

IMPROVING YOUR VOCABULARY

The need for a good vocabulary is not limited to the classroom. Most students' reactions to this is "I can communicate well enough with the words I know." However, consider how many times that you have said: "I know what I mean, but I just can't express it." This is a clear indication of a weak vocabulary. Strong vocabulary skills are an asset in every academic area as well as in the work force. Without an adequate vocabulary, reading, learning and even thinking become difficult tasks. A direct effort must be made in order for your vocabulary to grow - it won't grow on its own. Be genuinely interested in words. The words you use are usually an indication of your personality. Here are some suggestions to help you improve your vocabulary:

PUT VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

Deciding on the meaning of an unfamiliar word, through its use in a sentence, enables you to make sense of your reading, without having to take the time to look up the word in a dictionary.

Here are some tips to help you use this technique:

Definition: A sufficient explanation of the word is given within the sentence.

*His **succinct** style made for difficult reading: that is, he compressed so much information into a few words that it was difficult to get the full meaning.*

Succinct means: _____

Analysis: The parts used to construct the word (roots, suffixes, prefixes) can be a direct clue to its meaning.

*The material the teacher wanted to cover was **circumscribed** by the government's course regulations.*

Hint: circum- means around
 -scribe means write

Circumscribe means: _____

Experience: Either from an experience of your own or one that you can imagine, the meaning of the word becomes clear.

*We walked **warily** across the ice-covered sidewalk.*

Warily means: _____

Contrast: Look for words, phrases or ideas used in contrast.

*The troops fought to the end rather than **capitulate**.*

Capitulate means: _____

Inference: Sufficient clues are given so that you can make an educated guess.

*The medicine seemed to **ameliorate** her condition and soon she was feeling better.*

Ameliorate means: _____

Borrow from Another Language: If you know another language, watch for clues that appear when words are derived from another language.

*The instructor **augmented** his regular salary by tutoring privately.*

(Do you know the meaning of the French word "augmenter" or the Italian word "augmentare"?)

Augmented means: _____

Look for Repetition: Sometimes you may see almost exact restatements of familiar words that seem to be unfamiliar.

*I shall take a **postgraduate** course the fall after I graduate.*

Postgraduate means: _____

Look for Overlapping Words: Sometimes adjectives that have similar meaning are used in pairs.

*She was very **gregarious** and friendly at the same time.*

Gregarious means: _____

USE YOUR DICTIONARY

Don't be intimidated by the dictionary. Carrying a pocket dictionary around with you can be very useful. When you are studying, reading, or writing an essay, keep a good desk dictionary by your side. Use it to improve your understanding of the subject matter while you learn new and useful words.

USE YOUR THESAURUS

A thesaurus is a valuable tool for expanding your vocabulary. It is a book of synonyms (words that have the same meaning) and is very useful when you find yourself using the same word over and over again. For example, instead of repeating the phrase, he said, in your essay, the thesaurus will provide you with alternatives such as, he remarked, uttered, conveyed, declared, stated, announced, expressed, maintained, articulated. Most word processing programs have a thesaurus which makes looking for that perfect word easy and fun!

MAKE VOCABULARY SHEETS

To make a vocabulary sheet, first divide a piece of notebook paper into 4 columns.

In the first column: find the word you need to learn and write it here. Choose key words or specialized vocabulary that are used over and over in your courses or that are the subject of an entire section in your textbook. Choose those general vocabulary words that are somewhat familiar to you or that have always bothered you because you did not know them. Remember that even writing them down in the column will help you.

In the second column: write the word in the context in which you first found it here. Be sure to write only enough context to show the use of a word. Often only a phrase is needed.

In the third column: look up the meaning of the word in the dictionary. Write out the definition in your own words.

In the fourth column: associate the word or term with any other familiar English or foreign word, object, diagram, example, or experience and write it here. It doesn't matter how far-fetched the association is so long as it helps you to remember the new word.

Example:

I. TIRADE	II. We had to listen to his tirade after we came in late.	III. long, angry speech	IV. Feel "tired" after a "tirade"
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FIND YOUR ROOTS

Look up the origins of words. You will be surprised at the fascinating information you can gather from very simple words. It is useful to know the meanings of Latin and Greek prefixes, suffixes and roots. You can often get a pretty good idea of what a word means if you know the meaning of its Latin or Greek components and you study the context in which you find the word. Learn the precise definition of a root word and then surround it with as many prefixes and suffixes as possible. Try to understand what these additions make to the changing definition of the word.

