

Multilinguistic word study

What is MWS?

Multilinguistic word study (MWS) refers to the systematic, explicit and integrated teaching of multilinguistic aspects of words including semantics (vocabulary, word meanings), morphology (meaningful word parts), syntax (word order and parts of speech), phonology (pronunciation and sound structure) and orthography (spelling). This approach focuses on how multiple areas of language can be used to strategically support the development of both foundational and advanced word-level literacy skills and serve as a bridge to developing more complex text-level reading comprehension (Wolter and Green 2021).

Dual purpose

MWS targets the skills and knowledge underpinning academic literacy and supports curriculum engagement and achievement. It builds both language comprehension and word reading components required for academic vocabulary. MWS also targets foundational literacy skills for students who are not yet automatic in their linguistic skills. Critically, it provides a strategy for students with reading difficulties to break down and build up words that are complex and unfamiliar.

Beyond vocabulary instruction

MWS is an extension of explicit instruction of academic vocabulary. MWS builds on explicit vocabulary instruction in order to:

- improve the ability to read and comprehend targeted words in texts;
- support the ability to use academic vocabulary in writing tasks;
- build word consciousness;
- and critically, because we cannot teach every word a student will read or want to write, provide students with a strategic approach to learning unfamiliar words.

Explicit instruction

Orthography

Draw attention to spellings of sounds in words that may be challenging. Discuss how morphemes can change the phonology and orthography of a word.

Phonology

Focus attention on the phonological aspects of multisyllabic words. Discuss syllable stress and changes to phonology in derivatives.



Semantics

Explicitly teach word meaning using student-friendly definitions. Provide multiple opportunities for students to interact with the word across contexts.

Morphology

Explicitly teach the meaning components of a word and how affixes can change a word's form and function.

Syntax

Highlight the relationship between the morphology of a word and part of speech within sentences

Next steps

For more information, contact your school speech language pathologist or the Reading and Writing Disorders Advisory Service. The Advisory service may be accessed by telephone or email on weekdays between 8:30am and 4:30pm.

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