

## Q & A: How Can we Help Students Remember Vocabulary?

**Q:** I am teaching a very weak dalet (fourth-grade) student, and we're in the middle of Hickey lesson 5. We are moving very slowly, but she is catching on to the reading and we are progressing. She is actually great at cursive and feels very good about that. She is practicing daily, or so her mother (and the homework chart) tells me, but she cannot for the life of her remember the meaning of the English words. She remembers the meaning of maybe 5 or 6 words from the 3 yellow cards that we have made.

Her teacher has requested that I give her some work to do in class since she can't participate at all. I've given her lists of words to translate into Hebrew and also to draw, hoping that drawing and writing them will help the words sink in. This has not helped much. To give you an indication of how weak she is, she didn't even recognize the word "test" when I introduced it today.

I was wondering if you might have any tricks up your sleeve.

**A:** To tell you the truth, she doesn't sound at all unusual. It's pretty common to have little memory of vocabulary. The more contact and repeated interaction with the words - the better she will remember their meanings. Research says it takes an average of 14 meetings with a vocabulary word to cement it in memory - and for a weak learner it's probably even more. So the goal is to do stuff with those words as many times as possible, with as many senses as possible. My favorite way is to make and play games (see below).

Yellow cards: perhaps limit the number of words per card to 5 or 6, with the translation, on one side. You could make her some special blue cards where you fold the card vertically about 2/3 of the way over so that the flap covers the translation and she can test herself on the meanings of the words.

You can, of course, give her additional Hickey lessons from the website for the lesson you're on. They will have a lot of the same vocabulary, which might be helpful for showing her that it's not specific to that story and word list.

### Games and Activities

A good way to practice vocabulary is to make a "Go Fish" or "Happy Families" game with some sort of family theme uniting groups of four words. The words can be related by letter (letter they start with, vowel in the middle, etc) or some kind of theme (harder when you have few letters to work with, but it gets easier as you go; they can also be verbs, nouns, adjectives, etc.). There's a Go Fish game already made up, in Lesson 7 "Can-Can and the Kittens", but an even better way is to buy blank playing cards sold in educational materials stores (e.g. at David Yellin, in the store Zavit Acheret) and some permanent thin-tip markers, and have the learner write the cards herself.

I am doing this with a 12-year-old learner, not Hickey, who says she tuned out to the past irregular verbs last year. After writing a set of cards for each family, such as "-ew" (blow-blew, fly-flew, etc) she came in the next time and remembered all the members of the family - I don't just mean the past tense, but she reeled off all 7 members of the family - and when I asked her why she remembered she said, "because I wrote it so many times last week."

I firmly believe in making these games, even if it uses valuable lesson time, because it is an active interaction with the words, which hopefully will give the learner many more opportunities to play the game and practice the word. Of course, she writes the translation for the main word on that card at the bottom. The game can require the learner to translate all the words in the family when she puts it down, or if you want more practice in definitions, you can write the definitions on every card and ask for the card on your turn by reading the word and defining it, or using it in a sentence (hard for Hickey learners) or maybe spelling it aloud.

You could look at the Games section on the website and make up even more games with the words from the current lesson.

- Any word list can be laminated and cut up into "concentration" - have her check herself against the intact word list in her Hickey binder. She can do this with the cards face up or face down.

-You can make her (or have her make) a 9-square self-checking puzzle, with an answer key as to the list of valid pairs (word and definition).

- You can print out any story without the text, and have her write in the text, or cut up the squares and have her paste them into the right order, or highlight the words in the story with a highlighter, a different color for each word on the word list... really any activity that gets her to process those words, think about how they sound and what they mean, say them, write them, read them, understand them.

And patience, patience, patience. It takes a long time and if she a) doesn't have a natural gift and b) doesn't have much English naturally occurring in her environment, it will take even longer. There's no magic shortcut, I'm afraid. But with enough active engagement with the words, her ability to remember them will improve.