

Tips on learning vocabulary

New vocabulary

When you come across a new word don't rush straight for the dictionary:

- Try to work out the meaning from the context
- Try to work out the meaning from the structure of the word - it may contain familiar elements, e.g. in French se promener means to go for a walk. From this you can guess that un promenoir has got something to do with walking. (It's actually a covered walk)
- Think about what part of speech it is (is it a verb, a subject, an object etc.?). You're more likely to remember something you've worked out for yourself

Then use a good dictionary to check spelling.

Don't write down every new word you come across. Think about whether this is a really useful word to know or whether you just need to be able to understand it at the moment.

Make a note of the new word and its meaning (either in your own language or the target language) and give an example of its use in context. You could have different pages for different topics or a colour coding scheme (using biro or highlighters), e.g. feminine words in one colour, masculine in another, verbs in another etc.

Learning vocabulary

Learning vocabulary is necessary but it can be a bit boring if all you do is write endless lists of the words you come across in your lessons. Try some of the following ideas:

Cover up one column of your lists and work your way down, testing yourself, first from the foreign language to the definition, then the other way round. Work with a friend and test each other.

Write words out on pieces of paper/card and put the definition on the other side. Spread them out in front of you, choose one at a time, test yourself and check your answer on the other side. OR write the word on one card and the definition on another. Spread them out upside down and play memory games pairing them up. Each time you're right collect the card(s). Both of these are best played with a friend.

Create your own vocab box - Buy some cards that you can file in a box. You can decide to use coloured cards and to use one colour for each different type of word. e.g. - blue for verbs - pink for adjectives - green for masculine nouns - yellow for feminine nouns - white for prepositions, adverbs... A verb card could look like this:

APPRENDRE	TO LEARN
Present: j'apprends	I learn
pc: j'ai appri	I learnt
subjunctive: j'apprenne	that I learn
1. apprendre a (+ inf) ex: apprendre a nager	1. to learn (how) (+inf) eg. to learn how to swim
2. apprendre (qch) ex: apprendre le francais	2. to learn (+ noun) eg. to learn French
3. apprendre a (+inf) a (qqn) ex: apprendre a	3. to teach eg. to teach one's daughter
nager a sa fille	to swim

Keep your box in a place handy and keep testing yourself whenever you have a spare moment or play the vocab games described previously.

Other ways of grouping words in your vocab box

By themes : the face, the body, the house, transport, animals, etc... But remember: these titles cover a vast number of words, so whenever you can try to subdivide them into smaller categories. Transport for instance can be subdivided into car - train - plane - boat... This works very well for nouns but it is rather difficult to do a similar thing with verbs, adjectives or adverbs.

According to the purpose they serve in conversation, that is to say : how to greet sb / how to invite sb / how to express joy, surprise, anger / how to give an opinion / how to agree or disagree with sb, etc... Don't forget to differentiate familiar expressions (those you can use with friends) from more formal ones.

Whatever system you choose, it is advisable to use two different colours for masculine and feminine nouns, because gender often causes native speakers of English a lot of problems

