



224 High Frequency Word Cards based on the Dolch word list

The importance of sight words

Word mastery – where a word is committed to memory and can be read on sight without having to decode it – is vital for fluency and comprehension for all readers. Fluent readers only “sound out” words they do not already know by sight. Phonics decoding is an important skill, but is much easier to teach when the child has a good base of sight words to refer to when learning phonics. Having a basic sight word vocabulary allows for efficient learning of phonics and other decoding skills.

High frequency words make up a large portion of children’s reading material. Many of these words do not follow basic phonetic or structural decoding rules, and simply need to be committed to memory. Instant recognition of these words frees the early reader to concentrate on the remaining words in the text using decoding strategies, context or illustrations. Please see cards 9 -11 for the full Dolch word list in alphabetical order, with a few useful additions (marked with *), followed by the Dolch word list divided into traditional grade levels, which may be of use to some teachers as a guideline.

Why use a visual-conceptual approach to teach high frequency words?

Dolch words are a list of 220 frequently used or “service“ words, compiled by E.W. Dolch in 1936, which have to be easily recognized in order to achieve reading fluency in the English language. Mastery of Dolch words can be challenging for children. They are mostly abstract, and there are no nouns on the list, meaning that it is difficult to make mental pictures of most of these words. Also, many of the words are phonetically irregular and therefore cannot be “sounded out” using simple phonics.

Picture Me Reading sight word cards are different from other high frequency word flashcards in that they have a pictograph embedded in each word on one side (visual), with an auditory cue to provide context for the word on the other side (conceptual). Children need to see a word and hear it read correctly many times before it is mastered. Some children need to see a word 10 times, some 100 times or more, but with visual/conceptual clues children master words more quickly than they do without the clues.

The reason visual/conceptual clues shorten the time it takes to master a word is because the child can visualize the picture clue, recall the concept and recognize the word when the word is encountered later without any cues. This was demonstrated in an Illinois State University study entitled Sight Word Recognition Among Young Children at Risk: Picture-Supported vs. Word Only, by Meadan, H., Stoner, J.B., Parette, H.P. (2008). See our website for further studies.

Picture Me Reading builds the confidence of early readers, children with dyslexia and other specific learning difficulties/developmental delays, visual learners, people learning English as an additional language and adult literacy groups.

Using Picture Me Reading High Frequency Word Cards

- Decide on the order in which you will teach the words. We recommend starting with words that can be used to form a sentence, such as, *jump*, then *I*, then *can*, *up*, *down*, *and*, *you*, *we*, *play*, *run*, etc. As soon as these words have been introduced, children will be able to form a number of sentences using only these words. It is a good idea to teach words that will be found in their reading program or story books, or words that the children want to use in their own writing.
- Always **introduce a new word before showing the word card**, for example, “We are going to learn the word ‘jump’. Do you like to jump? What do you like to jump on? Show me how you can jump.” **This is very important!** Experience has shown that if children see the pictograph side of the card before hearing the word, confusion can be caused by guessing the meaning of the picture. For example, they might see the pictograph for *read* but guess *book*. It will take many viewings of the word and pictograph with the auditory cue before they stop thinking *book* when seeing the word *read*. Don’t ever skip this step. Trust us. It’s not worth the hassle!

- Next, show the pictograph side of the **Picture Me Reading** card and read the sentence on the reverse. Use the same sentence over and over whenever practicing the word. After a while you may hear the children using the sentence cues themselves to prod their memory.
- Please **don't let the children guess a word**, and **never ask them to sound out a word**. If there is any hesitation, just say the word clearly for them. The point of the exercise is to give children multiple correct exposures to the word until the word has been mastered. The built-in success helps children to gain confidence in their own ability to read.
- Ask the children to take turns using the word in sentences of their own, looking at the pictograph side, and turning the card over to see the word without the pictograph clue.
- The number of new words to be introduced in each session will depend on many factors, such as age, ability, etc. You will know by trial and error what will work best in your situation.
- **As repetition is the key to learning sight words, give many opportunities throughout the day, every day, for the children to see and hear the words and the clues. Playing games is a good way to do this. We have included a few suggestions on cards 7 and 8, but you may adapt almost any child's game to the purpose. If you are struggling for ideas, see picturemreading.com for our book, *All of Your Students Can Read*, which has 36 games and activities, along with reproducible props, to make using Picture Me Reading sight word cards even more fun.**
- If the children are able to write, encourage them to write sentences made up of the words they have learned, in their own book to be reread and added to daily. Alternatively, you could write what they dictate to you, or have them type their sentences. They may enjoy illustrating their sentences, too. Your children will soon have their own book which they will be able to read independently! This will be a huge boost to their confidence. This is also one way of deciding the order in which to introduce new words, as the children will request words that they need for their personal writing.
- Be creative and enjoy!

A few games to play using Picture Me Reading cards

Find the Word Game: Put all the cards the children are learning out on the table, pictograph side up. Ask a child to find *can* (for example). When the child finds the correct word, she reads the word, looks at the word-only side, says the word again, then keeps that card. The next child is asked to find a different word, and goes through the same process. This gives every child in the group multiple exposures to each word with and without the picture clue.

Word Matching Game: Put all the words the children are working on in the middle of the table, picture side up. Have each word written on a separate card without any clues. Try typing the words using different fonts so they get used to seeing the words written differently. Challenge the children to match the plain word cards with the picture cards, while saying the word. If help is needed, give it. Don't allow a child to become frustrated with the exercise. The purpose of this activity, as with all activities, is to provide many exposures to each word read correctly. It is not intended that the children learn to decode these words, but to recognize them instantly.

Coin Game: When children know the words with the pictograph but have not yet mastered the word alone, show them the pictograph side and ask what the word is. Give each child a "coin" (plastic counter) for each word correctly read. Turn the card over briefly after it has been read with the pictograph clue, so that they can develop a mental picture of the words alone. As they get more experienced, let them try the word-alone side and give them two "coins" for a correct answer. If they hesitate at all, turn the card over and let them read the word with the pictograph, and give them one "coin" for the correct answer.

What Rhymes with Me? Game: Choose a word that the children are working on. Write the word on paper or a whiteboard. Ask a child to replace the initial sound, writing the new word, such as, *can, pan, man, or find, kind, mind*, etc. This is a good way to introduce phonics using words that are already familiar to the children.

We would love to hear how the program is working for you!

Please feel free to send a review, comments or ideas that we can pass on to others via our email address below.

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