

Skills 360 – Building a Better Vocabulary (Part 1)

Discussion Questions

1. What types of materials do you usually use to practice reading and listening in English?
2. How do you usually remember or learn new words?
3. What kinds of words or expressions do you find useful to learn?

Vocabulary

(To take it to the) Next level: a more advanced level; if you “take it to the next level”, you are advancing, progressing, or doing something new; “If we want to take this little business to the next level, we’re going to need to attract some investors.”

Acceptable: good enough for a situation; “Jordan’s work is acceptable, but he’s certainly not going to get a promotion any time soon.”

Stock: the complete amount or collection of something that is available for you to use; “Looks like our stock of paper is running low, so could you call Staples and order a dozen boxes?”

Take the next step up: to advance, improve, or develop to the next level; “After five years as a junior account manager, I think I’m ready to take the next step up in my career.”

Proficiency: skill or ability; “Successful job applicants must demonstrate proficiency in all major design software.”

Materials: documents, books, or other things used for a special purpose; “Please make sure all the conference materials are printed at least a week before the big event.”

Resources: in education, “resources” are the things we use to study, such as books, websites, recordings, etc.; “The cost of the program includes all the resources you need to complete each course.”

Relevant: connected to a topic of discussion or activity; “Okay everyone, let’s make sure all our comments are directly relevant to the issue at hand or we’ll never finish this meeting.”

Context: the situation in which something happens; in language, “context” is the text or situation in which a word or expression is found; “It is best to avoid informal speech or slang in the context of a job interview.”

Sector: area or type of business; “I started out in the tech sector, but now I mainly work in finance.”

To limit: to stop something from growing or developing; “Fortunately, firefighters were able to limit the damage caused by the factory fire.”

"There are only so many hours in a day": when we want to emphasize that not everything is possible because there is not enough time, we can say "there are only so many hours in a day"; "Gee Brett, I'd love to get that report to you by Friday, but there are only so many hours in a day."

Best bang for your buck: best value or most worthwhile use of money, time, or other resources; "Considering location and age, the building on Gormand Street looks to be the best bang for our buck. Let's buy it."

Natural environment: we can talk about an animal's "natural environment" as the place the animal lives in the wild; the "natural environment" of other things, such as words, are the places they are usually found; "Jane is confident managing the office where she's worked for 20 years, but outside of her natural environment, she seems quite shy."

To incorporate: to include or add something to something else; "Overall, the design is very modern, but we've incorporated some small classical elements to the front of the building."

To identify: to see, notice, or understand what something or someone is; "A good entrepreneur can identify business opportunities in what seem like bad situations."

Something to work with: information that can help us do something, or resources to start a new activity; "Rather than letting the app developer guess what you want in terms of look and feel, give him something to work with, even if it's some rough sketches."

Frequency: how often something happens; "As the machine gets older, it is breaking down with increasing frequency."

Put another way: when we want to say something in different, sometimes simpler words, we can say "put another way"; "Your actions clearly contravene labor laws. Put another way: you can't do what you're doing."

To suit: to match or be appropriate for a person or situation; "A life coach can help you find a career that suits your personality."

Output: what something or someone produces or makes; in language, "output" is what we say or write; "Jesse's output as a copywriter is amazing; he can write more in a day than others can in a week."

Hence: for this reason or as a result, used to introduce a result or conclusion of something; "The CFO was found guilty of stealing money; hence, he was fired and forced to pay back what he'd taken."

Segmentation: dividing possible consumers into groups so that you can market or advertise to them appropriately; "Market segmentation has helped us design products that suit particular groups of people of certain ages, lifestyles, and locations."

Pip: a small fruit seed; "We can now grow all sorts of fruit without pips, such as watermelon, grapes, oranges, and lemons."

"The fact is": used to emphasize an important or surprising idea or point; "Don't go into real estate. The fact is, with so many new agents, competition is really fierce."

Transcript

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

Many students of English have the feeling that they've learned pretty much all the grammar they need. Many also feel that they can understand fairly well and speak and write at an [acceptable](#) level. But these same people sometimes feel that they're missing something, and that they say the same things in the same way all the time.

In fact, once you've reached an intermediate level, *vocabulary* becomes more important than ever. You need to add more and more words, idioms, and expressions to your [stock](#) of language so that you can [take the next step up in proficiency](#). So how can you learn new words? What are the secrets of expanding your language ability?

First, let's talk about [materials](#), or what you use to learn English. You need to find good sources of English that will include words and expressions that will be useful to you. I strongly recommend you use both listening and reading materials. If you focus only on reading, as many students do, you won't learn how language sounds and feels in your mouth. If you focus only on listening, you won't know how it's written.

So then *what* should you be listening to and reading? You want [resources](#) that are [relevant](#) to your purpose, both in terms of [context](#) and topic. Let me explain what I mean. If your purpose is to improve your conversation and presentation skills to do your job as a salesperson, then use resources that teach you conversational English and the language of presentations. That's the correct match for the context of your English development. And if your work as a salesperson is in the hi-tech [sector](#), then find resources that include vocabulary related to technology. That's the correct match for the *topic* of your studies.

I don't mean that you should [limit](#) yourself to only the kinds of language that you'll meet every day. Variety is important too, and you need to read and listen to things that are interesting to you, not just practical. But [there are only so many hours in a day](#), and if you're like most people in business, you need to find what gives you the [best bang for your buck](#).

Now, I've mentioned what kind of resources you should look for, and you'll notice that I didn't mention anything that is specifically about vocabulary. I mean like a vocabulary book, or word lists. That's because it's best to study vocabulary *in context*. You might have memorized words and definitions for language tests in high school or university. But did that really teach you how to use those words? Did you really understand the kinds of situations that those words can be used in? Probably not, so instead of memorizing lists, study vocabulary in its [natural environment](#), and it'll be easier to [incorporate](#) new words into your own speaking and writing.

So, you have found some good resources, and you understand the importance of context, but when you read and listen, which words and expressions should you be learning? How do you *choose* the vocabulary that you should study? Well, a lot of good study materials will [identify](#) the useful vocabulary for you. And they might give

you definitions and examples. So with the context and this added info, you've got [something to work with](#).

But if you're trying to choose vocabulary on your own, you should focus on two ideas: relevance and [frequency](#). [Put another way](#): words that [suit](#) your purpose and words that are common. Words that suit your purpose are those that are related to your work and your English [output](#). If you never write formally in English, then a word like "[hence](#)" might not really be relevant to you. And if you work in finance, then a marketing term like "[segmentation](#)" might not be relevant.

Words that are common are important, because you'll hear them more often and they'll be more useful. So although you might encounter the word "[pip](#)" and think it's interesting, it's very uncommon, and so you shouldn't spend your mental energy trying to remember it. There are thousands of more common and more useful words that you should learn first.

[The fact is](#), we can't learn every word we meet. We need to pick and choose carefully, and that means focusing on what is relevant and common. And we'll find what is relevant and common in reading and listening resources that have the right topic and language context.

That's all for today. If you'd like to test yourself on what we've just covered, have a look at the [myBEOonline.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. When does vocabulary become more important than ever?
 - A When you embark on a new career.
 - B When you reach an intermediate level of English.
 - C When you grow tired of your study resources.
 - D When you work in sales or marketing.

2. What is an important point to remember about the materials you use to study?
 - A They should be mostly paper-based.
 - B They should focus on one aspect of English.
 - C They should include good vocabulary lists.
 - D They should include both reading and listening.

3. English language resources that suit your purpose should be relevant in terms of... [choose two]
 - A Topic
 - B Variety
 - C Length
 - D Context

4. Which of the following are NOT recommended as effective vocabulary study techniques? [choose all that apply]
 - A Studying words in context.
 - B Memorizing word lists.
 - C Looking at definitions and examples of words from reading or listening.
 - D Studying vocabulary books.
 - E Focusing more on readings that are interesting rather than practical.
 - F Choosing topics that are related to your work.

5. Based on the ideas of *relevance* and *frequency*, which of the following words do you think a salesperson learning English might study? [choose four]
 - A Politics
 - B Pricing
 - C Account
 - D Preposition
 - E Benefit
 - F Lounge
 - G Courage
 - H Order
 - I Publicity

6. When studying vocabulary, why is it important to focus on words that are both relevant and common?
 - A Because these are the words identified in our study materials.
 - B Because people will be more impressed by our language ability.
 - C Because these are the words that other English learners will know.
 - D Because we have limited time and can't remember every word we meet.

Review Answers

1. When does vocabulary become more important than ever?

B When you reach an intermediate level of English.

2. What is an important point to remember about the materials you use to study?

D They should include both reading and listening.

3. English language resources that suit your purpose should be relevant in terms of... [choose two]

A Topic

D Context

4. Which of the following are NOT recommended as effective vocabulary study techniques? [choose all that apply]

B Memorizing word lists.

D Studying vocabulary books.

E Focusing more on readings that are interesting rather than practical.

5. Based on the ideas of *relevance* and *frequency*, which of the following words do you think a salesperson learning English might study? [choose four]

B Pricing

C Account

E Benefit

H Order

6. When studying vocabulary, why is it important to focus on words that are both relevant and common?

D Because we have limited time and can't remember every word we meet.

Online Practice

Click the "Launch" button to open the **online practice**:

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