

Bedtime best for learning written words for children with poor vocabulary

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A team of researchers at the University of York has found that bedtime might be the best time for children with poor vocabulary skills to learn new written vocabulary words. In their paper published in the journal

Royal Society Open Science, the group describes experiments they conducted with a group of children and what they learned from them.

As the scientists note, a considerable amount of research has been conducted to better understand the process by which children learn new words they hear—the process of reading written words is less understood, however. In this new effort, the researchers sought to learn more about this process by looking at learning times. Do children learn new words more easily during the [morning](#), during the day, or at night? To find out, they enlisted the assistance of 59 young volunteers between the ages of eight and 12 years old as participants in learning experiments.

The experiments were based on prior research that has shown that when someone learns a new word, their degree of learning can be measured by testing them with similar-sounding words that they already know—banana, for example, because most people know the word banana. Prior studies have shown that if a person stops to think when asked later for the new word, it is an indication of deeper learning than if they respond right away. This is because it shows they have internalized the word to such a degree that they can come to the answer by using the memory processing parts of their brain.

The experiment involved teaching each child a new word at one of two times of day; in the morning or near dinnertime. The following morning, the children were each presented with a word fill-in task, such as B____A and were asked to fill it in with the new word they had learned. They were timed to see how long it took them to fill in the correct letters for the new word.

The researchers found that children with poor vocabulary skills tended to do better on the experimental test when they learned the new word at bedtime, as opposed to the morning. Those [children](#) with average or better [vocabulary](#) skills showed no differences.

More information: S. Walker et al. Growing up with interfering neighbours: the influence of time of learning and vocabulary knowledge on written word learning in children, *Royal Society Open Science* (2020). DOI: [10.1098/rsos.191597](https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.191597)

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