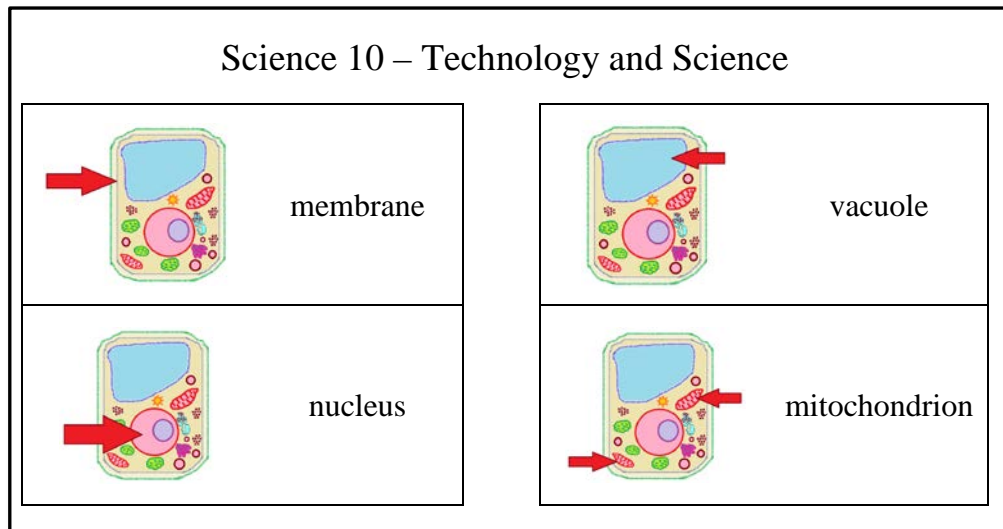Word walls may include sight words, high-frequency words, and word families.

C	D	E	F
Caleb	does	each	from
come	don't	Ethan	family
could	doctor	every	French
Christmas	Davita	either	February
character	December		
cold			

Word walls may also include high-frequency words from across the curriculum, irregularly spelled words, frequently misspelled words, and unit or content-specific words.

Math words

Sum	The answer in an addition problem. $5 + 3 = 8$ $8 + 9 = 17$
Difference	The answer in a subtraction problem. $17 - 9 = 8$ $8 - 3 = 5$
Product	The answer in a multiplication problem. $4 \times 5 = 20$ $6 \times 9 = 54$
Quotient	The number that results from dividing. $8 \div 2 = 4$ $100 \div 20 = 5$
Proper fraction	A fraction that has a top number less than its bottom number. ½ ¾ ⅝

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Word walls can also include academic language from subjects/disciplines.

Science 10 – Technology and Science	
membrane	vacuole
nucleus	mitochondrion

Tips for individualized supports

- Create personalized word walls/books (e.g., in a file folder, on a tablet) for students to use on their own or during group work.

- Use a variety of background colours to help students distinguish frequently misspelled words, subject-specific words, synonyms, homonyms, parts of speech, or categories.

- Include visual supports such as colour clip art, photographs, or the actual item beside the word.

- Use the back of a word card to display definitions, additional characteristics of the word, or a sentence to give the word context and enhance vocabulary development and comprehension.

- When programming for students who are learning English, include the word in the student's first language and/or use visuals.

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