

Choosing Words for a Word Wall

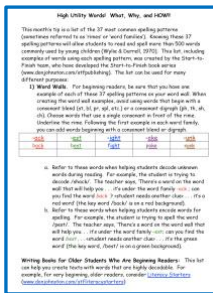
Making Hard Choices!

WHAT AND WHY? Word walls are a crucial component of literacy instruction for students who are transitional and early conventional learners. One important decision every week is the words you select for your word wall, especially for beginning readers. Since a maximum of five words will be added each week, teams must be very 'picky' about the words they select! This tip provides specific suggestions for choosing well, as your word wall will likely have only 90-120 words by the end of the year.

WHO IS THIS FOR? This tip is for families setting up word walls at home, or teachers and SLPs setting up classroom word walls. Specific suggestions are made regarding students who use AAC (augmentative and alternative communication).

WHAT ARE THE KEY DECISION POINTS? As Erickson and Koppenhaver (2020, p. 174) note, the primary sources for word wall words are: 1) The keyword list created by the team (e.g., rat, sit, pain, make) and, 2) high-frequency words that appear across texts (e.g., you, the, was).

HOW TO MAKE DECISIONS. This tip will share tools for making those decisions, plus considerations for individual classrooms.



Choosing Keywords. The team works together to create a keyword list, ensuring that you have one word for each of the high frequency word endings identified by Wylie and Durell (1970). See the February, 2007 High Utility Words at www.aacintervention.com. The Keyword Planning form (add link?) by the Center for Literacy and Disability Studies (shown on right) is also very helpful.

1. -ack	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. -all	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. -ain	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. -ake	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. -ale	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. -ame	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. -an	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. -ank	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. -ap	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. -ash	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. -at	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. -ate	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. -aw	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. -ay	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. -ent	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. -er	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. -est	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. -ice	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. -ick	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. -ide	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. -ight	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. -ill	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. -in	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. -ine	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. -ing	<input type="checkbox"/>
26. -ink	<input type="checkbox"/>
27. -ip	<input type="checkbox"/>
28. -ir	<input type="checkbox"/>
29. -ock	<input type="checkbox"/>
30. -oke	<input type="checkbox"/>
31. -op	<input type="checkbox"/>
32. -or	<input type="checkbox"/>
33. -ore	<input type="checkbox"/>
34. -ock	<input type="checkbox"/>
35. -off	<input type="checkbox"/>
36. -ump	<input type="checkbox"/>
37. -unk	<input type="checkbox"/>

Choosing High Frequency Sight Words and AAC Words.

We have used the high frequency word list developed by Jerry Stemach for the Start to Finish book series (see the November 2006 tip at www.aacintervention.com). If our classroom includes students who use AAC words, we use the top 36 words list from Project-Core. The chart on the left is a [free download from Lesson Pix](#).



Considering Word Onsets. When choosing keywords, think about the onsets (all letters up to the first vowel). By the end of the year, you want to have at least one word that represents:

- Each letter of the alphabet
- Digraphs (*ch, th, sh*)
- High frequency blends (*bl, fl, st, spr, etc.*)

So, when you are trying to think of a word to represent the -ank ending, you could choose thank, prank, lank, etc. For one classroom, we chose 'prank' because we had words representing the *th* and *l* onsets, but didn't have a word that started with *pr*.

Personally Meaningful. Let's say you are trying to find a keyword to represent the -at ending. There are many words that you could use, such as cat, hat, rat, slat, fat, etc. So, think about YOUR group of students:



- Several students have a pet feline – you might pick cat
- You have a class rat – you might choose rat
- You have a student named Pat – you might put his name on the word wall.

Fun. Sometimes, we can't decide which word would be the best keyword, so we pick one that will be fun to teach, read, and write! Prank served this purpose for one group – and students began to use it in conversation within a couple of weeks!

Below are two charts I've made with groups, so that teachers, parents, paras, and student can understand *why* I chose the words I did.

Rationales – Set # 10

Word	Top 100	Keyword	Onset	AAC	Personally Meaningful Or Fun	Other
but	√					
eat	√		√	√		Important for AAC
how			√			Lots of rhymes; Q word
stir		√	√			
prank		√	√		√	

Rationale – Set 11

Word	Top 100	Keyword	Onset	AAC	Personally Meaningful Or Fun	Other
luck		√			√	
mall		√				
very			√	√		Important adverb
where				√		Q word, important AAC
zip		√	√			

References.

Erickson, K. & Koppenhaver, D. (2020). *Comprehensive Literacy for All: Teaching learners with Significant Disabilities to Read and Write*. Baltimore, MD. Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Musselwhite, C. *Wonderful Word Wall Fun: Tips, Tools, and Templates!*
<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Store/Caroline-Musselwhite>