



Strategies in Language Learning

How to remember vocabulary

How you choose the words you want to remember will depend upon your level and your needs. Are you a beginner traveler for example, or a beginner in another country to where the language is spoken.

The following general rules are important to consider:

1. Choose high frequency words that you are likely to use in your experience. So for example, working on animal names might not be the best choice unless you are a vet, etc.
2. Choose words appropriate to the level of your language. So working on legal terminology might not be the best choice if you are a beginner.
3. Choose words that can be used in multiple contexts when you are starting out. The high frequency word lists one can find on the net are a good start here.

Of course there may be exceptions to this, but these are useful general guidelines that can accelerate your progress and be more satisfying as they will more readily locate themselves in the sentences you can speak and they will be used more often.



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A Specific Method

Let's say you choose the word "stir" as you like cooking.

Here are my pointers to help you not just remember but be able to use this word.

Put it in at least 3 different sentences that are meaning packed and personal. This creates context and the kinds of links you will need for recall.

1. My mum always stirs the onions when she fries them.
2. I don't like stirring too much as I get tired.
3. If I don't stir the meat, it will burn.

Now it might take you some time to do this the first time. Don't worry. ANY effort you make will help place that word into your memory. By working to create "correct" sentences, you will be using your understanding of the language to help drive it further into your memory. It is important to work towards using grammatically and situationally correct sentences. It is not critical that they be 100% correct. The closer the better though, as that way you are embedding desirable habits into your working memory.

By situationally, I mean that in some situations some language is not really correct even though it may be grammatically correct. For example, "My mother is stirring the meat on the bench" or "If I stir the meat, it will burn" are correct grammatically but they do not make much sense. This might be easy to see here, but one of the criticisms I have made of many language books is that they use language native speakers find hard to process or would never say. "My brother is in Delhi with my cousin," may be hard to make meaningful for some people if they have no brother! Or even worse still, an example which I took from a grammar book, "You're not very good at doing."



Now once you are pretty sure the sentences are ok, there are 2 further things you can do to embed them into your memory:

1. Say them aloud. This way you are using your muscles and your brain in a different way to help you plant them further into your memory by creating different kinds of links.
2. Visualise the actions/meaning as you are saying it. This takes the process to a whole another level as you are now enlisting another part of the brain, which has been shown by scientific testing to be a powerful mechanism to assist memory.

Also, if you look closely at the “stir” example, have used 3 forms of the word stir – stir, stirs & stirring. We have now given this verb a grammatical workout!

At first, this might seem to be overkill for one word but believe me the effort is well worth it. Why? Because you are retraining your brain to work in different ways. Great language learners do this kind of work instinctively. That is where we want you to get to, so you can do this on the run as it were. But first as with any new skill, you first need to train yourself, a step at a time.

Do this with as many new words as you have time to (at least once a day) and you will see that once you get the hang of it, you will become faster in coming up with the sentences. Eventually you won't need to write down any thing. You will be in fact be training your mind to work in the new language, not just translating or whatever else you have been doing.

Expect a little resistance! 😊 Your mind may well play tricks on you and try talking you into using the old “fast” ways. They probably not have been giving you the results you want, otherwise you would not have downloaded this guide!



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You may wonder if this will really work. Well I will make a suggestion. Make a decision to work with this method for 28 days multiple times a day. After that time period, sit down and reflect on your experience. Has anything changed?

I will be very surprised if the answer is no. In fact if you do what I say and there has been no improvement, I will return what you paid, no questions asked!

Enjoy!

Andrew Weiler