

Learning Vocabulary

Which words do you want to learn? During the course, you will come across hundreds of new words, and you cannot remember every one of them. Therefore you will have to pick out the words that you most want to learn. At the same time, you need to increase your receptive vocabulary very quickly and therefore you must aim to remember new words effectively and plan your learning carefully.

Which words should I learn?

This is a question that you need to discuss with your teacher. You need to think about how useful words may be to you in your study, but you may also choose words that you can use socially. Try to find out how frequently a word or expression is used in academic discourse, and particularly in your subject area, as this can help you to decide whether it is worth your time learning the word.

Vocabulary is not only single words. You also need to learn fixed expressions such as ‘in relation to’ or ‘all things being equal’. You also need to learn expressions that can be used to help your reader or listener to see the connection between the ideas that you want to express.

Task one

Look at the 10 words listed in the box below. Choose 5 which you think you are most likely to use in your academic writing

<i>analyse</i>	<i>authority</i>	<i>estimate</i>	<i>evident</i>	<i>legislate</i>
<i>valid</i>	<i>volume</i>	<i>phase</i>	<i>justify</i>	<i>output</i>

Compare your choices with a partner and explain why you have chosen those words.

What do I need to learn about a word?

In the worksheet *Using a Dictionary*, you saw that a dictionary can give you information about the following: spelling, meaning, pronunciation and stress, part of speech, inflected forms, local grammatical features, collocations, example phrases or sentences, similar or opposite words, style, and frequency. When you record words, you may choose to write down some or perhaps even all of this information about the new word. It is up to you to decide how much information you are going to record, and it is important for you to consider the following question:

Is this a word that I plan to use productively (i.e., in speaking and writing) or is it a word that I will use primarily in reading and listening?

If the answer is that you want to use the word productively, then you will need to write down much more information about the word: the meaning, pronunciation and stress, part of speech, inflected forms, local grammatical features, collocations, example phrases or sentences, at least.

Task two

Look at the words in the box and indicate with a **P** the ones you think you will use productively and with an **R** those you think you would need to be able to recognize when you meet it

<i>trace</i>	<i>margin</i>	<i>infrastructure</i>	<i>depress</i>
	<i>notwithstanding</i>		<i>preliminary</i>
<i>eliminate</i>	<i>inhibit</i>	<i>mechanism</i>	<i>regulate</i>

Compare your answers with a partner and explain why you have made those decisions

Task three

Write the five **P** words you have chosen in the left hand column of the table below. Decide what information you would need to record about the words. Put ticks in the relevant columns for each word.

Productive words	meaning	pronunciation	part of speech	inflected forms	collocations	sentence patterns	local grammar features, e.g. C or U, prepositions

Compare your completed table with another student and explain why you would record the information you have indicated

Task four

Here are some words a student has recorded in a notebook. Look at what she has written and decide with a partner what other information you would record to help you to use this word productively and correctly

- ratio** the relationship between two groups of people or things showing how much larger one group is than the other, expressed as numbers
example: *the ratio of applications to places is 100 to 1*
- hierarchy** noun [C] a system in which people are put at various levels or ranks according to their importance
also the people in the upper levels of an organization who control it.
- criterion** Pron: /kraɪˈtɪəriən/ noun
a standard on which a judgment or decision may be based
a characterizing mark or trait

How am I going to learn?

- 1 You can write new words in a **vocabulary notebook**. If you are going to use a vocabulary notebook, how are you going to organise it? Are you going to arrange the pages in alphabetical order, so that the first page is for words beginning with the letter 'A', or are you going to arrange them by topic, by part of speech (verbs, nouns, adjectives, etc), by function, or by date? Arranging words by date is probably the most common approach but it is not necessarily the best. You can use tables, boxes, networks, or pictures to group words too.

Task five

Look at the words in the box below. There are a number of possible links between the words. Make two groups using different organizational criteria, for example, topic, function or grammar. You will not need to use all the words to make these groups but you should be able to find about 4 or 5 words for each group

<i>whereas</i>	<i>text</i>	<i>initial</i>	<i>grant</i>
<i>invest</i>	<i>notwithstanding</i>	<i>final</i>	
<i>income</i>	<i>hence</i>	<i>thereby</i>	<i>strategy</i>
<i>target</i>	<i>preliminary</i>	<i>economy</i>	
<i>objective</i>	<i>policy</i>	<i>intermediate</i>	<i>fund</i>
<i>temporary</i>	<i>draft</i>	<i>chapter</i>	<i>goal</i>

Compare your groups with other students and explain your organising principles

- 2 You can write the words on **vocabulary cards**. Buy a set of cards at a stationer's and keep them in a box or wallet. You might want to buy a set of cards with different colours so that you can use a colour coding system. Write the word on one side, with any useful information such as the pronunciation, and the stress pattern; on the other side, write an explanation of the word in English, or a translation, an example, or draw a picture.
- 3 You can record the words on **cassette**, with useful information about the word.

Task six

With other students discuss how you could use notebooks, vocabulary cards or a cassette to review, memorise and test your vocabulary.

For example:

With cards you could test your knowledge of the word, by looking at the reverse side of the card (with the translation or drawing), and trying to remember what the English word is

What are the advantages and disadvantages of the different methods?

For example:

recording on a cassette would remind you of the pronunciation and you could listen while you are doing something else

Which method (s) would be most useful for you?

Report back to the whole group.

When?

You should aim to learn five to ten new words every day, and revise the vocabulary that you learnt previously at regular intervals. Keep your notebook or cards with you all the time, or listen to the tapes at every available opportunity.

What else should I do?

You need to read as much as possible. You will be asked to do plenty of homework which will keep you very busy, but try to find time every day to look at a newspaper or read a few pages of a book that interests you and is not necessarily connected with your area of study.

Listen to English as much as possible: on the radio (BBC World Service, for example), on television, or on tape, in APILL or in the language laboratory. You can even listen to short extracts of English on the Internet (on the BBC World Service site, for example). Listen to songs, if you like music, and try to catch the words.