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Photos vs. Drawings: Different Levels of Learning Vocabulary

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There are many ways to help students acquire, categorize, and generalize vocabulary words. One of the most engaging ways is to use pictures. Pictures bring vocabulary words “to life” and provide a visual that can help students remember the vocabulary word. They can “picture” the word in their minds, a strategy that can help with word recall and overall comprehension.



Five Picture Levels

The following information, as adapted from *Five Ways of Looking™* by Kristen Wixted, discusses five levels of images, ranging from the easiest to the most difficult for a student to identify. Use images that are appropriate for each student’s needs and progress to more challenging levels as they improve their understanding of the different types of images.

Level 1: *Photo with No Distraction*



- The simplest picture level
- A photo of an entire image on a white background without any distractions

Level 2: *Photo with Distraction*



- The next easiest level
- A photo that includes items that are distracting in addition to the main item

Level 3: *Simple Drawing*



- A more advanced level
- A drawing with some color and a few important details

Level 4: *Cartoon*



- The next level
- A detailed color drawing that is disproportional or exaggerated (cartoon style art)

Level 5: *Black & White Line Drawing*



- The most difficult picture level
- No color cues – a pencil sketch with details but no distinctive lines



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(cont.)

Teaching Vocabulary Using Five Picture Levels

The following activities, adapted from *Five Ways of Looking*™ by Kristen Wixted, are fun ways to help your students learn vocabulary using photos and drawings!

Teach Vocabulary Acquisition

Use a *Level* of picture cards appropriate to the needs of the student. Use the following examples to help students *learn* the vocabulary words.



Receptive – Present two to three cards and say, “*Show me the _____.*” The student points to the card that matches the vocabulary word. It is important to present cards one *Level* at a time.



Expressive – Present the card and say, “*What is this?*” The student names what is on the picture card. It is important to present cards one *Level* at a time.

Categorization with Cards



After the student learns the vocabulary, present six to eight cards from at least two categories. Ask the student to separate the cards by category. For example, use three animal cards and three toy cards and have the student separate them.

Generalize Vocabulary



Put a “stimulus” card in front of the student and say, for example, “*These are (shoes).*” Place three cards from the same *Level* to the right of the “stimulus” card (*shoes*), and two should be foils (*dog and coat*). Point to the “stimulus” card and say, “*Show me the other (shoes).*” Continue with cards from various *Levels* to help the student learn to generalize.



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