Intermediate Level Academic Vocabulary Spelling Inventory

This academic vocabulary inventory assesses the depth of students’ knowledge of academic vocabulary and, through spelling, assesses their orthographic development (Flanigan, Hayes, Templeton, Bear, Invernizzi, & Johnston, 2011; Townsend, Bear, & Templeton, 2009). There are two parts to this assessment outlined in the form found following this explanatory and scoring material. The first thing students do is to spell the words “the best they can” as they have in other developmental spelling inventories. Second, they go to the top of the spelling form and for each word, they have 15 seconds to rate their knowledge of the meaning of each word and to write down as many related words that they can think of. For example, for the first word source students could enter sources, resources, resourceful, sources, sourced, sourceless. Beforehand, students are given examples different from test items as models.

What Is Academic Vocabulary?

Consider briefly what an academic vocabulary tells us about students’ learning. As you peruse the vocabulary of students’ textbooks, notice that there is a vocabulary that is common in all of the texts no matter the content area. Students need to be able to read and understand this vocabulary to be successful in any of their classes. As examples, notice how these academic words may appear in each of our students’ textbooks: source, definition, majorities, significance, and occurrence. Contrast these words with the specialized vocabulary peculiar to particular content areas: mitochondria in biology, egalitarian in social studies, and sine and cosine in geometry and trigonometry.

The words in this inventory were found in Coxhead’s list of academic words (Coxhead, 2000), and were selected for the spelling features they contain. For example, the word participants was chosen for its plural s, the suffix ant, the reduced vowel spelled with an i, the stem partic with its soft c sound. Students who say they know the words and can generate two or more related words for most words (e.g., participant, participatory, nonparticipants, participant), are likely to have a deeper knowledge of the words, a larger vocabulary and better reading than students who generate only one or no related words in the 15 seconds allotted for this task.

Scoring and Interpretation of the Inventory

Together, the spelling, students’ rating of their knowledge, and their brainstorming of related words tap the depth of students’ orthographic and academic vocabulary knowledge. In a study of a sample of seventh and eighth graders, we have found that the number of words spelled correctly and the number of related words generated was significantly related to standardized measures of vocabulary, reading, and spelling. This indicates that this inventory is a good resource to examine students’ orthographic development and academic vocabulary.
Counting the number of words that the students spelled correctly yields a Power Score. With this score, refer to Table 1 to determine a stage of spelling for each student. You can see that this table presents gradations within each stage. It is often useful to choose the stage and gradation that is the most conservative; one of the golden rules for where to begin word study is this: when in doubt, take a step backwards so that the students are secure in their learning. This gives the students a chance to become familiar with the word study schedule and promotes students’ confidence and motivation. It is also useful to examine informally the actual features that students misspelled. Students who misspelled the vowel pattern in source or the consonant blend in distinct need a very different form of word study than students who spelled nearly all of the words correctly, and omitted assimilated prefixes in occurrence or irrelevance.

The second part of the assessment is scored according to the number of words students say they know, do not know, and may know, along with how many related words they are able to produce for each spelling word. Students who do not know the meaning of many of the words are often English learners who are acquiring this vocabulary in English. As you score the production of related words generated in 15 seconds, you will find that students who produce two or three related words for the items have a thorough knowledge of the vocabulary, and are likely to have a well-developed vocabulary overall. Students who produce no or one related word for most words will have a less developed vocabulary and may have difficulty comprehending their texts when there is an abundance of these words in their reading. It will be important for these students to be engaged in contextualized word study with academic vocabulary words.

Given the synchrony between reading and spelling, and reading and vocabulary as noted throughout this book, this inventory is useful in forming differentiated reading groups. The Power Score indicates what stage of spelling students are in, which is usually related to students’ reading stages. Students in the Transitional stage account for many struggling readers; in our research and teaching, Transitional readers comprise up to a third of the struggling sixth through eighth graders. They do not generate many related words even if they do know the meaning of the words. Students in this stage who are asked to read in middle or secondary grade level materials will have difficulty with these materials and require the support of the activities discussed in Chapter 6. They will read their texts slowly, often reading aloud, or silently with lip movement. Students in the Syllables and Affixes stage are likely to be Intermediate readers, and they read silently and study the spelling of how multisyllabic words combine. In the related word section, students in the Syllables and Affixes stage will likely indicate that they know the meaning of the words, but they may generate only one related word. In vocabulary study, these students need to study the meanings of harder prefixes and suffixes, and study the relationships between grammar and spelling. The students are learning the meaning of various roots, and they are predominantly reading silently and learning basic outlining and other study skills, mostly with grade level materials. Keep in mind that this
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The inventory was created with middle school students who we would expect to be in the Syllables and Affixes stage of spelling and the Intermediate stage of reading. High school students who score in the Within Word Pattern and the early part of the Syllables and Affixes stage of spelling are likely to find their reading materials are at a frustration level.

REFERENCES


Intermediate-Level Academic Vocabulary
Spelling Inventory (Townsend, Bear, & Templeton, 2009)

Student Directions

Display or provide a copy of these directions for students to follow.

“Today we are going to take a spelling test. I am going to say a word, use it in a sentence, and then say it again. Please do your best to spell the word. Don’t do anything in the columns next to where you wrote the word—we’ll come back to those after we go through all 20 words.”

SPELLING INVENTORY—SPELL THESE WORDS THE BEST YOU CAN.

“Write down all the sounds you hear and feel when you say the word to yourself.”

KNOWLEDGE RATING—DO I KNOW WHAT THIS WORD MEANS?

“Now, let’s go back to the top. I’m going to read each word again and I want you to think about a couple of things. First, think about what the word means. If you’re sure you know what it means, check yes. If you have an idea what it means, but you’re not quite sure, check maybe. And if you’ve never heard of the word or you’re really not sure what it means, check no. Any questions?”

THINK OF RELATED WORDS—CAN I THINK OF RELATED WORDS?

“After you have checked the yes, no, or maybe box, look to the last column. Use this last column to write down as many real words that you think of by adding or by taking away syllables and other word parts or forms. These boxes are for you to write down other forms of the word that you can think of. Try to write other forms of the word that are actual words and not made-up words. For example, if the word forget were on our list, you could write forgetful, but not unforgestful, because unforgestful isn’t a real word. Here’s another example: If the word reply were on our list, you could write replying, but not replyment. It’s OK if you can’t think of other forms of each word—just do the best you can. Any questions?”

“We will now go through each word one more time. Rate how well you know the word by checking yes, no, or maybe, and write as many other forms of the word that you can think of.” The teacher will say each word. Students will have 15 seconds to rate their knowledge and think of and record related words.
Teacher Form: Words and Sentences

Read each word and sentence, and repeat the word. After spelling all 20 words, return to the beginning to allow students to rate their knowledge and to generate related words. Say each word and give students 15 seconds to rate their knowledge and record related words.

1. source The source of Earth’s heat is the sun.  
2. traditional The actress preferred to wear traditional clothes.  
3. distinct There was a distinct difference between the two artists’ work.  
4. restructure The partners decided to restructure their company.  
5. requiring The school started requiring that students wear uniforms.  
6. economical It is more economical to shop at some stores than others.  
7. residence My grandmother’s residence is on a quiet road.  
8. definition The girl gave the definition of the new vocabulary word.  
9. conception Her conception of the new gallery was different from his.  
10. majorities Presidential candidates try to win the majorities of different groups of people.  
11. participants The participants in the game had a great time.  
12. significance The war in Iraq is of great significance to our military.  
13. unapproachable The girl did not smile and was very unapproachable.  
14. benefited The whole community benefited from the new park.  
15. financially People with large savings accounts are financially sound.  
16. consequently The team trained hard, and consequently, they won the big game.  
17. assessment The assessment was challenging to the students, but they tried their hardest.  
18. occurrence In Reno, snow in July would be a very strange occurrence.  
19. perceive The new teacher did not perceive the change in the students after vacation.  
20. irrelevance Her argument was full of irrelevance and she lost the debate.
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