

## The aim of this leaflet

Most of us find it difficult to find the right word in a foreign language when we are trying to speak or write, even though we know the word when we see it written down. The aim of this leaflet is to introduce you to materials that you may find useful if you want to make your vocabulary more active, and to suggest learning techniques that you may like to try.

## Choosing materials

- If you want to improve your vocabulary for **speaking**, it's useful to *listen to conversations* as much as possible; similarly, to improve your vocabulary for **writing**, it's useful to *read* as widely as possible. Both these methods will help you to see how words are used in context, which is vital if you want to use vocabulary appropriately. You can do this anywhere, not necessarily in the Language Commons.
- If you want to use commercial learning materials, you may find it useful to choose material which shows words in context, and gives a lot of information about words which are commonly associated together (*collocations*,

*synonyms*<sup>1</sup> etc.). Listening material that has tapescripts will be useful.

## Useful materials in the Language Commons

### Vocabulary textbooks

- For material on **collocations**, try the following:  
*More than Words 1*, unit 5

### Pronunciation materials

If you are trying to improve your spoken vocabulary, it's vital (a) to know the spoken forms of words, and (b) to know how they are pronounced in context, in connected speech.

- To know **how a word is pronounced**, we recommend:  
*The American Heritage Dictionary*
- To learn more about **how the pronunciation of words changes in connected speech**, and in particular, how words link together, you will find the following materials in the Language Commons useful (all on the *Pronunciation* shelves):

*Speaking Clearly, In Tempo*.

For more information and advice on pronunciation, check out the Advice Sheet **Selecting Materials for Pronunciation (P3)**.

### Dictionaries

- For examples of how words are used in context:  
*COBUILD English Dictionary, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*
- For groups of similar words together (these help you to see the difference between similar words):  
*Longman Language Activator, Longman Lexicon of Contemporary English*. The *Longman Language Activator* helps you choose the right word or phrase to express your meaning, e.g. *stumble/trip/collapse/fall flat on your face* rather than just 'fall'.

<sup>1</sup> See the glossary at the end of this leaflet for definitions.

## Other reference materials

These reference sources give extra information about what words normally go together:

- *WordNeighbor* is a software learning tool that provides a huge amount of information about how English words are used in context. *WordNeighbor* also shows you word *collocations*<sup>2</sup>, word frequency etc., and can be accessed as you write your document. Ask a Speaking or Writing Adviser for a demonstration if you want to find out more about its many features.
- *COLLINS COBUILD Dictionary Collocations*.

## Learning tips

Here are some tips for learning vocabulary for speaking or writing. You may already have your own method that works well for you. If so, that's great — stick with it. If not, you may like to try one of these:

- Read or listen as much as you can.
- Find lots of examples of how the words you want to use are used **in context** (use dictionaries, concordancers etc.). Learning common combinations of words or phrases will be very helpful for your speaking or writing.

---

<sup>2</sup> See the glossary at the end of this leaflet for definitions.

- Read or listen to a lot of material on one topic (or a small number of topics). This helps you quickly become familiar with vocabulary on that topic. For example, for listening you can:
  - interview a number of fluent/advanced/native speakers for one or two minutes each on the same topic and record each conversation. You can then play back all the short recordings, noting the vocabulary used.
  - follow a major news story on the radio or TV over a period of time.
  - only listen to certain types of news story.
- Use diagrams to make connections between words that are associated together. See *English Vocabulary in Use*, unit 2 (*Vocabulary* shelf).
- Put the word you are learning into a sentence about you or what interests you at the moment. e.g. *Categorise*: I'm categorising the words into different topics.
- Ask an advanced/fluent speaker to check that your sentences are appropriate.
- Practise speaking or writing as much as possible.
- Read Chapter 7 of *How to Learn a Language* (*Study skills* shelf).
- If you are not sure which words you should spend your time on, check out the

Advice Sheet **Deciding Which Words are Worth learning (V2)**.

- For tips about organizing your learning so that it's systematic and you don't become overloaded, check out the Advice Sheet **Organizing Your Vocabulary Learning (V3)**.
- For tips about remembering words that you have learned, check out the Advice Sheet **Remembering Vocabulary (V4)**.
- If you want to learn phrases or units of language that are longer than just one word, check out the Advice Sheet **Learning Phrases or Idioms (V10)**.
- For tips on how to keep talking when you can't think of the right word, see the Advice Sheet **Coping with Problems: Strategies for Speaking B (S3)**.

**N.B. The important thing is to find out what works/does not work for you and why.** Do your methods help you to learn effectively? If not, what could you do that would help you learn more effectively?

If you do use an effective technique, please contact an Adviser to let us know about it — we would like to hear from you!

## Evaluating your progress

Here are some methods for checking on your progress that you may like to try:

- Keep records of your writing or speaking. (With speaking, you can tape-record your conversations.) Can you find evidence of progress? If not, try to focus on what is causing you difficulties.
- Keep a diary as you learn. Write down your feelings and comment on your progress as you go. This will help you to see evidence of progress and detect problems.
- Ask a fluent or advanced speaker or writer of English to check your speaking/writing. They will be able to comment on your performance or tell you if you have progressed after a period of time.
- Make an appointment to see an adviser for advice about evaluation.
- For more information, see the Advice Sheet **Evaluating Your Vocabulary Learning (V5)**.

**And now...**

If you would like any help or advice, or just a chat about your progress, please get in touch - **we are here to support your independent learning!** To contact us:

- Make an appointment to see an adviser. For details of advisers and their availability, please go to <https://ilang.cle.ust.hk/language-adviser-timetable/>.
- E-mail your questions to **iLANG** ([lcilang@ust.hk](mailto:lcilang@ust.hk)).
- Ask at the reception counter of the Language Commons — if the receptionist cannot help you directly, s/he will pass your query on to one of the advisers.

## What else can you do?

- Browse the many physical (<https://ilang.cle.ust.hk/language-commons/#resources>) and online materials (<https://ilang.cle.ust.hk/resources-vocabulary/>) for Vocabulary.
- Join a Vocabulary activity or short course (<http://ilang.cle.ust.hk/vocabulary/>).

•  
**Glossary**

<b>Antonym</b>	A word that is opposite in meaning to another word.
<b>Collocation</b>	When two words often go together (i.e. one follows the other in speech or writing), they are said to collocate with each other. For example, an adjective that often collocates with <i>rain</i> is <i>heavy</i> . <i>Heavy rain</i> , therefore, is a collocation.
<b>Concordancer</b>	A computer program that searches through a large collection of texts and then lists all the examples of a particular word in context.
<b>Connected speech</b>	Fast, conversational spoken English — i.e. the speaker does not stop to pronounce each word separately, but produces a ‘stream’ of sounds joined together.
<b>Synonym</b>	A word similar in meaning to another word.
<b>Tapescript</b>	The written text of a spoken audio or video recording. Tapescripts are available for most tapes in the Language Commons: ask at the Language Commons Reception if you can’t find one for the audiotape or videocassette you are using.

*Last Updated: September 2017*