

# TYPES OF VOCABULARY: BRICKS AND MORTAR

Dutro & Moran (2003) (*Zwiers*, 22) refer to “brick” and “mortar” terms as a way to distinguish between content-specific vocabulary and general cross-curricular academic language.

“Brick” words are the vocabulary specific to the content and concepts taught in a specific discipline. “Brick” words tend to be found in glossaries and in bold face print in the content area text books.

“Mortar” words and phrases are the general utility vocabulary required for constructing sentences and paragraphs to engage in discussions using academic English. Mortar words and phrases help to connect language together and are essential to its comprehension. Mortar terms include:

- **Connecting words:** best represents, for example, however and whereas
- **Prepositions and prepositional phrases:** on, in, under, behind, between
- **Academic vocabulary typically found in content area objectives, test questions and assignments:** analyze, plan, compare, evaluate

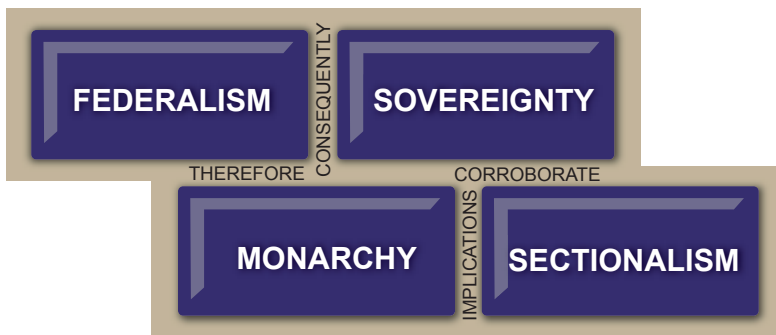
While native English speakers may have more familiarity with “mortar” terms, English learners often do not and such vocabulary requires explicit instruction.

Students need both bricks and mortar terms and phrases to fully participate in academic English discourse.

**Example:** Social Studies

Bricks: federalism, sovereignty, monarchy, and sectionalism

Mortar: therefore, consequently, implications, and corroborate



**Additional examples:**

| Discipline           | Bricks   | Mortar   |
|----------------------|--|--|
| <b>Math</b>          | reciprocal, equation, proof, obtuse                                | estimate, solve, represents, approximate               |
| <b>Science</b>       | photosynthesis, igneous, genetic                                   | hypothesis, variable, conclude, observe, evaluate      |
| <b>Language Arts</b> | characterization, alliteration, theme, plot, simile, foreshadowing | in contrast, interpret, persuade, narrate, punctuation |