

## Exam technique: What it means to 'know' a word

**Exam tip:** In the IELTS Speaking exam you will be judged on your use of vocabulary. Having a good vocabulary is not just about knowing lots of words and phrases. You have to know how to use them. If you use slang in the exam, it might sound inappropriate. Equally, some words that are extremely formal or old-fashioned are not often used in speaking, and might also sound inappropriate.

- 1 Match words 1–5 with their more neutral synonyms a–e. Which of the words 1–5 are informal and which are old-fashioned?

1 mate	a parents
2 beau	b boyfriend
3 bloke	c friend
4 folks	d members of a family
5 kinsfolk	e man

- 2 To really *know* a piece of vocabulary, you should know the following:

- 1 What part of speech is it? For example, what part of speech is *folks*? What part of speech is *formal*?
- 2 What are the other parts of speech of the word? For example: *formalise*. (v)
- 3 Is the word slang, informal, formal, or old-fashioned? Is it used in all English-speaking countries or just in some countries? For example, is *bloke* used in the UK or the US?
- 4 Does the word have any connotations you should be aware of? For example, both *slim* and *skinny* mean *thin*, but which can be insulting and which is complimentary?
- 5 How do you pronounce the word, and which syllable is stressed? For example, which syllable is stressed in *boyfriend*? Which syllable is stressed in *acquaintance*?
- 6 Note the grammar of the word/phrase. Is it an irregular verb (for example, *seek-sought-sought*) or a noun with an irregular plural (for example, *man-men*)? Is it followed by a particular preposition?
- 7 Are there any useful collocations? For example, you know the word *friend*, but do you know and use all these collocations: *a close friend*, *make friends (with somebody)*, *a circle of friends*. Do you know any other collocations with *friend*?

Use a dictionary to find answers to the questions in points 1–7.