

English Vocabulary Development

Choosing which words to study and learn

Which words should you learn? You hear and read many new words. It's important to consider what new words, phrases, and expressions are most important to you in order to increase your fluency in the English language. Think about developing your language skills for business, work, and for professional purposes. Business English, our work language, is typically ESL speakers' prime motivation for becoming more fluent in English. Consider how useful a vocabulary item may or may not be to you. If you're not sure of how to consider this, then ask someone or ask a teacher.

We can think of vocabulary, or vocabulary items, as being either passive or active. Of course, some vocabulary, or vocabulary items, may fall into both categories. Words we consider to be more passive are, of course, more useful for receptive skills. We are more likely to use words we consider to be more active in our speaking. One's specific purpose for increasing one's fluency can determine how much effort one should give to incorporating certain words into one's active vocabulary. [note: Receptive language skills are listening and reading. Productive language skills are speaking and writing]

Using a dictionary

A dictionary can give you information about the following: spelling, meaning, pronunciation, part of speech, inflected forms, grammatical features, collocations, similar or opposite words, and example phrases or sentences. When writing a word in a notebook, one should write the information about a particular word that is most important. This won't be same for each word, and the information that each person records won't always be the same.

Studying and learning

Study and learn words in context. The traditional academic approach of memorizing isolated words which are part of vocabulary lists oftentimes does not prove to be beneficial. It's important to notice how words are used with other words in what we call lexical phrases, fixed expressions, semi-fixed expressions, and collocations. Context is important. Observe words, expressions, lexical phrases, and collocations in online articles, podcasts, magazines, movies, on the radio, or in newspaper articles. Consider how vocabulary items are used, why they are used, where they are used, and when they are used. Register is important as well. Some words may be suited to more casual and informal types of discourse, whereas others may more often occur in more formal and serious types of discourse. Write new words and expressions in a vocabulary notebook, and keep the sources from which you come across new words, phrases, or expressions in order to observe the context in which writers and speakers use them.