

# Intentional Instructional Moves

Strategic Steps to  
Accelerate Student  
Learning

## Companion Guide

Chapter 17: Intentional Step Five



## Chapter 17

### **Intentional Step Five: Encourage Student-to-Student Discourse with Academic Vocabulary**

In this phase, teachers have established a healthy culture of student-to-student discussions, but they want to ensure those discussions remain academically rigorous. This often involves making sure students are using appropriate academic vocabulary. Academic vocabulary includes words and phrases that one encounters in academic conversations and texts. These words typically don't appear in everyday speech, so students are often less familiar with them and less comfortable using them at first.

To build students' understanding of academic vocabulary and encourage them to use these words more regularly in classroom discourse, teachers should provide direct instruction on key vocabulary, model how to use it in conversations, and let students practice during group discussions. For further guidance on encouraging students to utilize academic vocabulary in literacy and math discussions, see the “Encouraging Literacy Discourse” and “Encouraging Mathematical Discourse” handouts.

#### Strategy 1: Academic Hint Cards

Teachers can create a stack of index cards that contain relevant academic vocabulary, and/or a picture that represents the vocabulary, with definitions on the back. The teacher hands out these cards to groups as they discuss, or writes a list of words on the board as a reminder to students to use these words during their discussion. The teacher can then circulate the room and listen for instances of students using the words.

This strategy is especially helpful for ELL and diverse learners. It also requires less direct intervention from the teacher as students are talking. If the teacher needs to remind students to

use more academic vocabulary, the teacher can point to the cards, or the list of words on the board. For more ideas on Hint Cards, see Chapter 5.

### Strategy 2: Finger Snaps

Instruct students to snap their fingers when they hear other students using academic vocabulary. For instance, if a student in a history class is discussing feudalism and uses relevant academic language like “vassal” and “fief,” other students can snap their fingers in response.

This simple exercise lets teachers know that students are paying attention, that they can identify academic vocabulary, and that they recognize when it’s being used appropriately. To add to this exercise, teachers might create other signals for when students detect that academic vocabulary is missing from the conversation or if it’s being used incorrectly. This kind of check-in can prompt students to remain engaged in the learning task, listen actively to their peers, and make connections to prior knowledge.

### **Chapter 17 Handouts**

1. Encouraging Literacy Discourse
2. Encouraging Mathematical Discourse