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VOCABULARY
ACQUISITION AND HOW
IT HAS CHANGED

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The learning of new vocabulary should not be rushed. It should be a long ongoing process that never stops. Language learners should use a personalized process to learn new words that they find both easy to follow and entertaining.

When a person sets out to learn a foreign language, whilst still living in their own country, they face several dilemmas to be able to find the opportunity to practise and when to find time to pick up new vocabulary. When you learn a language in the country, in which it is the first language, it is easy to get the opportunity to practice and to learn new vocabulary as the learner is immersed in the language and the culture, as they need to use the language in day to day life to get by; what I want to say by this is that the acquisition of language is much easier as it is learned passively through constant repetition and reinforcement. But what can language students do to make up for this lack of input?

The key to the process is to do it little by little. I would suggest that language learners always carry a notebook with them to be able to take note of new words they need to learn well; it is proven that if a learner takes notes on paper they will remember the words better ([HERE](#)). Using the notes taken the student can use their vocabulary learning strategy to reinforce their understanding of the word. For an example of this strategy, click [HERE](#).

The acquisition of new vocabulary is simple when you know how. You need to give new words a CONTEXT! When we learn new words we need context with which to relate them or they are very difficult to recall when needed. It is useless to review long lists of words and translate them or only look up the definition. In the past people believed that we could memorize large amounts of information and try to recall it on demand but seeing the results of this in our education system and through personal experience, something needs to change. We need to use the new vocabulary to give it a link to something that we can relate to when we wish to use it. What we need to do is form a type of 'language web or database' in which we can easily access the information that



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we are likely to use. The vocabulary we are likely to use is usually more limited than what we understand; this is normal in our mother tongue and is also true for our second language. What we need to do when starting out, is start in order of importance and build a base of vocabulary that we will use most frequently. This needs to be based on the learner's own interests and therefore, will be easier to take in. The base of a person's vocabulary needs to be solid and well established to later push on and advance in level. (See our previous post [HERE](#) for more background information on this).

The perfect balance for a language learner is to incorporate the new language into their daily routine. They should try to use a language learning App like Duolingo, sign up to a language course ([HERE](#)) with native teachers to guide them and also try to do the seven things suggested in this post. With this constant contact with the language, learning it should be a natural process and easier.

You need to be realistic with the amount of language you can learn, you shouldn't expect to learn 100 words per day, for example. It is important to set yourself small targets and also to begin with the type of language that you will probably use most. [HERE](#) is a summary of the 100 most frequently used words in English and also some extra vocabulary learning advice ([HERE](#)).



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There are numerous methods to be able to develop out language database. Notice that they are simple and can be related to everyday activities, keep it simple and do what you enjoy.

1. TV - watch movies with subtitles, write down and research new vocabulary and expressions. The film will give it relevance (it is also a good idea to see things that you have already seen in your own language).
2. Games - playing games such as taboo or boggle are a great way to improve vocabulary and can be easily adapted according to level. The fun side of it makes it a much more interesting way of picking up new vocabulary.
3. Word linking - word association and word grouping are great methods of expanding vocabulary and relating new vocabulary to already known words.
4. Read - reading is a great way of learning new vocabulary. Even if it is at a basic level (children's books) it is great reinforcement.
5. Music - listening in general is an essential part of language learning but it is essential in the acquisition of new vocabulary. Music is great as it is repetitive and easy to remember due to the rhythm and rhyme.
6. Images - describe images and see where you have gaps in your knowledge.
7. Shower conversations (I say the shower because it is a personal space) - think over or act out everyday conversations to see where you have mental blocks or missing links in vocabulary. That can be as simple as going blank or finding it hard to recall words. In short it means talk to yourself or think in English to see where you are likely to stumble when you want to converse.



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Our START method ([HERE](#)) focuses on the acquisition of new vocabulary to best enhance the learning of language. To do this it is important to be clear on the most important words and collocations to begin with. Our courses teach the learner to not focus on individual words, but to learn new words as a phrase and instead of words like 'depend' for example, we encourage our students to first learn the word pattern 'depend on' and then relate it to a synonym 'count on' and then put the new words into a phrase, '*It all depends on the amount of time available*'. This way the learner will have a context to be able to remember the individual words. This is an essential part of learning phrasal verbs ([HERE](#)) and also the most frequently used collocations using keep ([HERE](#)), get ([HERE](#)), have ([HERE](#)) or take ([HERE](#)).

An interesting perspective can be seen in this video on vocabulary learning and how learners can get by using the most frequently used words.

Native speakers with higher education (University studies) usually only use between 25-30,000 words, about 5% of the generally recognized number of words in the English language. Language learners who do not live in an English speaking country use up to 2,000 words. This is a small amount so what learners need to do is prioritize what they need to learn. English contains an almost incomprehensible number of words but as you can see in the video below, our students can get by with as few as 2,800. This data has been compiled by Charles Brown, a language expert working in Japan. See the video below to find out more.