

Vocabulary

What **You** Need to Know



Brushing your teeth might be paramount to learning new words—read this presentation all the way through to find out why!

Conquering the Navigation

Throughout this presentation you will find links to more information. You probably won't need all of them, but you will need some.

When you see a **bright green word**, you can click that and get more information. After you've clicked, the word will turn to a **darker green**.

The new pages will have **green** headings instead of the aqua ones you see here, so you will know where you are.

When you're finished, simply click your browser's "Back" button to return to the main presentation.

If you would like to open the presentation in a new window, use the "Ctrl" key while you click.

The Basics

Building your vocabulary is something you can do daily with simple tasks such as reading a newspaper or a magazine, engaging in conversation , or playing some word games on the internet.

Vocabulary acquisition can help keep your mind sharp and active, and can help you understand and appreciate new and different people and situations.

Vocabulary Acquisition in a Nutshell

Think about what you do when you come across a new word in your reading or listening. What do you do? Look it up in a dictionary? Try to figure out what it means by looking at the meaning of the sentence and the words around it? Skip it and hope that it won't matter too much?

There are two quick-and-dirty skill builders that can help you get ready for the vocabulary questions on the VPT.

- knowing how to decipher context clues
- recognizing common prefixes, suffixes, and roots

Context Clues



One way to decipher new words in your reading and listening is to use context clues. Take for example this stanza from the poem “Jabberwocky” by Lewis Carroll:

"And, has thou slain the **Jabberwock**?
Come to my arms, my **beamish** boy!
O **frabjous** day! **Callooh! Callay!**
He chortled in his joy.

While we don't know the meanings of the words “Jabberwok,” “beamish,” “frabjous,” and “Callooh! Callay!” we can guess because of their context.

Jabberwock=some evil monster (think Godzilla)
beamish=beaming with pride, the look of success
frabjous=fabulous
Callooh! Callay!=the Lewis Carroll version of “good job!”

Try it!

See if you can figure out the meanings of the words in bold. Then click [here](#) for the answer and see if you guessed right.

“My dull brother acted rather **phlegmatic** toward what I thought was a great offer.”

“When her approval ratings dropped, the politician was forced to **abjure** her previous statements and apologize.”

“I grew up without any luxuries, thinking my father an extremely **penurious** man, but I wound up learning how to be resourceful, and I learned the value of a dollar.”

Roots, Prefixes, Suffixes

Without getting too technical about what each one of them does, let's just say that root words, prefixes, and suffixes help us form words. They are usually Greek or Latin in origin, although we have had them as part of the English language for so long that we don't even think of them as "foreign."

Some of these are very common. For example, "anti" which means "against" helps form word like "antisocial" and "antibacterial."

Some are little less common. "Plas" means "to form" and helps form words like "plaster" and "plastic."

How many, did you say??

There are probably over 2,000 different roots, prefixes, and suffixes out there, and we are not suggesting that you start printing pages of them and reciting them while you brush your teeth .

However, you can use them in a similar way to context clues. When you see a new word, think of what it looks or sounds like. Is there a syllable or two in it that resembles one in a familiar word?

For example, you may not know what the word “bibliophile” is, but you probably know that a “bibliography” has something to do with books. “Biblio” means books, so you can guess that a “bibliophile” probably has something to do with books. That gets you one step closer to figuring out what the word means.

For more information...

You can always do a good, old internet search for roots, prefixes, and suffixes and you will get plenty of results.

Google images has some nifty charts you can print and tape to your bathroom mirror to read while you brush your teeth, if you're into that kind of thing, but that won't be necessary for you to pass the VPT.

If you can look at new word and instead of skipping over it, decipher it even just a little bit, you are that much closer to the correct answer.

The Last Word...

While reading is the BEST way to learn new words, there are several websites out there that can help you build your vocabulary and that are not terribly painful to use.

One of these is FreeRice.com, a “guess the definition” game that rewards you with 10 grains of rice for every question answered correctly. The rice accumulates and goes to people in need. Courtesy of the World Food Programme.

Another one is Dictionary.com, the Word Dynamo menu item. These are quizzes that will help you build your knowledge.