**13. VOCABULARY-BUILDING STRATEGIES**

How to Improve Your Vocabulary: 7 Ways to Expand Your Vocabulary

Written by MasterClass

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One of the easiest ways to bolster your existing writing skills is to add new words to your written vocabulary. The English language is among the most voluminous of all languages, and this means that you will never run out of vocabulary words to learn and use. All forms of the written word—from fiction to journalism to essay writing to poetry—benefit from a strong vocabulary. To that end, the time you spend improving your vocabulary skills is actually time invested in your writing skills.

Why Is Vocabulary Important for Writers?

Much like a speaking vocabulary, a writing vocabulary encompasses the words you can easily summon and use. From [action words to descriptive words](https://www.masterclass.com/articles/how-to-use-descriptive-verbs-to-better-your-writing) and beyond, a strong vocabulary facilitates precise writing and helps you avoid vague words. As you broaden your range of vocabulary, you become better able to describe specific settings, emotions, and ideas. You also hone a skill that’s known among writers as “[painting with words](https://www.masterclass.com/articles/how-to-paint-with-words).”

The most valuable vocabulary words are those that you can recall and use almost automatically. After all, learning vocabulary is only valuable if you can actually use your new words in a piece of writing and—equally important—use them correctly. If you ask a published author for [writing tips](https://masterclass.com/articles/spike-lees-writing-process), you’ll likely be told that it’s better to correctly use common words than to incorrectly use complex words. Fortunately, a key benefit of a better vocabulary is being able to use both common and complex words with equal precision.

7 Ways to Improve Your Vocabulary

Most of us have not spent much time learning new vocabulary since we were high school or college students. Thankfully, you can always pick up where you left off. Here are some tips to help you start learning new vocabulary words:

1. **Develop a reading habit.** Vocabulary building is easiest when you encounter words in context. Seeing words appear in a novel or a newspaper article can be far more helpful than seeing them appear on vocabulary lists. Not only do you gain exposure to unfamiliar words; you also see how they are used.
2. **Use the dictionary and thesaurus**. Online dictionaries and thesauruses are helpful resources if used properly. They can jog your memory about synonyms that would be better words in the context of what you’re writing. A full dictionary definition can also educate you about antonyms, root words, and related words, which is another way to learn vocabulary.
3. **Play word games**. Classic games like Scrabble and Boggle can function as a fun way to expand your English vocabulary. Crossword puzzles can as well. If you really want to be efficient, follow up rounds of these word games with a little notetaking. Keep a list of the different words you learned while playing the game, and then study that list from time to time.
4. **Use flashcards.** A quick way to build a large vocabulary is to study several words via flashcards. In today’s digital age, a wide array of smartphone apps make flashcards convenient and easy to organize. Aiming for one new word a day is reasonable. You can always go for more, but it may not be reasonable to assimilate dozens of English words every single day.
5. **Subscribe to “word of the day” feeds**. Some web platforms will provide you with a word a day—either on a website, an app, or via email—to help you expand your vocabulary. You can add these words to running word lists.
6. **Use mnemonics.** A mnemonic device is a form of word association that helps you remember words’ definitions and proper uses. For instance, think of the word *obsequious* which means “attempting to win favour from influential people by flattery.” Break down that word into components: “obse” is the beginning of “obsessed,” “qui” sounds like the French word for “yes” (oui), and “us” is like the word “us.” So, you can think of that big word *obsequious* as “obsessed with saying yes to us”—which is kind of what it means!
7. **Practice using new words in conversation.** It’s possible to amass a huge vocabulary without actually knowing how to use words. This means you must take it upon yourself to put your personal dictionary into use. If you come across an interesting word in your reading, make a point of using it in conversation. By experimenting in low-stakes situations, you can practice the art of word choice and, with a little bit of trial and error, hone in on the right word for a particular context.