

Vocabulary Building

Using the Dictionary

A good dictionary, such as the Oxford English Dictionary, is essential in helping you to increase your vocabulary. Not only does it give you the meaning and spelling of a word, it also tells you how to pronounce it.

Pronunciation

Sometimes, the pronunciation key can be a little bit difficult to master, but don't give up at the first attempt.

For instance, The Chambers Student Dictionary gives one definition of the word "censor" as:

“A Roman magistrate with authority to regulate the moral conduct of the citizens”

and another definition as:

"An officer who examines written or printed matter of films, with the power to delete or suppress the contents or to forbid the publication or showing."

It also gives us the pronunciation - "SENSOR" - which tells us that the letter "c" is soft and pronounced as an "s"; the dictionary further tells us what part of speech the word is - "n" - meaning it is a noun.

The definition of the word "gaze" - meaning "to look fixedly", ("v" for verb) or "a fixed look" ("n" for noun), tells us it is pronounced "gāz". The line above the "a", shows us that it is pronounced "ay".

Now look up the word "Ceilidh"; this is a Gaelic word, meaning an informal evening of song and story", it is a noun, ("n") and is pronounced "kali". The "C" is hard and the "a" is pronounced "ay". Another way of describing the pronunciation, would be to spell it "Kaylee."

A way of mastering the pronunciation key is to look up a word you know and know how to pronounce, and match your correct pronunciation to the key given in your dictionary. Do this several times, and you'll soon have grasped the pronunciation key and be able to apply it to unknown words.

Games

Games using a dictionary are an enjoyable way of increasing your word power. Here is one based on the BBC programme "Call My Bluff."

The ideal number of players for the game is six, in two teams of three. You'll also need at least two dictionaries, but more if at all possible.

Each team takes a word from the dictionary and comes up with three very different definitions for that word, one true and two false ones. The true definition is obviously taken from the dictionary, but the other two can be your own invention or “stolen” from other words in the dictionary.

When each team has the same number of words to define, they take it in turns to give their words to the other team, along with the three definitions. The opposing team

must then decide (without the aid of a dictionary this time), who is telling the truth and who is giving the real definition.

Although the ideal number of people for this game is six (three per team) it can be played with just two people, although it's much harder work, as each player has to give one true definition and two false ones.

Here's an example: The word is “EQUIPONDERATE”. One definition, given below, is genuine, but the other two are false.

1. The word “Equiponderate” comes from two Latin words; “Equus”, meaning horse and “pons” meaning “bridge”.

So, an equiponderate bridge is a bridge, or more specifically, a pack-horse bridge. These bridges are from the time when goods were transported by slow-moving pack-horses who often used tracks away from the main thoroughfare and consequently had to cross small streams, using an equiponderate bridge to do so.

2. “Equidponderate” comes from two Latin words, “Aequus” meaning “equal” and “pondus” meaning “weight”.

So, equiponderate means to be equal in weight or to balance. If you and I both weighed 10 stones and 7 lbs, we could be said to be equiponderate.

3. The word “Equiponderate” comes from two words. “Equi” comes from the name of the actors' union, “Equity”, and “ponderate” from the word “ponder” or “consider”.

When an actor first joins the acting profession, he is given a period of time (usually three months) to consider whether or not he should join the union. This period of time is called the “equiponderate” period in an actor's career.

Which of these definitions is correct? Have a guess if you really don't know, and write your answers in the box below.

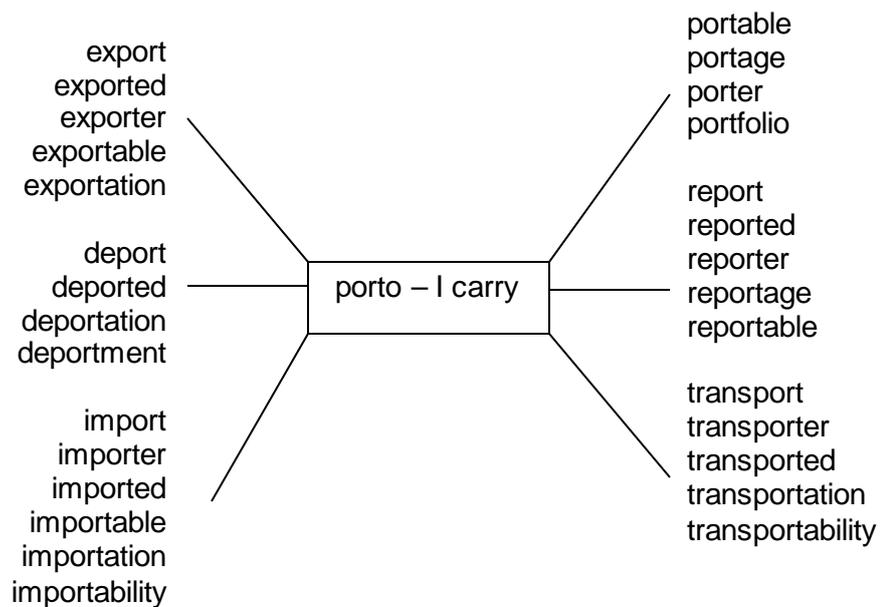


Check your answers by looking up “equiponderate” in the dictionary. The correct response is provided for you this time.

The tactic of breaking down a long word into sections is a useful one when you’re trying to work out its meaning.

The root of the word is the part of the word which gives the word its essential meaning. (Many roots, do in fact, originate from Latin, but a knowledge of Latin language isn’t usually necessary to work out a word’s meaning).

Below is an example of a Latin word root and a number of words which can be derived from it.



If you look at many of the words which originate from the word “porto”, you will see that they have a prefix (a syllable or section of a word placed before the root, to vary the meaning) or a suffix (a syllable placed after the root, to supplement its meaning).

The prefix “ex” means “out”, while the prefix “im” means “in”, so “import” means “to carry in”, and “export”, “to carry out”.

Look up some of the other prefixes in the dictionary and then apply them to other words. If “transport” means “to carry from one place to another”, what do you think “transcribe” means?

Try breaking it down into prefix and root; you don’t need Latin to know that a scribe is someone who writes, so to transcribe is “to write over from one book to another” or to copy.

Try to break down the words listed in the next activity into prefix (or suffix) and root to find the meaning. Then look them up in the dictionary to check your accuracy.

1. Depose
2. Insensible
3. Translucent
4. Intermediate
5. Exclaim
6. Maltreat
7. Abstraction
8. Antenatal
9. Proscribe
10. Displacement

Response B2

1. De/pose: (verb) “To remove from a high station; to degrade; to attest.”

From the Latin “de”, meaning “from”, and “pausare”, meaning “to pause or to place”.

2. In/sensible: (adjective) “Calious; dull; unconscious; unaware of; imperceptible by the senses”.

From the Latin “im”, meaning “not”, and “sensible” meaning “perceptible by sense; easily perceived; appreciable; cognisant; aware of.”

3. Trans/lucent (adjective) "Allowing light to pass, but not transparent."

From the Latin "trans" meaning "across", and "lucere", meaning to shine and "lux", meaning "light".

4. Inter/mediate: (adjective) "Placed, occurring or classified between others or between extremes or stages; intervening".

From the Latin "inter", meaning "between", and "medius" meaning "middle".

5. Ex/claim: (verb) "To cry out; to utter or speak vehemently".

From the Latin "ex" meaning "out", and "clamare", meaning "to shout".

6. Mal/treat: (verb) "To use roughly or unkindly".

From the Latin "mal", meaning "ill", and "tractare", meaning to "treat".

7. Abs/tract/ion: (noun) "State of being abstracted; absence of mind; the operation of the mind by which certain qualities or attributes of an object are considered apart from the rest; that which exists only in theory".

From the Latin "abs", meaning "away from", "tractum", meaning "drawn", and "ion", meaning "a state of being".

8. Ante/natal: (adjective) "Before birth",

From the Latin "ante", meaning "before", and "nata", meaning "of", or "connected with, birth", which in turn comes from the Latin "natus", meaning "to be born".

9. Pro/scribe: (verb) "To outlaw; to refuse to tolerate; to prohibit".

The word comes from ancient Roman history, and meant "to put on the list posted in a public place, the names of those who may be put to death".

From the Latin "pro", meaning "before, or publicly, and "scribere", meaning to write".

10. Dis/place/ment (noun) "A putting or being out of place; the difference between the position of a body at a given time and that occupied at first; the quantity of water displaced by a floating body".

From the Latin "dis", meaning "negative". "place". meaning "place or position" and "ment", meaning "action, state or quality".

Using a Thesaurus

Besides having a good dictionary at your disposal, it's also very useful to invest in a "Thesaurus" such as "Roget's Thesaurus".

For each word you want to use, the Thesaurus will give you a list of words or phrases with the same or similar meaning. It will also give you the different usages of your word. For instance, in one edition of Roget's Thesaurus, the index at the back of the book gives four different uses of the word "Lamb":

1. A "youngling" ("n" for noun), meaning a young animal.
2. "To reproduce itself" ("v" for verb) meaning the act of giving birth to lambs, for a yew.
3. A "sheep" ("n") meaning the adult of its species.
4. An "innocent" ("n") meaning someone who is blameless, guiltless or unworldly.

Using your own Thesaurus, find out how many usages of the word "prospect" the index gives you, and look up each of them in the main section.

Activity B3

Give 3 usages of the word "prospect" in the Activity box below.

Response B3

1. To prospect - to search for something.
2. A "looking forward", relating to the future.
3. An appearance.

These differing usages of the word "prospect" can probably best be shown by putting them into sentences which help explain their individual meanings. Here are some examples.

1. In his search for fortune, the gold-hunter decided he would prospect in Alaska.
2. The prospect of a night out with his friends was very appealing, and the young man decided he would get dressed up and have a good time.
3. The prospect of the valley from the top of the hill presented the most beautiful view she had ever seen.

A Thesaurus is very valuable in helping to find and use different words, phrases for the commonly used and often hackneyed terms we use all too often. For instance, how often

do we use the word “got” in our speaking and writing when, with very little effort, we could use another word in its place?

Read the passage below and then, using your Thesaurus if necessary, replace the word “got” (or phrase including it) with another word or phrase, to make the piece more interesting to read. Note the ‘gots’ in the following sentences and try replacing them.

We got to the beach at around 11 o'clock and immediately got into the sea because it was already so hot.

When we got back to where we'd left our things, we got out our sun-tan oil and got down to some serious sunbathing.

By noon we'd all got a bit of a tan and we were all hungry, so we went and got some lunch at a local restaurant.

After lunch, we got in the queue for the rowing boats, and got in half an hour's fun on the water before it got quite cloudy and began to rain. We hurriedly got back to the beach and got back into our clothes before making a mad dash for the car. We got to it just as the Heavens opened and the rain came pouring down. We decided we'd got no chance of any more sunshine for that day, so we set off home.

We got there at about 4 o'clock and immediately got the kettle on for a cup of tea.

Activity B4 – list alternative words alongside each ‘got’.

1. got to:
2. got into:
3. got back to:
4. got out:
5. got down to:
6. got a bit of a sun-tan:
7. got some lunch:
8. got in the queue:
9. got in:
10. got quite cloudy:
11. got back to the beach:
12. got back into our clothes:
13. got to it:
14. we'd got no chance:
15. got there:
16. got the kettle on:

Response B4

1. got to: reached, arrived at.
2. got into: went into; dived into
3. got back to: returned to.
4. got out: produced; found.
5. got down to: settled down to.
6. got a bit of a sun-tan: achieved/acquired a sun-tan.
7. got some lunch: bought/obtained some lunch.
8. got in the queue: joined the queue.
9. got in: managed.
10. got quite cloudy: became quite cloudy; clouded over.
11. got back to the beach: rowed for the beach.
12. got back into our clothes: redressed.
13. got to it: reached it.
14. we'd got no chance: we had no chance.
15. got there: arrived.
16. got the kettle on: put the kettle on.

Synonyms and Antonyms

This was a rather simplistic exercise in that most of the “got” words and phrases were easily replaceable.

“The Collins Thesaurus in A – Z Form” or a “Dictionary of Synonyms and Antonyms” will help you bring a little variety to your writing.

Synonyms are words with the same or similar meanings, while Antonyms are words with different or opposed meanings.

Some examples of synonyms and antonyms are given below.

Word	Synonym	Antonym
Revealed	Showed, disclosed	Hid
Hastily	Quickly, hurriedly	Slowly, carefully
Nourish	Feed, nurture	Starve, neglect
Saunter	Wander, ramble	Run, rush
Big	Huge, enormous	Small, tiny, minute
Definite	Clear, precise, concrete	Vague, undefined, imprecise
Satisfactory	Appropriate, acceptable	Unsatisfactory, unacceptable
Movable	Mobile, transportable	Immovable, static, immobile
Spacious	Roomy, open	Crowded, constricted
Irritated	Annoyed, aggravated	Placated, pleased

Notice how antonyms are sometimes formed by placing a negative prefix in front of the word (precise – imprecise) but can also be completely different words altogether (precise – vague).

Now read the passage on: “The Role of the Supervisor” and in Activity B5 replace the words emboldened with a synonym which could be inserted into the passage without changing the meaning.

Remember to look at the words in the context in which they are used in the passage. For example, the word “respect” does not necessarily mean “reverence” or “high esteem” here, although it may well do so when used in a different context in a different passage.

'The Role of the Supervisor'

A first step to creating an effective workforce is the **fostering** of good working relationships between staff at all levels. The supervisor is a key figure as he is frequently the link between management and operatives over a wide range of issues, such as the introduction of new company policies or the investigation of complaints from junior staff. The supervisor will also need to co-operate with other supervisors so that he has a complete picture of the situation. Such consultation may reveal factors he has previously not **appreciated**.

The supervisor must always promote and maintain high morale by keeping in constant touch with his staff and dealing with their grievances as they arise. If problems are allowed to carry on without being tackled, they worsen and can damage relationships permanently. Such situations can best be prevented by regular meetings with staff, the operation of a suggestion scheme and encouraging **participation** in company affairs by all staff. It is unreasonable to expect co-operation from staff who feel **isolated**, and the supervisor who allows this to happen is failing in his job.

A well disciplined work force is a major factor in promoting good working relationships. This does not mean a harsh **regime** is necessary as good discipline is best achieved by close co-operation among workers who have a clear understanding of their roles in the company. The supervisor must ensure that when changes in company policy are introduced, staff are fully **briefed**. You can all think of occasions where staff made mistakes because they were not fully informed of new **procedures** - do not let that happen in your firm.

The supervisor should also make sure that new employees are quickly settled in their jobs. Even in small companies new employees need time to adjust to new surroundings and people, and the supervisor has a key role to play in this **respect**.

This extract is taken from an Institute of the Motor Industry Membership Examination, Use of English paper.

Activity B5

fostering:

appreciated:

participation:

isolated:

regime:

briefed:

procedures:

respect:

Remember too that there is not just one correct answer for each of these substitutions, although suggestions for alternative words are listed below:

fostering: forging, promoting, encouraging.

appreciated: acknowledged, understood, realised.

participation: co-operation, taking part.

isolated: alone, detached, separate.

regime: administration, system.

briefed: informed, acquainted.

procedure: methods (of working), courses (of action).

respect: way, matter.

Don't worry if you found different replacement words; the important thing is that you LOOKED THEM UP if you weren't sure of their meanings.