

Introduction

WHY VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT COUNTS

You have probably often heard it said, “Building vocabulary is important.” Maybe you’ve politely nodded in agreement and then forgotten the matter. But it would be fair for you to ask, “*Why* is vocabulary development important? Provide some evidence.” Here are four compelling kinds of evidence.

- 1 Common sense tells you what many research studies have shown as well: vocabulary is a basic part of reading comprehension. Simply put, if you don’t know enough words, you are going to have trouble understanding what you read. An occasional word may not stop you, but if there are too many words you don’t know, comprehension will suffer. The content of textbooks is often challenging enough; you don’t want to work as well on understanding the words that express that content.
- 2 Vocabulary is a major part of almost every standardized test, including reading achievement tests, college and graduate school entrance exams, and armed forces and vocational placement tests. Test developers know that vocabulary is a key measure of both one’s learning and one’s ability to learn. It is for this reason that they include a separate vocabulary section as well as a reading comprehension section. The more words you know, then, the better you are likely to do on these important tests.
- 3 Studies have indicated that students with strong vocabularies are more successful in school. And one widely known study found that a good vocabulary, more than any other factor, was common to people enjoying successful careers in life. Words are in fact the tools not just of better reading, but of better writing, speaking, listening, and thinking as well. The more words you have at your command, the more effective your communication can be, and the more influence you can have on the people around you.
- 4 In today’s world, a good vocabulary counts more than ever. Far fewer people work on farms or in factories. Far more are in jobs that provide services or process information. More than ever, words are the tools of our trade: words we use in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Furthermore, experts say that workers of tomorrow will be called on to change jobs and learn new skills at an ever-increasing pace. The keys to survival and success will be the abilities to communicate skillfully and to learn quickly. A solid vocabulary is essential for both of these skills.

Clearly, the evidence is overwhelming that building vocabulary is crucial. The question then becomes, “What is the best way of going about it?”

WORDS IN CONTEXT: THE KEY TO VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

Memorizing lists of words is a traditional method of vocabulary development. However, a person is likely to forget such memorized lists quickly. Studies show that to master a word, you must see and use it in various contexts. By working actively and repeatedly with a word, you greatly increase the chance of really learning it.

The following activity will make clear how this book is organized and how it uses a words-in-context approach. Answer the questions or fill in the missing words in the spaces provided.

Inside Front Cover and Contents

Turn to the inside front cover.

- The inside front cover provides a _____ that will help you pronounce all the vocabulary words in the book.

Now turn to the table of contents on pages v–vi.

- How many chapters are in the book? _____
- What two sections conclude each unit? _____
- Three short sections follow the last chapter. The first of these sections provides a limited answer key, the second gives helpful information on using _____, and the third is an index of the 300 words in the book.

Vocabulary Chapters

Turn to Chapter 1 on pages 8–11. This chapter, like all the others, consists of five parts:

- The **first part** of the chapter, on pages 8–9, is titled _____.

The left-hand column lists the ten words. Under each **boldfaced** word is its _____ (in parentheses). For example, the pronunciation of *affinity* is _____. For a guide to pronunciation, see the inside front cover as well as “Dictionary Use” on page 179.

Below the pronunciation guide for each word is its part of speech. The part of speech shown for *affinity* is _____. The vocabulary words in this book are mostly nouns, adjectives, and verbs. **Nouns** are words used to name something—a person, place, thing, or idea. Familiar nouns include *boyfriend*, *city*, *hat*, and *truth*. **Adjectives** are words that describe nouns, as in the following word pairs: *former* boyfriend, *large* city, *red* hat, *whole* truth. All of the **verbs** in this book express an action of some sort. They tell what someone or something is doing. Common verbs include *sing*, *separate*, *support*, and *imagine*.

To the right of each word are two sentences that will help you understand its meaning. In each sentence, the **context**—the words surrounding the boldfaced word—provides clues you can use to figure out the definition. There are four common types of context clues: examples, synonyms, antonyms, and the general sense of the sentence. Each is briefly described below.

1 Examples

A sentence may include examples that reveal what an unfamiliar word means. For instance, take a look at the following sentence from Chapter 1 for the word *incessant*:

The children nearly drove their parents crazy on the long car trip with their **incessant** demands: “Are we there yet? Is it much further? How much longer?”

The sentence provides three examples of incessant demands: “Are we there yet?”, “Is it much further?”, and “How much longer?” What do these three examples have in common? The answer to

that question will tell you what *incessant* means. Look at the answer choices below, and in the answer space provided, write the letter of the one you feel is correct.

___ *Incessant* means a. silent. b. wise. c. nonstop.

All of the examples given in the sentence are questions that young children on car trips ask over and over. So if you wrote *c*, you chose the correct answer.

2 Synonyms

Synonyms are words that mean the same or almost the same as another word. For example, the words *joyful*, *happy*, and *delighted* are synonyms—they all mean about the same thing. Synonyms serve as context clues by providing the meaning of an unknown word that is nearby. The sentence below from Chapter 2 provides a synonym clue for *dispassionate*.

The surgeon’s voice was **dispassionate** when he told the patient’s family that the operation had failed, but despite his calm tone, his eyes looked very sad.

Instead of using *dispassionate* twice, the author used a synonym in the second part of the sentence. Find that synonym, and then choose the letter of the correct answer from the choices below.

___ *Dispassionate* means a. unreasonable. b. unemotional. c. disturbing.

The author uses two terms to describe the surgeon’s tone of voice: *dispassionate* and *calm*. Therefore, *dispassionate* must be another way of saying *calm*. (The author could have written, “The surgeon’s voice was *calm*.”) Since *calm* can also mean *unemotional*, the correct answer is *b*.

3 Antonyms

Antonyms are words with opposite meanings. For example, *help* and *harm* are antonyms, as are *work* and *rest*. Antonyms serve as context clues by providing the opposite meaning of an unknown word. For instance, the sentence below from Chapter 1 provides an antonym clue for the word *opulence*.

The **opulence** of the magnificent, luxurious resort was in stark contrast to the poverty of the little fishing village at its gates.

The author is contrasting the resort and the fishing village, so we can assume that *opulence* and *poverty* have opposite, or contrasting, meanings. Using that contrast as a clue, write the letter of the answer that you think best defines *opulence*.

___ *Opulence* means a. closeness. b. riches. c. permanence.

The correct answer is *b*. Because *opulence* is the opposite of *poverty*, it must mean “riches.”

4 General Sense of the Sentence

Even when there is no example, synonym, or antonym clue in a sentence, you can still deduce the meaning of an unfamiliar word. For example, look at the sentence from Chapter 1 for the word *affinity*.

My cat has an **affinity** for small, dark hiding places—I’ve found her asleep in my dresser drawer, under the footstool, and inside my suitcase.

After studying the context carefully, you should be able to figure out the connection between the cat and small, dark hiding places. That will be the meaning of *affinity*. Write the letter of your choice.

___ *Affinity* means a. a preference. b. a fear. c. ignorance.

Since the sentence says that the cat is often found in these places, it is logical to conclude that the cat has a preference for them. Thus answer *a* is correct.

By looking closely at the pair of sentences provided for each word, as well as the answer choices, you should be able to decide on the meaning of a word. As you figure out each meaning, you are working actively with the word. You are creating the groundwork you need to understand and to remember the word. *Getting involved with the word and developing a feel for it, based upon its use in context, is the key to word mastery.*

It is with good reason, then, that the directions at the top of page 8 tell you to use the context to figure out each word's _____. Doing so deepens your sense of the word and prepares you for the next activity.

- The **second part** of the chapter, on page 9, is titled _____.

According to research, it is not enough to see a word in context. At a certain point, it is helpful as well to see the meaning of a word. The matching test provides that meaning, but it also makes you look for and think about that meaning. In other words, it continues the active learning that is your surest route to learning and remembering a word.

Note the caution that follows the test. Do not proceed any further until you are sure that you know the correct meaning of each word as used in context.

Keep in mind that a word may have more than one meaning. In fact, some words have quite a few meanings—and may even be more than one part of speech. (If you doubt it, try looking up in a dictionary, for example, the word *draw* or *fast*.) In this book, you will focus on one common meaning for each vocabulary word. However, many of the words have additional meanings. For example, in Chapter 1, you will learn that *fledgling* is an adjective meaning “inexperienced,” as in the sentence “Myra and her sisters are excited about their fledgling catering service.” If you then look up *fledgling* in the dictionary, you will discover that it has another meaning as a noun—“a young bird that has recently acquired its flight feathers,” as in “We watched a robin giving flying lessons to her three fledglings.” After you learn one common meaning of a word, you will find yourself gradually learning its other meanings in the course of your school and personal reading.

- The **third part** of the chapter, on page 10, is titled _____.

Here are ten sentences that give you an opportunity to apply your understanding of the ten words. After inserting the words, check your answers in the limited key at the back of the book. Be sure to use the answer key as a learning tool only. Doing so will help you to master the words and to prepare for the last two activities and the unit tests, for which answers are not provided.

- The **fourth and fifth parts** of the chapter, on pages 10–11, are titled _____ and _____.

Each practice tests you on all ten words, giving you two more chances to deepen your mastery. In the fifth part, you have the context of an entire passage in which you can practice applying the words.

At the bottom of the last page of this chapter is a box where you can enter your score for the final two checks. These scores should also be entered into the vocabulary performance chart located on the inside back page of the book. To get your score, take 10% off for each item wrong. For example, 0 wrong = 100%, 1 wrong = 90%, 2 wrong = 80%, 3 wrong = 70%, 4 wrong = 60%, and so on.

You now know, in a nutshell, how to proceed with the words in each chapter. Make sure that you do each page very carefully. *Remember that as you work through the activities, you are learning the words.*

How many times in all will you use each word? If you look, you'll see that each chapter gives you the opportunity to work with each word six times. Each “impression” adds to the likelihood that the word will become part of your active vocabulary. You will have further opportunities to use the word in the crossword puzzle and unit tests that end each unit and on the computer disk that is available with the book.

In addition, many of the words are repeated in context in later chapters of the book. Such repeated words are marked with small circles (°). For example, which words from Chapter 1 are repeated in the Final Check on page 15 of Chapter 2?

A FINAL THOUGHT

The facts are in. A strong vocabulary is a source of power. Words can make you a better reader, writer, speaker, thinker, and learner. They can dramatically increase your chances of success in school and in your job.

But words will not come automatically. They must be learned in a program of regular study. If you commit yourself to learning words, and if you work actively and honestly with the chapters in this book, you will not only enrich your vocabulary—you will enrich your life as well.