



English Vocabulary

How many words do you need to know in English? This is a very common question and it varies depending on your goal. Because TalkEnglish.com focuses on speaking, the vocabulary presented in this section will be the most commonly used words in speaking.

1. There are roughly 100,000 word-families in the English language.
2. A native English speaking person knows between 10,000 (uneducated) to 20,000 (educated) word families.
3. Professor Paul Nation found that a person needs to know 8,000-9,000 word families to enjoy reading a book.
4. Studying heritage language learners reveal that a person with a vocabulary size of 2,500 passive word-families and 2,000 active word-families can speak a language fluently.

Many people do not know what a heritage language learner is. Let's say a person from Mexico moves to the US at the age of 5. The person knows basic Spanish and is fluent for a 5 year old but eventually English will become dominant. This person whose first language is Spanish actually does not know many Spanish words and must study Spanish to retain it. Because they grew up for 5 years speaking Spanish, they are a different type of language learners. This type of person is considered a heritage language learner.

GOOD NEWS - If your goal is to speak English fluently, you are not required to study 10,000 words. 2,000 is enough to get you started.

Here is another list of things to consider before studying vocabulary

1. Before studying vocabulary, understand the difference between each word in a word-family. By doing so, you will be able to understand how to use words more easily. A word-family is a grouping of words derived from the same base. For example, active, actively, activities, and activity are all in the same word-family.
2. There is a difference between passive vocabulary and active vocabulary. Passive vocabulary is used in reading and listening, where you are receiving information. Active vocabulary is used in writing and speaking, where you are giving information. In reading, you have time to think. If you want to be fluent, you don't have time to think because the definition of fluent is to speak smoothly and easily.
3. Your goal should be to increase the depth of your vocabulary knowledge instead of the breadth of your vocabulary knowledge. There are many English learners who know 8,000 words, but they cannot speak a single sentence. On the other hand, there are people who know only 2,000 words and they can speak fluently. The difference is how deeply you know a word. Knowing 10,000 words passively will not help you with speaking. Instead focus on learning the first 2,000 words deeply.
4. Learning vocabulary by memorizing the definition in your native language is an inefficient way to learn words. Rather, reading is the best way to increase your vocabulary. Learn words by seeing the word in a sentence. You can look up words in a dictionary, but study them in sentences, not the word itself.

The vocabulary words in the list below were created by extracting words from dialogs totaling more than 250,000 words. The only words to make it into the top 2,000 words were those that were present in 1) The British National Corpus top 3,000 words, 2) The Corpus of Contemporary American English top 5,000 words, and 3) The 3,000 most frequently spoken words from Longman Communication.

Before you start studying, watch this video to learn how to study and improve your [English Vocabulary](#).

If you had to choose the first 2,000 words to learn, the list below is very accurate. The number next to the link is the actual number.

[Top 2000 English Vocabulary Words used in Speaking](#) (2265)

Out of the 2265 words in the list, a total of 1867 word families were present.

[Top 2000 Word Families](#) (1867)

The following is broken down by type of words. All the words in the following lists are in the list of 2000 words. The sum is greater than 2,000 because many words can be both a noun and a verb.

Finally, before you start studying vocabulary, keep in mind that you will need to learn a lot more than 2,000 words. However, studying the right 2,000 words in the proper depth will help you to become fluent in English much faster.

[Top 1500 Nouns](#) (1524)

[Top 1000 Verbs](#) (1010)

[Top 500 Adjectives](#) (528)

[Top 250 Adverbs](#) (252)

[Top 60 Pronouns](#) (58)

[Top 50 Prepositions](#) (46)