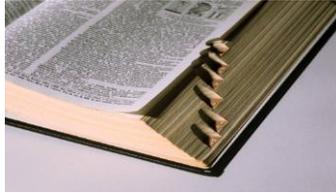


# 15 EASY WAYS TO INCREASE YOUR VOCABULARY

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## 1. Spend 15 minutes every day reading a newspaper or a weekly newsmagazine.

As you read, circle unfamiliar words. When you finish the article, return to these words and use context clues to try to determine meaning. Then look the words up in a dictionary, comparing your definition with the actual definition. Add each word, its definition, and its sentence in a vocabulary notebook, on a 4 x 6 index card (see #8 below), or onto a web site like [www.quizlet.com](http://www.quizlet.com) for later review. These magazines and newspapers are good sources of vocabulary:

*New York Times*

*Wall Street Journal*

*Time*

*Toronto Globe & Mail*

*Newsweek*

*MacLean's*

## 2. Use vocabulary web sites, especially those with a “Word of the Day,” on the Internet or your cell phone if you have a data plan with Internet access.

These web sites may be useful for increasing your vocabulary:

- [www.m-w.com/game/](http://www.m-w.com/game/) (This site is by Merriam-Webster dictionary.)
- [www.vocabulary.com/](http://www.vocabulary.com/)
- [www.wordcentral.com](http://www.wordcentral.com)
- [www.wordsmyth.net](http://www.wordsmyth.net)
- <http://www.worldwidewords.org/>
- <http://home.earthlink.net/~ruthpett/safari/index.htm>
- [www.nytimes.com/learning/students/wordofday/index.html](http://www.nytimes.com/learning/students/wordofday/index.html)

These web sites have a “**Word of the Day**” feature. Subscribe and a new word will be sent to your e-mail address every day. This is an easy way to build your vocabulary:

- [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)
- [www.m-w.com/game/](http://www.m-w.com/game/)
- [www.wordcentral.com](http://www.wordcentral.com)
- [www.wordsmith.org](http://www.wordsmith.org)

## 3. Browse a dictionary.

Leaf through a dictionary to look for unfamiliar words. For example, if you notice the word “**unorthodox**,” you may realize that you’ve seen it before or heard it in the phrase “orthodox Jews” but never really knew what it meant. (“Unorthodox” means “breaking with convention or tradition.”) Browsing through a dictionary to look for unfamiliar words or words related to subjects you’re studying can help you learn useful words.

## 4. Learn the origins of words.

It’s fascinating to learn where words come from. Because many English words derive from Latin and Greek, once you learn the meaning of a word part, you can apply that knowledge to new words. When you discover the “story” behind a word, you’re more likely to remember its meaning. Here’s an example of one such “story,” taken from *1000 Most Important Words*, by Norman Schur:

**endemic** (en dem’ ik) *adj.* Anything endemic is characteristic of or peculiar to a particular place, race, nation or sect. This word is used, for example, of diseases that flourish regularly in certain parts of the world: “Dysentery is endemic to India, Egypt, and to much of the rest of the Third World.” Not only illnesses, but also customs and folkways can be said to be endemic

to a particular place or sect: “Community singing is *endemic* to Wales” and “Vendettas are *endemic* to Sicily.” From the New Latin *endemicus*, based on the Greek *endemos*; note the root *demos* (people), from which we get *democracy*.

These books in the Niagara University library, which describe the origins of words, are located in the PE 1500 – 1596 section on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor:

- Giangrande, L. *Latin in the Service of English*
- Green, T. M. *The Greek and Latin Roots of English*
- Grummel, W. C. *English Word Building from Latin to Greek*
- Kelz Sperling, S. *Tenderfeet and Ladyfingers: A Visceral Approach to Words and their Origins*
- Lee, Laura. *The Name's Familiar*
- Nealon, T. E., & Sieger, F. J. *Vocabulary: A Key to Better College Reading*
- Weekly, E. *An Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* (2 volumes)
- Williams, R. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*

Or get *Merriam Webster's Vocabulary Builder*, which includes a discussion of over 1,000 words and their origins and many short quizzes with answers.

### 5. Do the quiz “It Pays to Enrich Your Word Power” in *Reader's Digest*.

This *Reader's Digest* column is an easy way to increase college-level vocabulary. After doing the 20-question quiz, turn the page for the answers, meanings, and derivation of the words.

### 6. Use context clues to try to determine the meanings of words.

Don't skip over unfamiliar words. Try to determine meaning by analyzing unfamiliar words and the sentences surrounding them. Careful analysis can often give you a pretty good idea of what the word means. Mark the word with a pencil. When you finish reading, look up the word in a dictionary to see if you were close. Although context clues may not always be present, looking for them can sharpen your comprehension.

Here's an example of using context clues to determine the approximate meaning of an unfamiliar word: “The job was more **odious** than taking out the garbage.” Because most people find taking out the garbage an unpleasant task, you can guess that “odious” describes something very unpleasant. (In fact, **odious** means “exciting hatred or repugnance; abhorrent.”)

### 7. Get a tear-off calendar with a new word each day.

Request a daily tear-off calendar with a new word for each day for a birthday or holiday gift. Place your calendar where you'll see it each day.

### 8. Use 4 x 6 index cards to make vocabulary flash cards.

As you try the suggestions on this handout, don't just read about a new word or look it up in a dictionary. Make a vocabulary flash card. On one side of an index card, write the new word, its part of speech, and its phonetic spelling. Include Greek or Latin word parts. On the other side, write its definition and any related word parts. Copy the sentence in which you found the word, and then write the word in an original sentence of your own.

Carry these cards with you to review. Before you write papers, flip through your cards. This increases your chance of being able to use one or two of these words in your writing.

### 9. Use Quizlet to review the new words you learn.

Go to [www.quizlet.com](http://www.quizlet.com) and enter your words. The program will generate quizzes and games custom- made for your word list.

### 10. Take a Latin course or Greek (or Spanish or French).

Many words in English derive from Latin and Greek. A semester of Latin or Greek can help you understand English words. Niagara University offers LAT 101 and GRK 101. Spanish (SPA 101) or French (FRE 101) may even help since many Spanish and French words derive from Latin.

## 11. Set a specific goal.

Learning new words requires a commitment. Since you're less likely to hear sophisticated vocabulary in daily conversation, take matters into your own hands and teach yourself new words. Set a goal such as, "I'll learn one new word each day" or "I'll try one suggestion on this handout every day during semester break or summer."

## 12. Do crossword puzzles and other word puzzles.

Although some crossword-puzzle words are obscure or seldom used, some words will increase your vocabulary. And the information in crossword puzzles may increase your background knowledge.

## 13. Listen to radio and television programs that use a college-level vocabulary.

Network television and mainstream radio stations may limit your exposure to new vocabulary. These local media may expose you to a broader vocabulary:

- Radio:
- National Public Radio (in Western New York, it is WBFO FM-88.7), particularly "Morning Edition" from 6:00-9:00 am, and "All Things Considered" from 5:00-7:00 pm.
  - CBC (Toronto, AM 740)
- Television:
- PBS (in Western New York and Southern Ontario, Channel 17) – just about any program that interests you. Also, instead of watching network news, try the News Hour with Jim Lehrer, from 6:30-7:30 pm on Channel 17.

## 14. "Use a word 3 times and it's yours!"

It's that simple. If you don't make an effort to use new words you learn, you're likely to forget them. Using words makes them a permanent part of your vocabulary. You know common words like "cow," "walk" and "pleasant" because:

1. you've heard them frequently
2. you've read them frequently
3. they may have been taught to you
4. you've used them many times in your speech and your writing

If you don't routinely hear or read words like "catalyst," "disparage" or "aberration," use them at least three times in your writing or your speech. Gradually they will become a part of your vocabulary.

## 15. Learn the "Word of the Day" in *The Buffalo News*.

The "Word of the Day" is located in the Classifieds section of *The Buffalo News*. Look for the picture of the dog.

Some of these suggestions are adapted from:

- *Becoming a Successful Student* by Laraine E. Flemming and Judith Leet (1989).
- *Instructor's Resource Manual* to accompany *Thinking Critically*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., by John Chaffee (1991).
- *Sharon's Simple Study Strategies for College Success* by Sharon Green (2004).

### Recommended dictionary web sites:

[www.m-w.com](http://www.m-w.com)

<http://encarta.msn.com/encnet/features/dictionary/dictionaryhome.aspx>

<http://www.bartleby.com/61/>

Be sure to click on the pronunciation.