

# Learning vocabulary

## Why is learning vocabulary important in Modern Languages?

Modern Languages requires multiple ways of learning

Passive vocabulary learning includes:

- Reading
- Listening
- Looking up words to establish meaning

Proactive vocabulary learning leads to:

- Using words in the future in different contexts
- Enabling you to speed up reading
- More understanding
- Improved ease of communication

## Memorising is a crucial skill in language learning

Understand what works for you

- Different ways of making our memory work
- Our previous experience affects our practices
- What we need to learn may require specific learning strategies
- Be aware of your individual learning preferences.

Be pro-active

- How can you decide whether you know something?
- Discovering how you learn

Talk to other people about how they learn

- Consider working with friends to share strategies
- Practicing vocabulary with others

## Language apps



## Making your memory work for you

Beginnings

Remembering what is learnt at the beginning of a session

Endings

Remembering what is learnt most recently

## Patterns

The brain likes patterns and structure. Create your own using stories, timelines and mnemonics

## Chunks

Remembering in small chunks. Identify points where to break down what you need to learn. Keep the chunks small.

## Links

Link things with what you already know – hang information onto familiar hooks so you can retain it. Create your own links, no matter how silly.

## What you need to do

- Put things into your memory
- Find the information later
- Use the information when you need to generate some output
  - Conversation
  - Written materials
  - Presentation

Transferring information from short-term to long-term memory

## Input

Use all your senses

Be aware of your individual preferences and what feels effective

[Explore apps for vocabulary development](#)

Visual strategies

# Colour

# Shape

Pictures

- Diagrams
- Flow charts
- Mind maps
- Posters

See for example [German Grammar Rules mind-map](#)

## Accessibility, Student Services Development

### Auditory

- Record
- Listen
- Verbalise (aloud)
- Music
- Rhythm

### Kinaesthetic

- Move
- Write
- Draw
- Touch

## Output

Think about how you will use your vocabulary

### Regularly review and reinforce your learning

This helps transfer information to your long-term memory.

### Keep it small

#### Structured reviews of what you have just learned

- check 15 mins
- review after 24 hours
- Review 2 or 3 days later

You can do this informally – a few minutes regularly each day

### Materials and resources

- Prompt cards
- Sound files
- Practicing with friends

## Applying memory strategies to learning vocabulary

Decide how long you are going to spend on vocabulary each day

**ACTION:** establish a routine

e.g. 15 minutes at the beginning of each work session

Identify what you need to learn

**ACTION 1:** read through your passage without stopping to look up words

Steps:

- Identify which words you know, which you think you can guess from context and which you definitely do not know.
- Use highlights, colour coding, underlining – whichever works for you.
- Read through again checking words in a dictionary. Decide if your guesses were accurate or if you need to learn.

**ACTION 2:** using a dictionary

- Use electronic dictionaries
- Look at all the meanings and make sure you have chosen the right one for the context
- Make sure you have the whole phrase including gender, any following prepositions etc

Keep a record of what you intend to learn

**ACTION:** Aim for a list of words you need to learn both in English and your study language (e.g. French, Russian)

Steps:

- Decide on the materials you need e.g. electronic or paper notebook
- Organise the words e.g. by topic
- How to deal with non-topic specific words e.g. verbs
  - Organised alphabetically?
  - By date with a note of the text they occur in?
  - Colour coded for gender e.g. masculine/feminine nouns
- Provide a short sentence for each word to give context?

Think about how you will learn the vocabulary

**ACTION:** decide how many words at a time you will learn

- Use chunking e.g. 3-4 words initially

**ACTION:** use a multisensory approach (visual, auditory, kinaesthetic) but use your strengths where a particular approach suits you

- Make links. Look for similarities with words you know already that are connected in meaning, recognise root words and analyse, order the words to make up a story, no matter how silly.
- Auditory: Saying aloud in French and English; record yourself saying them in French and leave a space to say the English, sing them!
- Visual: Write in colour, join French and English with shapes; create symbols that mean something to you; make posters of the week's words and put up on the wall. You are trying to create a picture you can use to help you recall.

What to do if you have to work hard at remembering the spelling

**ACTION:** identify the parts of the word you cannot remember

**ACTION:** say it, read it, write it – does repetition help?

**ACTION:** use a stylus or your fingers with a drawing app to 'write' the word as you say it

**ACTION:** focus on the difficult part, highlight it and look for links that will help you recall

- Break the word into chunks that mean something to you

**ACTION:** look, cover, write, check

- Increase the time between looking and writing the word out again to establish it in your memory

## As you build your confidence, increase the number of words you are learning at a time or move to the next

Reviewing your learning

**ACTION:** Use structured reviews (page 3)

**ACTION:** highlight any that are a problem and focus on those

## Final checklist

- Can you read a passage in which your learnt words occur without problems?
- Keep reviewing your learning as your vocabulary increases
- If you understand then several weeks after you added them to your list – they may be in your long-term memory now

Further tips on memory improvement at [www.mindtools.com](http://www.mindtools.com)