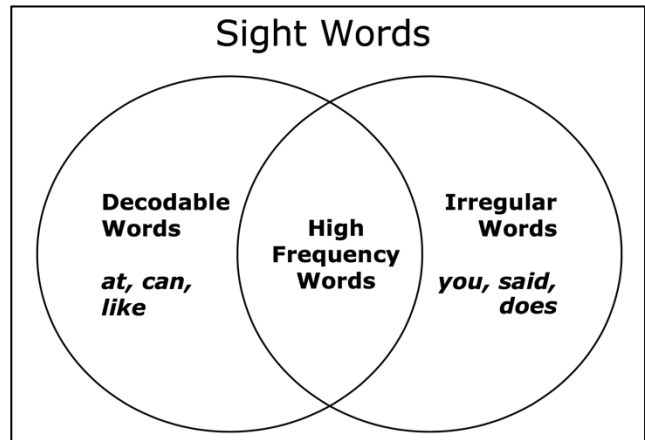


Sight Words

Educators sometimes confuse the following related terms: *sight words*, *high frequency words*, *decodable words*, *irregular words*. **Sight words** are words that are automatically read as a whole. **High frequency words** are the words most commonly used in the English language. Because high frequency words are essential to learning how to read, teachers should begin to teach some high frequency words as sight words to children in primary grades at the same time children are being taught how to use phonics to decode words. Teachers introduce these words as soon as kindergarten if their students are ready.

Some high frequency words are **decodable** – they can be “sounded out” using regular phonics concepts (e.g., *in*, *and*, *had*, *that*, *him*, *did*, *then*, *with*, *down*, *at*, *on*, *can*, *like*). Some high frequency words are **irregular** – they are not phonetic and must be read as a unique word (e.g., *the*, *was*, *from*, *have*, *of*, *there*, *want*, *you*, *said*, *does*). When a teacher introduces a new high frequency word, it is helpful to point out to children if it is irregular or if it is decodable using the phonics concepts the children have learned.

At first, high frequency words are the words young students learn to read by sight (e.g., *the*, *what*) along with words that are meaningful to each child (e.g., family names, name of their town). Over time, many words that young students read by applying decoding skills eventually become sight words – that is, students learn to read them automatically by sight.



There is no definitive list of which high frequency words should be taught at which grade level or at which time of year in a grade level. Reading programs typically incorporate some instruction of high frequency words into daily lessons. Teachers can also select words to teach from word lists such as the Fry 100 List (the 100 most common words used in English, ranked in order of frequency, Fry, 1980). This list is on the next page. In addition, teachers can choose to teach sight words from reading assessments such as the *mCLASS Assessment Word Recognition Lists* and *Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment High Frequency Word Lists*.

Instructional Suggestions

- Follow a consistent procedure for teaching students to read and spell a high frequency word that is multisensory and includes multiple exposures to assist students in memorizing the word. For example:
 1. Introduce a word by saying it and using it in a sentence for context.
 2. Write the word on the board (or show it on a card) and spell aloud, pointing to each letter.
 3. Students spell and trace the letter in the air (e.g., *air writing*) to support large muscle memory or on paper using two fingers to support fine muscle memory.
 4. Students cover the word and try to picture it in memory, then try to write it from memory.
 5. Students repeat steps 3 and 4 several times to develop automaticity to read and spell the word.
- Teach new high frequency words before students encounter them in text they are reading.
- Limit the number of words introduced at one time.
- Introduce visually similar irregular words, such as *where* and *were* or *was* and *saw*, in separate lessons to avoid confusion (Carreker, 1996).
- For irregular words, help students discover the parts of the word that do not represent their most common sounds. Circle or underline the irregular pattern (e.g., said, from) (Carreker, 1996).
- Spiral back and review words that have been previously taught.