

20 tips on teaching vocabulary

Penny Ur The 2nd P.A.R.K. Online Conference Connecting Teachers January 23rd, 2021















What do you think about teaching vocabulary?

- How important is it?
- How many times do you need to review new items?
- American or British vocabulary?
- Guessing from context?
- ... etc.



Vocabulary-teaching ideas

Mostly to add to, rather than replace, what you are doing already





Tip #1: Spend a lot of class time vocabulary teaching

Because:

Sheer amount the students need to learn

2. They don't usually just 'pick it up'







Research:

- You need to know about 3000 words at intermediate (B1) level
- 5000 words at advanced (B2)
- At least 8000 for academic studies





Which means

Teaching a lot of vocabulary in lessons...

... and reviewing it



Students don't just 'pick it up

Learning new vocabulary from extensive reading is slow

- How much do your students read?
- In their own language? In English?





Tip #2: Review again and again

Research indicates we need to encounter a word 6-16 times in order to remember it... ... So recycle as many times as you can





Useful routines

- Remind students at the end of the lesson of vocabulary they learned earlier.
 (Display on the screen)
- Start the next lesson by asking them to recall. (Challenge to write into the chat box)





Tip #3: teach multi-word items, not just single words

'Phrases' 'Lexical phrases' 'Chunks' 'Lexical chunks' 'Expressions' ... etc.





About 10% of the vocabulary students need to know

Most could not be guessed by knowing the single words

- of course
- by the way
- by and large
- now and then

- look after
- get on with
 - willy-nilly
- out and about



Tip # 4: Teach a new word + what it goes with

- angry + with; afraid + of
- tall + person but high + mountain
- *fast* + food, runner, *quick* + review, visit, question
- sleep soundly, work hard
- dead right but not *dead correct





Tip #5: Prioritize international vocabulary

The distinction between British and American doesn't matter so much...

What matters is:

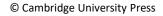
Will this word/expression be understood by other people using English as an international language?





Which would you teach?

- fortnight / two weeks
 - billfold / wallet
 - fall / autumn
- program / programme
- she just finished / she has just finished
 - Do you have..? / Have you got..?
- It's here, isn't it? / It's here, no? / It's here, right?





A useful tool: Corpus of global web-based English (GloWbe)

pus of Global Web-Based English (GloWbE)) (i) 🖹 🛃 🖓 🕓	_ ≔ 🤇
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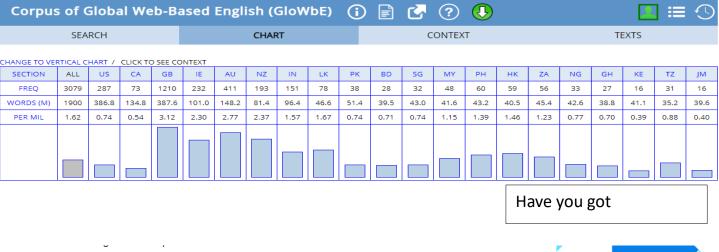
© Cambridge University Press

https://www.english-corpora.org/glowbe/

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PER MIL	0.04	0.11	0.05	0.01	0.04	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.04	0.05	0.00	0.02	0.05	0.12	0.04	0.02	0.03	0.00	0.00	0.10
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Corpus of Global Web-Based English (GloWbE) **(i)** (?) **R** SEARCH CONTEXT TEXTS CHART CHANGE TO VERTICAL CHART / CLICK TO SEE CONTEXT AU PH SECTION ALL US CA GB IE NZ IN LK PK BD SG MY HK ZA NG GH KE ΤZ JM 39151 8851 3113 7168 1745 3610 1989 1806 765 685 947 970 950 973 772 757 589 795 FREO 684 859 1123 WORDS (M) 1900 386.8 134.8 387.6 101.0 148.2 81.4 96.4 46.6 51.4 39.5 43.0 41.6 43.2 40.5 45.4 42.6 38.8 41.1 35.2 39.6 22.04 20.09 PER MIL 20.61 22.88 23.10 18.49 17.27 24.36 24.44 18.73 14.68 14.89 17.35 20.63 22.43 23.49 21.45 26.33 19.91 18.44 16.75 Do you have





CAMBRIDGE Tip #6: Reading texts: You don't always have to pre-teach vocabulary

- If you teach 10-12 new words immediately before reading a new text ...
- Students probably won't remember what they mean when they encounter them.
- Some evidence that teaching vocabulary after, rather than before, encountering it in a text brings about better learning.





So if you pre-teach:

- Only a few key items
- In a previous lesson
- Leave time to review them before reading.





It's fine to teach the new items as they come up

Meaningful context Immediately contribute to text comprehension

+ review later





Tip # 7: Don't usually ask students to guess words from context

In most cases – they get it wrong.

- frustration
 - failure
- no learning
- time-wasting









While most clothes with care will last many years, changing fashions mean their lifespan is artificially shortened by consumers changing tastes.

(1)..... figures suggest modern clothing will have a lifespan of between 2-10 years – with underwear and t-shirts lasting just one to two years, while suits and coats last for around four to six years.

Would (2)..... our clothes help to reduce the toll our fashion addiction has on the environment?

Currently just 13.6% of clothes and shoes thrown away in the US end up being recycled – while the average American throws away 37 kg. of clothes every year. (3)..... just 12% of the material used for clothing ends up being recycled. Compare that to paper, class and plastic PET bottles – which have recycling rates of 66%, 27% and 29% (4)..... in the US – and it is clear clothing lags behind.

Indeed, most of the recycled polyester being used now by leading fashion brands in fact comes from (5)..... rather than old clothing.



While most clothes with care will last many years, changing fashions mean their lifespan is artificially shortened by consumers changing tastes. **Industry** figures suggest modern clothing will have a lifespan of between 2-10 years – with underwear and t-shirts lasting just one to two years, while suits and coats last for around four to six years.

Would **recycling** our clothes help to reduce the toll our fashion addiction has on the environment?

Currently just 13.6% of clothes and shoes thrown away in the US end up being recycled – while the average American throws away 37 kg. of clothes every year. **Globally** just 12% of the material used for clothing ends up being recycled. Compare that to paper, class and plastic PET bottles – which have recycling rates of 66%, 27% and 29% **respectively** in the US – and it is clear clothing lags behind.

Indeed, most of the recycled polyester being used now by leading fashion brands in fact comes from **bottles** rather than old clothing.



Conclusion

- Guessing from context is not usually very useful.
 - Ask students to guess only if you are fairly sure they can do so successfully.
 - Otherwise: just tell them what the words mean!
 - Use your cursor or highlight to direct their attention to the word you are explaining



Tip #8: Use online profilers to help you decide which vocabulary to teach from a text

Prioritize the common vocabulary from your text.

How do you know which are most common?

- 1. Your own professional judgement
- 2. Vocabulary profilers





Corpus-based online tools

• <u>Lextutor</u>

https://www.lextutor.ca/vp/comp/

By thousand words in a frequency list (K1 etc.)

- Text Inspector
- http://englishprofile.org/wordlists/text-inspector CEFR (A1, A2 etc.)
- Wordandphrase

https://www.wordandphrase.info/analyzeText.asp

By thousand words in a frequency list (K1 etc.)



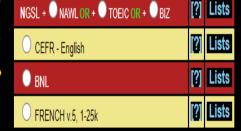




Untitled

How to make list framework comparisons? Demo 8 here Lex Frequency predicts Text Complexity? Check these Try VP Average-Level-sorted concordances. Easiest contexts first, check this

VP-1 🗰 VP-Basic



nput mode A Type or paste small to medium size text (max about 15,000 words) into window, choose options, and click yellow Submit_window button for Lexical Frequency Profile.

|+| Eng+Frl Cognates 🔲 (Lists) |+| Sentence Count 📕 |+| Bar Chart 📕 |+| Coca Count-Index/List 📕 <mark>?</mark> |+| Basic 🗏 <mark>?</mark>

While most clothes with care will last many years, changing fashions mean their lifespan is artificially shortened by consumers changing tastes. Industry figures suggest modern clothing will have a lifespan of between 2-10 years – with underwear and t-shirts lasting just one to two years, while suits and coats last for around four to six years. Would recycling our clothes help to reduce the toll our fashion addiction has on the environment?

Currently just 13.6% of clothes and shoes thrown away in the US end up being recycled – while the average American throws away 37 kg. of clothes every year. Globally just 12% of the material used for clothing ends up being recycled. Compare that to paper, class and plastic PET bottles – which have recycling rates of 66%, 27% and 29% respectively in the US – and it is clear clothing lags behind. Indeed, most of the recycled polyester being used now by leading fashion brands in fact comes from bottles rather than old clothing.

Demos: Isogram | Lit (1) (2) | Graded (1) (2) | Science (1) (2) | News (NYT) (WP) | Speech Adults Kids | Rex Murphy | Legal | GSL+AWL 1k 2K AWL | French Highlight

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K-2	15	88.8
K-3	4	91.2
K-4	9	96.5
K-5	2	97.7
K-8	1	98.3
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REPEATED 2+ K-Families to remove with care when simplifying to lower K or C level [?]

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cycle Dan

+ UNREPEATED

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Tip #9: It's OK to practice words out of context (as well as in...)

You don't always have to contextualize in full sentences.

Single-word review is also useful. Or brief phrases





Single-word review



- Recalling (chat box)
- Translations (pencil and paper)
 - Dictation (pencil and paper)
- Odd one out (pencil and paper)
 - 'Yes/no' (annotating or poll)





Words in phrases



What adjectives could you apply to the word *question*? (chat box) How many phrases can you think of

using the word under? (chat box)





Tip #10: Make exercises interesting

There are simple strategies which can make vocabulary exercises more interesting.

For example....





Original exercise

- tree apartment bicycle ice cream
- 1. Mary likes eating _____
- 2. The boy is riding a _____
- 3. The family lives in this ____
- 4. There is an apple on the _____







Strategy 1: Delete the word bank

tree apartment bicycle ice cream

- 1. Mary likes eating _____
- 2. The boy is riding a _____
- 3. The family lives in this _____
- 4. There is an apple on the _____







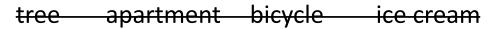
- 1. Mary likes eating _____
- 2. The boy is riding a _____
- 3. The family lives in this ____
- 4. There is an apple on the _____







Strategy 2: Delete part of the 'root' sentence



- 1. Mary likes eating ice cream
- 2. The boy is riding a bicycle
- 3. The family lives in this apartment
- 4. There is an apple on the <u>tree</u>







1.	Mary	ice cream
2.	The boy	a <u>bicycle</u>
3.	The family	apartment
4.	There is	the tree





Strategy 3: Personalize

- tree apartment bicycle ice cream
- 1. I... Mary likes eating ... ice cream
- 2. I... The boy is riding ... a bicycle
- 3. I... The family lives in this ... apartment
- 4. I... There is an apple on ... the tree







1.	l	ice <u>cream</u>
2.	I	a <u>bicycle</u>
3.	I	<u>apartment</u>
4.	Ι	the <u>tree</u>





Strategy 4: Extend

- tree apartment bicycle ice cream
- 1. Mary likes eating ice cream when
- 2. The boy is riding a bicycle because ...
- 3. The family lives in this apartment but ...
- 4. There is an apple on the tree and...







What makes exercises more interesting?

- Open-ended responses
 - Creativity, humour
 - Unpredictability
 - Higher-order thinking
 - Personalization





Tip 11: Avoid word games like 'Hangman' and 'Wordsearch'

They're mainly a waste of time for vocabulary learning.

More time spent searching or wrong guesses than finding: (Useful as time-fillers)





Tip #12: Use L1 (as well)

 When introducing the meaning of a new vocabulary item





How to present meaning:

- Picture?
- Realia?
- Mime?
- Synonym?
- Explanation?
 - Examples?
 - Context?
- Translation?







Picture

Impact

BUT

may be ambiguous

not all items can be depicted















Probably more impact than a picture BUT May be ambiguous Not all items can be presented by realia or mime







Quick BUT Only at higher levels May be inaccurate or rough





Explanation

For higher levels Added exposure to English. BUT: time? clarity?

e.g.

Disappointed: If you are disappointed you are sad because something has not happened or because something is not as good as you had hoped.







Can explain some general terms E.g. sweet: apples, sugar, honey ... sports: football, tennis, basketball, swimming BUT

Not everything is easily explained by examples





Use in context



Adds knowledge of sentence-context More exposure to English BUT

Often does not clarify the meaning

exact:

- 1. They knew the _____ answer.
- 2. Please be more _____!
- 3. I need to know the _____ price.





Translation

- Usually accurate
 - Quick
 - Natural





Bottom line:

Use pictures, explanation etc...

... with a quick translation as backup.

(And DON'T feel guilty about it!)





Tip #13: Don't teach lexical sets all together for the first time

e.g. colors, parts of the body, prepositions, action verbs

Some evidence that they aren't learnt very well.

Interference theory





Better to teach items that will naturally co-occur in a given context

NOT blue + red, yellow, green BUT RATHER: blue + sky

NOT: mother, father, daughter, son, uncle, aunt, cousin ...

BUT RATHER: mother, father, home, together, love, take care of, family, baby



Tip 14: Don't spend ages checking homework exercises in class

If they've done a vocabulary exercise at home...

... Don't (usually) go through the entire exercise again in class (and certainly not online!)





Better:



Provide the answers on the screen, they selfcheck.

Or:

(In break-out rooms) Check each other in pairs or threes.

Call to ask you if they aren't sure ('ask for help', then 'invite host')







(if you have time)Take in notebooks and check at home.(They send you homework by email or school website, you check digitally and send back)





Tip 15: Get students to present new vocabulary

- 'Word of the day'
- 'Phrase of the day'
- (But make sure you have a reserve ...) (students share screen)





Tip 16: Get students to design test items

If you want to test all the vocabulary we've learnt over the last month (term? six weeks?...)

Get students to design questions (in pairs in class? For homework? Both?)

Take them in, correct if necessary and design the test based on them.

Send it to them by email attachment, they do it at home and send back to you







- The test preparation is itself review
- Lowers test anxiety
- The students 'own' the test



Tip # 17: Make online lessons as interactive as you can

In general: face to face is better! If online: make interactive

- Microphones and cameras
- Chat box
- 'Breakout rooms'
- Polls







Give homework assignments to ...

- Read (easy books they enjoy)
- Search for new vocabulary in the 'landscape'
- You-tube
- Finding out things online





Tip 19: Don't over-use the dictionary

Students need to know how to use a dictionary when they are on their own. So: good to teach dictionary skills. But in class... You are the best dictionary for them Fast, accurate, user-friendly.





Tips are ideas that can often help, but there may be situations where they don't!

So use selectively, or adapt.

Never say never!





Thank you for your attention and participation!

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Better Learning