

Easy Ways to Improve and Expand Your Vocabulary: Seven Tips for Learning New Words

Communicate (speak and write) more clearly and concisely using these seven tips for learning new words... easy ways to improve and expand your vocabulary.

Looking for tips for improving your vocabulary? Whether you are trying to strengthen and broaden your vocabulary for school or personal growth, the key is a commitment to regularly learning new words.

Why expand your knowledge and use of words? You'll be able to communicate (speak and write) more clearly and concisely, people will understand you more easily, and you will increase the perception (and reality) that you are an intelligent person. Besides, learning new words is a fun activity -- and one you can even do with the people around you. Challenge a friend, family member, or roommate to learn new words with you.

This article reviews seven easy ways to improve your vocabulary and learn new words.

- 1. Read, read, and read.** The more you read -- especially novels and literary works, but also magazines and newspapers -- the more words you'll be exposed to. As you read and uncover new words, use a combination of attempting to derive meaning from the context of the sentence as well as from looking up the definition in a dictionary.
- 2. Keep a dictionary and thesaurus handy.** Use whatever versions you prefer -- in print, software, or online. When you uncover a new word, look it up in the dictionary to get both its pronunciation and its meaning(s). Next, go to the thesaurus and find similar words and phrases -- and their opposites (synonyms and antonyms, respectively) -- and learn the nuances among the words.
- 3. Use a journal.** It's a good idea to keep a running list of the new words you discover so that you can refer back to the list and slowly build them into your everyday vocabulary. Plus, keeping a journal of all your new words can provide positive reinforcement for learning even more words -- especially when you can see how many new words you've already learned.
- 4. Learn a word a day.** Using a word-a-day calendar or Website -- or developing your own list of words to learn -- is a great technique many people use to learn new words. This approach may be too rigid for some, so even if you do use this method, don't feel you *must* learn a new word every day. (Find some word-a-day Websites at the end of this article.)
- 5. Go back to your roots.** One of the most powerful tools for learning new words -- and

deciphering the meaning of other new words -- is studying Latin and Greek roots. Latin and Greek elements (prefixes, roots, and suffixes) are a significant part of the English language and a great tool for learning new words. (Follow these links for the sections of this site that provide English Vocabulary Derived from Latin and English Vocabulary Derived from Greek.)

6. Play some games. Word games that challenge you and help you discover new meanings and new words are a great and fun tool in your quest for expanding your vocabulary.

Examples include crossword puzzles, anagrams, word jumble, Scrabble, and Boggle. (Find some word-game Websites at the end of this article.)

7. Engage in conversations. Simply talking with other people can help you learn discover new words. As with reading, once you hear a new word, remember to jot it down so that you can study it later -- and then slowly add the new word to your vocabulary.

Final Thoughts On Improving and Expanding Your Vocabulary

You hold the key to a better vocabulary. By using the tips outlined in this article, you should be well on your way to discovering and learning new words to expand your vocabulary and strengthen your use of the English language.

Finally, remember that you must practice putting your new words into your writing and speaking or risk not retaining them in your brain. Use repetition exercises when you first learn a word -- and consider other learning techniques, such as index cards, recording yourself reciting your words, association games, and mnemonics.

Some Vocabulary Tools/Websites

Here are some useful (if slightly random) tools for helping improve your vocabulary:
Dictionary.com's Word-of-the-Day

English-Word Information

Free Rice: Learn Vocabulary, Donate Rice to UN World Food Program
Get The Words

Improving Vocabulary

Vocabulary.com: Free Word Puzzles and Activities

Vocab Vitamins: MyWordADay, Grammar, Vocabulary Supplements
WordPlays.com: Word Games

Here is a list of the most common prefixes:

PREFIX	MEANING	EXAMPLES
ante-	before	antenatal, anteroom, antedate
anti-	against, opposing	antibiotic, antidepressant, antidote
circum-	around	circumstance, circumvent, circumnavigate
co-	with	co-worker, co-pilot, co-operation
de-	off, down, away from	devalue, defrost, derail, demotivate
dis-	opposite of, not	disagree, disappear, disintegrate, disapprove
em-, en-	cause to, put into	embrace, encode, embed, enclose, engulf
epi-	upon, close to, after	epicentre, eposcope, epidermis
ex-	former, out of	ex-president, ex-boyfriend, exterminate
extra-	beyond, more than	extracurricular, extraordinary, extra-terrestrial
fore-	before	forecast, forehead, foresee, foreword, foremost
homo-	same	homosexual, homonuclear, homoplastic
hyper-	over, above	hyperactive, hyperventilate
il-, im-, in-, ir-	not	impossible, illegal, irresponsible, indefinite
im-, in-	into	insert, import, inside
infra-	beneath, below	infrastructure, infrared, infrasonic, infraspecific
inter-, intra-	between	interact, intermediate, intergalactic, intranet
macro-	large	macroeconomics, macromolecule
micro-	small	microscope, microbiology, microfilm, microwave
mid-	middle	midfielder, midway, midsummer
mis-	wrongly	misinterpret, misfire, mistake, misunderstand
mono-	one, singular	monotone, monobrow, monolithic
non-	not, without	nonsense, nonentity, nondescript
omni-	all, every	omnibus, omnivore, omnipotent
para-	beside	parachute, paramedic, paradox
post-	after	post-mortem, postpone, post-natal
pre-	before	prefix, predetermine, pre-intermediate

semi-	half	semicircle, semi-final, semiconscious
sub-	under	submerge, submarine, sub-category, subtitle
super-	above, over	superfood, superstar, supernatural, superimpose
therm-	heat	thermometer, thermostat, thermodynamic
trans-	across, beyond	transport, transnational, transatlantic
tri-	three	triangle, tripod, tricycle
un-	not	unfinished, unfriendly, undone, unknown
uni-	one	unicycle, universal, unilateral, unanimous

A suffix is a letter or a group of letters that is usually attached to the end of a word to form a new word, as well as alter the way it functions grammatically.

Depending on whether it is a noun, verb, adjective or adverb, a different suffix would be required. For example, the verb *read* can be altered to become the noun *reader* by adding the suffix *-er*. The same verb can also be turned into the adjective *readable* by adding the suffix *-able*.

It is just as important to understand the definitions of suffixes as prefixes, because they too help us to deduce the meanings of any new words that we learn. I have listed some of the most common suffixes below:

SUFFIX	MEANING	EXAMPLE
NOUN SUFFIXES		
-acy	state or quality	democracy, accuracy, lunacy
-al	the action or process of	remedial, denial, trial, criminal
-ance, -ence	state or quality of	nuisance, ambience, tolerance
-dom	place or state of being	freedom, stardom, boredom
-er, -or	person or object that does a specified action	reader, creator, interpreter, inventor, collaborator, teacher
-ism	doctrine, belief	Judaism, scepticism, escapism
-ist	person or object that does a specified action	-sion, -tion state of being position
ment	condition	enchantment, argument
-ness	state of being	heaviness, highness, sickness
-ship	position held	friendship, hardship, internship

esque	in a manner of or	
resembling	picturesque, burlesque,	
grotesque		
-ful	notable for	handful, playful, hopeful, skilful
-ic, -ical	having the character of	
	psychological, hypocritical, methodical,	
, musical		
-ious, -ous	characterised by	pious, jealous, religious, ridiculous
-ish	having the quality of	squeamish, sheepish, childish
-ive	having the nature of	inquisitive, informative, attentive
-less	without	meaningless, hopeless, homeless
-y	characterised by	dainty, beauty, airy, jealousy

ADVERB – SUFFIXES

-ly	related to or quality	softly, slowly, happily, crazily, madly
-ward, -wards	direction	towards, afterwards, backwards, inward
-wise	in relation to	otherwise, likewise, clockwise

Synonyms

Words that have similar definitions are known as **synonyms**. We use synonyms constantly in speech and in writing. These are the words that can be used interchangeably, but the meaning of the message remains the same. For example, look at these two sentences:

1. The long baseball game lasted over four hours
2. The lengthy baseball game lasted over four hours.

Which word was changed in the second sentence? 'Lengthy' replaced the word 'long.' But did the meaning of the sentence change? No, it did not, because 'long' and 'lengthy' are synonyms; they have similar definitions. Synonyms can generally be used interchangeably without a change in meaning of the overall message.

Many synonyms are very useful because they can show different variations of the same understanding. To show this, let's look at the word 'good.' We all know the meaning of 'good.' It is one of the first understandings you come to as a child, and you learn quickly what it means to be a good kid. Generally speaking, 'good' can be defined as something correct or pleasant and enjoyable. There are numerous synonyms for good: okay, well, fine, great, excellent, magnificent and wonderful. All these words are describing a positive event or experience, but the variations can show a clearer understanding. For example, an 'okay day' is not as good as an 'excellent day.' But a 'wonderful day' is just about the same as a 'magnificent day.' The range of synonyms can give the audience or reader a better understanding of the speaker's exact intentions.

Understanding synonyms is important for not only precise communication, but variety in language. As a writer, you should use synonyms to reduce redundancy and keep writing or speech interesting to the audience. Remember the whole point of language is to express oneself or to send a message. If the audience gets bored or confused by the same word being used over and over, the message will be lost.

Choosing a Synonym

There is a certain skill involved in choosing the most appropriate synonym, as not all are created equal. It is important to consider the connotation of the word because some synonyms can inject a different meaning than the one intended.

For example, one synonym of sad is "gloomy" however, this word carries quite a negative connotation. Depending on the circumstance you can use it, but if you just want to say that someone is "down," then another synonym such as "blue" or "unhappy" would be more applicable.

Here is a list of adjectives and their synonyms that are commonly used to describe people.

- Beautiful: Attractive, Pretty, Lovely, Stunning
- Fair: Just, Objective, Impartial, Unbiased
- Funny: Humorous, Comical, Hilarious, Hysterical
- Happy: Content, Joyful, Mirthful, Upbeat
- Hardworking: Diligent, Determined, Industrious, Enterprising
- Honest: Honorable, Fair, Sincere, Trustworthy
- Intelligent: Smart, Bright, Brilliant, Sharp
- Introverted: Shy, Bashful, Quiet, Withdrawn
- Kind: Thoughtful, Considerate, Amiable, Gracious
- Lazy: Idle, Lackadaisical, Lethargic, Indolent
- Mean: Unfriendly, Unpleasant, Bad-tempered, Difficult
- Outgoing: Friendly, Sociable, Warm, Extroverted
- Rich: Affluent, Wealthy, Well-off, Well-to-do
- Strong: Stable, Secure, Solid, Tough
- Unhappy: Sad, Depressed, Melancholy, Miserable
- Lucky: Auspicious, Fortunate
- Positive: Optimistic, Cheerful, Starry-eyed, Sanguine
- Bossy: Controlling, Tyrannical

Here are some miscellaneous words and their synonyms:

- Baffle: confuse, deceive
- Hypocrisy: duplicity, falseness
- Pacify: appease, placate

Recalcitrant: obstinate, stubborn

- Turbulent: disordered, violent
- Valid: authorized, legitimate
- Old: antiquated, ancient, obsolete, extinct, past, prehistoric, venerable, aged
- True: genuine, reliable, factual, accurate, precise, correct, valid, real
- Important: required, substantial, vital, essential, primary, significant, requisite, critical
- Weak: frail, anemic, feeble, infirm, languid, sluggish, puny, fragile

Amazing — incredible, unbelievable, improbable, fabulous, wonderful, fantastic, astonishing, astounding, extraordinary

Anger — enrage, infuriate, arouse, nettle, exasperate, inflame, madden

Angry — mad, furious, enraged, excited, wrathful, indignant, exasperated, aroused, inflamed

Answer — reply, respond, retort, acknowledge

Ask- — question, inquire of, seek information from, put a question to, demand, request, expect, inquire, query, interrogate, examine, quiz

Awful — dreadful, terrible, abominable, bad, poor, unpleasant

Bad — evil, immoral, wicked, corrupt, sinful, depraved, rotten, contaminated, spoiled, tainted, harmful, injurious, unfavorable, defective, inferior, imperfect, substandard, faulty, improper, inappropriate, unsuitable, disagreeable, unpleasant, cross, nasty, unfriendly, irascible, horrible,

atrocious, outrageous, scandalous, infamous, wrong, noxious, sinister, putrid, snide, deplorable, dismal, gross, heinous, nefarious, base, obn

oxious, detestable, despicable, contemptible, foul, rank, ghastly, execrable

ADVERTISEMENT

Beautiful — pretty, lovely, handsome, attractive, gorgeous, dazzling, splend

magnificent, comely, fair, ravishing, graceful, elegant, fine, exquisite, aesthetic, pleasing, shapely, delicate, stunning, glorious, heavenly, resplendent, radiant, glowing, blooming, sparkling

Begin — start, open, launch, initiate, commence, inaugurate, originate

Big — enormous, huge, immense, gigantic, vast, colossal, gargantuan, large, sizable, grand, great, tall, substantial, mammoth, astronomical, ample, broad, expansive, spacious, stout, tremendous, titanic, mountainous

Brave — courageous, fearless, dauntless, intrepid, plucky, daring, heroic, valorous, audacious, bold, gallant, valiant, doughty, mettlesome

Break — fracture, rupture, shatter, smash, wreck, crash, demolish, atomize

Bright — shining, shiny, gleaming, brilliant, sparkling, shimmering, radiant, vivid, colorful, lustrous, luminous, incandescent, intelligent, knowing, quick-witted, smart, intellectual

Calm — quiet, peaceful, still, tranquil, mild, serene, smooth, composed, collected, unruffled, level-headed, unexcited, detached, aloof

Come — approach, advance, near, arrive, reach

Cool — chilly, cold, frosty, wintry, icy, frigid

Crooked — bent, twisted, curved, hooked, zigzag

Cry — shout, yell, yowl, scream, roar, bellow, weep, wail, sob, bawl

Cut — gash, slash, prick, nick, sever, slice, carve, cleave, slit, chop, crop, lop, reduce

Dangerous — perilous, hazardous, risky, uncertain, unsafe

Dark — shadowy, unlit, murky, gloomy, dim, dusky, shaded, sunless, black, dismal, sad

Decide — determine, settle, choose, resolve

Definite — certain, sure, positive, determined, clear, distinct, obvious

Delicious — savory, delectable, appetizing, luscious, scrumptious, palatable, delightful, enjoyable, toothsome, exquisite

Describe — portray, characterize, picture, narrate, relate, recount, represent, report, record

Destroy — ruin, demolish, raze, waste, kill, slay, end, extinguish

Difference — disagreement, inequity, contrast, dissimilarity, incompatibility

Do — execute, enact, carry out, finish, conclude, effect, accomplish, achieve, attain

Dull — boring, tiring, tiresome, uninteresting, slow, dumb, stupid, unimaginative, lifeless, dead, insensible, tedious, wearisome, listless, expressionless, plain, monotonous, humdrum, dreary

Eager — keen, fervent, enthusiastic, involved, interested, alive to

End — stop, finish, terminate, conclude, close, halt, cessation, discontinuance

Enjoy — appreciate, delight in, be pleased, indulge in, luxuriate in, bask in, relish, devour, savor, like

Explain — elaborate, clarify, define, interpret, justify, account for

Fair — just, impartial, unbiased, objective, unprejudiced, honest

Fall — drop, descend, plunge, topple, tumble

False — fake, fraudulent, counterfeit, spurious, untrue, unfounded, erroneous, deceptive, groundless, fallacious

Famous — well-known, renowned, celebrated, famed, eminent, illustrious, distinguished, noted, notorious

Fast — quick, rapid, speedy, fleet, hasty, snappy, mercurial, swiftly, rapidly, quickly, snappily, speedily, lickety-split, posthaste, hastily, expeditiously, like a flash

Fat — stout, corpulent, fleshy, beefy, paunchy, plump, full, rotund, tubby, pudgy, chubby, chunky, burly, bulky, elephantine

Fear — fright, dread, terror, alarm, dismay, anxiety, scare, awe, horror, panic, apprehension

Fly — soar, hover, flit, wing, flee, waft, glide, coast, skim, sail, cruise

Funny — humorous, amusing, droll, comic, comical, laughable, silly

Get — acquire, obtain, secure, procure, gain, fetch, find, score, accumulate, win, earn, rep, catch, net, bag, derive, collect, gather, glean, pick up, accept, come by, regain, salvage

Definition of Antonyms

An **antonym** is a word that means the opposite of another word. For instance, the antonym of 'hot' may be 'cold.' The root words for the word 'antonym' are the words 'anti,' meaning 'against' or 'opposite,' and 'onym,' meaning 'name.'

In order to better understand antonyms, let's take a look at what the word 'synonym' means. A **synonym** is a word that has a similar meaning to or exactly the same meaning as another word. Synonyms and antonyms are exactly the opposite.

Why Are Antonyms Important?

Oddly enough, to better understand the meaning of a word, we can take a look at its antonym, or opposite meaning. For instance, take the word 'morose.' The definition of 'morose' is 'gloomily or sullenly ill-humored.' Sometimes, even reading a dictionary definition is not enough to give us a complete understanding of a word. Most dictionaries provide synonyms and antonyms, as well.

For instance, here are a few listed synonyms for the word 'morose:' 'moody,' 'sour,' 'sulky.' Also, here are a few antonyms: 'cheerful' and 'optimistic.' Now we know that the opposite of 'morose' is cheerful and even optimistic! Taking a look at both the synonyms and antonyms really provides us with a clearer definition.

Using Antonyms in Writing

Sometimes, we get stuck when trying to choose the best word in a sentence, or we tend to use the same words too often. For instance, we might be looking for a word that means the opposite of 'courageous,' but we want to choose a different word than 'scared.' Let's take on the antonym challenge and see if we can find a better word!

Important Antonyms List

Absence	presence
Accept	refuse
Accurate	inaccurate
Advantage	disadvantage
Alive	dead
Always	never
Ancient	modern
Answer	question, query
Approval	disapproval
Approached	receded, departed
Abundant	scarce
Admit	deny
Advance	retreat, retire
Artificial	natural
Arrival	departure
Ascend	Descend
Attack	Defense
Attractive	Repulsive
Attention	Inattention
Asleep	Awake
Ally	Enemy
Agree	Disagree

bad	good
backward	forward, onward
bend	straighten
beautiful	ugly
beginning	ending
below	above
bent	straight
big	small, little
blunt	sharp
better	worse
best	worst
blame	praise
bless	curse
bitter	sweet
borrow	lend
bravery	cowardice
build	destroy, demolish
bold	timid, meek
bright	dull
broad	narrow
clear	vague, cloudy
careful	rush, careless
calm	troubled

capable	incapable
captivity	freedom, liberty
cellar	attic
cheap	dear, expensive
close	distant
clever	stupid
cold	hot
combine	separate
clockwise	anti-clockwise
correct	incorrect
conceal	reveal
come	go
common	rare
comfort	discomfort
courage	cowardice
cruel	kind
courteous	discourteous, rude
cunning	simple
dainty	clumsy
danger	safety
dark	light
deep	shallow
decrease	increase

definite	indefinite
demand	supply
despair	hope
disappear	appear
disease	health
discourage	encourage
dismal	cheerful
doctor	patient
dry	wet
dull	clear, bright
dusk	dawn
early	late
easy	difficult
ebb	flow
East	West
economise	waste
encourage	discourage
entrance	exit
employer	employee
empty	full
excited	calm
end	beginning
expand	contract

Reading comprehension is the ability to read text, process it and understand its meaning. An individual's ability to comprehend text is influenced by their traits and skills, one of which is the ability to make inferences. If word recognition is difficult, students use too much of their processing capacity to read individual words, which interferes with their ability to comprehend what is read. There are a number of approaches to improve reading comprehension, including improving one's vocabulary and reading strategies.

Reading comprehension is incredibly complex and multifaceted. Because of this, readers do not develop the ability to comprehend texts quickly, easily or independently. Reading comprehension strategies must be taught over an extended period of time by parents and teachers who have knowledge and experience using them. It might seem that once a child learns to read in the elementary grades he is able to tackle any future text that comes his way. This is not true. Reading comprehension strategies must be refined, practiced and reinforced continually throughout life. Even in the middle grades and high school, parents and teachers need to continue to help their children develop reading comprehension strategies. As their reading materials become more diverse and challenging, children need to learn new tools for comprehending these texts. Content area materials such as textbooks and newspaper, magazine and journal articles pose different reading comprehension challenges for young people and thus require different comprehension strategies. The development of reading comprehension is a lifelong process that changes based on the depth and breadth of texts the person is reading.

Reading comprehension includes all of the processes related to deriving meaning from written language (including books and other forms of written language) and constructing meaning from written language. "Deriving meaning" indicates that there is meaning in texts and that meaning needs to be understood. "Constructing meaning" indicates that often readers go beyond the meaning explicitly contained in the text and add to that meaning based on their own experience and their ability to infer additional or deeper meaning. Thus reading comprehension is much more than the ability to read individual words and know what those words mean. To comprehend what one reads is to understand the meaningful message sent by the author.

The following knowledge, skills, and dispositions are all brought to bear in comprehending a text:

Literacy Awareness

- *Literacy awareness:* Literacy awareness includes knowing that written language has meaning and purpose, and that there are conventions in printed language (e.g., left-right and top-down progression of words on the page; sequence of pages; title page; table of contents; index; etc).

Decoding Skill

- *Decoding skill:* Decoding skill includes knowledge of the alphabetic code (i.e., that there are systematic relations between the sounds of the language and written letters and combinations of letters on a page); ability to attack and decode ("sound out") familiar

and unfamiliar words; and reasonable fluency (ease and speed) of decoding. Fluent decoding is critical for effective comprehension; students who do not decode fluently exhaust their limited cognitive resources on decoding and are therefore unlikely to comprehend effectively what they read.

Language Factors

- *Language knowledge: Phonological awareness:* Phonological awareness refers to awareness of the sound system of the language. This includes awareness of words that rhyme (end the same) and alliterate (start the same); ability to break words into

component syllables (e.g., blackboard = black + board) and component sounds (mat = m+a+t). The latter is known as phonemic awareness and is critical for fluent decoding.

- *Language knowledge: Word knowledge:* Word knowledge includes knowing the meaning of words (e.g., understanding them when they are spoken), including multiple meanings of ambiguous words. Good readers have a broad vocabulary.
- *Language knowledge: Discourse structures:* Discourse structures are the conventional ways in which people organize stories, descriptions, explanations, and the like. For example, a simple story (or an episode in a longer story) typically begins with the characters, place and time; then moves to some event that starts the action of the episode; then describes how the main characters react to that event; then describes how they plan to deal with the issue; then presents the unfolding of the actions; then offers a resolution. This standard way to organize a story is called narrative organization, narrative discourse structure, or story grammar.
- *Language knowledge: Syntax rules:* Reading comprehension also assumes syntax knowledge and an ability to infer meaning from the order of words (e.g., “John hit Tom” means something different from “Tom hit John”).