

## **How to Build Your Vocabulary (and why you need to)** by Jeff Gregory

### **Why It's Important**

The reason you need to build (i.e., increase) your vocabulary is because failure to understand the meaning of a word can seriously hinder your understanding of printed or oral communication.

One of the major reason students have difficulty in understanding a text is because their vocabulary is weak: they just don't understand enough of the words to catch the point being made by the author.

A person's ability to communicate with fluency and exactness in all fields of knowledge increases as their vocabulary increases. For example, physicians can communicate with one another and understand one another easily because they have been trained to understand the meaning of medical terms that the average person may not understand.

### **The Cause of a Weak Vocabulary**

It is generally agreed by educators that the number one cause of students' weak vocabularies is the fact that **most students read very little**. A major reason they read very little is because they watch so much television. Watching television is not all bad, but most people watch a lot of entertainment - everything from game shows to comedies to kung-fu action shows. This kind of entertainment is written in a low-level vocabulary so that even a person

with little education can understand everything. Entertainment happens but not vocabulary building nor intellectual stretching.

### **Some Solutions**

Building a stronger vocabulary is not something that can be done overnight - it will take time. But the good news is that it can be done. Here are a few suggestions:

#### **1. Make up your mind to build a stronger vocabulary.**

The necessary ingredients to building a stronger vocabulary are commitment, effort, and time. Once a student realizes their need to build up their vocabulary and commits themselves to doing it, victory is in sight. Determination to fight the good fight of vocabulary building is the first step.

#### **2. Use a dictionary.**

Several formats are available and all are good: a traditional book, an online program, or a mobile electronic dictionary. The point is that **you must look up words**. Laziness is probably the number one reason for failure to use a dictionary. But chances are we will run into that unknown word again. So why remain ignorant? Go look up the word and learn it so it won't trip you up the next time.

#### **3. Use context clues to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words.**

Many times you will be able to figure out the probable meaning of an unknown word by taking note of the context in which the word is found. This may involve not only the word's

location in a sentence, but also in the paragraph and even the article in which it is found. This will save you time in having to look up the word. So, use and develop this skill. You can always write a word down and look it up later when you have time.

**4. Read as much as you can.**

Make a determined effort to spend at least 15-20 minutes a day reading something: a book, magazines, newspapers, articles on the internet, etc. Read what interests you! Your vocabulary will naturally grow as you become familiar with more and more words.

**5. Take college courses.**

Courses in reading and English are especially helpful, but nearly any course you take is going to require you to learn new words appropriate to that field of knowledge.

**6. Play crossword puzzles or other games such as *Scrabble*.**

These activities can be a fun way of increasing your vocabulary.

**In summary:**

Personal vocabulary building is a process that continues throughout a lifetime. As an individual's personal vocabulary grows and expands so will their ability to communicate in an increasingly skilled manner.

Vocabulary building takes hard work. Yet the rewards of enhanced communication skills make the effort of the journey worth every step.