

Skills 360 – Building a Better Vocabulary (Part 2)

Discussion Questions

1. When you read or hear a word that you don't know, how do you try to understand its meaning?
2. Do you have a system for writing down new words and expressions that you learn?
3. What's the best way to remember and practice new words that you learn?

Vocabulary

To take something to the next level: to improve, develop, or make something much better; "With the launch of their smart watch, Apple is going to take wearable tech to the next level."

To suit your purpose: to match or fit what you want to do; "We need to transport large groups of visitors, so a compact or mid-size car doesn't really suit our purpose."

Chock full: very or completely full; "We have to rent extra warehouse space because our storage facility is chock full of inventory that we can't move."

To keep in mind: to remember or think about something important; "When you're choosing a location for the conference, keep in mind how people will get there from the airport."

Collocation: a pair or group of words that are naturally or usually used together; "Instead of saying *make a deal*, you can use the common collocation *strike a deal*."

Piece of cake: very easy; "With your new content management system, adding pages and content to your website is a piece of cake."

To turn a profit: to make a profit or earn money through business; "Many small businesses don't actually turn a profit for the first three to five years."

When it comes to: regarding or with regards to; "I feel I'm pretty good with basic office software, but when it comes to advanced design and accounting programs I feel lost."

To give up: to quit; "Although Target's expansion into Canada hasn't been a huge success, the company isn't ready to give up trying to capture market share."

Back to square one: at the beginning or in a starting situation again; "We thought we almost had a deal, but the union rejected our offer and now it's back to square one."

To sort out: to determine or figure out; "Patty, I'm new here, so could you help me sort out which travel expenses I can claim and which I can't?"

A good starting place: a good first step in trying to do something; "If you're looking to improve your local network, your Chamber of Commerce or business improvement association are both good starting places."

To get a solid grasp: to understand something well; "Our ComputerPro workshops are designed to help your employees get a solid grasp of the software they use every day."

To chew over: to think about or consider; "I've been offered a good position at HP, but I need to chew it over for a couple of days before deciding."

To keep a record: to write things down or record them for future reference; "Please keep a record of how much you use your vehicle for work purposes and you will be compensated accordingly."

To come across: to find, discover, or encounter; "While I was flipping through the newspaper, I came across an interesting article about the future of the water industry."

To put to good use: to use something wisely or effectively; "The young entrepreneurs put their start-up funds to good use by purchasing key technology and developing a brand identity."

Masterpiece: an extremely good example, especially of writing, art, or music; "I really think our new TV spot is a masterpiece of advertising, and the great public response proves it."

To give you a leg up: to give an advantage or help you succeed at something; "An MBA can really give you a leg up over other job applicants."

To recall: to remember; "I can't recall exactly how much we earned in the first quarter, but I think it's somewhere around two million."

To dwell on: to think or talk too much about one thing; "Job-seekers shouldn't dwell too much on salary; they also need to consider benefits, workplace culture, and job flexibility."

To lean on: to rely or depend on; "If we want to expand our facility, we're going to have to lean on bank financing to do it because we don't have the cash reserves."

To reach for: to use something to help you when trying to solve a problem; "Instead of reaching for the instruction manual when you have a problem, just use the online help service."

To mimic: to imitate or copy in action or spoken words; "When our YouTube videos went viral, we had millions of teenagers mimicking our company spokesperson."

To commit to memory: to memorize or make yourself remember something; "Our boss has made a point of committing all the employees' family members' names to memory."

To take steps: to take actions to try to reach a goal; "Sales are slowing down, and if we don't take creative steps to turn the situation around, we'll be faced with a real crisis."

To be well on your way to something: making progress toward a goal or destination; "With an extremely successful first and second quarter, we're well on our way toward our yearly earnings target."

Transcript

Hello and welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast. I'm your host, Tim Simmons, and today I want to look at more ways to take your English vocabulary to the [next level](#).

So, you've found some great resources for studying English that [suit your purpose](#). You've got a variety of listening and reading material [chock full](#) of great words and expressions that you want to learn to use. But how do you do it? How do you take those words and expressions and not only remember them but also make them an active part of your working vocabulary? Well, there are several things to [keep in mind](#), and a few key techniques that you can use, as we'll see today.

One really important idea is that words are used in groups. Sometimes we call them "chunks" or "[collocations](#)." The basic idea is that we put words together in common patterns, and we should learn those patterns, not just individual words. Think of a simple sentence like "Dave is interested in golf." Understanding what "interested" means is a [piece of cake](#). But if you really want to make that a useful word, you need to pay attention to the fact that we say *be interested in* something. Take another example like the noun "profit." It's hard to use the word if you don't know that we usually say *make a profit* or [turn a profit](#).

The idea of groups of words is especially important [when it comes to](#) idioms and phrasal verbs, because *together* words can have a new meaning. So when we hear "[give up](#)", we don't think about *giving* or the idea of *up*, but the meaning they have together, which is "quit". And don't think about squares when you hear the expression "[back to square one](#)." Together, those words mean "start again."

Once you understand the importance of chunks of language, how can you [sort out](#) what those chunks mean? [A good starting place](#) is context. Look at how the words are used in the situation. From the situation, you can usually get clues to the meaning. Only after examining the context should you look at a definition. And if you really want to [get a solid grasp](#) on the meaning, you should look at more examples of the word or expression in a sentence. Good study materials should give you example sentences to learn from.

But it's not enough just to notice vocabulary and [chew over](#) its meaning. You need to *do* something with it if you're going to remember it and be able to use it. That starts with writing vocabulary down. [Keep a record](#) of good words and expressions that you [come across](#). Write down the word, the context, and example sentences if you can. This is not just so that you have something to review. The act of writing the word and examples down will help you remember it later.

Okay, beyond writing down what you've learned, you need to [put](#) your new vocabulary [to good use](#). This means trying to use the words you've learned in new sentences. You don't need to write a [masterpiece](#) on business communication; you just need to practice putting that new word into a different context. And if you struggle, look back to where you found it or your example sentences. From that context, you should be able to see how the word or expression fits into a sentence. And again, practicing like this will really [give you a leg up](#) in [recalling](#) the words.

Okay, it seems like we've been [dwelling on](#) reading and writing, but let's not forget listening. Learning words through listening is great if you want to actually apply them in conversation. We can learn how individual words sound, and how groups of words sound together. If you're using listening materials that include a transcript, don't [lean on](#) that transcript too soon. Really listen carefully before [reaching for](#) the written version.

Again, vocabulary you learn through listening should be written down and practiced in sentences. But to really take it to the next level, you should actually *say* the words. Start by repeating what you hear in your listening. Really try to [mimic](#) the sound and flow of speech. Then read aloud from your examples or the sentences you've written. And try to make completely new sentences just in speaking. In this way, you're getting your brain and mouth ready to actually apply the words in conversation.

As you probably realize, it's pretty easy to forget new words if we don't [take steps](#) to [commit](#) them [to memory](#). And even when we remember them when we hear or read them, it can be difficult to use them. But if you focus on chunks of language, if you look closely at how words are used in context, and if you write them down and practice using them in writing and speaking, you'll be [well on your way](#) to building a better vocabulary.

That's all for today. If you'd like to test yourself on what we've just covered, have a look at the [myBEonline.com](#) website. There you'll find a quiz about today's show as well as a complete transcript.

So long. And see you again soon.

Review

1. What important concept do the expressions “be interested in” and “turn a profit” illustrate?
 - A Collocation
 - B Grammatical usage
 - C Learning from listening
 - D Context

2. What is special or significant about phrasal verbs and idioms?
 - A They must be practiced more than other expressions to be remembered.
 - B They are uncommon in written English.
 - C They are key indicators of language ability.
 - D They have a new meaning beyond the meaning of the individual words.

3. Which of the following are mentioned as things that help us understand the meaning of new vocabulary and expressions? [choose all that apply]
 - A Context
 - B Grammar
 - C Example sentences
 - D Translators
 - E Definitions
 - F Pronunciation

4. Why should we write down new words and expressions? [choose 2]
 - A So that we have something to review.
 - B Because English spelling is difficult to master.
 - C So that we can share with colleagues.
 - D Because it will help us remember the words.

5. What should you do if you are struggling to make a new sentence using a given word or expression?
 - A Review the definition carefully.
 - B Look back to the context in which you found it.
 - C Consider related phrasal verbs or idioms.
 - D Focus on a different word that is easier or more common.

6. What are effective ways of learning vocabulary from listening? [choose all that apply]
 - A Always read a written version as you listen.
 - B Write down the useful words and expressions that you hear.
 - C Create new sentences in speaking with the words you’ve learned from listening.
 - D Pause recordings frequently to think carefully about what you’ve just heard.
 - E Listen carefully before looking at a transcript of what you’ve heard.
 - F Translate words and ideas in your head as you listen.
 - G Repeat out loud what you have heard.

Review Answers

1. What important concept do the expressions “be interested in” and “turn a profit” illustrate?

A Collocation

2. What is special or significant about phrasal verbs and idioms?

D They have a new meaning beyond the meaning of the individual words.

3. Which of the following are mentioned as things that help us understand the meaning of new vocabulary and expressions... [choose all that apply]

A Context

C Example sentences

E Definitions

4. Why should we write down new words and expressions? [choose 2]

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B Write down the useful words and expressions that you hear.

C Create new sentences in speaking with the words you’ve learned from listening.

E Listen carefully before looking at a transcript of what you’ve heard.

G Repeat out loud what you have heard.

Online Practice

Click the “Launch” button to open the **online practice**:

Launch Quiz