The Vocab Clinic

Support your students towards better language use, with
the help of our resident word-wizard, **Alex Quigley**…

TRY THIS TODAY: 'HIGHER OR LOWER'

When writing in school, pupils will commonly not write with a close focus on selecting the right word for the job. To help address this, you can draw upon the classic game show, 'Play Your Cards Right' and apply the strategy 'higher or lower'.

Put simply, this involves presenting pupils with a range of useful synonyms or alternative word choices. Given a range of word choices on a scale – such as 'blue', 'sad', 'glum', 'despondent' and 'melancholic' – they can play your cards right and select a word from a point in the scale. In history, for example, you might discuss whether a battle was '*damaging*', '*devastating*' or '*cataclysmic*'.

Cracking the academic code

A key concept that defines the 'academic code' of school writing is that style and word choices are more formal than those typically found in everyday communication. It can therefore be helpful to teach pupils how to make appropriate writing choices with the aid of a 'formality scale'.

We want them to avoid using slang, sloppy spelling, or fragments of sentences, whilst selecting more sophisticated vocabulary (e.g. 'perspire' in place of 'sweat'). The differences between words can subtle, though. For instance, a student could begin a sentence with '*firstly*', '*first*', or '*now*', with each choice representing a different point along the formality scale.

DO THEY KNOW?
It took almost 50 years to complete the first Oxford English Dictionary

ONE FOR: FOOD AND NUTRITION STUDENTS

BLANCHING

Derives from: Old French, *'blanchir'*, meaning 'to whiten and clean' ('blanc' being French for 'white')
Means: A method of speedy cooking in hot water that retains colour and flavour enzymes
Related terms: Boiling, parboiling, scald, whiten, decolourise, etiolate
Note: 'Blanch' has broadened in meaning to convey a person being shocked and turning pale

I DON'T THINK IT MEANS WHAT YOU THINK IT MEANS...

DISPLACEMENT

In maths/physics

The changing position of an object, represented by the formula $x = xf - x0$

In geography

A particular form of migration where people are forced to move against their will

One word at a time

The term 'population' is commonly known, used in geography, history, statistics and most corners of the school curriculum. Indeed, you could say it is 'popular' in the classroom…

We commonly define the word as 'a distinct group of individuals, typically with some shared characteristics'. The word 'population' is Latin in origin, deriving from the root *'populus'* meaning 'people' (with the root 'pop' often commonly seen in words like 'popular'). In Roman times, popularity was considered a little vulgar; appealing to the 'populi' meant communicating with illiterate, common people. Today, those negative connotations have fallen away, leaving 'population' as a versatile academic term and 'popular' is a definitively positive adjective.

Alex Quigley is a former teacher and the author of *Closing the Reading Gap* and *Closing the Vocabulary Gap*; he also works for the Education Endowment Foundation as National Content Manager