

# Parents' CLIPBOARD

SECONDARY LEVEL

BY THE PARENTS &amp; READING COMMITTEE OF THE COLORADO COUNCIL, INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION

## Q&A Reading Concerns at the Secondary Level

**Q** My son has vocabulary words to learn each week. Is it really important that he learn all of the words; and if so, how can I help him?

**A** Research conducted since 1941 reveals that vocabulary knowledge is the single most important factor contributing to reading comprehension. Vocabulary is a way of naming things we know about; it is the label associated with a packet of knowledge stored in permanent memory. The relationship between vocabulary knowledge and academic achievement is well established. (Marzano, *Building Background Knowledge for Academic Achievement*, 2004).

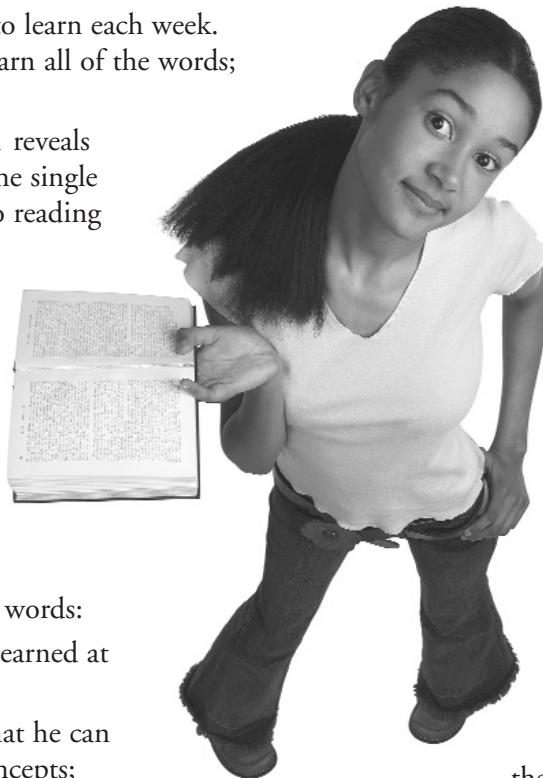
When helping your son study his words:

- ✦ limit the number of words to be learned at one time to seven or less;
- ✦ cluster the words if possible, so that he can see associations among related concepts;
- ✦ connect the new words to experiences and concepts that your son already knows;
- ✦ have your son use mental images or nonlinguistic representations to remember word meanings;
- ✦ model how to determine a word's meaning in the context of the material so he knows what to do when he encounters unfamiliar words later on.

**Q** My daughter reads her textbook very slowly. I think the text is too hard for her. How can I determine if she is capable of reading it?

**A** A simple way of determining if a text is within the independent reading level for your daughter is to have her use the five finger test of readability.

- 1 Open a page of the textbook at random.
- 2 Spread five fingers of one hand across the page.



3 Have your student attempt to read the five words at the end of each fingertip.

4 Repeat the process on another four pages.

If your daughter struggles with more than two to three words, the book may be too difficult for her. This method is not perfectly scientific because it does not take into account interest or background knowledge, but it does provide a system for determining readability. (Keith Topping, 2001)

**Q** My daughter used to read outside of the classroom quite a bit, but now she is involved with friends, sports and extracurricular activities at school. She just doesn't take the time or have the time to read anymore. Is it really necessary that she continue outside reading?

**A** Correlational evidence for the positive effects of extensive reading on achievement can be found in the *NAEP Reading Report Card for the Nation*, (US Dept. of Education).

Achievement Percentile	Minutes of reading per day	Words per year
90th	40.4	2,357,000
50th	12.9	601,000
10th	1.6	51,000

At each grade level, students who read more pages each day are likely to achieve the proficient level of performance on reading assessments. Research further suggests that an increase of five minutes of daily silent reading can produce an additional month's growth on a standardized reading achievement test. (Richard Allington, 2002)