Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding available research that indicates which high-frequency/sight word list is better to use in the K-3 classroom (Dolch vs. Fry). Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the ten regional educational laboratories (REL) that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. It provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations on research based education questions.

The information below represents the most rigorous research available. Researchers consider the type of methodology and give priority to research reports that employ well described and thorough methods.

**Question:** Is there research that indicates which high-frequency/sight word list is better to use in the K-3 classroom (Dolch vs. Fry)?

**Key words and search strings used in the search:** word frequency; Dolch word list AND Fry word list; high frequency word lists AND teaching methods; sight word lists AND high frequency word lists AND reading instruction; beginning reading AND word lists AND fluency drills; sight word instruction AND word lists; analysis of word lists

**Search databases and websites:**

2. JSTOR: [http://www.jstor.org/action/showAdvancedSearch](http://www.jstor.org/action/showAdvancedSearch)
3. Google Scholar: [www.google.com/scholar](http://www.google.com/scholar)

**Citations Retrieved:** (NOTE: Abstracts and executive summaries are copied directly from the reports when possible to ensure accuracy):


**Abstract/Summary:** Presents an updated version of the Instant Word List, based on recent new list, and the uses of the list. (FL)


**Abstract/Summary:** The 1936 Dolch basic sight word list is still a useful tool for beginning readers, although it should be revised according to recent word-count studies. (CS)

**Abstract/Summary:** Documents the high degree of similarity between basic word lists derived from a variety of word lists and the Dolch list. (RB)


**Abstract/Summary:** Studies of the effect of word frequency in the serial recall task show that lists of high-frequency words are better recalled than lists of low-frequency words; however, when high- and low-frequency words are alternated within a list, there is no difference in the level of recall for the two types of words, and recall is intermediate between lists of pure frequency. This pattern has been argued to arise from the development of a network of activated long-term representations of list items that support the reintegration of all list items in a non-directional and nonspecific way. More recently, it has been proposed that the frequency effect might be a product of the co-articulation of items at word boundaries and their influence on rehearsal rather than a consequence of memory representations. The current work examines recall performance in mixed lists of an equal number of high- and low-frequency items arranged in contiguous segments (i.e., HHHLLL and LLLHHH), under quiet and articulatory suppression conditions, to test whether the effect is (a) non-directional and (b) dependent on articulatory processes. These experiments demonstrate that neither explanation is satisfactory, although the results suggest that the effect is mnemonic. A language-based approach to short-term memory is favored with emphasis on the role of speech production processes at output. (Contains 3 tables, 2 figures and 2 footnotes.)


**Abstract/Summary:** This technical report contains a review of definitions of sight words, the development of sight word lists, and practices for grade-leveling word lists. Based on the review of the literature in the area of word list fluency, recommendations for best practices in the development of word list fluency assessments for beginning readers are made.

Abstract/Summary: The authors compared the effects of two sight word fluency drills (i.e., reading racetrack and list drills). They used a repeated acquisition design across 8 second-grade students identified as at risk for reading difficulties. More participants performed better when they read words on the reading racetrack than on the list; however, results were mixed. The study also showed that the participants preferred the reading racetrack over the list. Findings indicate that teachers should consider using the racetrack drill as part of supplemental reading instruction, particularly when student motivation is a factor. Suggestions for practice and future research are discussed. (Contains 8 figures and 3 tables.)

Referrals

Federally Funded Resources:

- Institute of Education Sciences (IES), public search engine available at: http://ies.ed.gov/pubsearch/

Disclaimer:

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