

Glossary of terms used in South African schools

Here is a brief glossary of the “words” that are being used in classrooms these days! They are arranged in alphabetical order.

2-D – two-dimensional; a flat surface having or appearing to have length and breadth

3-D – three-dimensional; an object or solid having or appearing to have length, breadth and thickness

active listening – when a person tries to put themselves in the place of the speaker and listens seriously to what is being said

additional language – a language learned in addition to the home language

additive multilingualism – when a person learns a language (or languages) in addition to his or her home language.

analogue time – time read from a clock with a face and hands

antonym – a word that means the opposite of another word, e.g. ‘big’ and ‘small’ are antonyms.

area – the amount of surface covered by a two-dimensional shape, measured in square units

assessment – a continuous planned process of gathering information on learner performance, measured against the assessment standards

assessment standards – the knowledge, skills and values that learners need to show to achieve the learning outcomes in each grade

audience – the person or people who will listen to, read or view a particular text

auditory discrimination – the ability to distinguish between the separate sounds of a language

authentic texts – texts which are found in the real world, e.g. magazine and newspaper articles, recordings from radio and television, advertisements, labels from packets, brochures, forms, letters

bar graph – uses vertical or horizontal bars to represent information

barriers to learning – physical, social or other factors that prevent a learner from learning or taking part in activities

baseline assessment – initial assessment used to find out what learners already know

bias – a tendency to favour one thing over another

blends, blending – an aspect of phonics in which children learn how to put together two or three letters to make a sound (e.g. ‘spr’ in ‘spread’)

capacity – the amount of space inside a container measured in millilitres, litres or kilolitres; it is used mostly for liquids (see also volume)

code-switching – switching from one language to another for a purpose

coherent – something which makes logical sense. A coherent paragraph is one in which there is a clear development of ideas, and in which sentences have clear logical links.

collocation – words that typically go together or that cluster around the same topic or subject matter (e.g. ‘fish and chips’)

cone – a three-dimensional object or solid with a circular base tapering to a point, called the vertex or apex

conjunction – a word used to join two clauses in a sentence (e.g. ‘and’, ‘but’, ‘so’)

consonant cluster – consonants which occur together in consistent patterns in a language (e.g. ‘str’ in ‘stripe’, ‘string’ and ‘strange’)

context – the situation in which a text is created and interpreted

continuous assessment – assessment model that encourages integration of assessment into teaching and the development of learners through ongoing feedback



critical outcomes – together with the developmental outcomes, key outcomes of the National Curriculum Statement inspired by the Constitution; they include core life skills for learners, such as communication, critical thinking, activity and information management, group and community work, and evaluation skills

cube – a polyhedron with six square faces

cylinder – a three-dimensional object or solid with a curved wall standing at right angles to its circular base, making the top and base identical

data – information

decreasing – getting smaller

developmental outcomes – together with the critical outcomes, key outcomes of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 (Schools) that are inspired by the Constitution; they include enabling learners to learn effectively and to become responsible, sensitive and productive citizens

diagonal – line joining one vertex of a polygon to an opposite vertex

diagraph – two letters used to refer to a single sound. In English there are consonant diagraphs (e.g. 'th', 'sh') and vowel diagraphs (e.g. 'ea', 'ee').

digital time – time read from a clock that has a continually changing digit display rather than a clock face

dimensions – measurements of an object or shape (e.g. length, breadth, height, radius, circumference)

directionality – the fact that in English we read from left to right, and when we come to the end of a row of print, we must begin on the left-hand side again.

diversity – differences among learners that can be used to enhance the learning experience

edge – where two faces of a solid object meet

enlargement – a transformation which changes the size of an object without changing its shape

enunciate, enunciation – to pronounce words carefully and clearly

face – a flat surface of an object or solid

flow diagram – a diagram which shows the steps to be followed in solving a problem

foreign language – a language spoken beyond the borders of South Africa (e.g. French)

Formal assessment tasks – planned assessment tasks that form part of the formal assessment programme and are designed to assess learners against particular assessment standards

formative assessment – a form of assessment that assesses learner progress during the learning process in order to provide feedback that will strengthen learning

Foundation Phase – the first phase of the General Education and Training Band: Grades R, 1, 2 and 3

free writing – when learners are given the freedom to write whatever they like without worrying about mistakes. Learners should be encouraged to write as much as possible.

General Education and Training Band (GET) – Grades R to 9

graded readers – books which are written with grammar and vocabulary at different levels (e.g. 500 word level, 1000 word level).

grid paper – paper printed with vertical and horizontal lines making equal squares

histogram – a graph which shows the frequencies of grouped data

holistic – approaches to language which integrate all the skills and various kinds of knowledge in activities and do not focus on each in turn.

home language – the language which children learn through being immersed in it in their home and/or community. More than one language can be learned in this way, so

learners can have more than one home language.

homonym – a word which has both the same sound and spelling as another but has a different meaning, e.g. ‘fan’ (an appliance that moves air around) and ‘fan’ (an admirer)

homophone – a word which sounds the same as another but is spelled differently and has a different meaning (e.g. ‘reign’ and ‘rain’)

horizontal – a horizontal line is drawn across the page

image – a picture or visual representation of something

increasing – getting bigger

integration – when learners to use their knowledge and skills from other Learning Areas, or from different parts of the same Learning Area, to carry out tasks and activities

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Intermediate Phase – the second phase of the General Education and Training Band: Grades 4, 5 and 6

intonation – a pattern of rise and fall in the pitch of one’s voice which contributes to the meaning of sentences (e.g. questions are spoken with a rising intonation)

kite – a quadrilateral with two pairs of adjacent sides equal in length, but not all four sides the same length

language of learning and teaching (LOLT) – the main language that is used in a particular learning and teaching environment

learner profile – an all-round record of a learner’s progress, including personal information, social development, support needs, samples of work and annual reports

learning area statements – the statement for each Learning Area that sets out its Learning Outcomes and Assessment Standards

learning areas – the eight fields of knowledge in the Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 (Schools): Languages, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Technology, Social Sciences, Arts and Culture, Life Orientation, and Economic and Management Sciences

learning programmes – programmes of learning activities, including content; teaching methods and assessment tasks

literacies – The different kinds of literacy: reading and writing; cultural literacy; (the cultural, social and ideological values that shape our reading of texts); critical literacy (the ability to respond critically to the messages in texts); visual literacy (the reading/writing of images, signs, pictures, etc.); media literacy (the reading of newspapers, magazines, television and film as cultural messages).

literacy – the ability to read and use written information and to write for different purposes. It is part of a general ability to make sense of one’s world.

maximum – greatest

meta-language – a language used to talk about language. It includes terminology such as ‘sound’, ‘word’, ‘sentence’, ‘text’, ‘context’, ‘audience’, etc.

milestones – statements of what a Grade 1 to 3 learner should be able to do by the end of each term in the school year; milestones are set out in the Foundations for learning assessment framework and in Part 3 of this guide.

minimum – smallest

mode – There are different modes of communication: the written mode, the spoken or oral mode, the visual mode (which includes graphic forms such as charts). Changing information from one mode to another (e.g. using a graph to write a passage, using information from an oral text to label a



picture) is a very important part of language learning.

multicultural – having more than one culture

multilingual – having more than one language

multimedia – an integrated range of modes that could include text, visual material, sound, video, etc.

multimodal texts – texts which are designed to make use of more than one mode of communication (e.g. sound, print and images)

net – a flat diagram from which a model of a polyhedron can be made

number sequences – a set of numbers written in order and obtained according to some rule

outcomes – the intended measurable results of a learning process in outcomes-based education

outcomes-based education – a process and achievement-oriented, activity-based and learner-centred education process. The National Curriculum Statement is outcomes-based in nature and aims to encourage lifelong learning

parallel lines – lines that are always the same distance apart

parallelogram – a quadrilateral with both pairs of opposite sides parallel

perimeter – the total distance around a two-dimensional shape

perpendicular – at right angles to

perspective – the relative distance, size and proportion of objects viewed from a particular point

phoneme – the separate sounds of a language (e.g. 't', 'th', 'k', 'sh', 'ee/ea' and 'oa' are all phonemes of English)

phonemic awareness – the ability to distinguish between the separate sounds of the language (e.g. in English to identify the same sound in 'bad', 'sad', 'glad', 'mad', and to distinguish between the sounds in 'bed', 'bad', 'bud' and 'bird')

phonic families – groups of words containing the same sound (e.g. 'bad', 'sad', 'glad', 'mad')

phonics – the relationship between sounds and their spelling. This assists in word recognition when reading and helps learners to learn to spell.

pictograph – a graph which makes use of pictures (e.g. people, cars) to represent data

pie graph – a graph using sectors of a circle to show information

polygon – a two-dimensional figure with three or more straight sides

polyhedron – a solid which has four or more flat faces

portfolio of evidence – individual file or folder of each learner's work

prism – a polyhedron in which all cross-sections taken parallel to a base are identical to the base

progression – when class teaching and learning materials are planned so that the learner gradually develops more complex, deeper and broader knowledge, skills and understanding
summative assessment – this is formal assessment aimed at measuring the progress of a learner at a certain time. Summative assessment is formally reported on, usually at the end of the term or year

pyramid – a polyhedron with a polygonal base and triangular faces

quadrilateral – a polygon with four straight sides

reading vocabulary – words which a reader understands in context. Some of these words will be part of the reader's active vocabulary (words they use). Other will be part of their passive vocabulary (words they can understand in context but do not know well enough to use).

rectangle – a polygon with opposite sides the same length and four right angles; a parallelogram with right angles

rectangular prism – a polyhedron in which all cross-sections taken parallel to the base are rectangles identical to the base



reflection (flip) – a transformation which produces a mirror image of the same shape and size as the original, but reversed

register – the words, style and grammar used by speakers and writers in different contexts or situations (e.g. official documents are written in a formal register, legal documents are written in a legal register)

rhyme – words or lines of poetry that end with the same sound including a vowel (e.g. bin, din, fin, grin)

rhythm – a regular and repeated pattern of sounds (e.g. of strongly and weakly stressed syllables)

rime – the part of the syllable from the first vowel onwards (e.g. s-at). It has the potential to rhyme.

rotation (turn) – a transformation under which a slope or object is rotated (turned) around a fixed point (called the centre of rotation) into a new position

scaffolding – When we ‘scaffold’ learning, learners are enabled to do things with support that they could not otherwise do. Once they are able to do the task independently, the temporary scaffolding can be taken away.

scanning – to run your eyes over a text in order to find specific information

sight words – words that readers recognise automatically without having to decode them phonically. In the first stages of reading, sight words are usually frequently-occurring or ‘high frequency’ words like ‘he’, ‘she’, ‘they’, ‘a’, ‘the’, ‘are’, ‘were’, ‘my’, etc.

skimming – to read a text very quickly to get an overview

solid – a three-dimensional object

sphere – a three-dimensional ball-shaped object

square – a polygon with four equal sides and four right angles; a rectangle with four equal sides

stress – to give emphasis to a particular syllable in a word (e.g. the word ‘remind’ is stressed on its second syllable)

syllable – a word or part of a word which contains a vowel sound or a consonant acting as a vowel.

symbol – something which stands for or represents something else (e.g. ‘A red ribbon is a symbol of HIV/Aids.’)

symmetry – exists if a two-dimensional shape or three-dimensional object can be divided into two identical parts

synonym – a word which has the same meaning or a similar meaning to another word (e.g. tidy and neat are synonyms)

tangram – a Chinese puzzle made up of seven pieces that form a square

tempo – the speed of spoken words

tessellation – formed by fitting shapes together to cover a plane without overlapping or leaving gaps

text – any written, spoken or visual form of communication

three dimensional (3-D) – an object or solid having or appearing to have length, breadth and thickness

to recount – to tell about past events in a sequence (e.g. to say or write about what one did yesterday)

translation (slide) – a transformation under which a shape or object is moved by sliding into a new position

trapezium – a quadrilateral with only one pair of opposite sides parallel

triangle – a polygon with three sides

two dimensional (2-D) – a flat surface having or appearing to have length and breadth

vertical – a vertical line is drawn up and down the page

visual discrimination – distinguishing between the shape of different letters and words

volume – the amount of space occupied by an object, or the amount of space inside a container, measured in cubic units (see also capacity)

word bank – a store or file of new words

