**Class 2: Building your English Vocabulary**

1. **Learning Objectives**

At the end of this class, learners should able to:

1. Hold properly a vocabulary notebook
2. Recognize the root or base words
3. Use affixes (prefixes and/or suffixes) to expand their active English vocabulary.

* **Importance of Vocabulary**

*Vocabulary is the basis or foundation of any language. Both general and professional vocabulary are useful for developing knowledge and skills, for understanding others in listening and reading and for communicating fluently both in writing and speaking. English vocabulary includes roughly 1 million words among which 7000 words are the key to speaking English well. Speaking English well or very well is a dream for most non-native English speakers who have not lived and/or studied in an English speaking country. But with hard word and organization, non-native English speakers can achieve a good working knowledge of English. Language experts have said that one need only the most commonly used 500-600 words in a language to be able to be fluent in that language1. Except Arabic, most language fits in that category.*

*Failing English reading comprehension test in elementary schools can predict the future of pupils.* “*Nationally, they predict prison populations on the basis of third-grade achievement. So people who are falling behind in third grade are more likely to end up in our criminal justice system, and we have to address that challenge*.” Cook County Board President in Chicago, USA2.

*English vocabulary can be used to predict the grades in English and academic achievement for non-native English speakers3,4. For native English speakers, admission to graduate schools in most English speaking countries will require an English language proficiency test (TOEFL score, etc…) and vocabulary especially academic vocabulary is a key component of such tests5,6.*

1. **Teaching and Learning Activities**

* **Activity 1: Vocabulary notebook**

It is important and vital to hold a vocabulary notebook for building your own English vocabulary. Below are the steps in your journey in getting fluent in English proportionately to your effort in building your vocabulary.

**Step 1:** Get a 400-page note to be divided into two parts. You label the first part “Passive vocabulary” and the second one “Active vocabulary”.

**Step 2**: Dedicate 15-30 minutes every day in reading and/or listening English. Read a short text in English or listen to a short conversation with transcripts to select 1-3 words daily.

**Step 3:** Go to [www.wordreference.com](http://www.wordreference.com) and select English-French (if Francophone), English-Arabic (if Arabic speaking or English-Portuguese (If Lusophone). Click on search to have the meaning of the English word in your desired language. Read the different sentences to see the meaning of the word in different contexts. Just below the search window and your left, a microphone will appear. You can select the style of pronunciation of your choice (U.S, or U.K or Canada or other). Repeat after the word is pronounced as many times as possible until you get it right. Do the same for as many new words as possible, but the fewer the better for a beginning. Write that word or those words in the first part of your vocabulary notebook. Make your own sentence (s) with that word or those words. Read your sentences loudly to yourself.

**Step 4:** The next time, you run into a word from your passive vocabulary in listening or reading and you can remember the meaning and make a sentence in writing and speaking with it. You move it to the second part of your vocabulary notebook “Active vocabulary” and you give it a number in order.

**Step 5:** If a key word is difficult to memorize, take a sheet of paper and write it down 25 times while pronouncing it correctly.

**Step 6:** Track your progress in terms of the number of words in your active vocabulary, the number of words learned daily, and how fluent you are become over weeks and months.

**Step 7:** Make a flip card for commonly used words in English and irregular verbs. Take a piece of paper, one side, you have the word and on the other side write the meaning and a sentence with it.

**Step 8:** Once a while (every week or every two weeks), try to revise what you have learned in the past week or two weeks. Practice with at least a study partner.

**Step 9:** Once you are becoming more comfortable, go for topic-specific and profession-specific vocabulary.

* **Activity 2: Expanding one’s vocabulary using the roots of the words plus affixes (prefix and suffix)**
* A root word or base word holds the most basic meaning of a word. Adding a prefix and/or a suffix helps create a stand-alone word. A prefix (before the root or base word) or a suffix (after the root or base word) is known as an affix.
* A prefix is one- to 3-syllable affix added to the beginning of a root or base word to slightly or completely change its meaning.

Example 1: We analyze the data every month.

We **re**analyze the data every month. (A slight change in meaning)

Example 2: It was possible to include positive and negative controls into the PCR reaction.

It was **im**possible to include positive and negative controls into the PCR reaction. (A complete change in meaning)

* A suffix is a syllable or a letter or letters, which is added to the end of a base word to change its conjugation, word type, or make it plural.

Examples:

* Conjugation: We analyze**d** or reanalyze**d** the data last month. (A change from present simple to past simple)
* Word type: My student has success**ful**ly passed his exam. (Success is a noun, successful is an adjective and successfully is an adverb).
* Plurality: The entire class failed the quiz last week. Students failed their quiz**zes** last week. (a change from singular to plural)
* To determine (a verb in infinitive), determine (base form of the verb). Adding a suffix will give determined (its preterit), determining (its gerund), determination (a noun). Adding a prefix and a suffix: will give undetermined (opposite of its preterit).

Note: Here are three (3) important points:

1. Being familiar with root words and affixes can drastically multiply or extend or expand one’s active English vocabulary. It will make your understanding much greater during your reading.
2. In addition [www.wordreference.com](http://www.wordreference.com), you will benefit more when you are able to learn the proper pronunciation with someone. To repeat the proper pronunciation (number of syllables and intonation) after someone else is known as root learning. It is a fundamental aspect of learning any language. English is not an exception.
3. Topic-specific or profession-specific vocabulary is very important. As a nonnative English speaking scientist or researcher or health professional, you will call or receive phone calls, travel, shop, be in hotels and/or visit doctors. Here is where the general English vocabulary holds its importance. You will also communicate with your peers, present at conferences and meetings and write manuscripts. You need to be familiar with the most commonly used vocabulary in your field.
4. **Evaluation**
5. What is the importance of vocabulary in English?
6. What is the importance of topic-specific and profession-specific vocabulary?
7. How do you hold an English vocabulary notebook?
8. Where can you learn to pronounce English words properly?
9. How should you use root words, and affixes to expand our active vocabulary?
10. **References**

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