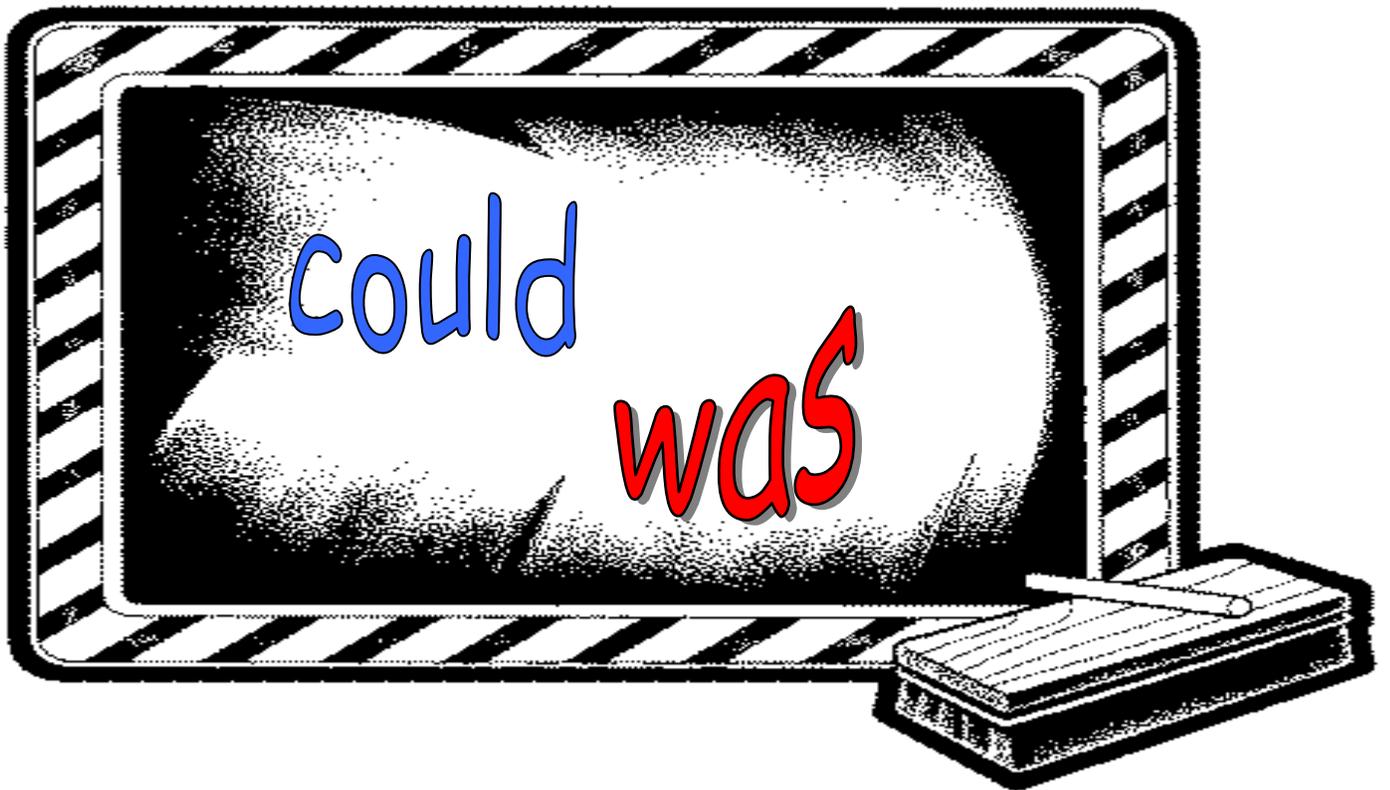


# Learning High Frequency Words



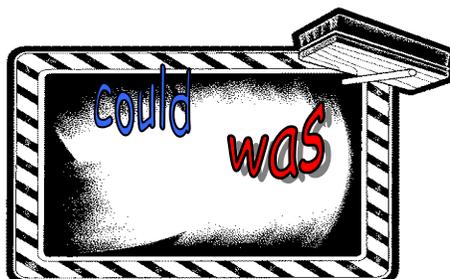
# Why Learn High Frequency Words?

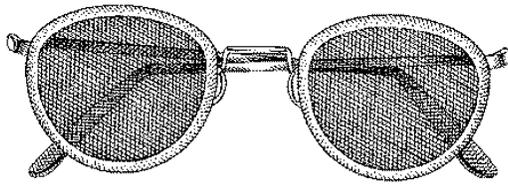
High frequency words (sight words) are words that students encounter frequently in reading and writing. It is critical that readers and writers develop automaticity (automatic recognition), a skill that leads to fluency. "Students need to be able to read the first 300 Instant Words "instantly" without a moment's hesitation, because these 300 words make up 65% of all written material" (Frye). Comprehension begins to break down when students are focused on trying to decode or sound out the words.

Some high frequency words do not follow regular phonetic rules. They do not follow easy spelling patterns (example: cave, Dave, save, wave, gave, have) As a result, these words are more difficult for students to master. Asking children to "sound it out" is pointless and generally causes increased frustration for most struggling readers. Beginning readers need to recognize these words as "sight words". "In order for students to retain a difficult word, they need many opportunities to experience and manipulate it (Throop).

Much of our language has been adapted from other languages during its development. One sixth of the words survived from old English and almost all of those words are high frequency words.

A prime example of the importance of high frequency words in a piece of text can be seen in counting the number of sight words appearing in a simple version of The Three Bears. Another reality check is looking for high frequency words in the story problems in your daily math lessons like Excel Math.





# Sight Words

This term refers to

- a.) Nonphonetic words - those needing to be recognized by sight because they can't be sounded out (e.g., was, through).
- b.) Frequently occurring words - those needing to be recognized easily because they occur so often.
- c.) High-interest words - those recognized by sight because they have special interest and/or emotional overtones for child (e.g., mom, dad, love, birthday, Christmas, dinosaur, etc.)

## Connections

*Sight words and context clues:* students need to know enough words by sight in order to have enough context to help identify other words:

The \_\_\_ went to the \_\_\_ to \_\_\_ and had a \_\_\_.

For the above sentence, it is more difficult to predict the words than in the following:

The child went to the \_\_\_ to play and he had a \_\_\_.

*Sight words and prior knowledge* - already knowing the pronunciation and meaning of spoken words makes it easier to recognize and remember written words.

## Importance of sight words for independent reading

- ◆ Enables use of context clues.
- ◆ Increases fluency and ease of reading
- ◆ Children can read greater amounts and for longer periods.
- ◆ Focus can be more on comprehension than on decoding.

# Instructional Implications for Teaching High Frequency Words

Learning is the key to knowing how to write these words. Children need to see the words, make the words with plastic letters, and write the words many, many times before they will know them. To encourage their learning, you may consider some of the following activities.

- Use plastic letters. Make the word, read the word, and break the word. Later, encourage them to make the word, read the word, cover the word, write the word, check the word, read the word. (Children may peek at the word if necessary while they are learning to write it correctly.)
- Use dry erase boards or magic slates. Write the word over and over until it is learned, erasing each time. This is a writing task, not a copying task. If the child is using paper and pencil, fold the paper over each time or use another paper or card to cover the previous word. If the child needs a model to start with, provide it. Then cover it and allow the child to peek if necessary. Then remove it altogether. Encourage the children to make sure the words are in their heads.
- Keep a list of high-frequency words in the back of each child's writing journal for reference. Each time the child writes the word correctly, the more habituated it becomes.
- I Have, Who Has?  
Make cards for this game to practice sight words: I have "the," who has "from?"
- Making and Breaking (Reading Recovery)  
Going from the known to the unknown using onset & rime:  
i.e., from at to cat and sat using magnetic letters  
(also useful for prefix/suffix, medial vowel changes)

Familiar words:

Break the word apart and make it say "the" again  
Check it with your finger.

➤ Flexible Practice/Taking high frequency words to fluency:

Write several times on the practice page

Rainbow writing

Magnetic letters

Write on the white board

Write in the air, on the carpet

Write on a Magna Doodle

Write on a chalkboard

Write words with a wet sponge or brushes on a chalkboard

➤ Provide a guided reading creative response that requires the children to write the word in a meaningful context. Give the children a sentence starter to copy and complete. For example:

I like the part when \_\_\_\_\_.

My best character was \_\_\_\_\_.

Make sure the children copy the sentence starter because in this way they are practicing the high-frequency word

➤ Commercial Games/Activities: any games with cards to read or letters to manipulate:

Scrabble

Go Fish

Bingo

Boggle

Clusters

Lotto

Chunks

Word Search

Hang Man

➤ Vocabulary Cards or Word Banks

Words on rings or in a box: word on one side, use in a sentence on the other, underline the high frequency word, illustrate.

➤ Can You Find and Frame?

After a child reads a passage, ask him/her to frame one or two high frequency words.

➤ Word Wall Activities

Read the word wall quickly. Read it backwards from z to a. (All go at the same speed!)

Pick one letter list. Read it fast. Read it faster. Read it faster.

Chants

What's My Rule

Guess the Rule: 4 clues, 4 guesses

Teacher or student gives a word clue (i.e., I'm thinking of a word that starts with b) from the word wall. Students write their first guess on their individual white boards. Provide a second clue (It's a noun.) Students write their second guess. Continue with clues/guesses (examples: It ends with a silent e. It has two syllables. It rhymes with, etc.). By the fourth clue, everyone should have the correct word. You will need to model this activity.

Timed by whole group

I'm Thinking of a Word

This is a good activity for developing scanning skills. However, be sure to build in success for all. You need to have many words on the word wall for it to be effective.

I'm thinking of a word. It rhymes with, means the same thing as, is the opposite of, we use this word when, etc. When you know it, raise your hand. Kids can provide the clues later.

➤ Flash Card Activities to engage all readers (including expert readers)

Whisper/Shout: teacher/parent directed using cards

As you go through the stack of cards, students read words in a whispery voice. After several words, "Say it louder." Students gradually move up to a gentle shout for the last few words.

Funny Voices:

As you go through the stack of cards, ask the children to read in the following voices:

baby      robot (monotone)      goofy      scary      mad      old

### Making Sentences:

This is a good activity to use once a week for the whole class or in a small reading/skills group. Start by giving each student 2 cards face down. Each child thinks of a sentence that uses those two words. When a student recites his/her sentence, ask the class, "Can we guess what the two words are?" Students may look at the word wall for help. Gradually move up to more words.

### ABC Order:

Each child gets four or five cards to put in ABC order on the floor in front of them. They check with a partner, combine cards and put in ABC order. Add another pair, etc.

### Slap

Each group sits in a circle on the floor. The leader of each group has a stack of high frequency word cards. He/she lays the cards on the floor as students say the words. The leader starts the game by giving a clue such as "I'm thinking of a word that starts with . . ." Students put their fingers on their shoulders before the clue is given by the leader (otherwise they hover over the word cards). Whoever touches the correct card first gives the next clue. Rotate card stacks through the groups for practice with all the current words.

Note: Model this activity in small groups before attempting it with your entire class. Slapping the floor is much quieter than slapping the table!

- High Frequency Words and Daily News: Encourage the children to spell the high-frequency words for you to write in the Daily News story or your specific writing demonstration. Have children come and write the high-frequency words directly into the news story for you.
- Swat!: Write a list of words on the board. Divide the class into two teams. Give a flyswatter to the first child in each team. Say a sentence that includes one of the words. The first person to touch the correct word earns a point for his/her team. Ten points is a winner!

- High Frequency Word Sentence Building  
Choose a paragraph from a content area text or from a recent story. Write each sentence on sentence strips, using a different colored marker for each sentence. Cut up each sentence and give small groups time to reconstruct the sentences. (Keep the punctuation with the sentence.) Read the reconstructed sentences together and sequence in a pocket chart. (This is a good way to model and practice paragraph formation with main idea, detail sentences, and concluding sentence.)
- Highlight high frequency words: Have children go through the poem of the week, worksheets, math homework, etc. and highlight the sight words of the week.
- Circle, Circle, Underline: Circle the prefix, circle the suffix, and underline the vowels in the root word. This makes multi-syllabic words more manageable, breaking them into chunks of meaning.
- Simple spelling cards: Provide lists for the children to use. Ensure that in the early stages words that look alike are not on the same card. Number the back or color code the cards in order of difficulty. You may want to demonstrate to the class how to use the cards and then place them in the reading center for students to use independently.

### Using the Spelling Cards

Introduce the first card to the children  
Tell the children the words on the card.  
Explain the steps for learning the words.

### Steps for Learning the Words

- Say the word. Ask someone if you don't know it.
- Look at the word.
- Say the word.
- Trace the word with your finger, saying the word as you trace it.
- Copy the word, read it, copy it again, read it.

- Place your hand over the word and see if you can write it. Peek if you need to.
- Check the word you have written.
- Read what you have written.
- Keep writing the word without coping until you know it.
- Say the word each time you write it.
- Take a picture of the word with your invisible camera and put it in your head.
- Shut your eyes and see if you can see it.
- Write it again.
- When you think you know all the words on the card, ask a friend to check you. Your friend says the word, and you write it. Your friend will let you peek if you need to.
- When you can write all the words on the card without peeking, come and show the teacher how clever you are.
- After the teacher has checked, he or she will give you the next card.

Note on a master list which words each child has mastered. Expect to see evidence of this correct spelling in the children's writing. If you do not, insist that the children correct these misspellings for themselves.

# Beyond the Word Bank

Once words are taken from a meaningful context and are displayed on a chart, word bank cards can be made. Individual, paired or small group interactive learning games may include:

- Match cards whose word begins with the same letter or syllable.
- Match cards whose word ends with the same letter or syllable.
- Match cards whose word is the same.
- Match cards whose words rhyme.
- Arrange cards according to alphabetical order.
- Arrange cards according to the number of syllables in each word.
- Make up sentences using the words on the cards.
- Make up a story using all the words on the cards.
- Find synonyms, antonyms or homonyms.
- Find cards whose words have the same root or base word.
- Find cards whose words have prefixes or suffixes.
- Find cards with compound or derived words.
- Arrange cards by the stress on the words.
- Make up a story or poem using all or most of the words on the cards.

# Recommended Reading/Resources

Frye, Edward, *1000 Instant Words*, Laguna Beach Educational Books.

Throop, Sara (1999) *Success with Sight Words: Multisensory Ways to Teach High Frequency Words*, Creative Teaching Press.

Behr, Donald, et al, *Words Their Way*