Enhancing Your Vocabulary

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When you create a plan for expanding your vocabulary, it is important to begin with realistic goals. It is both impossible and unnecessary to learn every word in the English language. Rather, you should choose new words according to what would be useful for you.

Focus on words you see or hear often.
Keep a notebook of words that recur: in your research, in the classroom, in the media, or in conversations with your peers.

Choose words that carry key meaning. Can you understand the main idea of a sentence without knowing a particular word? Then it is less important. Prioritize words that you MUST know in order to get the general idea of a sentence.

Use your resources wisely: Dictionaries.
Use a high-quality dictionary—a good one will include examples of usage.
        Consider investing in a dictionary of your own.
        When you look up a word (in your own dictionary), circle it.
Read the whole definition: words can have more than one meaning.
        When you use a thesaurus, use it in conjunction with a dictionary—
        synonyms can have different connotations or shades of meaning

Best practices for retention
Don't try to learn too many words at once; **2-3 new words a week** is a good place to
        start.
Process words thoughtfully. Create associations with words that you are learning
        by thinking of and recording language contexts and situational contexts in
        which you might use the word.
Space your study of words to create more lasting memories. Review words a
        few minutes after first looking at them, then an hour or so later, then the next
        day, then a week later, and then review a couple of weeks after that.
Avoid interference between the words you are learning. Choose words that are
        spelled differently, start with different letters, and have different meanings to
        keep from confusing them.

Keep track of new vocabulary in an organized form:
Keep a notebook in addition to using individual flashcards
Keep running lists of words you want to learn
Develop a system for identifying words you have become comfortable with and
        words you still need to practice
        Each month, check that you still know words you haven't reviewed recently
Contextualize words: write a (complex!) sentence or two

Guessing the Meaning of Words You Come Across

Learn to guess word meanings by breaking them into parts
Many English words share common Latin or Greek roots
Prefixes often qualify a word by showing: negation, time, quantity,
      direction/position
Suffixes frequently indicate how a word works grammatically (what part of speech
      it is)
Start by identifying the add-ons—what are the prefixes and suffixes that are added
      to the word root(s)?
When you subtract prefixes and suffixes, you are left with the root of the word.
      There can be more than one root!
Put these elements together:
      Start with your root(s): are there two you have to combine?
      Then **identify what any suffix(es)** tell you about the part of speech
      Finally, what additional information does the **prefix** offer?
You can also deduce word meanings by finding similarities to words you
      already know

Tips for Creating Flashcards
Put the vocabulary word in the middle of the card in a circle
Below the word, add the abbreviation for its part of speech (n, adj, v, etc.)
In one corner, write "Context" and copy the context (spoken or written) in which
      you heard or saw the word. Cite the source(s)
On one side of the word, write "Meaning and Example;" add the dictionary definition
      for this context, and write an example sentence using the word
On the other side of the word write "Related Words," and list words that come from
      the same root(s). Include their parts of speech. Not all words will have
      related words, but many will.

Don't make cards for words you already know. Focus your energies on new words.
Do not write in any other language on the front of the card. You may write a
      translation on the back of the card in pencil for difficult words. Later, when
      you know it in English, erase the translation.
Create a separate card for each word.

What are Collocations?
The reason it is best to record new words **in a context**, is that in any language, there
      are words that are typically used with other words
Certain nouns, for example, are always paired with particular verbs or adjectives;
      we might drink 'weak' tea, or 'strong' tea, or 'milky' tea, but we don't drink
      'light' tea or 'dark' tea
Certain verbs tend to be paired with certain adverbs. I might 'strongly' recommend
      that you practice English daily, but I wouldn't 'weakly' recommend
      something
These associated words are known as 'collects'
It is important to study the collects of new vocabulary along with the words'
      definitions; this will help you use new words more naturally and correctly.

When learning new words, take note of the specific context in which you heard it.
When you hear people use words that you are learning, note down the sentences in
which they are used, and ask them to repeat themselves, if necessary
A good dictionary will include frequently-used collects in its entries; study those
along with the definition.

Other resources for studying collocations:
Pearson's List of Academic Collocations:
http://pearsonpte.com/RESEARCH/Pages/CollocationList.aspx
Organized alphabetically by main word; consult for collects of new vocabulary
words

Collocation Dictionaries: in addition to a good standard dictionary's examples of
word usages, some companies publish collocation dictionaries

Selecting Academic Vocabulary: The Academic Word List
Developed/published in 2000 by Averil Coxhead
The AWL is a list of the most commonly-used words in English academic writing.
It contains 550+ words, listed by head-word
The list is divided into 10 sub-lists, listed from more to less common
It builds on and assumes knowledge of the General Service List, which is made up of
roughly 2,000 of the 'most common' words in English
Using the AWL
Think of it as a supplement:
Consult the lists to see if words you encounter are commonly-used
Use it as the basis for building vocabulary **alongside** words you encounter in
class and research
Use it in conjunction with lists of words specific to your discipline
http://www.uefap.com/vocab/select/selfram.htm
Prioritize words you encounter more frequently
When working through the list, begin with sublist 1 and work back toward
10
And most important—**read research for vocabulary as well as content!—**
prioritize words that you have encountered in your work.

Remember!
Read and listen for vocabulary as well as content
Systematize your vocabulary list
Don't try to learn too many words at once
Prioritize words that are commonly-used in your academic discipline
Study words with their collocations