

UNIT 1

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Language is absolutely central to your learning: without it, you cannot make sense or communicate your understanding of a subject. You will need to improve your English language proficiency in order to: understand and make the most effective use of your study materials, develop the vocabulary relevant to your subject as well interpret assessment questions and select relevant and appropriate material for your response. This will be done by focusing on the following: vocabulary, words in context and spelling.

1. VOCABULARY

Vocabulary is an important aspect in the acquisition of knowledge across the curriculum in all subjects. The expansion of vocabulary will have a positive impact on both effective reading and writing skills, and these are skills students are expected to have in order to perform well in their studies. Synonyms and antonyms are two of the tools that one can use to expand one's vocabulary.

1.1. Synonyms

An important way of expanding your vocabulary is by looking for synonyms. Synonyms are words that have the same or very similar meaning. All words can have a synonym.

Give examples of synonyms for the following words:

problem.....

house.....

It is advisable to replace commonly used words with synonyms in order to express yourself better.

Replace these commonly used words with better synonyms.

Ask.....

Bad.....

Beautiful.....

Start.....

Dangerous.....
Delicious.....
Do.....
Enjoy.....
Explain.....
Fat.....
Get.....
Good.....
Happy.....
Hate.....
Have.....
Important.....
Love.....
Make.....
Old.....
Quiet.....
Strange.....
Tell.....

1.2. Antonyms

Antonyms are words that are the opposite meaning of another. Sometimes, antonyms can be easily made by adding a prefix. Examples of antonyms that were made by adding the prefix “un” are:

- Likely and unlikely
- Able and unable
- Fortunate and unfortunate

Other common prefixes for forming antonyms are in-, im-, il- and dis-.

Give antonyms for the following words:

Tolerant, Decent, Excusable, Direct, Increase

.....
.....

Other antonyms change the word altogether, for example, easy and difficult.

Give other examples of words whose antonyms have a different from.

.....
.....

2. WORDS IN CONTEXT

From time to time, we all come across difficult and unfamiliar terms. You know terms like modem, online, hacker, website, and chat because they are commonly used by all. What do you do when you read a word and you do not know its meaning? Do you look it up in a dictionary or do you stop reading? The first thing you need to do is: try and determine what it means from the context. This you can do by looking at the chapter and/or paragraph heading of the text, a synonym, definition, example that illustrates the word's meaning as well as other words in the same sentence that offer clues.

Sometimes the context of a word helps us to distinguish between homonyms and homophones.

2.1.Homonyms

Homonyms are words that are spelt and pronounced in an identical way, but they have different meanings and functions e.g. cloud, mouse, format, virus and monitor.

2.2. Homophones

Homophones are words that are pronounced in the same way but differ in spelling and meaning, e.g. program and programme.

Use the above examples in a sentence to show their differences.

Program

.....
...

.....
....

Programme

.....

...

.....

...

2.3. Commonly confused words

Take a look at these two sentences – look at the highlighted words and decide whether they have been used correctly? If not, correct them.

This wine **complements** the food well.

You are full of **compliments** today, and I like it!

Which one is correct? Are you uncertain which one is right? English has many words that look or sound alike but their meaning is very different, such as pore and pour or whole and hole. It is easy to confuse the words and the unfortunate part is that most electronic spellcheckers will not be much help in a situation like this: they can tell you if a word has been spelled wrongly but they cannot generally flag up the misuse of a correctly spelled word. Therefore it is of the utmost importance that you expand your vocabulary so that you can know when to use which word and how.

Here is a list of some commonly confused words and their meaning.

coarse	rough
course	path; series of lectures
conscience	sense of morality
conscious	awake, aware
council	governing body
Counsel	advice; to give advice
dairy	place where milk products are processed
diary	personal journal
dessert	final, sweet course in a meal
desert	to abandon; dry, sandy area

device	a plan; a tool or utensil
devise	to create
fair	light skinned; just, honest; a carnival
fare	money for transportation; food
human	relating to the species <i>homo sapiens</i>
humane	compassionate
its	possessive form of "it"
it's	contraction for "it is"
loose	unbound, not tightly fastened
lose	to misplace
miner	a worker in a mine
minor	underage person (noun); less important (adj.)
moral	distinguishing right from wrong; lesson of a fable or story
morale	attitude or outlook usually of a group
passed	past tense of "to pass"
past	at a previous time
personal	intimate; owned by a person
personnel	employees
quiet	silent, calm
quite	very
respectfully	with respect
respectively	in that order

sight	scene, view, picture
site	place, location
cite	to document or quote (verb)
their	possessive form of "they"
there	in that place
they're	contraction for "they are"
weather	climatic condition
whether	if
whose	possessive for "of who"
who's	contraction for "who is"
your	possessive for "of you"
you're	contraction for "you are"

2.4. Ambiguity

Ambiguity is a word, phrase, or statement which contains more than one meaning.

Ambiguous words or statements lead to vagueness and confusion, and shape the basis for instances of unintentional humour. For instance, it is ambiguous to say “I rode a black horse in red pyjamas,” because it may lead us to think the horse was wearing red pyjamas. The sentence becomes clear when it is restructured “Wearing red pyjamas, I rode a black horse.” Similarly, same words with different meanings can cause ambiguity e.g. “John took off his trousers by the bank.” It is funny if we confuse one meaning of “bank” which is a building, to another meaning, being “an edge of a river”. This confusion can often be resolved by context.

2.5. General sense

When the meanings of words are not stated clearly in the context of the text, they may be *implied* - that is, suggested or hinted at. When meanings are implied, you may *infer* them. There are several ways to help you draw conclusions from what an author may be implying.

The meaning of a word may be implied by the general sense of its context, as the meaning of the word ***incarcerated*** is implied in the following sentence:

Murderers are usually incarcerated for longer periods of time than robbers.

You may infer the meaning of **incarcerated** by answering the question ‘What usually happens to those found guilty of murder or robbery?’ If you answered that they are locked up in prison, you correctly inferred the meaning of **incarcerated**.

3. SPELLING

There are several areas in which British and American spelling are different. This is because

British English has tended to keep the spelling of words it has absorbed from other languages (e.g. French), while American English has adapted the spelling to reflect the way that the words actually sound when they are spoken.

It is important to note that in South Africa, we have adopted the British English spelling rules for writing. Below are examples of words denoting the British English and American English variation of spelling.

British	American
accessorise	accessorize
apologise	apologize
behaviour	behaviour
calibre	caliber
catalogue	catalog or catalogue
cheque	check
colour	color
cosy	cozy
defence	defense
disc	disk
fibre	fiber
grey	gray
judgement	judgment

metre	meter
odour	odor
sulphur	sulfur
yoghurt	yogurt

Common misspellings

In addition to the spelling variations between British and American English, there are words that people commonly misspell. Below is a list of words with such words. Included in the list is the correct spelling of the word and tips on getting it right, so you can check to see whether you were also making the same mistakes.

Correct spelling	Spelling advice	Common misspelling
accommodate,	two cs, two ms	accomodate,
achieve	i before e	acheive
across	one c	accross
appearance	ends with -ance	appearence
beginning	double n before the -ing	begining
believe	i before e	beleive, belive
committee	double m, double t, double e	commitee
conscious	-sc- in the middle	concious
definitely	-ite- not -ate-	definatly
disappear	one s, two ps	dissappear
disappoint	one s, two ps	dissapoint
embarrass	two rs, two s's	embarass
environment	n before the m	enviroment
government	n before the m	goverment
harass	harassment one r, two s's	harrass, harrassment
immediately	ends with -ely	immediatly
interrupt	two rs	interupt
necessary	one c, two s's	neccessary
occasion	two cs, one s	ocassion, occassion
occurred	occurring two cs, two rs	occured, occuring
possession	two s's in the middle and	posession

preferred	two at the end	prefered, preferring
really	preferring two rs	realy
receive	two ls	recieve
referred,	e before i	refered, refering
separate	referring two rs	seperate
successful	-par- in the middle	succesful
surprise	two cs, two s's	suprise
tomorrow	begins with sur-	tommorow, tommorrow
truly	one m, two rs	truely
until	no e	untill
	one l at the end	