

Building Your Vocabulary

Tips and Tricks for improving your repertoire

Why do I need a big vocabulary?

- To write better academic essays
- To improve formal communication
- To be better understood
- To make a good impression
- To switch “registers” effectively
 - AKA. “Code switching”

What is a “register?”

- A register is:
 - The way you speak and the words you use in a certain group or environment
 - Ie. Business talk with businessmen
 - The language that identifies a particular group or field
 - AAVE/Ebonics, “lawyer speak,” “Spanglish,” etc.

How do I learn the “language” of my field?

- Read:
 - Read journals, magazines, and/or research within your field of study
- Speak:
 - Talk to people in your field
 - Note the specialized words and/or phrases they use
- Practice:
 - Use the new words/phrases you learn as often as you can

What other ways can I broaden my vocabulary in general?

- Reading:
 - Challenge yourself to read material that is one level above what you are comfortable reading
 - I.e. If you have a college freshmen reading level then try to read sophomore level materials
 - This is a great way to get exposed to new words!

- Read with a dictionary by your side
- Never skip words just because you don't know them.
 - Try to get their meaning from the context of the sentence
 - Then look them up in a dictionary
 - Use the pronunciation guide in the front of the dictionary to learn the proper pronunciation

■ Read a variety of texts

- Read more than one newspaper and/or magazine
 - *New York Times, Los Angeles Times, The Wall Street Journal, Time Magazine, etc.*
- Watch channels like CNN and MSNBC
 - These channels often have a variety of shows and discussions where great new words can be learned
 - They aren't always the most interesting but you can learn a lot

■ Watch specialty channels to learn specialized words

- I.e. The Science Channel has a lot of programs from which you can learn specialized science terms
 - Ex. Aurora borealis v. "northern lights"
 - These two phrases mean the same thing but scientists use one and non-scientists use the other

■ Practice the new words you have learned

- This helps you learn to use the words in context
- It also helps when trying to remember new words
- Don't worry about making mistakes, you're still learning

Recommendations

- The Longman's English dictionary
 - This is a dictionary of American English and has some of the most commonly used words in it
 - It defines most words in under 50 words or less which makes the definitions easy to understand
 - It tells you which words are formal/informal and uses them in a sentence
 - It also gives the alternate forms of the word
 - (verb, noun, adjective, etc.)

- Merriam-Webster Online (www.m-w.com)
 - This is a great dictionary site
 - It's free
 - It has a lot of words
 - It also has a free thesaurus

- Find the thesaurus that goes with your dictionary
 - If you have a Merriam-Webster's dictionary then you should get a Merriam-Webster's thesaurus
- You can get specialized dictionaries
 - For lawyers, college students, medical personnel, etc.

- Make sure that the dictionary you use is easy for you to understand
 - If you can't understand it then it can't help you
- Check to see if the dictionary has difficult to find words (like "pensive")
- If you really want a dictionary with a lot of words then buy an unabridged dictionary
 - They are far more expensive but if you think you'll use it then it's worth the money

The Pronunciation Guide (IPA)

Symbol	Key Word	Pronunciation	Symbol	Key Word	Pronunciation
/ɑ:/	hot	/hɑ:t/	/b/	boy	/bɔɪ/
/ɜ:/	far	/fɑ:t/	/d/	day	/deɪ/
/æ/	cat	/kæt/	/dʒ/	just	/dʒʌst/
/aɪ/	fine	/faɪn/	/f/	face	/feɪs/
/aʊ/	house	/haʊs/	/g/	get	/get/
/e/	bed	/bed/	/h/	hat	/hæt/
/eɪ/	name	/neɪm/	/k/	car	/kɑ:t/
/i:/	need	/ni:d/	/l/	light	/laɪt/
/ɪ/	sit	/sɪt/	/m/	my	/maɪ/
/oʊ/	go	/ɡoʊ/	/n/	nine	/naɪn/
/u/	book	/bʊk/	/p/	pen	/pen/
/u:/	boot	/bu:t/	/r/	right	/raɪt/
/ɒ/	dog	/dɒɡ/	/s/	see	/si:/
	four	/fɔ:t/	/t/	tea	/ti:/
/ɔɪ/	toy	/tɔɪ/	/tʃ/	cheap	/tʃi:p/
/ʌ/	cup	/kʌp/	/v/	vote	/voʊt/
/ʌ/	about	/ə-ˈbaʊt/	/w/	west	/west/
			/y/	yes	/jes/
			/z/	zoo	/zu:/
			/θ/	they	/ðeɪ/
			/θ/	think	/θɪŋk/
			/ʃ/	shoe	/ʃu:/
			/ʒ/	vision	/ˈvi:ʒən/
Stress					
ˈ	city	/ˈsɪ-ti/			
	dictionary	/ˈdɪk-ʃən-ri/			

The Pronunciation Guide (IPA)

Consonants	Vowels and diphthongs
p as in play /pleɪ/	i as in tree /tri:/
b as in boy /bɔɪ/	r as in rest /rest/
t as in tree /tri:/	e as in bet /bet/
d as in dog /dɒɡ/	o as in cat /kæt/
k as in car /kɑ:t/	ɔ as in car /kɑ:t/ British, /kɔ:t/ American
g as in get /get/	ɒ as in bought /bɔ:t/
ʃ as in thin /θɪn/	ɔ as in now /nəʊ/
ʒ as in judge /dʒʌdʒ/	u as in us in foot /fʊt/
f as in fine /faɪn/	ʊ as in boot /bu:t/
v as in vest /vest/	ʌ as in up /ʌp/
θ as in thin /θɪn/	ɔ as in fur /fɜ:/ British, /fɔ:/ American
ð as in then /ðen/	ɜ as in ago /əˈɡoʊ/
s as in sick /sɪk/	eɪ as in play /pleɪ/
z as in zoo /zu:/	əʊ as in know /nəʊ/
ʃ as in shoe /ʃu:/	sk as in sky /skaɪ/
ʒ as in vision /vɪʒən/	so as in how /haʊ/
h as in how /haʊ/	ɔɪ as in boy /bɔɪ/
m as in much /mʌʃ/	ɪə as in near /nɪə/ British, /nɪr/ American
n as in now /naʊ/	ɛə as in where /weə/ British, /weər/ American
ŋ as in ring /rɪŋ/	ʊə as in pure /pjʊə/ British, /pjʊr/ American
l as in leg /leg/	
r as in red /red/ or /red/	
j as in yes /jes/	
w as in wet /wet/	

- Finally, remember that every word you learn had a proper use and a proper context.
 - Not every word you learn may be for everyday use
