



HOW TO LEARN VOCABULARY

Proven strategies
for improving your
business English



KATE BAADE

IS THIS EBOOK FOR YOU?

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN LEARNING A LANGUAGE? THEN **YES**, THIS EBOOK IS ABSOLUTELY FOR YOU.

ABOUT THIS EBOOK

When I was learning French at school we recorded new words in notebooks. We'd fold the page vertically in two, write new words as they came up and then write the translation on the other side. Every few weeks we'd have a test, so I had to learn them for a test, take the test and score well.

"MY METHOD FOR LEARNING VOCABULARY WAS GREAT FOR PASSING TESTS, BUT PRETTY USELESS WHEN IT CAME TO USING THE WORDS IN PRACTICE."

I would struggle to remember anything a week later.

Why is it that you can remember words immediately after learning them, but not after a period of time without seeing them? There are loads of reasons, but here are a few:

- you don't need them
- they don't interest you
- you've jotted them down on a piece of paper somewhere, and haven't seen that paper since
- your brain hasn't made a link to them
- you haven't had a chance to use them
- you don't really know how they relate to other words
- you haven't seen the word enough
- you don't have any positive associations with the word
- you already know a word that means the same thing and it works just fine

At Target Training we are passionate about delivering practical training that enables you to perform better on the job in English. Learning and, more importantly, being able to use vocabulary is a big part of this.



HOW DO YOU LEARN NEW WORDS IN YOUR OWN LANGUAGE?

When you learn a new word in your own language, you go through a process.

- Do I want this word?
- Will I need it?
- Do I want to recognize it or use it?
- How will I remember it when I need it?

If you answered “no” to any of the first 3 questions, the chances of the new word making it into your vocabulary are slim.

If you want to make it an active part of your vocabulary, this is where SPARKLE comes in.

HOW IS SPARKLE GOING TO HELP?

This eBook will add SPARKLE to the way you learn vocabulary.

You will **remember** and **recall** the learning tips you need, when you actually need them – and build your vocabulary.

SPARKLE stands for

- Select** Select which words you want to be able to use yourself, and which words you want to recognize.
- Personalize** What type of learner are you? What are the best learning techniques for you?
- Activate** How can you actively start using the vocabulary you've selected?
- Record** Record words so that you'll remember what they mean and how to use them.
- Keep trying** Be pro-active and make time to study, practice and review the new words that you want to learn.
- Leverage** Get the most out of the words you learn. Use the new words in your daily work life as much as possible.
- Enjoy** Enjoy yourself. It cannot be underestimated how useful playing games and having fun can be when it comes to learning and remembering language in general, but particularly vocabulary.

select

sɪˈlekt

Identify what you want to focus on. Decide which words you want to be able to use yourself, and which words you want to recognize.



ONCE WE'VE LEFT SCHOOL OR UNIVERSITY WE DON'T NEED TO LEARN WORDS THAT SOMEONE ELSE HAS DECIDED WE NEED TO LEARN. WE ALSO DON'T NEED TO TAKE A TEST OR PASS AN EXAM. WE NEED WORDS FOR A REASON: TO COMMUNICATE WITH OTHER PEOPLE. WE NEED THOSE WORDS MOSTLY IN JOB CONTEXT.

WHICH WORDS ARE THE RIGHT WORDS TO LEARN?

Only one person can answer that question: you. That's because you will only truly learn the words you choose to learn.

As a trainer I find it challenging when participants expect me to improve their vocabulary for them. That's not actually something I can do. I can guide you, offer you techniques, opportunities to see and use words, help you review them etc., but I can't tell you which words you need to learn and how to learn them.

HOW CAN YOU DECIDE WHAT YOU NEED TO LEARN?

Identify professional situations where you need to use English, but you find challenging. Why do you find them challenging? If the answer is that you find it difficult to say the right thing, then this is an excellent starting point. What language do you need that would help improve the situation? Work that out alone or with your trainer, and we can help you find the words you need.

HOW TO CHOOSE THE WORDS YOU WANT TO LEARN

You may find a word that interests you, but how useful is it actually going to be? How many situations will you be able to use it in? In general, the less specific the meaning of a word is, the more opportunity you will have to actually use it.

You will also begin to notice it more in texts and in spoken language. When you are deciding how useful a word is going to be, it is really helpful then to think about how much mileage you are really going to get out of the word.

3 GREAT IDEAS TO HELP YOU

Do a Language Gap Analysis:

Make a list of all the situations you need to deal with in English. Make notes. How would you deal with this situation in your own language? Where are you now in English? Where do you want to be? What vocabulary do you need to help you get there? (See the template on the next page.)

Notice words actively

Whatever you're doing, wherever you are, notice words that you think will be useful. For example, when you're reading, highlight new words you want to learn.

Use resources

Online picture dictionaries, dictionaries and thesauruses – you'll always be able to build your vocabulary with this.

LANGUAGE GAP ANALYSIS TEMPLATE

SITUATION	WHAT CAN I DO NOW?	WHERE DO I WANT TO BE?	WHAT DO I NEED TO DO TO GET THERE?
Going out to lunch with my clients.	Make basic questions, and give simple answers about some general topics like sport.	Guiding the conversations, asking lots of questions to get them to talk. Talk about lots of topics.	Learn expressions to start conversation topics and generate answers. Increase the list of topics I can talk about. Learn vocabulary in each area so I'm confident.

YOUR TURN

The next time you are reading or listening to something in English, make a note of a few words you come across that you don't understand and you think you would like to add to your vocabulary. Decide whether you want to be able to use the word yourself when you are speaking, or if you simply want to be able to recognize it.

personalize

'pə:s(ə)n(ə)laɪz

What type of learner are you? What are the best learning techniques for you?



YOU'VE CHOSEN THE WORDS YOU NEED. NOW, HOW CAN YOU MAKE THEM YOURS? HOW CAN YOU **PERSONALIZE** YOUR APPROACH TO LEARNING AND THE WORDS THEMSELVES?

WHAT'S YOUR LEARNING STYLE?

First, think about what kind of learner you are. There are a range of learner types. Many of us don't fit into just one category, but we do have tendencies. It helps to at least be aware of what your preferences are. This can also affect your working style. I, for example, know that I have very little chance of remembering what someone tells me. I need to see things in writing or as a picture.

What about you?

IF YOU ARE A VISUAL LEARNER YOU TEND TO LEARN BETTER WHEN YOU:

- Use graphics to reinforce learning.
- Colour code to organize notes and possessions.
- Use colour to highlight important points in text.
- Take notes.
- Illustrate ideas as a picture before writing them down.
- Ask for written directions.
- Use flow charts and diagrams for note taking.
- Visualise spelling of words or facts to be memorised.

IF YOU ARE AN AUDITORY LEARNER YOU TEND TO LEARN BETTER WHEN YOU:

- Read aloud.
- Recite information to learn.
- Use tunes or rhymes as mnemonic devices.
- Read aloud and record test questions or directions.
- Use verbal analogies and storytelling to demonstrate their point.

IF YOU ARE A KINAESTHETIC LEARNER, YOU LEARN BETTER WHEN YOU:

- Make models or role play to physically experience learning.
- Skim through reading material before reading it in detail.
- Annotate text and write questions while reading.
- Translate information into diagrams or other visual study tools.
- Recite a list of items by counting on fingers.
- Memorize or drill while moving e.g. when walking.
- Listen to music while studying.



HOW CAN YOU PERSONALIZE YOUR EXAMPLES?

Personalization in itself means that you can do it your way, so we can't tell you exactly how you should do it. What works for one person will have different results with another person.

Let's look at an example. Let's say you encounter the expression "to come up with an idea" in a document you are reading and you think it sounds much better than "to have an idea". This means you've taken the first step of selecting, or rather consciously deciding that you'd like to add this word to your active vocabulary.

Now you need to make it yours. Put it into a sentence that you would actually use. None of this "the monkey had an idea in the kitchen" stuff that you may have used at school simply to connect the words. The chances of ever actually saying that sentence are not high.

For me, something like "On the way to work, I came up with an idea we could try out..." would work. Most of the ideas I have seem to be when I'm not actually at work, so I would remember this sentence as something that I could actually use.

YOUR TURN

What would you do? How would your sentence sound? Go back to the words you made a note of at the end of **S**. Put them into a sentence that you have a high chance of remembering.

activate

'aktivert

How can you actively start using the vocabulary
you've selected?



7 GREAT IDEAS FOR ACTIVATING YOUR VOCABULARY

IDEA 1 - GUESS AND CHECK

Try guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words you come across. Check the meanings with other people or with dictionaries. Use more than one dictionary and compare results. There are a lot of online dictionaries out there. [We like this one particularly...](#)

IDEA 2 - ELABORATE

Take any word on your list and describe its meaning (aloud) using your own words. Use words you already know to describe this new one, and try to think of examples where you could put this word into a sentence that makes sense. Then check with a dictionary, or your business English trainer, and see how your description compares with the professionals. You might be surprised at how well you do!

IDEA 3 - CREATE A STORY

Take 5 random words from your vocabulary list and use them to create a story. It doesn't have to be true or personal (although this would be ideal), you can be as creative as you want. The point is, making an effort to use the new words in a meaningful way will have your brain working really hard, and that will help you learn the words themselves.

IDEA 4 - PLAN WHAT YOU WANT TO SAY

If you have a situation at work coming up where you might need to speak English, plan in advance what you might say. This gives you the opportunity to rehearse (out loud is best), and to prepare. Planning time gives your brain a boost and studies have shown that the quality of what you can say after planning is far better than what you can say spontaneously. That means that you'll use a richer vocabulary, from a wider range of words, and there will be less hesitation and pausing to think.

IDEA 5 – GET UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

The more you play with the language you want to learn by using it to create true and meaningful sentences about yourself, your work, your life and your experience the more effectively you can learn it. Reacting to words personally is the best activation strategy there is! For adult learners, this is especially true. You have a wealth of experience to draw on and opinions to express – doing it in English will really help you connect with new vocabulary.



IDEA 6 – GIVE YOURSELF THINKING TIME

Do you ever find yourself saying...‘wait a minute...what’s the word...’? This happens when you are trying to retrieve a word from the corners of your memory. Doing this, being patient with yourself, and giving yourself that crucial minute to actually find the word, is hugely rewarding in terms of learning the word. Next time you have to retrieve it, you’ll do it in a fraction of the time.

IDEA 7 – SET CONCRETE OBJECTIVES

Leading academics believe that strategies work best when they are linked to a goal – activate your strategies by setting a concrete objective e.g. I’m going to read technical manuals more easily or I’m going to make small talk more successfully. The key is to make sure your goals are realistic and achievable, as with almost everything in life. And don’t forget to celebrate when you achieve them!

YOUR TURN

Do you have a situation at work coming up in which you’ll need to use English? What English words (that you already know) do you expect to encounter or use? Now think about what other vocabulary you might need for this situation – look up useful words using a dictionary or online tools. You can make a mind-map with relevant words and phrases to help you plan what you might say, so that you can handle the situation more fluently when the time comes.



record

'rɛkɔ:d

Record words so that you'll remember what they mean and how to use them.

7 KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER WHEN RECORDING WORDS

Record new words on paper or on your computer. You can even make your own flashcards on cards or in apps like [Vocapp](#) and [Quizlet](#). That means you can check and test your vocabulary on the train, in your coffee break or anytime you have a few minutes to spare.

MAKING LISTS

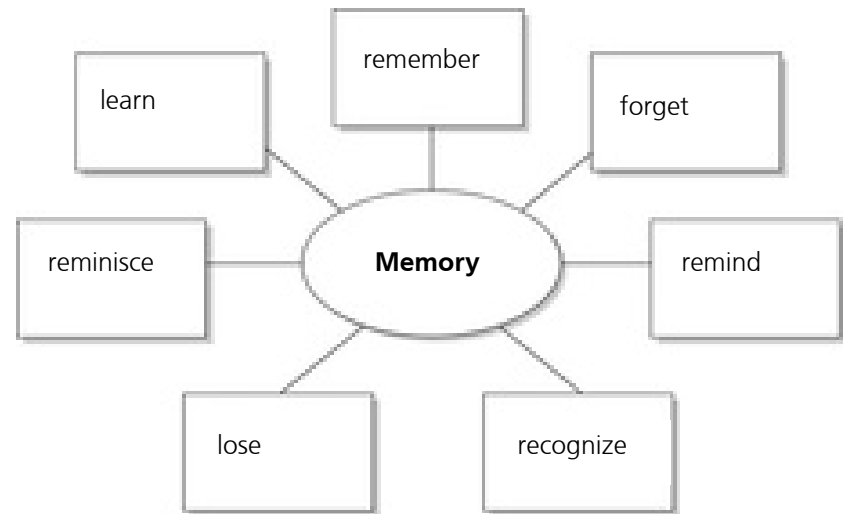
If you write words in a list, make the list into some sort of shape. Research has shown that even if you just create a diagonal list (see below) rather than a vertical one, there is more chance that you will recall the words later. You can use any kind of shape, here's an example of a diagonal list:

Memory

Remember
 Forget
 Remind
 Lose
 Recognize
 Learn

GROUPING WORDS

Don't just write down a list of random words you've collected – get organised. Group words by meaning. Add new words to groups of words you've already learned to help your brain link the old and the new. Spidergrams are especially helpful for identifying gaps in your vocabulary and revising words you know – here's one with verbs connected to memory:



REVIEWING

Research concludes that you need to encounter each word 5 to 16 times before you acquire it. That might simply mean looking at the word every now and then, or doing something more challenging with it like creating a true sentence about yourself, your experience, or your work. Unless you are truly gifted, reviewing is a must.



LEARN ALL ABOUT THE WORD

It's not simply the case that a word is either known or unknown. In reality your knowledge of each new word grows little by little. You might start by knowing how to spell and pronounce a word, and you'll probably have an idea of what it means. Then you might think about what kind of word it is so that you can use it in a sentence properly. Here's an example:

How do you say it/write it?	a business /'bɪznəs/
What word parts does it have e.g. prefix, suffix, root?	busiNESS
What does it mean?	a commercial organization engaged in industrial or professional activities
What words are related to it? e.g. synonyms, antonyms	synonyms: firm, company antonyms: charity
What is its grammatical behaviour? e.g. word class	noun -> plural: businessES
What other words are most often used together with this one?	a thriving business, a family business, the business district, to run a business, a business owner
Who would use this word? Where would they use it? Is it formal or informal, street language or business-like?	A standard word, not particularly informal or formal

PRACTICE

Find ways of trying out the word – e.g. say it in front of your bathroom mirror, use your phone to record yourself and listen to it. Saying things out loud helps to make new information more concrete – which just means that it will be easier to remember in future.

MAKE A NOTE OF WORDS THAT GO TOGETHER

E.g. put: put down, put up with, put away etc. **and in what order** e.g. it has to be fish and chips, not chips and fish, or mergers and acquisitions, not acquisitions and mergers.

MAKE NOTES OF USEFUL PHRASES

Let's say you want to remember the word '**time**'. You could note down:

- Do you have the time please?
- We're running out of time!
- It's time to go!
- Do you have time for a chat?

Then think about when you could use these phrases and what purpose you would use them for:

- **Different functions/purposes:** Do you have the time please?
- **Social interactions:** Do you have time for a chat?

YOUR TURN

Create sets of flashcards on different topics or use an app like Quizlet. Be creative about the topics you use – include business and social situations like 'Greeting People' or 'Language for Meetings'. Write the word or phrase you want to learn on one side. On the other side, write a definition, a synonym, and an antonym. Now test yourself, by looking at one side of the card and trying to remember what is written on the other side. Give yourself bonus points if you can come up with a true sentence about yourself featuring the word you are trying to remember!

keep trying

ki:p 'trʌɪɪŋ

Be pro-active and make time to study, practice and review the new words that you want to learn.

DEEP DOWN WE ALL KNOW THAT THE ONLY REAL WAY TO LEARN SOMETHING IS THROUGH PRACTICE. AFTER ALL, "PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT" AND THE ONLY WAY TO PRACTISE IS TO **KEEP TRYING**. BUT WHEN SHOULD WE PRACTISE THE NEW WORDS AND, JUST AS CRUCIALLY, HOW?

4 IDEAS TO HELP YOU KEEP TRYING

HOW MANY WORDS?

Be realistic. Is learning and reviewing 5 words per week going to be enough? Is learning 25 words per day going to be possible? Most people would say that learning/reviewing 10-12 words per day is a realistic goal to aim for. But remember – when learning vocabulary, the past is more important than the future! Always review new words regularly or start each day with a review of yesterday's words before learning new ones.

ROUTINE

Choose a time to review regularly and stick to it. First thing in the morning? Last thing at night before bed? During lunch? Find out what time works best for you and review the words you want to learn. Make a habit out of it. This way it'll become part of your day like anything else.

REPEAT WORDS ALOUD

Regardless of what category of learner you fall into, repeating words aloud helps retention far better than silent repetition. Whether you are travelling to or from work, washing the dishes or taking a shower, there are plenty of opportunities to repeat the words you want to learn aloud.

SET GOALS

No one enjoys taking exams, but having an exam date racing towards us does wonders for motivation. Similarly, if you know you have a big presentation looming or a business trip coming where you know you'll have to speak English, then it can be useful to treat these as deadlines and learn the new words you know you'll need to know. No major deadlines? Create them. Set realistic and achievable goals for the end of the week, month, quarter or year.



leverage

'lev(ə)rɪdʒ

Get the most out of the words you learn. Use the new words in your daily work life as much as possible.



USE IT OR LOSE IT

In other words, if you don't use the new words you are learning then you'll never remember them quickly and effortlessly in fluent conversation. But how?

DO YOU WRITE EMAILS IN ENGLISH OR TAKE PART IN ENGLISH MEETINGS?

Learn to see these as opportunities to use some of the new words and phrases that you are learning.

DO YOU HAVE ENGLISH SPEAKING COLLEAGUES?

Speak to them in English when you work with them or simply arrange to have coffee with them. Again, try to use this as an opportunity to try out the new language that you have learnt.

SET THE LANGUAGE OF YOUR COMPUTER TO ENGLISH

It will be almost guaranteed that after one week you will have learnt a plethora of new words simply by being exposed to them this way.

YOUR TURN

Try out some of the apps, spend time on the web looking for sites that can help you – there are literally hundreds, and we can't list them all here. Join an exchange program where you live – social media has made these so easy to find, and simple to set up if there isn't one in your area.

OTHER RESOURCES

<https://www.learnthat.org/de/>

This site is devoted to helping you learn vocabulary and spelling with multimedia resources and 'smart adaptive coaching' - check out the short introduction video for more information. Use it to customize your learning.

<http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/vocabulary-games>

A collection of fun and exciting games to suit a range of different learning styles. Use them to check your knowledge on a variety of topics e.g. clothes, football etc. Practise spelling, liven up your learning and challenge your friends.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/features/witn/ep-150812>

'Words in the news' is a current events page designed for learners. It features a short weekly video on an issue in the news for you to watch and answer vocabulary-related questions about. Use it if you are interested in world events, culture, science and other hot topics and want help learning vocabulary to talk about them.

<https://quizlet.com>

A site where you can create your own sets of vocabulary flashcards. Quizlet features lots of different ways for you to play with words and test yourself on vocabulary, you can even use it as an app and invite your friends to share word-sets. Use it if you want to customize your vocabulary learning, and practice on the move.

<http://vocapp.com>

A highly customizable app featuring a range of study modes to help you learn. Choose from a range of existing word lists or create your own. Try the tutorial before you get going to make sure you get the most out of this great app.

enjoy

ɪn 'dʒɔɪ

Enjoy yourself. It cannot be underestimated how useful playing games and having fun can be when it comes to learning and remembering language in general, but particularly vocabulary.



4 IDEAS TO HELP YOU ENJOY USING VOCABULARY

There are almost as many games, songs, rhymes and tricks that we can use to learn new words as there are stars in the sky, and we'd be fools not to make the most of them. "Eselbrücke" is what they are called in German but in English we refer to them as 'mnemonics', or, 'an aid to memory'.

POPULAR CULTURE

Enjoy listening to songs, watching movies and TV or reading books and magazines in English? The good news is that these are all great ways of encountering new vocabulary. Need to really learn and remember the new words that you come across? Simple, just listen to, watch or read the thing that you enjoy as much as possible.

GAMES

Scrabble, crosswords, hangman. There are lots of games based around using words and spelling correctly and with today's internet and Apps it couldn't be easier to discover and review new words with a partner or on your own.

STUDY IN DIFFERENT LOCATIONS

Sitting in the same place every time you study can start to get boring very quickly. Try changing the location of the place you practise English. The change of scenery will improve your enthusiasm, plus changing locations has been shown to improve memory. Your brain makes connections between what you're studying and where you are.

JOKES

These can be a great way to remember certain words as your mind is forced to make sense of the context in order for the joke to work. Reading a joke book is also a good way to practice tricky concepts like puns and idioms. You might find the joke book entertaining, and they will teach you how English speakers laugh and have fun.

YOUR TURN

Experiment. What do you like doing in your free time in your own language? Well, now go and find a way of doing it in English.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



KATE BAADE

Kate has worked in training since 1995, and in HR since 2005. She is a trainer, teacher trainer, materials writer and published author. Today Kate manages Target Training's largest project - an in-house Business English solution for Robert Bosch GmbH in Stuttgart, using the [InCorporate Trainer approach](#)

Kate and her team of 15 meet the business English training needs of approximately 1,550 engineers, specialists and managers through on-the-job support, groups, seminars and virtual learning platforms.



BETH HAMPEL

Beth has been involved in business English training since 2003, and has been a valuable member of the Target Training team since 2011. She manages a team of in-house business English trainers at Robert Bosch in Stuttgart, and delivers tailored training and on-the-job support to the corporate IT department.



ROBERT JACK

Robert has worked in English teaching since 2004 and business English training since 2009 in Spain, Mexico and Germany. He worked for two and a half years as an InCorporate Trainer as part of Kate's team in Stuttgart for Target Training's largest client, Robert Bosch GmbH. Robert is currently studying towards the DELTA certification from Cambridge University.