

FOR-PD's Reading Strategy of the Month

DISSECT

February 2008

(Developed by Zygouris-Coe, V. & Smith, L., 2008)

Rationale:

When one hears the term *dissect*, many images may come initially to mind. Perhaps the vision of a sprawled frog on a biology lab table, or a classroom discussion on the deconstruction and critical analysis of a piece of literature is visualized. While we may easily note examples of how *dissect* is used in biology or English classrooms, we should now turn our attention to how the acronym DISSECT can assist middle and high school struggling readers with word identification and pronunciation.

Adolescent struggling students with learning disabilities often experience reading difficulties that range amid comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, and into the realm of word identification. As these students advance from the elementary grades into the secondary school levels, the difficulty increases as text difficulties increase and may extend beyond current reading abilities causing students to feel exasperated. While many strategies exist to assist older students with comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency, word identification strategies are sometimes left behind.

Teachers understand the need for students to master the ability to decode unknown words early in their education. For struggling older readers, teacher must be prepared to assist those who struggle with long, polysyllabic words found in many secondary, content area text (Lenz & Hughes, 1990). Good readers have word attack tools, including structural analysis and contextual analysis, to support their word identification. As we shall read below, a strategy like DISSECT, can provide older students just such a tool.

How to Use the Strategy:

The Strategic Instruction Model (SIM) was introduced by Deshler and Schumaker in 1988 as an instructional system designed to help struggling students with learning disabilities succeed in their regular education courses. This model includes provides learning strategies related to six areas including reading, remembering information, expression, demonstration, social interaction, and math. Within the strategies prescribed for the reading portion of SIM, the DISSECT method was created by Lenz and Hughes to assist struggling students with decoding unfamiliar words by using a combination of context clues and word analysis strategies (1990).

The mnemonic acronym DISSECT offers the following steps to assist struggling readers identify unknown words.

Discover the Context. This step requires the student to skip over any unknown words and read to the end of the sentence. Then, the student uses the context of the sentence to guess the unknown word. If the guess does not match, the student moves on to the next step.

Isolate the prefix. In this step, students look at the first few letters of the word to see if there is a phoneme she is able to pronounce. A list of prefixes should be provided to facilitate recognition. If a prefix is identified, the student draws a box around it from the other part of the word.

Separate the suffix. Once the student has isolated the prefix, the next step is to separate the suffix in a similar manner.

Say the stem. The student attempts to pronounce the stem of the word. If the stem is recognized, the student says the prefix, stem, and suffix together. If the stem cannot be named, the student moves on to the next step.

Examine the stem. In this step, the student divides the stem into small, pronounceable word parts, using specific rules noted below.

- Rule 1: If the stem or part of the stem begins with a vowel, separate the first two letters and pronounce. If it begins with a consonant, separate first three letters and pronounce. Continue to apply rule until the end of the stem is reached.
- Rule 2: If you the stem is still not identifiable after using Rule 1, take off the first letter of the stem and use Rule 1 for the remainder of the stem.
- Rule 3: When two vowels are together, use what you know about pronunciation and try the different possibilities.

If at the end of the fifth step, the word still cannot be identified, the student should check with someone and/or try the dictionary.

Check with someone. The student checks with a teacher, parent, or classmate to see if the word can be identified.

Try the dictionary. The student looks up the word, uses pronunciation information to pronounce the word, and reads the definition.

Looking for an activity to assist with scaffolding the DISSECT method? This reproducible is great for both elementary and secondary classrooms.

Assessment:

The DISSECT method can be used to provide teachers information on the needs of their students with regard to word identification. While students often gain proficiency in identifying unknown words, teachers should also teach comprehension strategies separately or simultaneously with this method (Lenz & Hughes, 1990).

Resources:

DISSECT

http://people.uwec.edu/ROBERSEA/edmt380/design_print.pdf

This PDF document offers an outline of DISSECT which is a word identification strategy that is an effective tool to reduce common oral reading errors made by adolescent readers with learning problems.

DISSECT Reading Strategy

The DISSECT Deoding Strategy for Multisyllabic Words

<http://www3.mpls.k12.mn.us/stserv/alc/curriculummap.pdf>

DISSECT word identification strategy is research based for students with reading disabilities to become proficient readers by learning to decode multisyllabic words.

Word Analysis Strategies

<http://www.sedl.org/cgi-bin/mysql/buildingreading.cgi?showrecord=21&l=description>

DISSECT is mnemonic device to help students decode unknown words during reading of content area texts.

References:

Deshler, D. D., & Schumaker, J. B. (1988). An instructional model for teaching students how to learn. In J. L. Graden, J. E. Zins, and M. J. Curtis (Eds.), *Alternative educational delivery systems: Enhancing instructional options for all students* (pp. 391-411). Washington, DC: National Association of School Psychologists.

Lenz, B. K., & Hughes, C. A. (1990). A word identification strategy for adolescents with learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 23(3), 149-158, 163.

[Go to Strategy of the Month Archive.](#)



[Go to Adobe PDF instruction page.](#)

Last Updated February 13, 2008
forpd@mail.ucf.edu | (866) 227-7261 (FL only)

A project funded by the Florida Department of Education and Just Read Florida! housed at the University of Central Florida.