Adolescent Word Study

Building Skilled Readers in Middle School & High School

An Asynchronous Professional Learning Course

7 Modules • 30 Hours • Fully Self-Paced

Comprehension • **Vocabulary** • **Morphology**
Multisyllable Decoding • **Fluency** • **Background Knowledge**

What This Course Is

Too many adolescent readers are stuck. They can handle simple texts, but the moment they hit multisyllable academic vocabulary, dense paragraphs in a science textbook, or a primary source with unfamiliar context, they stall out. And most secondary teachers haven't been given the tools to help — because reading instruction is treated as an elementary concern.

This course changes that. It's built around six interconnected pillars of word study — comprehension, vocabulary, morphology, multisyllable decoding, fluency, and background knowledge — and designed specifically for teachers working with students in grades 6–12. A seventh concluding module pulls everything together into integrated, classroom-ready instruction.

Every module follows a learning arc: participants build understanding, practice with real texts from their content areas, and walk away with artifacts they can use Monday morning. This isn't theory for theory's sake. It's practical, research-grounded instruction that changes what happens in classrooms.

At a Glance

Format	Fully asynchronous — video, readings, interactive activities, discussion prompts, and practice tasks
Audience	Secondary ELA teachers, content-area teachers, reading interventionists, instructional coaches, and special educators (grades 6–12)
Modules	7 total: 6 pillar modules (4 sessions each) + 1 concluding integration module (5 sessions)
Time Per Module	Modules 1–6: approximately 5–6 hours each. Module 7: approximately 7–9 hours.
Total Time	Approximately 28–40 hours
Prerequisites	None. The course builds the science-of-reading foundation as it goes.
Assessment	Portfolio model — practice artifacts from each module plus a final Word-Study Action Plan. No high-stakes tests.
Pacing Options	Semester-long (one module every 2–3 weeks), intensive (one per week over 7 weeks), or fully self-paced

How Each Module Works

Modules 1–6 each follow a four-session mini learning arc. It's a consistent rhythm so participants always know what to expect, and it mirrors how people actually internalize new teaching practices:

🟢	**Activate**	Hook into the topic. Surface assumptions. Create productive dissonance — the "wait, really?" moment that makes people lean in.
🔵	**Build**	Core content. Research, frameworks, examples, and demonstration. The what and the why before the how.
🟠	**Apply**	Hands-on practice. Participants plan instruction, analyze student work, and build with real texts from their own classrooms.
🟣	**Reflect**	Step back. Connect to other pillars. Self-assess. Share work for peer feedback. Set intentions for what's next.

Each session includes video content (short segments of 8–12 minutes), readings, interactive activities, discussion prompts, and a practice task. Every module's Apply session produces a portfolio artifact that participants carry forward into Module 7.

The Seven Modules

Module 1: Comprehension
Micro to Meta: Understanding What Understanding Looks Like

4 sessions • 5–6 hours

• The micro-to-meta framework: word-level → sentence → paragraph → passage → cross-text → self-monitoring
• Why "find the main idea" isn't enough — comprehension breaks down at specific levels, and each requires different instruction
• The Simple View of Reading and why it still matters in secondary
• Diagnosing comprehension breakdowns: case studies, text mapping, and targeted think-alouds
• Practice task: text analysis and comprehension plan for a real content-area reading

Module 2: Vocabulary
Three Tiers, One Goal: Words That Unlock Understanding

4 sessions • 5–6 hours

• Beck's Three-Tier Model as a decision-making tool for which words to teach and how
• Why "look it up and write a sentence" doesn't work — and what deep processing actually looks like
• The hidden Tier 1 gap: everyday vocabulary that some adolescents are missing
• Frayer models, semantic mapping, spaced practice, and retrieval practice for lasting word learning
• Practice task: complete vocabulary plan for one unit — word selection, tiered instruction, and review cycle

Module 3: **Morphology**

Word Parts That Unlock Meaning: Prefixes, Roots, and Suffixes

4 sessions • 5–6 hours

• Why morphology is the most underused tool in secondary reading — and the research on its impact
• High-leverage Latin and Greek roots organized by content area, plus priority prefixes and suffixes
• Word matrices, the "peel and define" strategy, and morphological problem-solving
• How morphology supercharges vocabulary instruction and doubles as a decoding strategy
• Practice task: morphology lesson for your content area with a content-area morpheme audit

Module 4: **Multisyllable Decoding**

Breaking the Code on Complex Words

4 sessions • 5–6 hours

• The elephant in the room: 15–25% of secondary students can't decode multisyllable words
• Three flexible strategies: syllable-based, morpheme-based ("peel off"), and analogy-based
• Keeping it dignified: what to do and what NOT to do with older struggling readers
• The cognitive load problem: when decoding consumes resources, comprehension collapses
• Practice task: decoding support plan for 10 content-area words with strategy analysis and classroom routine

Module 5: **Fluency**

Beyond Speed: Accuracy, Rate, and Prosody in Older Readers

4 sessions • 5–6 hours

• Fluency isn't speed — it's accuracy, rate, AND prosody, and prosody is a comprehension skill
• Assessing fluency in secondary: WCPM norms, a five-dimension prosody rubric, and practical approaches that aren't juvenile
• Fluency-building strategies for adolescents: repeated reading, reader's theater, phrase-cued text, prosody instruction
• Academic sight vocabulary and the volume reading connection
• Practice task: fluency assessment, activity design, and academic sight vocabulary routine

Module 6: **Background Knowledge**

The Hidden Driver: How What You Know Shapes What You Understand

4 sessions • 5–6 hours

• The knowledge effect: when background knowledge trumps "reading skill"
• Activating vs. building knowledge — the critical distinction and when each is appropriate
• Text sets, strategic content sequencing, frontloading, and the pre-reading trap
• The equity dimension: knowledge gaps as opportunity gaps, not ability gaps
• Practice task: knowledge-building plan with audit, text set, frontloading strategies, and knowledge check

Module 7: **Putting It All Together**

Integration, Implementation, and Your Path Forward

5 sessions • 7–9 hours

• Session 1 — Seeing the System: all six pillars as one interconnected framework. Diagnostic pillar profiling. Revisit Module 1 case studies with new eyes.
• Session 2 — Integrated Lesson Design: the before-during-after framework, pillar pairings, demonstration lessons across content areas. Design an integrated lesson.
• Session 3 — Differentiation: three reader profiles, tiered supports, scaffolding for independence. Differentiate your lesson for three levels.
• Session 4 — Classroom Try-It: actually teach the lesson. Structured reflection protocol. Write a reflective case study.
• Session 5 — Action Plan: personal growth audit, 30-60-90 day milestones, finding your people. Write the Word-Study Action Plan.

What Makes This Course Different

It's built for secondary. Not adapted from elementary. Every example, text, strategy, and activity is designed for grades 6–12 and the specific challenges of adolescent readers.

It's integrated, not siloed. Every module's Reflect session connects to the other pillars. By the end, participants see a system, not a collection of separate skills.

It's content-area agnostic. ELA, science, social studies, math — every module includes examples and practice across disciplines. Participants use their own content-area texts throughout.

It demands implementation. Module 7 requires participants to actually teach an integrated lesson and reflect on what happened. No credit for just watching videos.

It's honest about equity. The course doesn't shy away from the fact that knowledge gaps reflect opportunity gaps, that decoding struggles are invisible in secondary, and that traditional vocabulary instruction doesn't work. These are hard conversations and we have them.

It's designed to last. The action plan, the routines, and the peer support structures are all aimed at sustainability. The goal isn't a great PD experience — it's changed practice.

Session-Level Content by Module

Each session includes the following components, consistently structured across all modules:

Component	Description
Opening Hook (5–10 min)	A video clip, case study, provocative question, or hands-on activity that pulls participants into the session's focus.
Video Segments (8–12 min each)	Short, focused video content. 2–3 segments per session, never more than 12 minutes each. Research, frameworks, demonstrations, and examples.
Interactive Activities	Hands-on experiences: word sorts, text mapping, passage markup, case study analysis, Frayer models, word matrices, and more.
Readings (12–15 min)	Curated research summaries provided as PDFs. Focused and practical, not dense academic articles.
Discussion Prompts	Asynchronous discussion with a main prompt and follow-up thread options. Designed to push thinking and connect to participants' classrooms.
Practice Tasks	Substantive, hands-on application using real classroom texts. These become portfolio artifacts carried into Module 7.
Quick Checks (5–10 min)	Low-stakes self-assessment. Not graded — a way for participants to gauge their own understanding before moving on.