

INTRODUCTION

I. The importance of, and the ways of, building vocabulary -

Good vocabulary helps, not only in improved performance in English section of exams such as the GRE, but in greater enjoyment of the language and in effective communication as well.

Building a better vocabulary can be pleasurable. Even 15 minutes a day of concentrated study on a regular basis can bring about a rapid improvement in your vocabulary skills. This will, in turn, increase the effectiveness of your spoken and written communication. You will also understand others' ideas better. Overall, you would gain.

Many of the words you already know were probably picked up as you came across them while reading, in conversation, perhaps even while watching television. You may already know thousands, and you may continue to learn more whether you work at it or not. Consider this, though – if you learned only one new word a day for the next three years, you would have about a thousand new words in your vocabulary, whereas, if you learn ten new words a day, in one year you would have added over three thousand words to what you already know, and you would also have gained a lasting habit of learning and self-improvement.

There are no shortcuts to vocabulary improvement. However, as you learn new words, the easier it will be to connect a new word with words you already know, and thus remember its meaning. As such, your learning speed will increase even as your vocabulary grows. Let's look at the most effective steps you can take.

Read, and be aware of words:

Folks with low vocabulary levels don't enjoy reading. It's probably more of a task than a pleasure because they don't understand many of the words. If this applies to you, try reading easier matter. Newspapers are usually easier than magazines, and a magazine like Reader's Digest is usually easier to read than, say, The Economist. It's important to find things that you would enjoy reading, and to read as often and as much as possible, with the idea of learning new words always in mind.

Reading alone may not be enough to help you learn new words. When you read a novel, for instance, you must curb the desire to get on with the story and skip over unfamiliar or perhaps vaguely known words. While the totally unknown words stand out, you have to be especially aware of words that seem familiar to you but whose precise meanings you may not know. Take a closer look at such words. First, try to guess at a word's meaning from its context - that is, the sense of the passage in which it appears; second, if you have a dictionary on hand, look up the word's meaning immediately to confirm or correct your understanding. While this may slow down your reading speed initially, the improved understanding of each new word will eventually make reading easier and faster. (You could follow these steps even with words that you come across when you're listening to the radio, talking to friends, or watching television.)

Read whatever interests you. If magazines or illustrated books are your choice, read them, don't just look at the photographs. Reading and awareness of words will help you find most of the words you should be learning. It is also the best way to check on words you have already learned.

When people use a word that puzzles you, ask what it means, or write down the word and look it up later, before the context of the word evaporates.

Use a Dictionary:

The dictionary should be one of the most often used books in your home. Keep it where you can find it readily and use it often. If you do your reading and homework in the dining room or drawing room and the dictionary is on a shelf in the bedroom, you're less likely to use it.

The home dictionary should be large enough to contain much more than just spellings! It should contain extensive definitions, word origins, notes on usage, and examples. Get in to the habit of reading the entire entry for the word you look up. Remember, words can have more than one meaning, and the meaning you need for the word you are looking up may not be the first one given in your dictionary. Even if it is, the other meanings of the word will help you understand the different ways the word is used. Also, the word's "history", usually given at the end of the entry, can often give you a fascinating picture of the way the word has developed its current meaning. This will add to the pleasure of learning the word as well as help you remember it.

Use a Thesaurus:

Start referring to a Thesaurus, which carries groups of words within overall meaning. Familiarising yourself with groups of words, by meaning, is an effective method of being able to deal with contextual usage of words.

Use the Roots-Prefixes-Suffixes method:

One of the approaches to vocabulary building is to identify word 'parts' - roots, prefixes, and suffixes – and understand how these parts can go together to form different words. You will find this approach useful, because it helps you understand how several words are formed (at least half of the words in the English language are derived from Greek and Latin roots), and this can often be of help in figuring out a word's meaning from its context.

Let's consider the examples of a few familiar words:

Let's start with 'philosophy'. Simply put, 'phil' is the Greek root for 'love', while 'sopho' is the Greek root for 'knowledge'. Thus we have 'love of knowledge'. When we come across other words with the same roots, we can make a reasonably good assessment of what they could mean.

We could follow the 'phil' connection to 'philanthropy'. Since 'anthrop' is the root for 'man' or 'humans', we understand that the word means 'love of man' or 'humaneness'. Taking this further, we could consider 'anthropology'. Since any 'ology' is the set of truths obtained through study, we understand that the word means the study of mankind. And so on...

Test yourself with games and puzzles:

Try your hand at Boggle and Scrabble, games which are good fun and help you learn and use new words. Try the crosswords in the newspapers, as well.

Use the Internet:

There are thousands of sites on the Web that help the 'vocab' enthusiast, including many free sites that mail you a word a day, a vocab tip a day, and so on – apart from those that have tests, puzzles, and word games.

Refer to vocabulary-building aids (books, etc.). These can effectively supplement the efforts you make through the first two steps discussed above. The advantages of such materials are that (i) they present you with words generally considered important to know, thus saving you time, (ii) they use the words in several sentences, so that you can see the words in different contexts, and (iii) they usually have exercises that test what you have learned.

Perhaps the most important factor in successful vocabulary building, however, is self-motivation. A larger vocabulary will help you in academics and at work. This is absolutely true. Believe this, stay keen, and look at adding to your word bank constantly. Your time could not be better spent.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is divided into many volumes for your perusal.

The General Word List presents words, meanings of words and usage in sentences. The words are given in alphabetical order.

There are some more words and their meanings given in the second volume (again in alphabetical order).

The Special Word List is particularly interesting. A wide variety of words has been classified into various categories. Particularly useful are the Idioms and Phrases, Confusable Words and Collocations which are tested in MBA Entrance Exams.

The fourth volume deals with Prefixes, Suffixes, Roots and Spellings. Knowing the roots will help you quickly associate with words having those roots.

This is followed by the fifth volume dealing with Word Groups.

You are advised to go through these volumes by spending some time on a daily basis. Try enjoying the process of learning new words. You can then attempt the simple tests on synonyms/word usage given in volume - VI.

Volumes VII and VIII deal with Vocabulary based Exercises and tests which will enhance your preparation for various MBA Aptitude tests.