



Hands-On Learning

High Frequency Words

Primary Concepts®

High Frequency Words

One of the most useful skills you can teach beginning readers is instant recognition of the most frequently occurring words in the English language. The 220 words on the Dolch list, for example, represent over half of all the words children encounter in their reading and writing. Knowing these words automatically is important because it allows children to focus on the meaning of their reading rather than on decoding the words. Often when children have difficulty decoding words, they lose understanding of a passage.

But learning to recognize and spell high frequency words is not easy. High frequency words are abstract, connecting words, with very little meaning attached to them. They are hard to define. Not many are nouns. Unlike words like *cat* or *house*, they cannot be represented by pictures. Sounding them out often doesn't work either. Many high frequency words, such as *the*, *said*, and *of*, do not follow regular phonetic patterns. Many of the words are similar (e.g., *could* and *cold*, *then* and *than*). It takes many exposures to the words for children to know them without hesitation.

The hands-on activities in this guide are intended to give children the frequent exposures necessary to achieve mastery. They use a set of 220 tiles on which are printed the sight words from the Dolch list. Words range from very easy (e.g., *I*, *a*, *in*, *on*) to much harder (e.g., *because*, *could*, *there*). Suggested sets of words, from the easiest to the most difficult, are listed on page 15. The goal of the activities is both instant recognition and flawless spelling.

Reading and Writing

In addition to the activities suggested in this guide, it is important to remember that one of the most effective ways for children to learn these words is through daily reading and writing.

In their independent reading, make sure children are selecting books that are fairly easy for them. Encourage them to read favorite books over and over again. Each time they read, they will get plenty of practice with high frequency words because they make up such a large percent of all the words found in early readers. In guided reading groups,

draw students' attention to the high frequency words they are studying. Invite the children to be word detectives. See how many times they can find the words in the books they are reading.

Independent writing, as with reading, gives children plenty of practice with high frequency words. It is hard to write a paragraph without using many of these words. After students finish writing, they should be encouraged to check that each high frequency word they use is spelled correctly. Many classrooms have word walls that display “no excuses” words children need to spell correctly in their writing.

Word Books

Word Books function in a similar way to word walls. Ready-made *My Word Books* are available from Primary Concepts. You can also make Word Books by folding six half sheets of paper to form the inside pages. Fold a half sheet of construction paper for the cover. Staple the folded papers together to form the books. Then have the children write their names and a title (*My Word Book*) on the cover. On each interior page, have students write the letters of the alphabet in order, one or more letters to a page.

Students should keep their Word Books handy at all times. When a new high frequency word is introduced, students should write the word in their Word Books on the page for the beginning letter of the word. Then when they need to spell a word, they can find it in these personal dictionaries.

Assessment

At the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the year, assess children's progress in both reading and spelling high frequency words. For the reading assessment, work with one child at a time. Give the child all the word tiles he or she has been studying. Have the child read the word on each tile. Score the child on the number of words he or she is able to recognize instantly.

For writing, give the whole class a spelling test on the words they are learning. Score the children on the number of words they are able to spell flawlessly.



Activity 1: Word Bingo

Word Bingo is fun to play and a great way to help children recognize high frequency words.

Preparation

Make copies of 5×5 grids (or use Word Pro Cards available from Primary Concepts). Gather some counters—about 20 or so for each child.

Activity

Use ready-made Word Bingo boards, or have the children make their own. Give each child a 5×5 grid on which to write words. Lay out the word tiles face down. Then have each child select 25 tiles and write those words anywhere on his or her grid. When the Word Bingo boards are ready, collect the word tiles. You are ready to play Word Bingo.

Randomly pick a tile and call out the word. If a player has that word on his or her board, the player should place a counter on it. First player to get five counters in a row or a column wins the game.

After a player has called “Bingo,” be sure to check that the words the child has marked were indeed called. (Hint: You can make the checking easier if you organize the word tiles alphabetically as you finish calling each word.)

Extension

Instead of reading words for the students to find on their Word Bingo boards, give word categories. Here are some examples:

- words with two syllables
- words with less than four letters
- words that end with *e*
- words with double letters
- words with silent letters



Activity 2: Say It Quick

In this activity, children sort tiles into words they know and words they don't know.

Preparation

Write *Words I Know* and *Words I Don't Know* on two 3" x 5" cards to use for labels, or write the headings on a two-column sorting mat.

Activity

Work with one child at a time. Have the child choose tiles and read the words. If the child knows the word, put it in the Words I Know column. If the child doesn't know the word, say it for the child and then put it in the Words I Don't Know column.

Words I Know	Words I Don't Know
in	who
it	down
big	our
can	

Repeat the activity many times until children know most or all of the words. Then challenge them further by telling them that from now on the Words I Know column can only have words they can say instantly, without any hesitation. Keep working on the words until children have achieved mastery.

Extension

When students have learned a word without hesitation, reward them by allowing them to add their word to a special goal poster made with adding machine tape. At the top of the paper, write the word *GOAL!* Then below the word draw the number of lines equal to the number of words you want the child to learn. As the child learns each new word, he or she writes it on a line of the adding machine tape, starting at the bottom and working up to the goal.



Activity 3: Concentration

There are lots of fun ways to play Concentration with the tiles, building skill with high frequency words at the same time.

Activity

Start with a game in which students find identical words. Mix up two sets of word tiles and place them face up. Have students take turns finding pairs of words that are identical and saying the words. As students get better at recognizing high frequency words, make the game harder by purposely selecting words that look similar so that children must look beyond the first letter to find matches. Here are four examples of word sets that are more difficult to distinguish:

Set 1: what when where which white who why

Set 2: that then their them then there these
those they think thank

Set 3: an am and any as at ate

Set 4: had has his him have her here

Extension

Play a game of Concentration in which students must find pairs of opposites. (See the list below.) Again, play with the word tiles face up.

before/after	always/never	yes/no	big/little
black/white	came/went	cold/hot	come/go
do/don't	up/down	eat/drink	to/from
get/give	he/she	him/her	you/me
new/old	now/then	on/off	in/out
over/under	walk/run	start/stop	these/those



Activity 4: Look Alike/Sound Alike

First students explore high frequency words that look almost the same. Then they study words that sound the same but look different.

Activity

Place word tiles face up on the workspace. Invite the children to find pairs of words that differ in only one letter. Have them read the words and use them in sentences. Here are some examples of Look Alike words:

am/an	and/any	but/buy	came/come	cold/could	gave/give
got/get	had/has	her/here	him/his	hot/how	but/buy
like/live	made/make	may/many	me/my	not/now	of/off
our/out	ran/run	saw/say	them/then	there/these	these/those
was/saw	were/where	with/wish	you/your		

Extension

On another day, focus on Sound Alike words. Randomly set out these tiles:

ate/eight	for/four	by/buy	know/no
read/red	right/write	their/there	too/two

Invite students to find the pairs of words that sound the same. Explain that these words are called “homophones.” To know which spelling to use, students need to know the meaning of the word. Give sentences and ask students to choose the right tile. Here is an example:

I **write** with a pen.

Turn **right** at the corner.



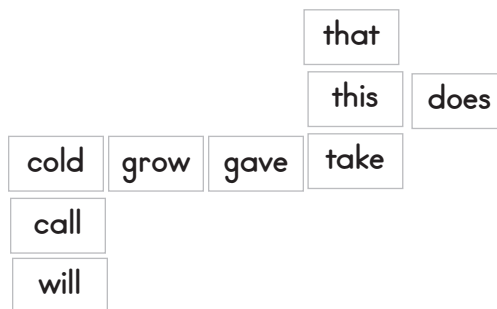
Activity 5: Word Dominoes

In this game, students see similarities in words.

Activity

Set out all the word tiles face down. Have each player take seven tiles and place them face up. Have a player begin the game by putting a random tile in the middle of the workspace. Each player in turn places a tile from his or her collection next to one already played that is similar in some way. After placing the tile, the player reads the two words and tells how they are alike. Here are some ways the words could be alike:

- same beginning letter
- same vowel
- same ending letter
- same spelling pattern (e.g., final silent *e*, vowel pair, digraph)



If a player is unable to play a tile, he or she takes a tile from the “bone” pile until the player can play a tile. The game continues until players cannot play any more tiles.



Activity 6: Outlaw Words

An outlaw doesn't follow the rules.

Activity

Explain that outlaw words are words that do not follow regular phonetic rules. There are many outlaw words among high frequency words. Display a set of word tiles children are studying. Then invite students to find outlaw words and tell why the word is an outlaw. In what way does the word not follow regular phonetic rules? For example, the word *have* has the silent *e* pattern. You might think it would be pronounced with a long *a* sound. If it were spelled like it sounds, it would be spelled *hav*.

Extension

Students can sort the word tiles and write them in two columns: one for outlaw words and one for words that are not outlaws. They can use a highlighter to mark the part of the word that makes it an outlaw.

Outlaws	Not Outlaws
there have	big



Activity 7: Show Us the Word

Laugh and *jump* are easy words to show. But how do you show the word *on*?

Preparation

Choose words from the list below. Place the word tiles in a paper bag.

around	drink	jump	read	sleep	wash
black	eat	laugh	red	stop	white
blue	eight	me	ride	ten	write
brown	fall	no	round	think	yellow
carry	five	old	run	three	yes
cold	four	on	seven	two	you
cut	green	one	sing	under	
down	hot	open	sit	up	
draw	in	pull	six	walk	

Activity

Invite children to come to the front of the room, take a word tile from the bag, and figure out a way to get the other children to say the word. They can act out the word (e.g., jump to show the word *jump*), pantomime the word (e.g., pretend to eat something for the word *eat*), or draw a picture of the word (e.g., draw four circles for the word *four*). They can use props (e.g., open the door for the word *open*) or point to something in the room (e.g., point to a picture of the sun for the word *yellow*), but they cannot say, write, or point to the printed word. Give each child a minute or two to see if he or she can get the other children to say the word. Then have the child reveal the word tile.



Activity 8: Word Search

Making these puzzles is as fun as solving them.

Preparation

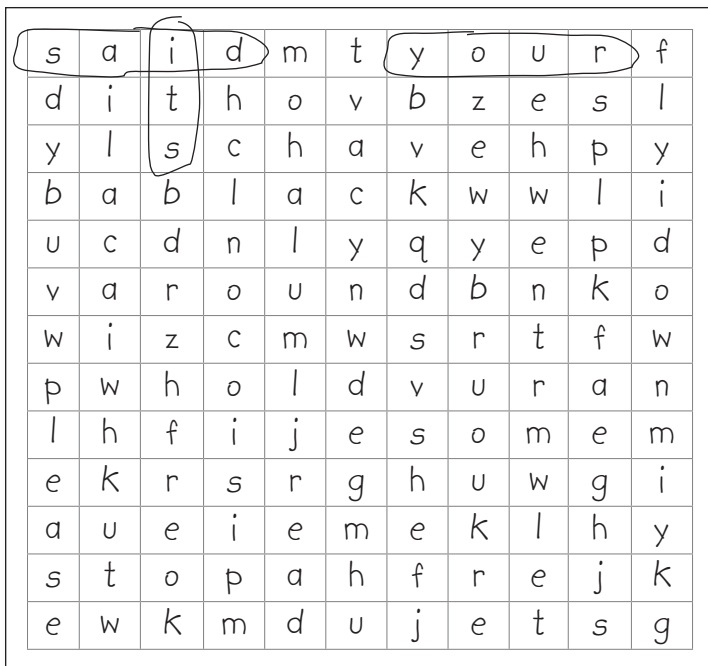
Make word searches for the words children are studying. Write the words either across or down, each letter in a square on a piece of graph paper. Then write random letters in the remaining squares. Make copies of the word search. Place copies of the word search and the word tiles you used in an envelope.

Activity

Invite students to find and circle the words they find in the word search. Challenge them to find all the words on the tiles.

Extension

Have the children make their own word searches for other students to solve.





Activity 9: Practice Makes Perfect

Look. Say. Turn over. Spell. Check.

Activity

Set out tiles for the words you want children to learn how to spell. Demonstrate the activity. Pick a tile and say the word aloud. Turn over the tile, and write the word on a piece of paper. Then turn the tile to the printed side, and check the spelling carefully. Are all the letters in the right place?

Next, have the children do the same with the other words on the tiles. Review the steps:

- Look.** Look at the word.
- Say.** Say the word to yourself.
- Turn over.** Turn over the tile.
- Spell.** Write the word.
- Check.** Check the spelling.

Extension

Have the children build the words with letter tiles. Then they can turn over the word tile, mix up the letters, and rebuild the word. Did they spell the word correctly? They can turn over the word tile to check.

where

w h e r e



Activity 10: Secret Sentence

Here's an adaptation of a popular television game.

Preparation

Make up simple sentences that use several sight words the children are studying. Draw blanks for each letter in the sight words. Write out the non-sight words. For example, for the sentence *Can you see the little black dog?*, you would write on the board:

_____ dog?

Activity

Invite the children to take turns guessing letters. If a guessed letter is in the sentence, write it on the blanks. Continue until a child is able to guess the sentence.

Extension

Set out the word tiles students are learning. Challenge the children to make up sentences for the game Secret Sentence. They can take turns being the MC for their own sentences.

T e e s _____ bug _____ m _____ desk!



Leveled Sets

<u>Set 1</u>	<u>Set 2</u>	<u>Set 3</u>	<u>Set 4</u>	<u>Set 5</u>	<u>Set 6</u>	<u>Set 7</u>	<u>Set 8</u>
a	and	are	all	best	ate	about	again
am	big	did	ask	eight	bring	after	because
an	black	get	call	fast	came	always	been
as	blue	good	cold	five	clean	any	before
at	brown	got	fall	four	come	around	better
be	but	had	find	going	does	away	both
by	can	has	fly	how	don't	could	buy
go	cut	help	have	jump	down	draw	carry
he	do	here	her	just	drink	found	done
I	for	hot	him	make	eat	grow	every
if	from	let	his	may	far	into	first
in	green	not	hold	much	goes	know	full
is	like	run	its	must	keep	live	funny
it	little	sit	kind	now	light	many	gave
me	look	thank	old	one	long	myself	give
my	of	that	our	pick	made	never	hurt
no	on	then	out	play	new	once	laugh
see	or	there	said	say	off	open	only
she	ran	this	small	seven	read	over	own
so	red	up	tell	six	ride	please	pretty
the	stop	us	them	take	right	round	pull
we	to	was	try	ten	sing	saw	put
why	what	when	well	three	sleep	show	shall
yes	white	where	will	too	some	soon	together
	yellow	which	with	two	start	their	upon
	you	who	your	went	these	today	walk
				were	they	under	want
				wish	think	very	warm
					those	would	wash
					use	write	work



Dolch List

a	cold	grow	may	said	too
about	come	had	me	saw	try
after	could	has	much	say	two
again	cut	have	must	see	under
all	did	he	my	seven	up
always	do	help	myself	shall	upon
am	does	her	never	she	us
an	don't	here	new	show	use
and	done	him	no	sing	very
any	down	his	not	sit	walk
are	draw	hold	now	six	want
around	drink	hot	of	sleep	warm
as	eat	how	off	small	was
ask	eight	hurt	old	so	wash
at	every	I	on	some	we
ate	fall	if	once	soon	well
away	far	in	one	start	went
be	fast	into	only	stop	were
because	find	is	open	take	what
been	first	it	or	tell	when
before	five	its	our	ten	where
best	fly	jump	out	thank	which
better	for	just	over	that	white
big	found	keep	own	the	who
black	four	kind	pick	their	why
blue	from	know	play	them	will
both	full	laugh	please	then	wish
bring	funny	let	pretty	there	with
brown	gave	light	pull	these	work
but	get	like	put	they	would
buy	give	little	ran	think	write
by	go	live	read	this	yellow
call	goes	long	red	those	yes
came	going	look	ride	three	you
can	good	made	right	to	your
carry	got	make	round	today	
clean	green	many	run	together	



Other resources for teaching high frequency words...

Word Wall Pocket Chart Large pocket chart for displaying high frequency word tiles. (1484)

Word Wall Tiles Large word tiles for display in a Word Wall Pocket Chart. (1482)

Word Wall Work: Mastering High Frequency Words A comprehensive guide to introducing word wall words. (1481)

Sight Word Spellers Student workbooks for studying high frequency words. (3930, 3932)

Word Practice Boards Mats on which students build and write high frequency words. (1461)

Sight Word Sentences Sentence frames you can use to create class books. (5220)

Sight Word Readers Delightful stories each focusing on a set of four high frequency words. (5260)

Word Bingo Kits Word Bingo boards and counters for playing Bingo. (3721)

Spelling Demons Tiles of tricky words. (1211)

For these and other language arts resources, consult a Primary Concepts catalog or visit our website at www.primaryconcepts.com.

Primary Concepts®
P. O. Box 10043
Berkeley, CA 94709
www.primaryconcepts.com

Cat. No. 221460