



## Action 100

# Sight Word Acquisition

### Power Words

The, was, come, what. *Sound them out. Try to spell them using phonics rules.*

The above words are typical of a high percentage of words in English, especially in “easy” books for beginning readers. As a matter of fact, it has been estimated that 50-100 words comprise 50% of the words used in English text at any level. Many of these words, encountered over and over again by beginning readers, defy basic patterns of the English sound system. Therefore, it is a mistake to begin reading as a “sounding out” activity. Instead, students should begin by learning these high frequency, low meaning, Power Words that they will see repeatedly as they try to read and write. By the end of Kindergarten, every child should have mastered these first 50-100 Power Words and be able to use them, along with initial letter sounds, pictures, syntax, and meaning clues, to read and write simple books.

It is essential that you do a FULL COURT PRESS on learning sight words at the beginning of Kindergarten when all of your students need them. Do not leave it to chance. Do not assume they will learn the words as they read lots of books. Students who have trouble learning sight words often end up significantly behind in reading. Students who know the words one day and not the next often end up in special education, where they usually continue to struggle. You can prevent this by ensuring that every student learns every sight word on time. It is worth the time and attention NOW to prevent significant trouble for everyone later. Send all your students to first grade with at least 50 Power Words that they can read anytime, anyplace, at flash speed.

### Flashing Power Words Doesn't Work For Most Children

“See and Say” is an inadequate method for teaching sight words to many students. Just flashing sight words and asking students to say them is a good way to assess how many of the words they know at flash speed, but it is NOT A GOOD WAY TO TEACH SIGHT WORDS. Average students will need 40 or more successful interactions with each word to learn it, other students will need to use:

- Associative Memory



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- Adrenaline/Competition/High Engagement
- Use of Multiple Sensory Modalities, Especially Gross Motor (Kinesthetic)

### **Power Words are the Primary Focus of Green Level**

Learning 50-100 Power Words is the PRIMARY FOCUS of Green readers. As Yellow readers, students learned to use a problem solving approach to reading, using picture clues, sentence patterns, language patterns, and initial consonant sounds to figure out pattern books. Later, as they move into Blue, the focus will change to vowel patterns and decoding. At this stage, however, you will have a Full Court Press on Power Word Acquisition. Although students will spend much time reading and writing Power Words in meaningful contexts, this will not be enough for many of your students. You must also provide explicit, high speed, frequent, fun, competitive, and multi-sensory experiences with each of the words in isolation.

Students should be able to master 10-15 Power Words a week. If students aren't learning them at this rate, re-think the way you are teaching them. If even a single student isn't learning them, re-think the way you are teaching that student. Every student can learn these words in Kindergarten, but some students need extraordinary measures to succeed, especially at the beginning of the process. The Visual/Auditory channel is not sufficient for some students, but watch the magic when they begin tracing the words in the air, use competition to beat their friends in a word race, or use the words as they write about something that matters to them. Students will learning differences develop alternative channels to learn/retain these essential first words.

### **Introducing Power Words: 1-3 Months**

#### **Power Word Pouches**

Do not make up complete sets of Power Words to give to the students. This is overwhelming and counterproductive. Add a few words to the student pouches as you introduce them. Do not add new words until they have mastered most of the old ones. Students should wear the pouches all day as you ask them to take the words out for a variety of experiences.



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### Word Introduction

Make a big deal out of each word. Look at it. Have students talk about it. Talk about what they notice about it. Write it on the board in lots of different ways. Turn it into art. Have students say it, write it, trace it in the air, trace it on their desks, trace it on each other's backs, decorate it. Use it in their writing. Stand up each time they hear someone say it. Give them the card. Have them test each other on it. Have them all wear it. Post it on your word wall. Come back to it throughout the day. Have them read it to you in line. Post it in the hallway outside the bathrooms. Post it wherever students are waiting. Put it somewhere in the classroom. Have students go stand beside it. You haven't finished with a word until every student can read it at flash speed, anywhere, anytime, any place. All of these "emotional associations" with the word help students file it into long term memory.

**VAKT:** Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic, Tactile

Students who can't seem to retain Power Words will need to use kinesthetic and tactile sensory channels, in addition to auditory and visual, in order to file them in their long term memory. Students should trace the words with their fingers as they look at them and say them. They can use heavy black crayon, sand, finger paint.

Most effective, is to involve the whole body. Have the students STAND and trace the word in the air while they look at it and say it. DO NOT HAVE THEM SPELL THE INDIVIDUAL LETTERS. THIS DOES NOT WORK. They should stretch out the word as they say it, but NOT spell it. Have them do this repeatedly until they think they know it. Then have them turn and face the other way and try to do it without looking. Then have them write the word on paper. Students who are having lots of trouble, should also trace the word with their finger after they write it. Continue until the student is able to successfully write the word from memory.

Consider adding music and marching and games to this and students will learn the words.

### Associative Learning

The problem with Power Words is that they don't really mean much. Most don't refer to anything concrete and they are almost invisible in our speech and thought. In order to help students remember these low meaning words, associate them with meaningful things.

1. **Partner Words:** Introduce a new Power Word and then use it with words that matter to the students. For example: *see*. By itself, *see* doesn't mean much. Create a list of your



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students' FAVORITE things. *Imagine you are going into a magic room that has everything you love inside it. What do you see?* Post student responses on the wall and read them. Cut the sentences up and see if students can put them in the right order.

- *I see the swimming pool. (You may include a simple drawing.)*
  - *I see the kittens.*
2. **2Y Books:** Have students write and illustrate 2Y books using a sentence stem including the new Power Word *I see the... I see the.... I see the....* Take a nature walk and have students take notes as to what they see.
  3. **Word Wear:** Introduce a few new words and pin them to your clothing. Throughout the day, point to a word and have students tell you what it is. Every time anyone says one of the words in the course of normal conversation, have students raise their hands and point to the word.
  4. **Student Labels:** Have each student wear one of the sight words you want him/her to learn. Put the word on a ribbon or plastic envelope necklace, or paper clipped to their collar. Instead of referring to the students by their name, ask everyone to call each other by the word they are wearing.
  5. **Exit Wall:** Post the words (sentence strip holder) beside the classroom door. As students line up to leave the classroom, insist they run through all the words at flash speed. Change up the order in which you point to the words. Increase the stakes by asking one student to volunteer to see if s/he can EARN THE PASS for the class by saying ALL the words at flash speed. You will find all the students eagerly watching to see if anyone can do it. Do NOT help the students. Insist that someone succeed at the speed,, certainty, and accuracy you expect them all to eventually accomplish.
  6. **Word Locations:** Post the words in sections of the classroom. Have all the boys whose names begin with a consonant go stand under the word: *with*. Everyone wearing a sweater go stand beside the word: *want*. When you get there trace the word in the air as you say it. (Say the word stretched out, not the letters.)
  7. **Art:** Decorate the words. See who can make the most beautiful picture using the word: *they*. Does it look like a lion?
  8. **Best Word:** Have students decide which is the most important, or fun, or beautiful Power Word. Have them bring up their word and tell why they love it. Have students vote. Create a tally chart.
  9. **Classroom Walls:** Anyone who comes into your classroom should be able to tell at a glance that your students are working on Power Words. They should be all over the walls: in isolation, in sentence strips, on the Word Wall, in student writing and art, etc.



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### Adrenaline Encoding

Used carefully, competition is a powerful learning tool. Adrenaline, generated by competition and peak attention and investment, promotes the storage of information into long term memory. It is essential that every student be successful and that competition is collaborative and productive. If students begin to get upset or negative, the competition must stop immediately. Students must be taught to encourage and support each other and celebrate each other's victories.

#### 1. Power Word Flash

Flash a small group of Power Words to the class. Tell them if they can say the word before you count to TWO (1,2), they get the word. If they can't, it's your word. Go very quickly through the words, counting quickly. They will probably not get any of the words the first time. The message is that your standards are high. This is going to go quickly. Try again. Do it over and over until they begin to win some of the words. Take great delight in your own victory over the class. Bemoan each word you lose. They will LOVE ultimately beating you. Then see if the girls can beat you. Then the boys. Then see if one of the students want to take you on. Then have the students practice with their partners. It is essential that this is fast-paced and you never let anyone get away with less than the fast count. Students want to achieve something difficult. Keep it difficult, but achievable. As you add new Power Words, you will add them to your pile. Soon most of the class will know all the words at Flash Speed and be able to win this consistently. The adrenaline is essential here. Keep them pumped up.

#### 2. Card Games: Power Word card games are best played with small groups.

- **Go Fish:** Have students use both their decks of Power Cards. Mix them together. Teach them to play Fish. They must ask for the card: Give me *see*. If their partner has *see*, they get to put down the match. The person with the most matches wins. This only works when you have 10-15 or more Power Words in the deck.
- **Concentration:** Have students use both their decks of Power Cards. Mix them together. Deal all the cards out face down. Each student turns over 2 cards and tries to find a match. Insist that students read each word they turn over. If they



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find a match, they take the cards and get to go again. The student with the most matches wins.

- **Dice Run:** Take one deck of Power Cards. Spread them out in a circle face up. Students each have a marker (like Monopoly) which they move around on top of the cards. Have them roll a die and move across that number of cards. Whatever card they land on, they must read. If they can read it, they get it and get to go again. The student with the most cards wins.

### Writers' Workshop

It is essential that students write every day. Give them story paper and have them write whatever they want. Have the Power Words posted on your Word Wall and hold students responsible for correct spelling of all introduced Power Words.

### Readers' Workshop

Remind students to be on the lookout for Power Words they know during Independent Reading. During Partner Share, have them point out the power words in their books to their partner.

### Read Aloud

Have students notice prominent Power Words in the titles of books you are reading.

### Morning Message

Use Power Words in Morning Message every day.