

Four Effective Ways to Enrich Your Vocabulary

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Abstract: None other than the teachers of Second Language realizes how important the vocabulary is in learning a new language. With a basic level of vocabulary students will be able to convey their ideas to some extent, but effective communication can be achieved better when the students have obtained vast vocabulary knowledge. This is not something that can ever be completely mastered; it expands and deepens over the course of one's lifetime. In this article I have focused on four effective ways that could help to enrich students' vocabulary.

Introduction

People you get in contact with will get the first impression of you not only through your physical appearance or the way you walk but also judge you with the words that will come out of your mouth. No matter how brilliant and intelligent you are in science subjects like Physics and Chemistry, possessing an insufficient and scarce vocabulary will send a negative message that you are not at all intelligent. Steven Stahl puts forward the importance of vocabulary as "Vocabulary knowledge is knowledge; the knowledge of a word not only implies a definition, but also implies how that word fits into the world." Students, while reading this, may feel that they do not care about what other people think of them, there is however, more to this matter than what is apparent on the face value. When you have to give a presentation at a certain event or apply for a vacant position at a company, your vocabulary power will determine whether or not you are successful. Whipple, in 1925, states the vital importance of vocabulary thus: "Growth in reading power means, therefore, continuous enriching and enlarging of the reading vocabulary and increasing the clarity of discrimination in appreciation of word values"(p.76). Imagine you have a million dollar idea, you will not be able to attract any investors because of your poor vocabulary. Being able to improve your vocabulary will open to lots of doors, those normally would remain closed.

For many years, the language programs that teachers prepared, gave little attention to the methods for assisting students to learn vocabulary. Even some books appeared to be advising teachers that students could learn all the words they needed without help. In fact, teachers were sometimes advised not to teach many words before their students mastered the grammatical structure and the sound system of the language. Volumes of articles appeared in journals and ELT magazines giving emphasis on pronunciation and grammar, there was often little or no stress on vocabulary teaching. In short, vocabulary teaching has been neglected in programs for teachers during the much of the twentieth century.

In order to develop your vocabulary you must have a game plan. The best way to get this plan in action is to come up with strategies that can lead you to success. The importance of vocabulary to reading achievement, more specifically to reading comprehension, has long been established (Davis, 1944; Thorndike, 1917). Knowledge of word meanings and the ability to access that knowledge efficiently are recognized as important factors in reading and listening comprehension, especially as students progress to middle school and beyond (Chall, 1983).

There are a variety of ways to improve your vocabulary, most of which are interactive and easy. This article reviews several easy ways to improve your vocabulary and learn new words.

Enrich Your Vocabulary While You Read

Studies have proven that reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge are strongly correlated.(Stahl, 1999), and researchers have found out that vocabulary knowledge in primary school can predict how well students will be able to comprehend texts they read in high school. (Biemiller,2000).Therefore there is no doubt that one of the most effective ways to build your vocabulary is to read, and read some more. You will want to read everything you can come across to. When you see a word that you're not familiar with, you will want to take the time to look it up. This may be tedious at first, you will have to make a habit of it. Once you get to do it a few times, you will

become used to it, and this will help you enrich your vocabulary. Apart from this, reading also improves the way you speak. You will learn how to structure your sentences properly, and you can say them in a way that makes a lot of sense.

However this requires lots of patience. Nothing great can ever be achieved over a night. It definitely will take time for you to build up a powerful and robust vocabulary, and the more you read, the better your vocabulary will become. Therefore, it is also essential to develop an interest in reading. You should not see reading as a chore. If you do, you will not be successful.

The people who have the most impressive vocabulary skill are those who look at reading as being fun or recreational, not a chore that needs to be done. Poor readers often read less, because they consider reading to be boring and frustrating. This means that they don't read enough to improve their vocabulary, which, in return, could help them to understand more. This perpetuating cycle can mean that as students continue through middle school and high school, the gap between the good and poor readers grows wider.

Good readers often acquire much of their vocabulary through independent reading. However, explicit instruction can help students learn enough words to become better readers and thus obtain even more words. Direct vocabulary instruction is useful for students at all ability levels, but it is particularly useful for beginning students who have a limited reading vocabulary and little exposure to incidental vocabulary learning outside of school. The importance of wide reading in the growth of students' vocabulary is critical (Nagy and Anderson, 1984).

Reading is extremely important for three reasons:

- It exposes you to known words in a repetitive way. This helps to cement the words in your mind.
- It shows you the words in context. This is really important as it shows you how the word is used in a real word context.
- It exposes you to collocations. I will cover this in more detail at a later point but simply collocations are sets of words that commonly occur together and "sound right" to a native speaker. For example, a quick shower sounds right, whereas a fast shower sounds wrong to a native speaker of English.

Looking at the Context

Research shows that there are more words to be learned than can be directly taught in even the most ambitious program of vocabulary instruction. Explicit instruction in word-learning strategies gives students tools for independently determining the meanings of unfamiliar words that have not been explicitly introduced in class. Since students encounter so many unfamiliar words in their reading, any help provided by such strategies can be useful.

The vocabulary knowledge is indispensable to reading comprehension and one can not grasp the text without knowing the meanings of the majority of the words included. (Nagy, 1988). Much of a student's vocabulary is learned incidentally through multiple exposures to words in multiple contexts (Stahl, 2003). Vocabulary development is a major focus in many classrooms because the words students use while speaking, reading, and writing will influence their success in any academic area. In order to understand vocabulary, it is important for the learner to construct meaning from many experiences.

We knew that to be effective, vocabulary learning must occur in context (Sternberg, 1987). Looking at the context strategy can help you to become a master at building up your vocabulary. With this strategy, you can learn what a word means by the context of the word in the text. If you read a word that you don't understand, you will often find that the words which surround this word will often tell you what it means. It is important to realize that looking at the context can be further broken down into three additional methods. These methods are synonyms, comparison clues, and the definition. The definition is the easiest to use. The author will tell you what the word means, and it will be done on the same page where the word appears.

With the synonym, the author will combine the unknown word with words they are similar to it. This will help the reader better understand what the word means. With the comparison clue, the unknown word will be used in conjunction with a word that is familiar.

By comparing the unknown word with the word you know, this can allow you to learn the meaning of the unknown word. While some books may only use one of these methods, other books may use all of them. They are very useful in allowing the reader to increase their vocabulary, and the author takes a vested interest in helping them.

When authors write, they often include context clues to the meaning of words they use but think that some of their readers may not know. The context clue is usually presented in the sentence or paragraph in which the word occurs. Sometimes a visual such as a picture is provided. The following figure shows the method for deriving word meanings.

Method for Deriving Word Meanings

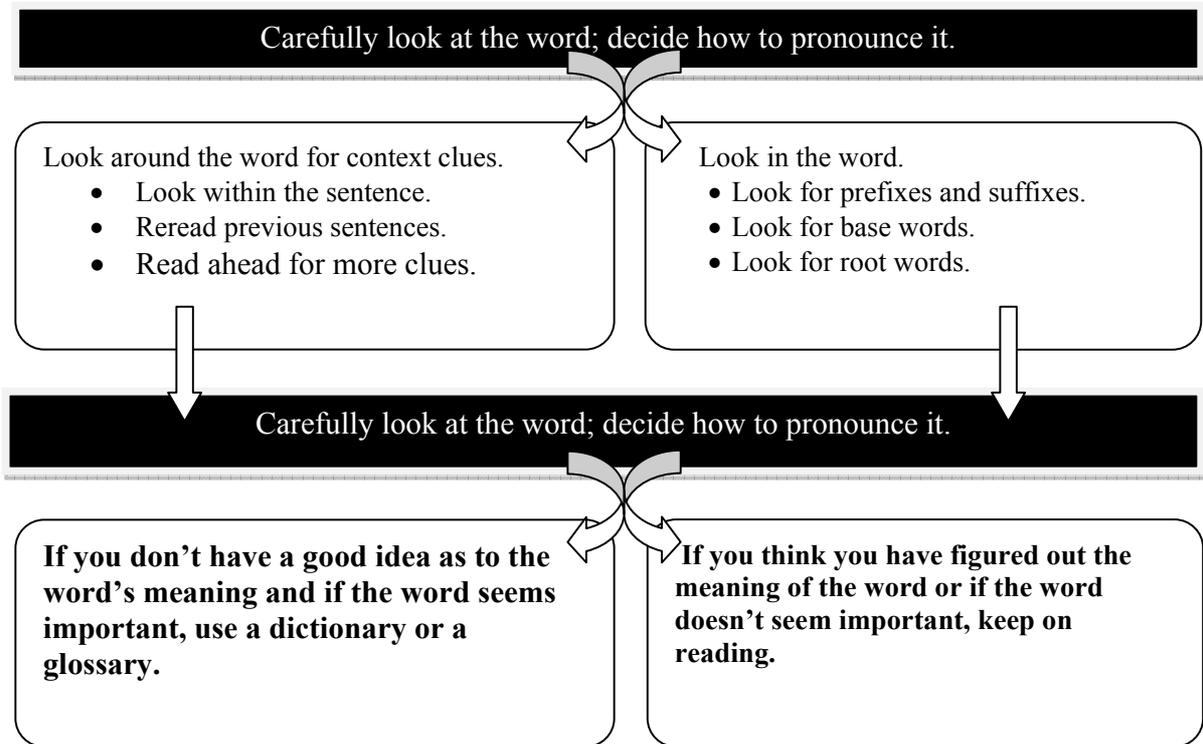


Figure 1

Here are five types of context clues used by authors to help the reader understand the meanings of words. An example is provided for each. In fact, good readers usually “blend” these types.

1. Definition context clue

The author includes a definition to help the reader understand the meaning of a word. In the following example, "tainted" is defined as having a disease.

The people of the town were warned not to eat the tainted fish. The local newspaper published a bulletin in which readers were clearly told that eating fish that had a disease could be very dangerous. This was especially true for fish caught in Lake Jean.

2. Synonym context clue

The author includes a synonym to help the reader understand the meaning of a word. A synonym is a word that means the same as or nearly the same as another word. In the following example, the synonym "pity" helps the reader understand the meaning of "compassion."

After seeing the picture of the starving children, we all felt compassion or pity for their suffering.

3. Antonym context clue

The author includes an antonym to help the reader understand the meaning of a word. An antonym is a word that means the opposite of another word. In the following example, the antonym "eager" helps the reader understand the meaning of "reluctant."

Joe was reluctant to take on the position of captain of the basketball team. He was afraid that the time it would take would hurt his grades. On the other hand, Billy was eager for the chance to be captain. He thought that being captain of the team would make him very popular in school.

4. Description context clue

The author includes one or more descriptions to help the reader understand the meaning of a word. In the following example, descriptions of President Kennedy as having charm, enthusiasm, and a magnetic personality help the reader understand the meaning of "charismatic."

John Fitzgerald Kennedy, our 35th president, improved human rights and equal rights for all people. He was a very charismatic president. People were attracted to his charm and enthusiasm. His personality was described as magnetic.

5. Summary context clue

The author makes a number of statements that help the reader understand the meaning of a word. In the following example, statements about being rude, showing no respect, having poor manners, and being impolite help the reader understand the meaning of "impertinent."

Andrea was a very impertinent young lady. She was so rude that she talked while her teacher was explaining a lesson. She showed no respect for other students. Her manners were very poor. Even her parents thought that Andrea was impolite.

Word Structure

Students acquire words they are engaged in word-rich environments where they have opportunities to hear and use language. Reading, listening, speaking and writing to communicate a message all build word knowledge. But it is also important to draw students' attention to word structure. Awareness of the way letters go together to make words not only helps students pronounce and spell words, but also gives them clues to their meaning.

In fact, to acquire vocabulary it's helpful to many English learners and struggling readers to hear the structure of words. For a learner of a second language it is probably easier to learn reading and writing if he learns to speak it first. Hearing the sounds and structure of words, and saying words, will prepare him for reading and writing. When students can hear, speak, read, and write a word, it fastens their learning of that particular word. We should ask this question then what students need to know about words to make learning them easier for them. There are several concepts about words that every reader should know according to Pinnell and Fountas(1998). Students first need to know that a word means something, it is made up of letters, the letters go from left to right, there is white space on both sides of a word, and words go together to send a message.

When a student hears a spoken word and says it, he can also look at the structure of the printed word and begin to realize that:

- A word has a special shape or configuration.
- Some words have patterns (for example, -ame, ike, -ot)
- Most letters in a word stand for sounds but some are silent (for example, "night")
- Some words have "chunks" of letters (for example, "un-happy" and "snow-man")
- One word may help to unlock the meaning of another word (for example, "drama" and "dramatically")

Early research on teaching word-part clues, or morphological analysis, produced mixed findings (Otterman, 1955; Thompson, 1958), but more contemporary studies have indicated that students can be taught various word-parts, most often prefixes and suffixes, to derive the meanings of untaught words (e.g., Graves & Hammond, 1980; Wysocki & Jenkins, 1987). If learners understand how this combining process works, they possess one of the most powerful understandings necessary for vocabulary growth (Anderson and Freebody, 1981).

Through analyzing the structure of a word, students know-a base word, prefix, suffix, or word root-to determine the meaning of an unfamiliar word. Once students understand how multisyllabic words are constructed, and once they master the meanings of common prefixes and suffixes, they can deconstruct the meaning of an unfamiliar word.

- Base words are words that are complete by themselves. Words that can be divided are made up of two or more prefixes, suffixes, and word roots.
- A prefix is a letter or series of letters that are added to the beginning of a word that has meaning only when attached to a word root. It changes the meaning of a word root. The most common prefixes are *un-* (not), *re-* (back, again), *dis-* (away, off, opposing), and *in-* (not).
- A suffix is a letter or series of letters that are added to the end of a word that changes the word's part of speech or tense. Many suffixes do have meanings, but they are more difficult to learn than are prefixes, which should be emphasized.
- Root words, mainly Greek and Latin, are the words that carry the main meaning of the word but usually cannot stand alone. When introducing structural analysis, you can write a relatively easy and well-known word such as *redo* or *rewrite* on the chalkboard. Ask students how they might determine the meaning of the words if they could not use a dictionary or read them in context. Ask students to come up with several other words that they know that begin with the prefix *re-*, and have them infer the meaning of the prefix. Guide students to understand that the prefix *re-* means "back" or "again," and they know what the base words *do* and *write* mean. Therefore, they can figure out that *rewrite* means "write again," and *redo* means "to do again." Review common prefixes with students, and put five grade-appropriate vocabulary words that contain those prefixes on the board, and then ask students to find the meanings of the words.

To help students decode unknown words, you can have them deconstruct compound words. For example, you might start by writing the word *birdhouse* on the board. Ask students to tell you what *bird* and *house* mean, and then guide them to figure out the meaning of the compound word by combining the meanings of the two base words. Group younger students into pairs, and have them find the meanings of several grade-appropriate compound words. There are a sizeable number of unknown words that you can figure out by using the word structure strategy. However, there are many situations where this strategy will not work.

Word Mapping

Word mapping for students is an effective way of acquiring and retaining knowledge of vocabulary. Word mapping enables students to improve their perception of key words by the means of mapping the words graphically. They help students to expand word meanings and discover relationships between the vocabulary items (Santa, Havens, & Valdes, 2004) They also help students to develop elaborated definitions, rather than simple, one or two word descriptions. Many students have a narrow conception of what the meaning of a word contains. Most of them conceive definitions as simplistic, imperfect statements that lack detail and personal comment. Word maps help students to create an expanded concept of a definition, one that encourages them to integrate their own knowledge (Santa et. al., 2004). By teaching word learning strategies over a period of time, students are provided a way to learn vocabulary independently. Concept of Definition Word Maps provides a structure for organizing conceptual information over the course of defining a word (Schwartz 1988; Schwartz & Raphael 1985).

For example, on the map shown on *Figure 2*, students will map a word's meaning as derived from its context. Then, they will present a figurative meaning for the word by comparing it to a known object. Finally, if you are reading a novel, you will connect the word's meaning to three different characters who illustrate its use in the novel.

Some key words to be defined could be *family, pride, respect, hope, tenacity, knowledge, and ethics*. Whatever you choose to define, connect it to one of the themes of the novel. These activities should be introduced and applied in conjunction with the lesson on context clues and idiomatic expressions.

A Sample Word mapping Chart

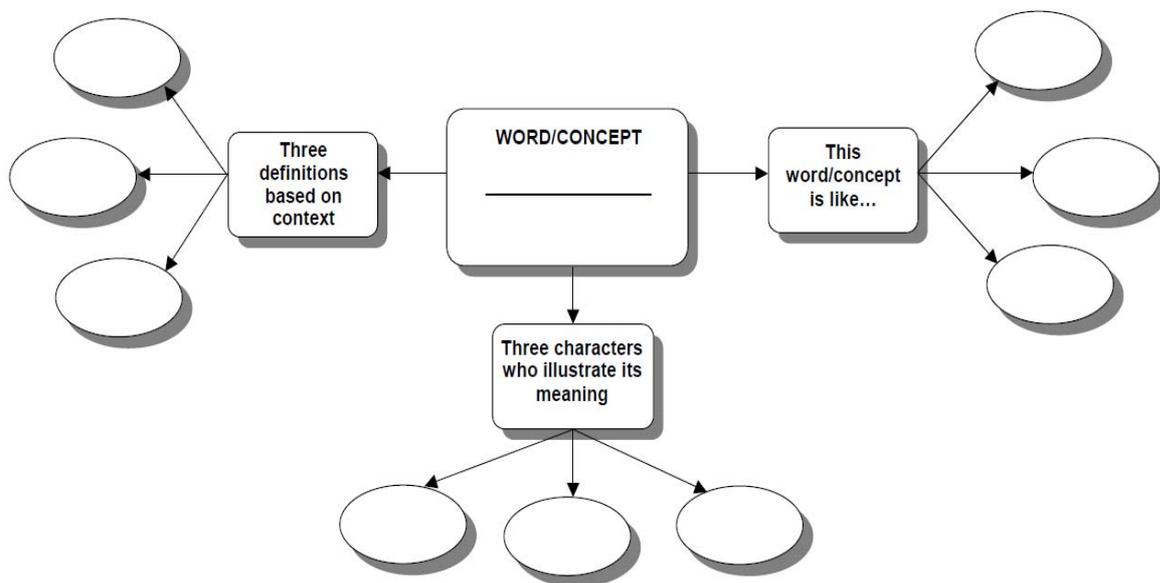


Figure 2

How to complete this word map!

1. Write the selected word and its meaning inside the box in the center
2. List three antonyms.
3. List three synonyms.
4. Lastly list three main characters who give the explanation of the basic meaning of this word.

You can prepare the students for this activity by reviewing how to clarify for meaning when coming across to unfamiliar words within the context of the text. You can model a mapping process before having students map independently.

Conclusion

In this article, the importance of vocabulary and the strategies to build up vocabulary have been emphasized. It is a grave mistake to underestimate the importance of having a powerful vocabulary, even if you are proficient in areas such as math. Being able to speak and write properly will ensure that people think highly of you, and it can allow you to reach the heights of power and success. Again it will be a grave mistake to overlook one strategy while favoring other. All of these strategies are equally important in vocabulary development. But the reading strategy seems one step ahead of the rest of them. Reading is a foundation of worth building. A foundation that carries the person through all subjects, and all their lives. It is a good investment. Most theorists and researchers in education have assumed that vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension are closely related, and numerous studies have shown the strong correlation between the two (Baker, 1995; Nelson-Herber, 1986). Therefore, helping students develop strong vocabularies is essential to their success, both in school and beyond. Students may forget many of the specific facts they learn in school, but the words they learn will serve them as useful tools for a lifetime. Effective vocabulary instruction is an attainable goal. The above-mentioned strategies can be applicable in wide range of fields where a robust vocabulary is essential.

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