

the ARTICLE (for instructors)

Vocabulary: Is it Important?

A beginning student of English says, "Go Canada. Homestay. Next month." Although there is no grammar structure whatsoever, he will still be understood. Similarly, a foreign tourist lost in New York who says, "Where. Subway. Close?" should get directed to the nearest subway station. Such is the power of vocabulary.

For students just beginning to study English, most new words have an immediate and obvious practical use. Because "doctor," "hungry," or "subway" are high frequency words, for example, they quickly become part of their everyday English. However, at higher levels, many students find that new words are used less frequently. They encounter the words, in reading or listening, only occasionally. Therefore, vocabulary acquisition seems less pertinent, at least immediately. New words are also more difficult to remember.

Does that make new vocabulary less important? No, of course not. But it places greater importance on the techniques and strategies students use to retain new words.

First, and perhaps most important, a student needs clear short-term and long-term goals. How many words will he learn within a month? How many words will he learn within six months? Without goals, a student often lacks motivation. But keep the goals reasonable!

Second, when a student encounters a new word, it's always best to guess the meaning from the context of the sentence. After guessing the meaning, then he can check an English-English dictionary. This technique makes his deduction abilities stronger. And yet, if wrong, the student will want to know *why*.

Lastly, it just comes down to hard work. A student should practice writing his own definitions, synonyms, and sentences at home. He should also read or listen to English as much as possible. As a final word of advice: relating new words to personal experience helps.

Teacher's Notes:

* Underlined words in **red typeface** may be vocabulary unfamiliar to the students.

the ARTICLE (for students)

Vocabulary: Is it Important?

A beginning student of English says, "Go Canada. Homestay. Next month." Although there is no grammar structure whatsoever, he will still be understood. Similarly, a foreign tourist lost in New York who says, "Where. Subway. Close?" should get directed to the nearest subway station. Such is the power of vocabulary.

For students just beginning to study English, most new words have an immediate and obvious practical use. Because "doctor," "hungry," or "subway" are high frequency words, for example, they quickly become part of their everyday English. However, at higher levels, many students find that new words are used less frequently. They encounter the words, in reading or listening, only occasionally. Therefore, vocabulary acquisition seems less pertinent, at least immediately. New words are also more difficult to remember.

Does that make new vocabulary less important? No, of course not. But it places greater importance on the techniques and strategies students use to retain new words.

First, and perhaps most important, a student needs clear short-term and long-term goals. How many words will he learn within a month? How many words will he learn within six months? Without goals, a student often lacks motivation. But keep the goals reasonable!

Second, when a student encounters a new word, it's always best to guess the meaning from the context of the sentence. After guessing the meaning, then he can check an English-English dictionary. This technique makes his deduction abilities stronger. And yet, if wrong, the student will want to know why.

Lastly, it just comes down to hard work. A student should practice writing his own definitions, synonyms, and sentences at home. He should also read or listen to English as much as possible. As a final word of advice: relating new words to personal experience helps.

Notes:

STEP ONE

Brainstorm: Brainstorm with a partner(s) words and ideas associated with "vocabulary acquisition" for 2 minutes.

Spend another 5 minutes or less discussing the words and ideas together.

STEP TWO

Discuss: Do you agree or disagree? Why?

- | | |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| a. | Studying vocabulary is boring! |
| b. | I rarely bother to use new vocabulary. If I hear or see it, and understand it, that's all right. |
| c. | It's easier to understand new words when they are written rather than when they are spoken. |
| d. | I can learn vocabulary for a test, but I usually forget most of the words a week later. |
| e. | I often write new words in a notebook during class, but I rarely look at the words after class. |

STEP THREE

The Article: Read the article, and work with a partner to understand it. Lastly, summarize in your own words.

STEP FOUR

Discuss: Talk about the following questions in pairs/groups. Remember to support your answers!

- | | |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| a. | What strategies do you use to study vocabulary? |
| b. | What strategies would you like to try to study vocabulary? |
| c. | Do you agree with the article's suggestions to retain vocabulary? |
| d. | Whose responsibility is it to increase vocabulary, the student's or the teacher's? |
| e. | Which English skill do you think is the most important? |
| f. | Which English skill is your weakest? |

STEP FIVE

Role-play: Student A takes on the role of a teacher, chooses a word (from today's list or another word of his/her choosing), and teaches 1-2 students that word. Be sure to follow the steps given in the article, assign homework, etc. The "students" ask appropriate questions. Switch roles and repeat.