

ENGLISH VOCABULARY

Work out the words

Before you reach for a dictionary or a translation app, try to work out the meaning of an unfamiliar word or phrase from its context.

If you do want to use a dictionary, make sure you have an English-English dictionary (also called a thesaurus). Using a thesaurus will help you learn to think in English.

Translation apps and dictionaries *can* be very useful—but be careful: they don't understand the context of the words you are looking for, and can give you incorrect or misleading results...



Keep a learning journal

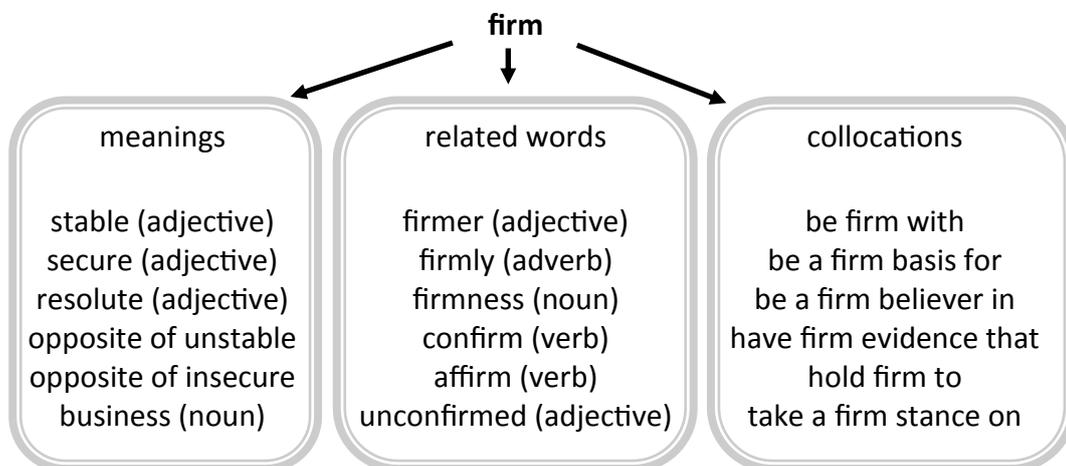
Collect new words and expressions in a notebook and try using them when you speak. Pay attention to context and formality: some words and phrases will only come up in very specific situations and can feel out of place elsewhere.

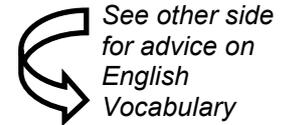
Review often

When you learn new words and expressions try to use them regularly: write them out in sentences, say them out loud to practise pronunciation and imagine scenarios where you could use them.

Visualise your vocabulary

Create mind maps and charts of new words and phrases, and connect and compare them to other words with similar sounds, meanings and spellings. Pay attention to related words, word variants and collocations (words that often appear together) - see below for an example with the word "firm".





THINKING IN ENGLISH

Leave your comfort zone

One of the hardest things about learning another language is learning to think in that language. It does not happen spontaneously, but you can learn to think in English if you work strategically.

Avoid translations

In order to think in English you need to learn to manage without dictionaries and translation apps. Leave them at home!

Turn subtitles and captions off as you watch English language programs.

See the other side of this sheet for useful strategies for developing your vocabulary in context instead of in translation.

Talk to yourself

Practise phrases, pronunciation and intonation by speaking to yourself. Listen to other speakers and try to emulate the rhythm and flow of their speaking.

Focus on phrases

Instead of focusing on the meaning and use of individual words, focus on phrases or strings of words to make them a natural part of your conversation. “How are you?” is easier to remember than “How + are + you?”

Be a beginner

Put yourself in an environment where you can't rely on your first language. For example, start a new hobby or study a subject you are not familiar with in your first language.

Be thorough

Context is very important in learning a language, so make sure you develop your thinking skills in many different contexts and interests. This will help ensure your fluency isn't limited to only some parts of your life.

In order to think in English you need to develop your reading, writing, listening and speaking skills: see our other English Language Survival Guides for advice on developing different skills in context.

Like this Survival Guide? Why not check out more of our guides...

Improving English at UWA, Reading and Writing in English, Listening and Speaking in English

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Any suggestions?

We would love to hear from you. Email us at studysmarter@uwa.edu.au

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