ENGLISH VOCABULARY

If only I had the right words...

The best way to improve your vocabulary is to:

1. Collect new words and expressions
2. Analyse them and build associations
3. Review and practise them often

1 Collect words and expressions

As you come across new words and expressions, write them down in a notebook you keep for this purpose.

Note how they sound, how they’re spelt and how they’re used in a sentence.

2 Analyse and build associations

Analyse and review new words, noting:

- meanings and parts of speech,
- related words and word variants,
- collocations (other words around them)

Here’s an example using the word ‘firm’:

3 Review and practise often

Practice makes perfect, so when you learn new words and expressions try to:

Use them regularly

Improve your memory by taking time to review new words.

Write them out

Be precise with grammar and spelling.

Create mental pictures

Remember when you first saw or heard new words. Imagine using them in other situations.

Say them out loud

Listen to them and say them out loud, focusing on word stress and pronunciation.

Link them to other words

Make lists and mind maps of words that have similar meanings or sounds.

Be creative

Try creating rhymes, songs and acronyms (words made from the first letter of several other words).
Try these on your own

**Flash cards**
1. Create seven flashcards, each with one new word or expression on it.
   On the other side of each flashcard, add notes on meaning and pronunciation.
2. Use new flashcards to test yourself daily.
3. When flashcards become easy, put them away for a week.
4. Then test yourself again.

**Post-it note lists**
1. Create five identical post-it notes, each with a list of words on one side and the meanings on the other.
2. Put each copy in a different place: one by your bed, another on the fridge, etc.
3. Test yourself each time you go to that place.
4. Create new sets of post-it notes weekly.

**News items**
1. Read the main news items for the day and highlight new words whose meaning you can’t guess by context.
2. Look up and write down their meanings.
3. Then watch or listen to news broadcasts, listening for the new words you’ve learned and noting pronunciation.
4. Read the original news items out loud.

**Concordances**
1. Look up a word using an online concordancer (software that searches for words), e.g. [www.lextutor.ca/concordancers/concord_e.html](http://www.lextutor.ca/concordancers/concord_e.html).
2. The concordancer will look for examples of the word you chose in a language database (a corpus).
3. Note common collocations (words used with your new word).

Try this with a friend
Take a different news article each and blank out every 7th word. Then swap and fill in the blanks.

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