

# Improve your English vocabulary by learning root words

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A rich vocabulary is an important indicator of a person's command over the English language. That is one of the reasons why we keep offering tips regularly on [how to improve your English vocabulary](#). However, building one's vocabulary requires sustained effort to discover and add new words that can be used effectively in your communication.

The process of enriching one's vocabulary can be simplified into 4 key steps: read a lot of good English books, magazines and newspapers or watch good English programmes and movies; identify new words; understand their meaning and usage; start using those words. Keep repeating the process as part of a continuous learning exercise.



The above process is a proven approach and can be applied to improve your vocabulary in any language and isn't limited to English only. In addition to this time-tested method, we suggest another technique that can be extremely useful and help you grasp and understand new English words faster. This technique is based on developing an understanding of etymology or the study of origins (or roots) of words. While it sounds a bit complex, the reality is that it is not, if you get a grip of how to use etymology.

For example, let us consider the following words: autophile, travelophile, androphile, bibliophile. As you can see, all of these words have the common suffix 'phile' in them. If you were to know that the word 'phile' actually indicates a person who has an affection or love for something, would you be able to better understand (or even guess) what these words mean? To put it simply, a travelophile is a person who likes travel and a bibliophile is a person who likes books! Along similar lines, a 'philosopher' is a lover of wisdom.



Just like ‘philo’ indicates love for something, the word phobia indicates ‘fear’. If you remember this word, then every time you see a word that has ‘phobia’ in it, you know that it denotes a fear of something. You can use your own understanding and intelligence to guess the meanings of some words. For example, the fear of water is hydrophobia. You will know that the word ‘hydro’ is related to water – for example, hydroelectric power plant; or ‘keep the body hydrated’.

The beauty of learning [root words](#) is that it quickly enables you to multiply your vocabulary. To give you some more examples, let us say that you understand the root word of sleep is “somnus”. So, when you see words like ‘somnolent’ (sleepy/drowsy), somnambulism (the practice of sleep walking), and insomnia (‘sleeplessness’), you will be able to quickly see the connection between these words and thus retain them in your head much better. Drawing such connections go a long way in getting new English words deeply entrenched in your vocabulary.

If you are interested in improving your vocabulary by learning about root words, we highly recommend the book “Word Power Made Easy” by Norman Lewis. This book has been used since a very long time by students appearing for international competitive tests like GRE and GMAT. Of course, there are lots of online resources available now to help you understand etymology and how to use that to improve your English language skills.

Last but not the least, if you are serious about using this technique to grow your vocabulary, then a key quality required is ‘curiosity’. It will enable you to learn a lot more root words, and the more such words you know, the richer your vocabulary will be!

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1. [Voracious reading: The real secret to building a strong English Vocabulary](#)
2. [To speak good English, surround yourself by people who speak English fluently](#)
3. [Why you should focus more on correct English pronunciation, not accent](#)

#### 4. [How to improve English Listening and Comprehension Skills](#)

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