

VOCABULARY BUILDING STRATEGIES

Guessing Meaning from Context

You can often guess the meaning of an unfamiliar word by looking at or listening to the words and sentences around it. Speakers often provide clues to a word's meaning.

- Restatement or synonym: *Cell phones can **have bad effects** on our health. They can **hurt** our brains.*
- Antonym: *People think these problems are in **the future**. We don't think about them **now**.*
- Definition: *She wants to build **walkways** in the trees. **It's like a bridge**.*
- Example: *They **don't want to sit at a desk and do the same activity**. That's **boring**.
I work with big **predators** as part of my work as a wildlife filmmaker, everything from **tigers to sharks**.*

Understanding Word Families: Roots, Prefixes, and Suffixes

Learning about word roots, prefixes, and suffixes will help you understand unfamiliar words and expand your vocabulary. A root (also called a *stem*) provides the main meaning for a word. A prefix is a group of letters you can add to the beginning of a root, and it usually changes the meaning. A suffix is a word ending, and it usually changes the part of speech. Words that share the same root word belong to the same word family (e.g., *create, recreate, creatively*).

Prefix	Meaning	Examples
<i>dis-</i>	not, opposite of	disappear, dislike
<i>un-, im-</i>	not	unfinished, impossible
<i>inter-</i>	between	Internet, international
<i>mis-</i>	badly, incorrectly	misunderstand, misuse
<i>pre-</i>	before	preheat, prepare
<i>re-</i>	again; back	repeat; return
<i>trans-</i>	across, beyond	transfer, translate

Suffix	Part of speech	Examples
<i>-able, -ible</i>	adjective	believable, impossible
<i>-ful</i>	adjective	beautiful, successful
<i>-ion, -tion, -ation</i>	noun	occasion, education, foundation
<i>-ize</i>	verb	realize, privatize
<i>-ly</i>	adverb	quickly, happily
<i>-ment</i>	noun	excitement, treatment

Tips for Using a Dictionary

- When you see or hear a new word, try to guess its part of speech (noun, verb, adjective, etc.) and meaning before you look it up in a dictionary.
- Some words have many meanings. Look up a new word in the dictionary and try to choose the correct meaning for the context.
- When you look up a word, look at all the definitions to see if there is a basic meaning. This will help you understand the word when it is used in a different context. Also look at all the related words, or words in the same family. This can help you expand your vocabulary. In the example below, the core meaning of *structure* is a *building of any kind*.

structure / 'strʌktʃər/ *n.* **1** [C] a building of any kind: *A new structure is being built on the corner.* **2** [C] any architectural object of any kind: *The Eiffel Tower is a famous Parisian structure.* **3** [U] the way parts are put together or organized: *the structure of a song||a business's structure*
-*v.* [T] **-tured, -turing, -tures** to put together or organize parts of s.t.: *We are structuring a plan to hire new teachers.*
-*adj.* **structural.**

Source: *The Newbury House Dictionary plus Grammar Reference*, Fifth Edition, National Geographic Learning/ Cengage Learning, 2014

Multi-Word Units

You can improve your fluency if you learn and use vocabulary as multi-word units (sometimes called *chunks*). Some multi-word units include idioms (*up in the air*), collocations (*interested in*), and fixed expressions (*in other words*). Keep track of multi-word units in a notebook or on notecards.

Vocabulary Notebook Template

A vocabulary notebook is a way to keep track of the words you are learning. There are many ways to organize a vocabulary notebook. Here is one way:

Word & part of speech	Definition or synonyms	Antonyms	Example sentence
unique (adj)	unlike anything else; special	common, ordinary	My name is unique; I don't know anyone else who has it.

You may also want to include a translation, other word forms, collocations, etc. Note what's helpful for you to remember the words.