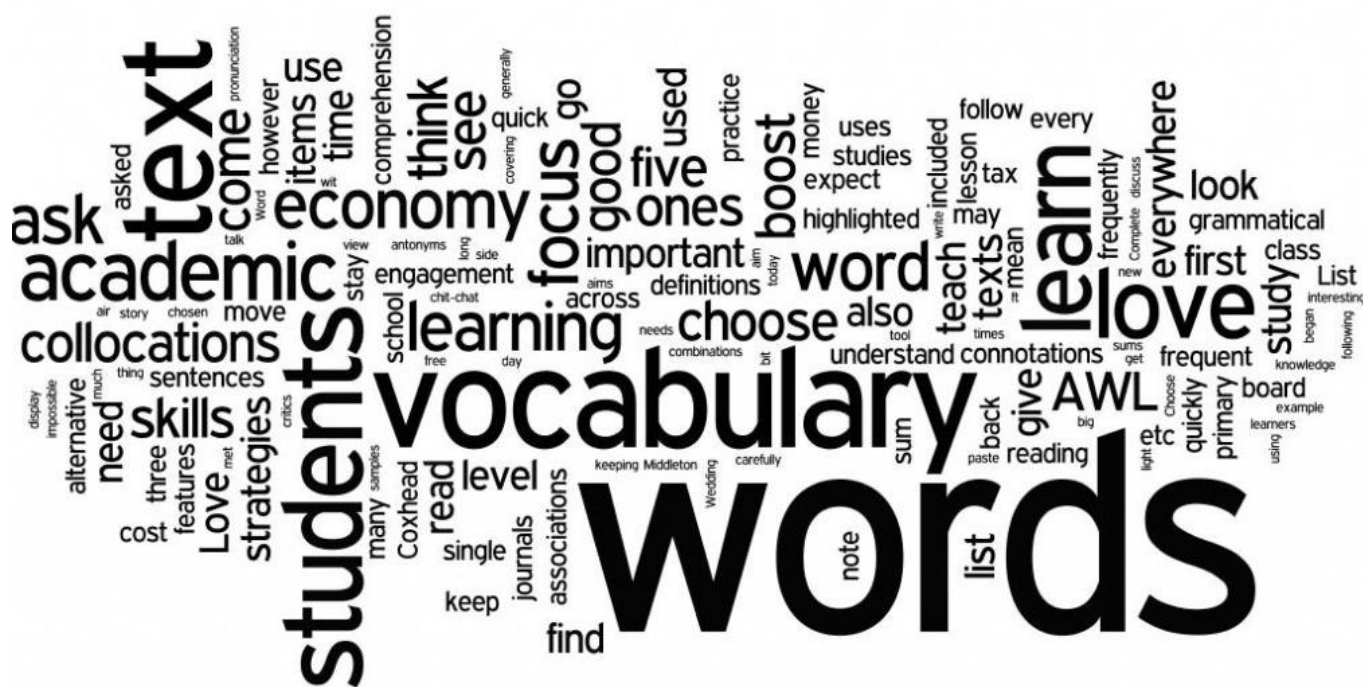




# Developing vocabulary

## A parent's guide

*"Not knowing the meaning of words in a text is a bottleneck in reading." (Perfetti et al., 2005).*



To succeed in school and beyond, children need to build a robust vocabulary. Studies have shown that a child's vocabulary aged 2yrs predicted their reading ability at 9yrs and 11yrs! It is the most influential factor in a child's ability to read. Children learn a lot from the adults in their lives and there are many ways you can help your child learn new words.

### **Take time and don't make assumptions**

Exploring vocabulary can take time. In school, vocabulary development will often take up entire sessions and will be the main focus. When reading at home, take time to talk about any new words. Don't worry if this means that your child reads less of the book. Talk about what the words mean, other words that mean the same thing and then what this words tells us. For example, if it was described that a character "*stomped* around the garden" explore what the word stomped means. Collect other words that mean the same but then talk about how *stomped* shows that the character moved in a grumpy, annoyed way. Why did the author choose this word? By spending time it shows that it's important to explore the meaning of words. Try not to assume that your children know what words mean. Periodically check different words and whether your child truly understands what they mean.

### **"Goldilocks Principle"**

Try not to overdo it. When trying to teach your child new words choose five unfamiliar new words to learn each week. See how often everyone in the family can use those words in everyday conversation.

### **Multiple Exposure**

Typically, a child needs to hear a new word 4 to 12 times before it is added to his vocabulary. When you introduce your child to a new word, try to keep a mental note of it and work to use it again in your conversations with your child. It is also important to use the word in a variety of different contexts, wherever it applies. Don't be afraid to throw in a word that you had focused on previously as well.

Repeated exposure is one of the best ways to master new vocabulary words.

## **Not Black or White**

Many people see learning new vocabulary as a very black or white issue; either you know the word or you don't. However, expanding vocabulary really exists on a sliding scale. There are words that you have heard before but you don't actually know the definition. There are words that you understand when other people say them but you would never use yourself in daily conversation. Then there are words that you regularly use in the course of your daily life. Children go through this as well as they develop their vocabulary. Try not to restrict yourself to only using words that your child knows, and don't stress if your child doesn't use the same word you do to refer to an object or item. For example, instead of calling a helmet a "helmet," your child may call it a "hat." After a while, though, they will begin to understand the subtle difference between the two and start referring to it as a "helmet."

## **Make Words Concrete**

As you are teaching your child new words, it is important to help visualise them. For nouns, show your child a picture of it by searching online, or showing a picture in a book or magazine. If it is an adjective, find things that can be described using the word. For example, if you come across "scratchy," point out the scratchiness of sand paper or a man's chin. With verbs, try acting out the word with your child. Children love moving around as you explore the words "prance" or "prowl."

## **See It, Say It, Write It**

In order for your child to actually learn a new vocabulary word, they need to be able to read it, say it, and write it. If your child comes across a word in a book and asks you how to pronounce it, encourage them to repeat the word out loud after you say it. Breaking it down and clapping out the syllables in a word helps them to say it more clearly. Explore how it is spelt and the unusual parts of the word- has it been spelt how they expected it to be? Are there any letters that they didn't expect?

## **Read Daily**

Books are the number one way to expose children to a richer vocabulary. As often as possible, read books with your child. When they come to a word that they don't know, give your child a quick child-friendly definition and continue reading. It's important not to have a big pause about the fact that they didn't know the word. When you finish reading the story, go back to the word again and ask if they remember it.

## **Show How You Learn New Words**

When you come across a word that you don't know, point it out to your child. Describe how you were able to determine its meaning by using context clues. By explaining this process out loud, you will help show your child what they can do when they come across an unfamiliar word. Highlight the fact that you still learn new words as well.

## **New Words Are Everywhere**

Help your child build their vocabulary by taking them to new places and exposing them to different ideas. Visit your local zoo or the nearest museum and have your child describe the various animals and exhibits that they see. Take your child along with you as you run off to the bank, shopping, or the post office, and see what new words you can discover.

## **Words with Multiple Meanings**

Children are often challenged by words that have multiple meanings. English is full of these types of words, such as "days" and "daze." Children begin to start learning about these homophones as early as Year 1. It is important to be aware that children will need help in this area. In fact, you might think that a child understands a joke that relies on word play because of their laughter, but actually most children aren't able to understand these types of riddles until at least the age of 8 or 9. To help your child understand the different uses for the same word, ask them to explain the word's meaning. For example, if they use the word "bat," ask if they meant the dark creature that flies at night or the wooden stick used in games.

Taken and amended from:

<https://www.parenttoolkit.com/academics/advice/english-language-arts/helping-your-child-build-a-strong-vocabulary>