

ORGANIZING YOUR VOCABULARY NOTEBOOK

Many students, when they encounter a new word, tend to write it down in their notebook, together with a translation in their native language. They think that by doing so, they have "learned" the word. Not that simple!

You can only say you have "learned" a word when you:

- know what it means
- know how to say it
- know how to spell it
- know when and when not to use it
- know the grammar of the word (e.g. which word must follow it)

Because you need to know so many things about a word, you should organize your vocabulary notebook in such a way that will help you remember new words.

Your vocabulary notebook should be a loose-leaf binder, divided into different sections for different vocabulary types.

Here are some examples of useful sections for your vocabulary notebook. Choose and include in your notebook the sections that you think are most useful to you.

SECTION #1

USEFUL "CHUNKS"

"Chunks" are groups of words or phrases which we can often identify as a **single unit of meaning**. For example, if someone uses "*Do you mind if I ...*" you should understand that the person is asking for permission to do something. So, "*Do you mind if I ...*" is a useful language chunk which fulfils a certain language function (in this case, asking for permission). Chunks should be recorded in your notebook and remembered as a **single unit**.

Sample entries in this section will look like this:

Useful Chunk	Function	Spoken/Written	Example
Do you mind if I ...	Asking for permission	S, W	It's hot in here. Do you mind if I open the window?
<i>Would you like ...</i>	<i>Offering</i>	<i>S, W</i>	<i>Would you like some coffee?</i>

SECTION #2

ADJECTIVE + NOUN COLLOCATIONS

Many words tend to have specific "partners". For example, a particular noun will take only certain adjectives. We need to know which adjectives go with which nouns. When you are listening or reading in English, pay attention to which adjectives are being used for a particular noun. If the same adjective is being used often, it is likely that this is a strong collocation, and it is a good idea to write down the adjective and noun pair in your notebook.

Sample entries in this section will look like this:

good	luck
bad	
hard	
tough	
rotten	
main	concern
serious	
real	
deep	
grave	

SECTION #3

VERB + NOUN COLLOCATIONS

Just as there are adjective and noun collocations, there are also verb and noun collocations. We can only use certain verbs together with a noun. For example, we can say "make mistakes", but we cannot say "do mistakes", so *make* and *mistake* form a strong verb + noun collocation. When you learn a new noun, therefore, it is useful to find out and remember which verbs can be used before the noun, and record the verb and noun pairs in your notebook.

Sample entries in this section will look like this:

make (a)	bargain
reach (a)	
arrive at (a)	
strike (a)	
keep to (a)	
<i>eat</i>	lunch
<i>have</i>	
<i>make</i>	
<i>prepare</i>	
<i>go out for</i>	

SECTION #4

PHRASAL VERBS

"Phrasal verbs" forms a large and important part of the English vocabulary. Native speakers use a large number of phrasal verbs in both their spoken and written English. It is therefore important to learn and understand common phrasal verbs. However, just memorizing lists of phrasal verbs (e.g. take over, take out, take off...) out of context can be very confusing and painstaking. It is better to remember phrasal verbs in context - that is, getting yourself familiarized with how they are being used in a sentence.

Sample entries in this section will look like this:

		Meaning	Example
break	up (with someone)	Stop being friends (with someone)	I broke up with my boyfriend because we don't get along anymore.
	into	Enter by the use of force	Last night when we were out, our house got broken into.
	down	Lose control of one's feelings	She broke down in tears when she heard the bad news.
	down	(machines) stop working	My car broke down so I had to take the bus to work.

Section 5

Expressions with Common Verbs

Simple, common verbs (e.g. get, take, make, put ...) almost always combine with other words to form useful expressions. We should remember and use such expressions as *a single unit*, and should not analyze the meaning of each word in such expressions. For example, the word "*make*" combines with different words to form expressions such as "*make sense*", "*make mistakes*", "*make love*", "*make peace*", etc. If you try to break down, say, "make sense", and analyze the meaning of "make" and "sense" separately, can you come up with a meaning for "make sense"? I guess not! Because "make sense" is a single unit and we cannot break it down.

Sample entries in this section will look like this:

Get	dressed
	angry
	lost
	injured
	drunk
Take	it easy
	care
	a break
	(something/someone) for granted

SECTION #6

TOPICS SUCH AS "TRAVEL", "JOBS", "SPORTS"

It is also useful to organize words and expressions into specific topics. It helps you remember the new vocabulary by association. Depending on your English level, you can have as many categories as you can think of for a particular topic. Take the topic of "sports" as an example, you can have the following categories: different kinds of sports; places where people do sports; sports related gear and equipment; adjectives describing sports, etc. Under each category, brainstorm and write down as many words and expressions as you can.

Sample entries in this section will look like this:

Topic	Kinds of Sports	Places	Gear and Equipment	Adjectives
Sports	tennis	tennis court	tennis racket	exciting strenuous
	ice hockey	hockey rink	hockey stick puck skates	fast-paced dangerous violent
	baseball	baseball field	baseball glove	interesting
	golf	golf course	golf club	relaxing

SOME FINAL COMMENTS

RECORDING STRESS PATTERNS

As you know, recognizing the stress (the "loudest part") within a word in English is very important. To identify the stress in a word, you have to first identify how many syllables or separate sound groups (音節) it has. In English, each vowel sound (母音) is in a separate sound group. So, "internet" has three syllables: in-ter-net. Then you need to identify the loudest syllable. In "internet", it's on the first syllable: IN-ter-net.

To make sure you say new words correctly, you should identify and record where the stress falls. You can do something like this:

—
in-ter-net or
IN-ter-net or
'in-ter-net

I hope you find the suggestions on organizing your vocabulary notebook useful. If there is anything unclear to you, or if you are using some other good methods that you would like to share with other students, please email me at 2ndnature-english@rogers.com.