

Three Tiers of Words

Tier One words are the words of everyday speech usually learned in the early grades. They are not considered a challenge to the average native speaker, though English language learners of any age will have to attend carefully to them.

Tier Two words (what the Standards refer to as *general academic words*) are far more likely to appear in written texts than in speech. They appear in all sorts of texts. Tier Two words often represent subtle or precise ways to say relatively simple things. Because Tier Two words are found across many types of texts, they are highly generalizable.

Tier Three words (what the Standards refer to as *domain-specific words*) are specific to a domain or field of study and key to understanding a new concept within a text. Because of their specificity and close ties to content knowledge, Tier Three words are far more common in informational texts than in literature. Recognized as new and “hard” words for most readers, they are often explicitly defined by the author of a text, repeatedly used, and otherwise heavily scaffolded.

Sorting Activity

Place the following words under the appropriate Tier
by referring to the descriptions above.

relative	cloud	accumulate	arm	misfortune	Impressionism
lava	carburetor	legislature	pizza	circumference	house
school	walk	expectation	falter	eclipse	aorta
vary	friend	itemize			

Tier One Words	Tier Two Words	Tier Three Words