

# To the Student

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## WHY A GOOD VOCABULARY MATTERS

At one time or another, you have probably heard someone say, “It’s important to have a good vocabulary.” Wanting to be polite, you may have agreed. But perhaps you really wanted to ask, “*Why* is having a good vocabulary important?” Here are five reasons why.

- 1 Knowing a lot of words makes it easier for you to understand others and for others to understand you.** Have you ever had trouble following what someone else was saying? Maybe you found it hard to understand a television news report. Perhaps you could not understand a doctor’s instructions for completing a medical form. Maybe you could not figure out what family members meant when they talked about an election. If you are like most people, you probably got upset when you didn’t understand what was being said.

It can also be difficult to tell others what you are thinking and feeling when you don’t know enough words. Maybe the words will not come when you are writing a letter to a sick neighbor. Perhaps you have a hard time explaining to relatives why you were hurt by something they did. Maybe you have trouble telling friends why you are so excited about your new apartment.

As your vocabulary gets larger, you will not have to work so hard to understand others—or to make others understand you. That, in turn, will make your life much easier.

- 2 A good vocabulary is the key to understanding what you read.** If you don’t know enough words, you are going to have trouble figuring out the meaning of what you read. One or two words whose meanings you don’t know may not stop you. However, if there are many words you don’t know, it will be hard for you to understand what you read. With a strong vocabulary, you will get more out of newspapers, magazines, books—or anything else you want to read.
- 3 A large vocabulary can help you score higher on tests.** Vocabulary is an important part of many tests—for example, the GED exam, college entrance exams, armed forces tests, and job placement tests. Why is that? It’s because the people who make up these exams know that vocabulary helps measure what you already know and how easily you can learn new information in the future. The more words you know, the better you will do on these exams.

- 4 A solid vocabulary will help you do better in school and at work.** Knowing many words makes you a better reader, writer, speaker, listener, and thinker. These are the skills you need to do well in the classroom and on the job. In school, having a good vocabulary helps you understand your textbooks, classmates, and teachers. And in the world of work, a good vocabulary counts as never before. More and more, workers are being asked to change jobs and learn new skills. Knowing how to learn quickly is the key to doing well in this fast-changing world. A good vocabulary makes it easier for you to understand new ideas so you can get ahead on the job—and stay there.
- 5 A strong vocabulary helps you believe in yourself.** Sometimes people who don't have large vocabularies feel they don't have what it takes to do well in today's world. They may sit quietly in the back of the classroom, nervous about joining in. They may hear about an interesting job opening but be afraid to apply. Having a strong vocabulary helps you feel you have what it takes to make your life better. In other words, having a strong vocabulary helps you build confidence. What is *confidence*? It is the belief that you can do things you used to think you would never be able to do.

Now you know why it is so important to have a good vocabulary. The next few pages tell how this book will help you build a strong vocabulary—one that can unlock doors that used to be tightly closed.

## HOW VOCABULARY BASICS IS DIFFERENT FROM OTHER BOOKS

The way most books try to build vocabulary is by asking students to memorize lists of words. But people usually forget memorized lists quickly. To learn a word really well, you must see and use it a number of times. *Vocabulary Basics* gives you the chance to use the new words in each chapter *seven different ways*. By the end of each chapter, you will easily remember what the new words mean because you will have used them so many times.

## UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK AS A WHOLE

### Inside Front Cover and Contents

By filling in the blanks below, you will understand how the book is organized. First, turn to the inside front cover. As you can see, the inside front cover provides a chart called \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_. This chart will help you figure out how to say the vocabulary words in the book. Next, turn to the Table of Contents on pages v–vi. There are \_\_\_\_\_ chapters in the book and a unit review after every \_\_\_\_\_ chapters. At the end of the last unit review, there are four short sections. The first section shows how to form verb tenses. The second gives information on making \_\_\_\_\_. The third section is a \_\_\_\_\_. The fourth section is a list of the \_\_\_\_\_ in the book.

## UNDERSTANDING EACH CHAPTER

Now it's time to turn to the first chapter in the book, on pages 8–13. This chapter, like all the others (except for the unit reviews), has seven parts. Each part is described below.

### 1. Learning Eight New Words

The first part of the chapter (see pages 8–9) is called “Learning Eight New Words.” The left-hand column lists eight **boldfaced** words. Underneath, you are shown how to say, or *pronounce*, each boldfaced word. For example, here is how to say **agreement**, the first word on page 8: uh-**gree**-muht. (Remember: for help on how to say the new words, see the guide on the inside front cover.)

After showing how to say the boldfaced word, the chapter gives the word's *part of speech*. What part of speech is *agreement*? It is a *noun*. 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. The words *boyfriend*, *city*, *hat*, and *truth* are all nouns. **Adjectives** are words that describe nouns, as in the following word pairs: *old* boyfriend, *large* city, *red* hat, *whole* truth. Many of the words in this book are **verbs**, words that show action. They tell what someone or something is doing. The words *ask*, *buy*, *drive*, *learn*, and *sing* are all verbs.

To the right of each boldfaced word are two sentences that will help you understand its meaning. And below the sentences are three possible meanings for the boldfaced word. From among the three choices, you select the answer that has the closest meaning to that of the boldfaced word. In each sentence, the other words near the boldfaced word—the *context*—will give clues that help you figure out the meaning of the boldfaced word. There are four kinds of context clues: *examples*, *words with similar meanings*, *words with opposite meanings*, and *the meaning of the sentence as a whole*. Each kind of context clue is described below.

- **Examples**

A sentence may have *examples* that help explain the meaning of the boldfaced word. For instance, take a look at the following sentence (from Chapter 1) and note how the examples (in *italics*) help explain the meaning of the word **agreement**:

After fighting for hours, the little girls made an **agreement** *to share their toys*.

The sentence gives an example of an agreement—sharing toys. To figure out what **agreement** means, think about the example. What would it mean if two children said they would share their toys? Now look at the three answer choices below. On the answer line to the left, write the letter of the answer you think is right.

\_\_\_ *Agreement* means      a. fight                      b. question                      c. promise

The examples make it clear that the two girls have made a *promise* to each other, so *c* is the correct answer.

- **Words with Similar Meanings**

Words with the *same* or *almost the same* meaning are called **synonyms** (**sin**-uh-nimz). For example, the words *joyful*, *happy*, and *pleased* are synonyms because they all mean about the same thing. Synonyms often give clues about the meaning of a nearby unknown word. Look at

the following sentence (from Chapter 1) and note how the synonym (in *italics*) helps explain the meaning of the word **prepare**:

Last year, I **prepared** all kinds of interesting dishes for our holiday dinner. But this year, I'm going to relax and let someone else *make* the meal.

Instead of using *prepare* again in the second sentence, the writer uses the synonym *make*. Now choose the letter of the right answer.

\_\_\_ *Prepare* means                      a. get ready                      b. watch                      c. leave

Since both *prepare the meal* and *make the meal* mean “get the meal ready,” answer *a* is correct.

#### • Words with Opposite Meanings

Words with *opposite* or *almost opposite* meanings are called **antonyms** (**an-toh-nimz**). For example, *help* and *hurt* are antonyms, as are *work* and *rest*. Antonyms can help you figure out the meanings of new words. How? By giving the opposite meaning of an unknown word, an antonym makes it easier to figure out what a new word means. Look at the following sentence from Chapter 1 and note how the antonym (in *italics*) helps explain the meaning of the word **cancel**. Then look at the three answer choices below and select the best answer.

I *had planned to* see the doctor today, but I feel so much better that I think I will **cancel** my visit there.

\_\_\_ *Cancel* means                      a. remember                      b. not do as planned                      c. get ready for

The sentence says that the writer *had planned to* see the doctor but now will *cancel* the visit. You can guess, then, that *cancel* has the opposite meaning of *plan to*. So *b* is the correct answer.

#### • The Meaning of the Sentence as a Whole

Sometimes there is no example, synonym, or antonym in a sentence. But even without these clues, you can figure out what a boldfaced word means by studying *the meaning of the sentence as a whole*. For example, look at the following sentence (from Chapter 1) and see if you can decide on the meaning of the word **flexible** simply by studying the rest of the sentence:

The new lamp next to my bed has a long neck that is so **flexible** it can be moved any way I want.

\_\_\_ *Flexible* means                      a. able to bend                      b. real                      c. heavy

It's clear that the neck of the new lamp must be able to bend in different ways. So *a* is the correct answer.

As you go through the “Learning Eight New Words” sections, look closely at the two sentences given for each word and at the answer choices. As you figure out the meaning of each word, you are doing what's needed to understand and remember the word. Working with the word in this way and seeing how it is used in a sentence are the keys to completing the rest of the chapter.

## 2. Matching Words with Meanings

The second part of the chapter (see page 9) is called “Matching Words with Meanings.” Often it is not enough to see how a word is used in a sentence. To understand a word fully, most people need to see the meaning, or *definition*, of the word. The matching activity gives the meaning of each new word, but it also makes you look for and think about each meaning. This is the best way to learn and remember a word. Now look at the *Be Careful* note that follows the matching activity. This note reminds you that you should not move on to the rest of the chapter until you are sure that you know the correct meaning of each word.

## 3. Adding One Word to an Item

The third part of the chapter (see page 10) is called “Adding One Word to a Sentence.” This section, with eight sentences, gives you a chance to show how well you understand the new words. After placing *one* word in each sentence, *be sure to check your answers* in the Limited Answer Key at the back of the book. Checking your answers will help you see if you really know the words. If you do, you are ready to complete the rest of the activities, for which answers are not given.

## 4. Adding Two Words to an Item

The fourth part (see page 10) is called “Adding Two Words to a Sentence.” This activity is a bit more difficult because you have to see which *two* words fit best in a sentence. The extra work you do to find the right answers will help you learn the words.

## 5. Showing You Understand the Words

The fifth part (see page 11), called “Showing You Understand the Words,” is made up of two sets of four items. Each item uses one of the chapter’s new words. By completing an item or by answering the question asked by an item, you show that you truly understand what the word means. You will, we think, have a lot of fun doing this activity.

## 6. Adding Words to a Reading

The sixth part (see page 12), called “Adding Words to a Reading,” has two interesting readings. By choosing the right word to fill in each blank, you get a good idea of the way the new words can be used in a paragraph.

## 7. Using the Words When Writing and Talking

The seventh part (see page 13) is called “Using the Words When Writing and Talking.” By coming up with your own ending for each item, you will be well on the way to making the words part of your everyday vocabulary.

At the end of the seventh part, you will find a box where you can enter your scores for “Adding One Word to an Item” through “Adding Words to a Reading.” To get your score for each part, count how many you got right. Then look at the “Number right” explanation below the box to see what your score is for that part. You should also enter your scores on the Vocabulary Performance Chart found on the inside back cover of the book.

Now you know how the chapters in *Vocabulary Basics* are organized. As you have seen, every chapter gives you the chance to work with the new words *seven times*. Each time you complete an activity, you get closer to making the new words part of your everyday vocabulary. And to give you even more practice, almost every chapter repeats some words from earlier chapters. (These repeated words are marked with small circles—like this<sup>o</sup>. If you are not sure of the meaning of a repeated word, turn to the Word List on pages 257–258. There you will find the page on which the word was first used.) In short, you will have plenty of chances to learn—and relearn—the words.

## UNDERSTANDING THE UNIT REVIEWS

As you saw earlier, there is a unit review at the end of every six chapters. Each unit review offers six different kinds of activities—everything from crossword puzzles to sentence writing. All in all, you will have the chance to practice each word in the unit *three* more times. When you finish the unit reviews, you will have worked *at least ten times* with each word in the book. By then, you should know the words so well that you will be ready to use them whenever you want.

Take a moment to look at the instructions for the final activity in the unit reviews (see page 53, for example). Note that when doing this final activity, you should “feel free to use **any tense of a boldfaced verb** and to make a **boldfaced noun plural**.” For example, for the verb *assist*, you might use a number of different *tenses*: “My family *assists* me when I have trouble with my schoolwork,” “Last summer, I *assisted* my uncle with the opening of his new store,” or “For two weeks, my friends *have been assisting* me with plans for the party.” For the noun *volunteer*, you might use the *plural form* and write or say, “Two *volunteers* came to the school to talk about fire safety.”

Like many people, you may have trouble remembering the correct form of some verb tenses and the correct plural form of some nouns. So, when doing this final activity, you will probably find it helpful to look at the charts on pages 249–251 and 252. They will give you the help you need.

## A FINAL THOUGHT

The facts are in. It *is* important to have a strong vocabulary. Having a good vocabulary makes you a better reader, writer, speaker, thinker, and learner. Having a good vocabulary can make things smoother for you at home, in school, and on the job. But learning new words will not happen easily or by itself. You must decide that you want to build your vocabulary and then work hard with the chapters in this book. If you do, you will not only add to your vocabulary—you will add to your life as well. Good luck.

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