

How many words?

Let us start with some definitions. The following words/terms/phrases and their described meanings will remain constant throughout this discussion. “Word” will refer a string of letters having finite length that exists in any reasonable consortium of the English language (i.e., “run” would count, but “oiasnvcowpevnfsfgio” would not count). “How many” will refer to the number of root English words, with proper nouns not included (i.e., “run” counts, but “running” and a shoe store called “Runner’s Place” each will not count). “Know” will refer to me having the proper knowledge necessary so that I may correctly state the definition of a given word. Words that are combinations of various common Latin roots which when put together have meanings that can be simply inferred will also be counted (i.e., Biology meaning “the study of life”, which can be inferred from its roots “bio-” meaning “life” and “-logy” meaning “the study of”).

The measure of this metric will consist of various vocabulary-testing websites that can be found with a simple internet search. I am mainly focused on netting a multitude of results and finding an average between them. The table below lists the websites used and how I was rated by each.

Website	Rating
https://my.vocabularysize.com/	16,300 word families
http://vocabulary.ugent.be/wordtest/start	61% of all English words
http://testyourvocab.com/	19,500 words
https://www.arealme.com/vocabulary-sizetest/en/	21,860 words
https://spellquiz.com/vocabulary-test	33,624 words
http://www.prolingua.co.jp/vocab_est_e.html	21,600 words
https://www.myvocab.info/en-en	12,700 word families

The source that evaluated my vocabulary as encompassing 61% of all English words is a far outlier from the rest, and will thus be discarded (using [BBC's](#) estimate of 171,146 English words, 61% would put me at a vocab size of over 104,000 words, which is quite obviously an unreasonably higher number than any of the other evaluations gave). An average of the other six evaluation sources puts me at a vocab size of about 20,930 words. Each site that I visited likely used its own roundabout way of estimating vocab size, so taking a simple average of the above sources may still not be as accurate as possible. However, unless there is some incredibly accurate way to determine vocab size that is to be revealed to us, an average of results from various sites is likely acceptable for all intents and purposes. [This article](#) from The Economist in 2013 lists the average adult native speaker having a vocab size of 20,000 – 35,000 words, so this indeed seems quite reasonable.

Another interesting aspect of this analysis would be the addition of possible pseudo-words and texting language (slang, pseudonyms, abbreviations, etc.) as well as my most used (i.e., top 10%) proper nouns (topics relating to CU, coding, sports, etc.). I don't imagine that including these would make a particularly massive difference, especially in comparison to my estimated vocabulary size of over 20,000 words. It may be interesting to see what kind of terms of these kinds I use the most, and how it has changed over time. Obviously, vocabulary size increases with age (at least as a young person), but the familiarity with proper nouns likely differs quite a bit from person to person (being a well-travelled individual would lead to a larger amount of name recognition of various companies, countries, cities, etc.).

In any case, my somewhat elementary method of quantifying the size of my vocabulary seems to have been quite effective. I am very interested to see how my results compare to that of my classmates, both those of who used methods similar to mine and those who chose various other methods of analysis.