

How to teach vocabulary

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1.i Vocabulary for Beginners

Beginners are more in need of vocabulary than any other level of student. There are a number of ways to present and practice vocabulary that help the learner understand, store and then recall the words. Remember, some learners are visual, some like moving about and learn by doing (kinaesthetic), some like listening and repeating, some like working things out for themselves. Here are some tips for making sure you have a clear aim and effective approach in how you present, explain and help the Ss store new words:

- Explaining vocabulary orally develops cognitive and listening skills but is not always appropriate for beginner Ss due to their low level; thus, PPT visuals, mime, flashcards and drawing are very important. Remember- beginner Ss need *very* simple instructions and explanations in English.
- Adding **cognitive depth** (i.e. getting the Ss brain working!) helps Ss acquire language.
- As does adding **affective depth** (i.e. making it personal in some way, getting the Ss to relate the language to their own life).
- Putting the language in **context**, even just at sentence level, also helps Ss understand it and store it.
- Using **synonyms** (words that mean the same thing), **antonyms** (words with opposite meanings) and **hyponyms** (words related to each other, e.g. flower – carnation – pansy – violet) help Ss understand and store words.
- Helping Ss with **strategies** both to work out the meaning of words and to store and retrieve them, helps Ss become more independent and increase their vocabulary.
- Giving Ss **functional** language helps them be able to use English to carry out simple tasks, both in the classroom and in real life. It's important to start with classroom vocabulary, commands, and language specific to their study environment.
- Keep a **dictionary** in the classroom and show Ss how to use it. English – Chinese is best for beginner Ss. Try not to encourage them in the use of electronic dictionaries, which are often inaccurate.

1.ii Approaches to Presenting and Teaching

The following are different approaches to present and teach new words, in which the above theories are taken into account.

Matching - The word to the picture, the word to the definition, the word to its synonym or antonym, etc. *Adds cognitive depth and gets Ss experimenting with meaning.*

Brainstorming - Can be done in pairs, groups or as whole class, *it is both cognitive and affective*, and it elicits all Ss present knowledge. For example - 'How many kinds of transport do you know?' This also helps Ss to think of words in groups / chains.

Mind-mapping - Similar to brainstorming, but gives Ss visual diagram of how words relate to each other. This helps *understanding and storing*. Try spider diagrams, word trees, etc.

Categorizing - Again *adds cognitive depth*. Ss can have three separate vocabulary chains, e.g. words for transport, furniture and food mixed up, and they have to put them in the correct vocabulary columns.

Ordering - Ss have to put words in some kind of order; e.g. family words, from youngest (baby) to oldest (great-grandfather) or adjectives from very hot (boiling) to very cold (freezing). This can be done on a thermometer-type scale or in steps (bottom step to top step).

Ranking - Similar to ordering, but here Ss have to use their own opinion to rank the words, e.g. Rank the following 5 sports in the order you like them best, number 1 being the most fun, number 5 the least - basketball, football, swimming, badminton, table tennis. Ss then discuss / compare their answers. This is very affective, as it asks the Ss to *relate the words to their own opinions and feelings*. Be sure they understand the instructions first.

Choosing - If Ss choose the words they like / need / want, then it is thought that by personalizing them like this, they will remember them more effectively. For example, if Ss are learning furniture or rooms in a house, why not get them to choose the furniture or rooms in *their own* house and talk about them? In this way, the Ss will *relate the words to their own life and remember them better*.

Spelling - *Works with visual and analytical learners especially*. Highlight how words are spelled and also focus on certain morphemes (the smallest bits of written language) such as plural *s*, regular past tense *ed*, person or worker *er* suffix, etc. You can use word jumbles, word roots (where the Ss see the root of the word then have to add the morpheme, e.g. work - worker), antonyms (happy – unhappy), etc.

Collocating - *Words do not stand alone- they interact with other words in the sentence*. Certain words go naturally with other words. This is called *collocation*. Why do we *make* money, but *do* business? Why can we say *very* tasty but not *very*

delicious? There are sometimes rules (e.g. extreme adjectives need extreme adverbs to modify them), but it is good for beginner Ss to just learn and memorize simple collocations so they can use them correctly in sentences. If the vocabulary you are teaching has certain collocations, make sure these are included in your lesson.

Chunking - When teaching new words, it is useful for Ss not just to learn the word but also the different ways, and different phrases, in which it is used. These bits of language are sometimes referred to as 'prefabricated chunks'. For example, if you teach the question word 'how', why not teach useful chunks featuring the word; e.g.:

'How are you?'
'How old are you?'
'How do you spell..?'
'How do you do?'
'How was your meal?'

Chunks do not have to be whole sentences; they can be collocations, phrases, idioms, etc.

Contextualizing - You can use a simple text or sentences. Present the text first then highlight the target vocabulary (Ss have to underline / find words, or answer simple concept questions on meaning, e.g. True or False / multiple choice). Or, present the vocabulary first, have them practice it then give them text with words embedded in it / gap-fills to put the words in.

Memorizing - Helping Ss with ways to remember the words is important for recall. After presenting vocabulary, it is a good idea to add an activity where they then have to try to remember the words from their pictures, definitions, a quiz, etc.

Listening and Doing - Total Physical Response (TPR) is a method of getting Ss to respond to commands, and show their comprehension through their actions. The teacher uses imperative forms of command (touch / open / get up / sit down / point to / listen) and the Ss do what the teacher says. To teach vocabulary, Ss can be asked to touch or point to pictures, bring or pick up objects, or mime instructions, to show their recognition of vocabulary.

Storing - It is important to teach Ss how to store the words they learn, not just in their heads, but physically too. Encourage use of notebooks where Ss can make their own dictionaries, mind maps and word lists.

Recycling - Try to make sure the words you have just taught will come up again and again in the lesson. A vocabulary presentation activity can be followed by a vocabulary practice activity; Ss can later use the new words in a reading or listening exercise, then again in an oral activity. The more Ss see and practice the new words, the more likely they are to remember them!

1.iii- Activities For Presenting Vocabulary

These activities can be used to present vocabulary for the first time, or review it later. They are also useful for helping Ss store and recall vocabulary.

- **Match-Up** - Ss have to match up the words to the pictures / definitions.
- **Listen and circle / write** - Ss can listen to the audio and circle the word / picture or write the words.
- **Listen and Match** - Ss listen to the audio and match with a word or picture.
- **Eliciting** - T presents visuals (on PPT / flashcards / drawing on board) and elicits word in English. Or: T gives definition or describes, then Ss give word in English.
- **Brainstorming** - In open class, or in groups. E.g. Things in the house - each group has a different room; they have to brainstorm as many things as they can in five minutes that can be found in their room.
- **Mind-Mapping** - Start with a central idea, e.g. transport, and get Ss to think of all the related vocabulary (car, bus, bike...); this can be done in a spider diagram or anything similar.
- **Word Trees** - Similar to mind-maps, but the 'super-ordinate (e.g. transport) is the root and the subordinates are elicited as branches (car, bus, bike...).
- **Mime** - Ss take turns to mime a particular vocabulary set, such as food or action words, class guess.
- **Swap** - Ss each get one or two vocabulary cards. Teacher tells them the words first, then they walk around the room showing the cards to each other and asking each other to say the words. If they get the words right, they swap cards and continue.
- **Concentration** - Cards with the words and definitions / pictures face down. Ss have to match them by turning over two; if they match, they get one point and another turn, if they don't match the cards are turned over again and the other team has a turn.

- **Circle Memory Drill** - Present a list of new vocabulary as pictures in a circle. Drill one-by-one round the circle. As Ss get the hang of the words, take one picture away at a time, so Ss now have to remember what the word was for the missing picture. Eventually, all the pictures have vanished and the Ss are drilling the words in the circle by memory. I find Chinese Ss particularly good at this.
- **In Authentic Pictures or Photos** - For example, teacher shows picture of a family to present family vocabulary.
- **Word bags / boxes** - Why not have a box or bag on the 'Before you go...' PPT slide, or even a real box or bag in the classroom, that Ss put review vocabulary into (on the PPT the words could drop into the box or bag). It gives a visual image of *storing* new words and could aid Ss' recall of them.

1.iv Activities for Practicing Vocabulary

- **True or False** - Teacher or Ss can say simple sentences using new vocabulary (e.g. 'I like football and swimming. I don't like basketball') and class guess which are True or False. T or F questions can also be used as part of a reading.
- **Guessing** - Ss describe a classmate (appearance / clothes / job / family, etc) and class guess who. Or Ss describe an object / place and class guess what / where.
- **Five Things** - Ss have to write or guess five things that are blue, five things you find in the kitchen, etc. Can be extended into a speaking activity where the teams have three minutes to guess each others' five things for a certain category.
- **In Sentences** - Once Ss have new vocabulary, they can practice putting it into whole sentences. E.g.: London is in ____.
- **Words in Text** - Once you have pre-taught the vocabulary using techniques above, have Ss read a short text with the words embedded in it. Note: at pre-beginner level this must be very short and simplified.
- **Gap-Fill** - Ss have to fill in; e.g. 'He helps students learn. He is a ____.'
- **Filling in** - Ss have to fill in a form, make a shopping list, etc, with new vocabulary.
- **Role-play** - As long as it's kept very simple (e.g. a short dialogue), Ss should be able to use new words in short role-plays.
- **'I like...'** Ss sit in a circle (whole class or groups). S1 says 'I like + food word'; S2 says 'He likes... but I like...'. Alternately, you can do this with activities such as sports and make it more communicative (sometimes possible with beginners); S1 says 'I like playing basketball.' Other Ss then have to ask questions. S2 then continues.
- **'I went to the market...'** Similar to 'I like...'. Ss have to say one thing they bought, after first saying what the previous Ss bought. E.g. 'I went to the market and I bought a watermelon'. 'I went to the market and I bought a watermelon and a hot dog...' and so on.
- **Planning a...** For example: You are going to cook dinner for the whole class - plan the meal. Ss need only understand the task then fill in the food vocabulary onto a pre-prepared menu sheet. This encourages Ss to personalize the vocabulary. Instructions can be given in Chinese by the local teacher, but task done in English.
- **Listening** - Ss can listen to a short text and answer questions / write down the vocabulary they hear. They can listen and point, circle or draw. They can use TPR to listen and 'do'.
- **Bingo** - Hand out bingo cards to Ss (a small bit of paper with six boxes); Ss write six words (numbers / foods / animals, whatever you are studying) on their bingo card. Teacher has all the words in a small box or hat; teacher takes out one word at a time, calling out the word. If S crosses off every word on their bingo card, they shout BINGO! and is the winner. Extend by getting Ss to call the words.
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- **Sentence Race**. A good game for large classes and for reviewing vocabulary lessons. Prepare a list of review vocabulary words. Write each word on two small pieces of paper. That means writing the word twice, once on each paper. Organize the pieces like bundles: 2 bundles, 2 sets of identical words. Divide the class into 2 teams. Get them to make creative team names. Distribute each list of words to both teams. Every student on each team should have a paper. Both teams have the same words. When you call a word, 2 students should stand up, one from each team. The students must then run to the blackboard and race to write a sentence using their word. The winner is the one with a correct and clearly written sentence.
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- **What's the Question?** To review question forms previously studied in class. Form two teams. Explain the game, with a few examples of answers in search of questions. Ask: 'What's the question?'; and get students to

- correctly say the corresponding questions for your answer. Have two players, one from each team, come to the front. Style it like a game show if you like, with the students standing side-by-side. If you have access to bells or buzzers, it's even more fun. Next, read an answer to a question and say, 'What's the question?' The fastest player to respond wins a point for her/his team. New contestants come to the front for a new round. This game is difficult for new Intro' Ss, but after a few lessons they could play very simple versions of it, e.g. T: 'Ross; what's the question?' S: 'What's your name?' SA: 'Blue; what's the question?' SB: 'What's your favorite color?'
- - **Bang Bang** - Divide the group into two teams. Explain that they are cowboys and they are involved in a duel. One student from each team comes to the front. Get them to pretend to draw their pistols. Say "how do you say..." and a word in their mother tongue. The first child to give the answer and then "bang bang", pretending to shoot his opponent is the winner. He remains standing and the other one sits down. I give 1 point for the right answer and 5 extra points if they manage to "kill" 4 opponents in a row. Note: Instead of saying the word in the students' mother tongue, it would be possible to use a picture or to say a definition ("What do you call the large gray animal with a long nose?")
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 - **Battleships** - Get Ss to make a grid with numbers along the top, letters along the side; these are for co-ordinates (eg: A3, or D1, etc). Ss then write in some new words horizontally, vertically or diagonally. Ss can play one v. one, or in pairs or teams. The game is played by one player calling out a co-ordinate, their opponent saying whether it was a 'hit' or a 'miss'. If the S hits every letter of the word, then that ship is 'sunk'. The winner is the first player or team to 'sink' all their opponents' 'ships. (Remember- they cannot look at their opponents' grid!)
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 - **Think Fast** - A game for revision or review. It also works well for the last 5 minutes of class. The teacher prepares a list of vocabulary sets for revision e.g. body, animals, colors, etc. Three to five volunteers leave the classroom and wait till their turn has come. The teacher appoints a student to take the exact time and another to take down a tick for every correct answer. No repetitions! (Set up or negotiate rules on pronunciation.) Then the first player is called in.
 1. Teacher: You have 20 seconds to name as many things as you can.
 2. Your topic: Parts of the body / animals / colors, etc.
 3. Ready, steady, go!
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 - **"Tic Tac Toe" or "Noughts and Crosses."** This is a good game for vocabulary revision. Divide the class into two teams. Draw a grid of nine squares on the board and write a number on each square (from 1 to 9). Prepare nine questions or have nine flashcards / pictures with your vocabulary and set one question for each number. The groups call out the numbers and if they answer the question correctly, they get the point. The goal of the game is to make a line (either horizontal, vertical or diagonal).
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 - **Act the sentence** - A great activity to get Ss using new verbs or nouns in a whole sentence. Give S a simple sentence on a slip of paper (e.g. present simple for routines: 'I go to work by bus', or present continuous: 'I am eating a banana'). That S has to act out the sentence, class have to guess the sentence. Do not accept any answer that is not exactly what is written on the paper (this forces Ss to get the grammar right!).
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 - **Fizz Buzz.** Numbers review game. Ss count in a circle (S1: '1', S2: '2', etc). But, they are not allowed to say 3 or 7, or any multiples of 3 or 7 (e.g. 6, 9, 12, 14, 15, etc). For 3 or its multiples Ss must say 'Fizz'; for 7 or its multiples Ss must say 'Buzz'. So, the game goes something like this: 1, 2, Fizz, four, five, Fizz, Buzz, 8, Fizz, 10, 11, Fuzz, etc. If a S makes a mistake, they lose a point and the counting starts back at 1 again.
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 - **Quizzes** - Ss can have an imaginary 'buzzer' (as in a quiz show on TV), or just put their hands up. You can practice all kinds of vocabulary by asking simple questions, holding up pictures, etc. If the game is played in two teams, it motivates Ss to remember and use the new words.
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 - **Add More** - If you know any effective vocabulary presentation, practice or fun activities or games, write them below:

1.v Activities for Practicing Spelling

- **Wordsearch** - Ss have to find the words. (See Puzzlemaker.com wordsearch for example).
- **Word Jumbles** - A good vocabulary review activity. Click to reveal or write on board the jumbled word, Ss have to guess and unscramble it.
- **Spelling Bee** - Teacher can say the word or hold up a picture (or reveal the visual on a PPT slide), Ss have to spell it. Can be played as a team game.
- **Spot the Mistake** - Words presented in groups of three, with one of the three words spelled wrongly; Ss have to correct.
- **Write in the Missing Letter** - Ss have to complete the incomplete words, e.g. numbers: o_e, t_o, th_e_ etc.

- **Hangman** - An old favorite, but still fun for adults as well as kids. You don't need to use a hanged man, you can use a man walking the plank off a boat into shark-infested waters, or a man being slowly beamed up by a UFO.
- **A-Z** - Can only be done with certain vocabulary sets (e.g. food / animals); most Introductory level classes will know enough food words to play this. It can go round in a circle (S1: 'Apple.' S2: 'Banana,' etc) or you can put Ss into teams (Team 1 a – g , Team 2 h - ...). This activity stretches Ss vocabulary and also gets them to visualize the *spelling* of the word.
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- **Catching up on your ABC's** - Write the alphabet on the board. Throw a bean bag or ball to someone and say a word beginning with the letter A. This person must catch the bean bag, say a word beginning with the letter B and then throw it to another person. The third person says a word beginning with the letter C and so on. Obviously the game is meant to be played fast. If played with higher level students you may not want to write the alphabet on the board. There are many ways to change the game to make it adaptable to your level of Ss.
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- **Words Beginning with a Given Letter** - T chooses a letter from the alphabet. Then each S must say a word that begins with that letter. If a S repeats a word that has already been said, then he/she is out of the game. The game ends when only one S remains. That S is the winner.
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- **Chain Spelling** - T gives a word and asks a S to spell it, and then a second S should say a word beginning with the last letter of the word given. The game continues until someone makes a mistake, that is, to pronounce the word incorrectly, misspell it or come up with a word that has been said already, then he/she is out. The last one remaining in the game is the winner. This game can be made difficult by limiting the words to a certain category, e.g.. food, tools, or nouns, verbs, etc.
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- **Survivor Spelling Game.** Make a list of vocabulary covered in previous lessons. Ss stand. Call out a vocabulary word. The first S begins by saying the word and giving the first letter, the second S the second letter of the word, the third student the third letter, and so on until the word is spelled correctly. If somebody makes a mistake they must sit down and we start from the beginning again until the word is spelled correctly. The last S must then pronounce the word correctly and give a definition in order to stay standing. The S who is left standing is the "survivor" and wins the game.

1. Pronunciation

2.i Pronunciation Focus

As well being essential to Ss being understood when they speak English, pronunciation is also useful for them in listening to and recognizing words and for hearing and storing new vocabulary. It includes not just the phonemes (the smallest sounds of language) but also word and sentence pronunciation, stress, intonation and connected speech (how the words sound together in a sentence). Beginner Ss arguably need more pronunciation practice than higher level Ss, and if you can get them forming the sounds the right way at Introductory Level, then there is a good chance their pronunciation will have less problems as they progress up the levels.

2.ii- Pronunciation Tips

Phonetics

- **Learn the phonetic alphabet** and use it when you present or board new language. Many Chinese Ss are familiar with this and it helps them a lot. If you are writing a PPT, include some phonetic transcriptions of words.
- **Present vocabulary written in the phonetic script** and have Ss match it or transcribe it with the written words.
- **Phonetics Race** - Put Ss into teams. Give each team some phonetic symbols. There are 44 for English: vowels, consonants and diphthongs (which are made up of two joined-up sounds) so that each S has three or four each. Read out a word; Ss have to run to the front if they have a symbol that is part of the word. Ss then have to arrange themselves in the order of the word. First S gets a point for their team, last S loses a point for their team. This is a lot of fun, but only works if the Ss enjoy games.
- **Phonetics Swap** - The same as vocabulary swap, but Ss have words written in phonetic script.
- **Phonetic Match-up** - If you are concentrating on two similar sounds Ss have problems with (e.g. ship and sheep), get Ss to match words with those sounds in two columns.

2.iii Phonemes, Words and Sentences

- **Model sounds and words** - It's important that the teacher models all the new words. Enunciate clearly and exaggerate your mouth movement so Ss can see its shape. Ss need to hear the word clearly and see your mouth shape.
- **Drill** - Start chorally (i.e. altogether) then proceed to individuals (this can depend on class size). Drill quietly then loudly then quietly again, to keep it interesting and help with intonation.
- **Isolate problem sounds** - If Ss are having a particular problem with one sound, 'take it out' of the word and practice it in isolation. Again, drill chorally and individually, quietly and loudly, or higher and higher as in musical scales.
- **Instruct Ss on how to form the sounds** - Ss' mouth shape, their lips, tongue, teeth and the air that comes out of their mouth is important. Local Ts can use Chinese to describe this (e.g. 'Put your tongue against the back of your top teeth...'). Look at how Ss are forming the sounds and correct their mouth shape. Don't be afraid to get close up and look!
- **Teach from texts** - Use listening exercises to highlight pronunciation. If Ss hear the words first, they get a model for the sounds and also feel more comfortable.
- **Identify L.1. Interference** - Your first language often has an effect on how you pronounce your second language. Chinese Ss have particular problems with certain English sounds (e.g. the difference between *think* and *sink*). These can be practiced and drilled so Ss are able to pronounce the similar sounds correctly. Cutting out at least some L.1. interference at the beginner stage is important.
- **Tongue Twisters** - Excellent practice for problem sounds. Look them up on the internet or make up your own.
- **Songs** - Listening to a song provides a model, but singing it provides excellent, natural and enjoyable pronunciation practice. However, not all Ss are comfortable singing, and you may have to sing too!
- **Model whole sentences** - Intonation (the rising and falling tones of English) and connected speech (how some sounds change because of the word directly before or after it) are especially difficult for Chinese Ss. Practice drilling phrases and sentences to help with this.
- **Write the sentence on the board** - Show how the words connect together in the sentence by joining them using a curved line.
- **Sound changes** - Show how the sounds of the words change or join together by writing on board and modeling orally, e.g. 'thang kyou'.
- **Back-chaining** - Sometimes if you start at the *end* of a sentence and work your way back in a drill, it helps Ss with intonation and stress. E.g.:

'I like playing football and basketball.'

'Basketball. 'N' basketball. Football 'n' basketball. Playing football 'n' basketball. I like playing football 'n' basketball.'
- **Intonation** - The Chinese tone system makes it particularly difficult for Ss to intone correctly. It's important to highlight this, for example the rising intonation at the end of a question can be practiced orally *and* highlighted on the board with arrows. Also, use your hands to indicate if Ss' intonation should rise or fall.
- **Stress** - In English we often stress the important words (often nouns) in the sentence, or use stress to show our feeling or meaning. E.g.:

How are you?
How **are** you?
How are **you**?

Notice how each stress pattern gives the question a different connotation. It is important for Ss to practice saying words and sentences in different ways. Each word also has its own stress, and incorrect stress can even change the meaning (e.g. **record** (n), **reCORD** (v)).
- **Big box / small box** - Try using big boxes / circles above the word to highlight stressed syllables, small boxes / circles to highlight unstressed ones. Stress can easily be highlighted on a PPT.
- **Finger Correction** - Another way to highlight word or sentence stress is to count out the beats on your fingers, with your hand held up so Ss can see it. If you are designing a PPT and want to highlight stress, you could use a picture of a hand and have the beats highlighted using colors or circles on each finger.