

Tips for Improving Vocabulary

English is the richest language with the largest vocabulary—over 1,000,000 words—yet the average adult has a vocabulary of only 40,000-50,000 words. Imagine what we're missing! These strategies will help you unlock the meanings of new words and remember them.

Context

You can often get at least part of a word's meaning from the way it's used in the sentence. So when you come to an unfamiliar word while reading, rather than first looking it up in the dictionary, try to figure out its meaning from the words around it. Often the author provides clues to help you unlock the general meaning.

“Perihelion is the point in the earth's orbit when the distance between the earth and the sun is at its minimum, as opposed to **aphelion**.”

Glossary

If your book has a glossary, it will give you the specific definition for this field of study. A glossary, a mini-dictionary in the back of a text, contains only the definition that fits the use in this book.

aphelion The point in the earth's orbit when the distance between the earth and the sun is at its maximum.

Dictionary

To find all the meanings for a word and where it comes from, look it up in the dictionary. The dictionary is a reliable source of definitions plus correct spellings, pronunciation, parts of speech, and derivations. To use this resource book effectively, however, you must understand the abbreviations it uses and the variety of information it includes. Since you may find a variety of definitions for a word, always fit the definition back into the original context to be certain it makes sense.

a•phe•li•on (ə fē'lē ən, ə fēl'yən, əp hē'lē ən), *n., pl.*
a•phe•li•a. the point in the orbit of a planet or a comet at which it is furthest from the sun. Compare **perihelion**.

Structure

Knowing the parts of words—prefixes, roots, suffixes—helps you understand and unlock the meanings of whole families of words. A prefix is the part that's sometimes attached to the front of a word; there are about 100 common ones. The root is the basic part of a word; most of our root words come from Latin and Greek. A suffix is the word part that is attached to the end of a word.

apo prefix from Greek meaning *away from*
helios comes from Greek meaning *the sun*

Now, other words with **apo** or **helios** start to make sense such as **apolune** = the point in the path of a body orbiting the moon that is farthest from the center, or **heliophyte** = a plant thriving in full sunlight.

Read, Read

In addition to using these strategies, it's important to read a variety of materials. The more you expose yourself to new words, the more words you will learn.

Practice: Remembering New Words

Unless you actively work at reviewing and remembering each of the new words you encounter, you will have to rediscover the meaning each time you see the word.

1. Write each word to be learned on a 3x5 card.

aphelion

2. On the back of the card, write the definition (the one that most closely fits the way the word was used in your original sentence).

The point in the earth's orbit when the distance between the earth and the sun is at its maximum.

3. Below the definition, write an example sentence using the word.

The point in the earth's orbit when the distance between the earth and the sun is at its maximum.
On January 3 the earth is about 3 million miles closer to the sun than it is during aphelion on July 4.

4. Use these cards for study, review, and testing yourself.
 - Look at the word and try to recall the definition on the back.
 - As you go through the cards, sort them into two stacks: know and don't know. The next time you review, use only the "don't know" stack to concentrate your study.
 - Periodically, review all the cards. Periodic review of information is critical to remembering.