

# Working with Words

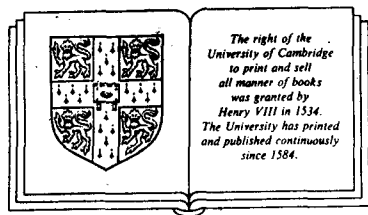
A guide to teaching and  
learning vocabulary

*Ruth Gairns and  
Stuart Redman*

# Working with Words

A guide to teaching and  
learning vocabulary

*Ruth Gairns and  
Stuart Redman*



Cambridge University Press  
Cambridge  
London New York New Rochelle  
Melbourne Sydney

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP  
32 East 57th Street, New York, NY 10022, USA  
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1986

First published 1986

Printed in Great Britain at The Bath Press, Avon,

Library of Congress catalogue card number: 85-30871

*British Library cataloguing in publication data*

Gairns, Ruth

Working with words: a guide to teaching and  
learning vocabulary. — (Cambridge handbooks for  
language teachers)

1. English language — Study and teaching —  
Foreign speakers 2. Vocabulary — Study and  
teaching

I. Title II. Redman, Stuart

428.1 PE1128.A2

ISBN 0 521 26889 3 hard covers

ISBN 0 521 31709 6 paperback

### Copyright

It is normally necessary for written permission to be obtained *in advance* from the publisher. Because *Working with Words* contains resource material, those activities which carry the wording '© 1986 Cambridge University Press' may be photocopied. The normal requirement is waived here and it is not necessary to write to Cambridge University Press for permission.

## Acknowledgements

We are grateful to all the people who have helped us with this book. Our thanks to:

Our editor, Michael Swan, whose expert help and guidance has been invaluable to us throughout the writing of the book.

Mary Carline, and the other authors acknowledged throughout the book, for specific ideas we have borrowed.

Tim Lowe, Eddie Williams, and Jean Stokes, for guidance in shaping the book.

The teachers at International House (London), and The London School for English, for piloting the student activities and providing us with essential feedback on the material.

Paul Meara for his comments on the final manuscript.

And finally, to Margherita Baker, Peter Ducker and the Editorial Staff at CUP for all their efforts in making this book possible.

The authors and publishers are grateful to the following for permission to reproduce copyright material:

pp.4-5 and 128-9 extracts from the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* edited by A. S. Hornby, pp.46 and 98 extracts from *Use your Dictionary* by Adrian Underhill, pp.180-1 extracts from *Streamline English: Connections* by Bernard Hartley and Peter Viney, reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press; p.11 article from the *Sunday Mirror* and pp.85, 116-7, 118 articles from the *Daily Mirror*, Syndication International Ltd; p.12 transcript of radio advertisement for Concorde Wine, Vine Products Group; pp.23-4 adapted text from *Themes* by Alan Matthews and Carol Read, Collins Educational; pp.28 and 29 extracts from the *Longman Active Study Dictionary*, pp.42 and 61 extracts from the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, p.43 extracts from the *Longman Lexicon of Contemporary English* edited by Tom McArthur, p.152 extract from *Storylines* by Mark Fletcher and David Burt, pp.174-5 extracts from *Studying Strategies* by Brian Abbs/Ingrid Freebairn with John Clegg/Norman Whitney, Longman Group Ltd, pp.38 and 41 extracts from *The Words you Need* by B. Rudska, J. Channel, Y. Putseys, P. Ostyn, Macmillan, London and Basingstoke; p.56 article reproduced by courtesy of *The Observer* London\*; p.113 extract from *Play Games with English: Book 1* by Colin Granger, illustrated by John Plumb, Heinemann Educational Books; pp.118 and 120 articles from *The Standard*, Express Newspapers p.l.c.; pp.121-2 by Peter Wilby from *The Sunday Times*, Times Newspapers Ltd; p.170 extract from *Gyles Brandreth's Book of Puzzles and Brain teasers*, Octopus Books Ltd.

\**The Observer* publishes a resource pack of authentic source material for teachers of EFL. In nine monthly packs, from October to June, over 150 *Observer* articles are used, each with a specially written worksheet and exercises. Available by subscription only, further details from: The Observer EFL Service, 8 St. Andrew's Hill, London EC4V 5JA.

# Contents

Acknowledgements	viii
Preface	1

---

## PART A WORDS: THEIR MEANINGS AND FORMS

---

<b>1 Language awareness activities</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2 Words and their meanings</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1 Conceptual meaning	13
2.2 Affective meaning	18
2.3 Style, register and dialect	20
2.4 Sense relations	22
2.4.1 Synonymy	23
2.4.2 Hyponymy	24
2.4.3 Antonymy	24
2.4.4 Other types of relations	28
2.4.5 Translation equivalents	30
2.5 Multi-word verbs	33
2.6 Idioms	35
2.7 Collocation	37
2.8 Componential analysis	40
<b>3 Words and their forms</b>	<b>44</b>
3.1 The grammar of vocabulary	44
3.2 Word building	47
3.3 Pronunciation	50

---

## PART B PRINCIPLES IN LEARNING AND TEACHING VOCABULARY

---

<b>4 Decisions about content</b>	<b>54</b>
4.1 Student responsibility and teacher responsibility	54
4.2 Criteria for selection	57
4.2.1 Frequency	58
4.2.2 Cultural factors	59
4.2.3 Need and level	59
4.2.4 Expediency	61



## Contents

4.3	Receptive versus productive vocabulary	64
4.4	How many items to teach	66
4.5	Grouping of items of vocabulary	69
<b>5</b>	<b>How the learner discovers meaning</b>	<b>73</b>
5.1	Traditional approaches and techniques used in the presentation of new vocabulary items	73
5.1.1	Visual techniques	73
5.1.2	Verbal techniques	74
5.1.3	Translation	75
5.2	Student-centred learning	76
5.2.1	Asking others	77
5.2.2	Using a dictionary	79
5.2.3	Contextual guesswork	83
<b>6</b>	<b>Memory and written storage</b>	<b>86</b>
	<i>Theoretical aspects</i>	86
6.1	Types of memory	86
6.2	Organisation of the mental lexicon	87
6.3	Why do we forget?	89
	<i>Practical implications</i>	90
6.4	Meaningful tasks	90
6.5	Imagery	92
6.6	Rote learning	93
6.7	Recycling	93
6.8	Written storage systems for learners	95

---

## PART C CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

---

<b>7</b>	<b>Using visual aids</b>	<b>103</b>
7.1	Using pictures as a guide to meaning	103
7.2	Using pictures for further practice	111
<b>8</b>	<b>Using authentic reading texts</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Teacher designed contexts and the use of the dictionary</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Speaking activities</b>	<b>144</b>
10.1	Role play	144
10.2	Narrative	149
10.3	Processes, priorities and appropriacy	154
<b>11</b>	<b>Games, questionnaires and problem solving</b>	<b>163</b>

---

**PART D VOCABULARY IN COURSE BOOKS**

---

<b>12 Vocabulary in course books</b>	<b>171</b>
12.1 Checklist	171
12.2 Extracts from course books	173

Key	185
Bibliography	196
Index	199

## Preface

In recent years, vocabulary has not received the recognition it deserves in the classroom. Not that it has been characterised by any neglect in terms of quantity. A vast amount of teaching time is consumed by explanation and definition, classroom blackboards are often littered with masses of new lexical items, and students compile page upon page of vocabulary word-lists that they rarely have the opportunity to practise. The simple fact is that vocabulary seems to arise in the classroom regardless of the chosen activity, and in spite of any conscious design on the teacher's part. Perhaps this is the root of the problem. Why should we go out of our way to select lexical items and invent classroom activities when there is a form of natural selection inherent in any classroom activity and an element of vocabulary teaching in every piece of classroom material? The answer lies in our assessment of what is useful and appropriate from this input. Can we assume that vocabulary arising incidentally in classroom materials will automatically be the most useful and appropriate to our students?

At this point it is relevant to consider the factors which distinguish 'street learning' from school learning. It is probably safe to assume that learners in an English-speaking country (and without the aid of formal instruction) will eventually uncover the vocabulary relevant to their individual needs. In a school learning situation with limited time available, conflicting student interests, and the constraints imposed by other syllabus demands, we cannot leave lexis to take care of itself in this random fashion and assume that students will acquire the vocabulary which best suits their needs.

In organising school learning, we have to select vocabulary carefully to ensure that high priority items are included, and provide varied opportunities for practice to compensate for the lack of repeated exposure available to the 'street learner'. It is the aim of this book to assist the teacher in making the most prudent selection and organisation of lexis for the classroom, and to offer as wide a range of practice ideas as we can summon up, in order to facilitate the kind of interesting generative practice without which effective learning cannot take place.

On the assumption that most people learn by doing, we have included a wide range of reader activities throughout the book. On the further assumption that people enjoy and benefit from feedback on their efforts,



## *Preface*

we have included a key of suggested answers at the back of the book. We must stress, however, that the answers are not exhaustive (this would have required a second book), and some of the activities are far too subjective to offer more than a very personal and possibly biased opinion about the best answer. The *Further reader activities* in parts C and D do not have answers in the key.

*Note:* For convenience we have referred to the teacher and student throughout in the masculine form. This is not because we are assuming an all-male readership and all-male classes, but because of the inadequacies of the English pronoun system.

## PART A WORDS: THEIR MEANINGS AND FORMS

### **1 Language awareness activities**

The activities which follow are intended as a practical introduction to some of the issues which are explored in chapters 2 and 3. They focus on typical problems learners encounter when acquiring vocabulary as well as on certain pedagogic questions.

You will find suggested answers in the key at the back of the book.

#### **1 READER ACTIVITY**

The utterances below were all made by foreign learners. The nationality of the speaker is given beside each example. Read each example and then answer the comprehension questions below each one. Afterwards, check your answer with the key at the back.

- 1 I've studied in a public school. (Italian)  
Q: Did the student pay, get a scholarship or have a free education?
- 2 I live in Sao Paulo which is a great city. (Brazilian)  
Q: Is the speaker giving factual information about Sao Paulo or expressing his opinion?
- 3 Can you tell me the way to the subway? (a Mexican at Piccadilly Circus)  
Q: Does the speaker want to cross the street or take a train?
- 4 I feel sorry for people who live in the suburbs. (Spanish)  
Q: Does the speaker think the suburbs are boring and middle-class, or ugly and poverty-stricken?
- 5 I'm not sure if that's possible – I'll have to look at my agenda. (French)  
Q: Is he going to look at the notes for a meeting or his diary?
- 6 The ski station is very pretty. (Tunisian)  
Q: Is the speaker talking about a railway station?

#### **2 READER ACTIVITY**

The three lists of words below are written in French, German and Spanish. Choose one of the languages with which you are not familiar and give what you feel to be an equivalent translation for each item.

<i>French</i>	<i>German</i>	<i>Spanish</i>
terrible	aktuell	contenta
librairie	singen	embarazada
furieux	famos	tímido
préparer	Menü	constipado
canne à pêche	kommen	movimiento

### 3 READER ACTIVITY

Look at the three items of vocabulary below. If you were going to teach them to a general English class, which meaning and which grammatical value would you teach first for each one? (The items are not related.)

picket      grant      record

Now look at the definitions of these items from the *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English (OALDCE)*. The dictionary states that definitions are listed in order of meaning from the most common or simple to the most rare or complicated. Do you agree with their order?

**picket** /'pɪkt/ *n* 1 pointed stake, etc set upright in the ground (as part of a fence, or to tether a horse to). 2 small group of men on police duty, or sent out to watch the enemy. 3 worker, or group of workers, stationed at the gates of a factory, dockyard, etc during a strike, to try to persuade others not to go to work: a ~ line, line of ~s, eg outside a factory. *flying ~*, ~ formed of workers who do not work at the place where the ~ is stationed. ☐ *vt, vi* [VP6A, 2A] 1 put ~s(1) round; tether (a horse) to a ~(1). 2 place ~s(2) in or round; station (men) as ~s. 3 place ~s(3) at: ~ a factory; act as a ~(3).

**grant** /grɑːnt *US*: grænt/ *vi* 1 [VP6A, 12A, 13A] consent to give or allow (what is asked for): ~ a favour/request; ~ sb permission/a request to do sth. He was ~ed a pension. 2 [VP6A, 9, 25] agree (that sth is true): ~ the truth of what someone says; ~ing this to be true/that this is true. I ~ his honesty/~ that he is honest. He's an honest man, I ~ you. *take sth for ~ed*, regard it as true or as certain to happen. *take sb for ~ed*, treat his presence and actions as a due rather than a favour. ☐ *n* sth ~ed, eg money or land from a government: ~s towards the cost of a university education; ~-aided schools/students.

**rec-ord** <sup>1</sup> /'rekɔːd *US*: 'rekɔːd/ *n* 1 [C] written account of facts, events, etc: a ~ of school attendances/of road accidents; the (Public) 'R~ Office, one in London where public documents with accounts of events, official acts, etc written down at the time they occur, are stored. 2 [U] state of being ~ed or preserved in writing, esp as authentic evidence of sth: a matter of ~, sth that is established as fact by being ~ed. *be/go/put sb on ~*. It is on ~ that the summer was the wettest for 50 years. I don't want to go on ~/don't want you to put me on ~ as saying that I think the Prime Minister a fool. *off the ~*, (colloq) not for publication or for recording: What the President said at his press conference was off the ~, not to be repeated by the newspaper men there, and not to be

used in their reports or articles. 3 [C] facts known about the past of sb or sth: *He has an honourable ~ of service/a good ~. Your ~ is in your favour.* What we know about your past is favourable to you. *That airline has a bad ~*, eg has had many accidents to its aircraft. 4 [C] sth that provides evidence or information: *Our museums are full of ~s of past history. R~s of ancient civilizations are still being excavated.* 5 [C] disc on which sound has been registered; what is ~ed on such a disc: 'gramophone ~s. ⇨ recording. ~-player n instrument for reproducing sound from discs (often one connected to an external loud-speaker). 6 [C] limit, score, point, attainment, mark, etc (high or low), not reached before; (esp in sport) the best yet done: *Which country holds the ~ for the marathon? Two ~s fell during the sports meeting at Oslo last week.* (attrib) *Hill made a ~ score in the match against Kent*, (cricket) scored a total that was a ~. *There was a ~ rice crop in Thailand that year.* *break/beat the ~*, do better than has been done before. Hence, ~-breaking adj.

re·cord<sup>2</sup> /rɪ'kɔ:d/ vt [VP6A] 1 set down in writing for reference; preserve for use, by writing or in other ways, eg on a disc, magnetic tape, videotape, film, etc: *This volume ~s the history of the regiment. The programme was ~ed.* Cf a 'live' broadcast. *The tape-recorder has ~ed his voice and the camera has ~ed his features.* ~ing angel, angel who, it is said, ~s men's good and bad actions. 2 (of an instrument) mark or indicate on a scale: *The thermometer ~ed 40°C.*

#### 4 READER ACTIVITY

Look at the way students have expressed themselves in the sentences below. In each case, can you suggest an idiomatic expression it would be appropriate for the student to learn?

e.g. 'When he told me women are not allowed on the underground, I knew he was *having a joke with me*.'

Answer: to pull someone's leg.

- 1 'In England, it is very bad to *go in front of someone else* in the queue.'
- 2 'Can you *take me in your car* to the station, John?'
- 3 'I was so tired when I went to bed last night that I *slept immediately*.'
- 4 'You are wearing your jumper *the wrong way*; I can see the label.'
- 5 'I had a terrible accident and my car was *completely damaged*.'
- 6 'Parents sometimes get angry because their children *do not thank them for their work*.'
- 7 'I can only study in England for one month so it is important for me to *take advantage of the time*.'
- 8 'I know a little hotel. It's an *unusual place* and not many people go there, but it's very nice.'

5 READER ACTIVITY

The sentences below are all typical learner utterances. What important feature of teaching do they highlight?

- 1 He made a complain about the food.
- 2 He's an economy lecturer.
- 3 I think the company needs to product more next year.
- 4 We devaluated our currency last year.
- 5 Kissinger is a politic.
- 6 It's a very analystical book.
- 7 My mother is a very good cooker.
- 8 You are very unpolite.

6 READER ACTIVITY

Look at the letter below. It contains several different errors, but which would you identify as being the area which requires the most *urgent* attention?

Calle Uria, 24  
Madrid  
May 24th

Dear Sir,

I am a student of English in Spain and my teacher advised me that I write to you for informations.

I want to make a course at London during the summer for one month and I would like that the course includes some Business English. I would prefer study on a course very intensive.

Could you also suggest me where I can find accommodation in London?

I look forward to hearing from you with all the informations.

Yours sincerely,



Conchita Piquer.

7 READER ACTIVITY



Look at the groups of verbs below. Each group has a specific problem for students: in each case, there would be one in particular which would need pointing out to students. What is it in each different group? (You should have four different problems at the end of the exercise.)

*Group 1*

to bring to take to eat to swim to fall

*Group 2*

to rely to depend to insist to apply

*Group 3*

to see to hear to want to know to smell

*Group 4*

to prefer to enjoy to dislike to avoid

8 READER ACTIVITY



Students are often required to transform a whole passage into the plural form. Look at the passage below and make the necessary changes in the forms of nouns, verbs and pronouns. What areas can you identify as being a source of difficulty for learners? You should find five different types of potential error.

The old woman, weighed down by heavy luggage, walked slowly along the corridor until she reached the check-in desk. The man in front of her was asking for information about the overdue flight while his wife was trying to control their hysterical child. A person near her was asking a policeman for advice about parking restrictions. The woman's patience was wearing thin.

9 READER ACTIVITY



What's the opposite of ...

dry?

strong?

rough?

thick?

hard?

Now give the opposite of the following:

dry wine

strong cigarettes

a rough sea

a thick person

a hard exercise

What does this indicate about the very common practice of teaching 'opposites'?

*Words: their meanings and forms*

10 READER ACTIVITY

In the groups below, cross out the 'wrong' answer in each case. What type of error is being made, and how can it be accounted for?

- |   |                               |  |  |
|---|-------------------------------|--|--|
| 1 | He made                       |  | an arrangement.<br>the bed.<br>a photo.  |
| 2 | He got off                    |  | the plane.<br>the taxi.<br>his bike.   |
| 3 | He lost                       |  | his wallet so he went to the police.<br>the bus so he was late.<br>his way so he got very upset. |
| 4 | He did                        |  | nothing all afternoon.<br>his homework.<br>an investment.  |
| 5 | A fire<br>The lesson<br>A war |  | broke out.   |

11 READER ACTIVITY

The groups of multi-word verbs below represent different ways that one might approach the teaching of such verbs. What is the logic behind each approach and do you consider any of the approaches to be more suitable than others?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 | to put something on<br>to put somebody up<br>to put somebody/something off |
| 2 | to take something up<br>to look something up<br>to bring something up      |
| 3 | to ring somebody up.<br>to get through<br>to hang up                       |
| 4 | to take off   clothes<br>a person<br>£5 (i.e. reduce)                      |



## 12 READER ACTIVITY

In the sentences below, can you think of incorrect words that students might use in place of the italicised items? How would you account for these mistakes?

- 1 When I was younger, I used to enjoy sitting in the back row at the cinema.
- 2 We have a ten-minute *break* between each lesson.
- 3 After twenty-five years he finally *achieved* his ambition.
- 4 In English cinemas it's very *common* to have an ice-cream in the interval.
- 5 Have you got any *room* in your car for me?
- 6 I'd like two tickets for the Saturday evening performance – preferably two *seats* next to the *aisle*.

## 13 READER ACTIVITY

If upper-intermediate or advanced students were given the words below, they would probably encounter a number of pronunciation difficulties unless the words were known to them. However, some of the words are likely to be more difficult than others. (For the moment, we are putting aside the difficulties likely to be encountered by different nationalities (e.g. German /v/ and /w/, Japanese /l/ and /r/) and we are focussing on the problems of sound/spelling relationships common to *most* learners.)

- 1 Can you decide which words would create most problems?
- 2 What skills are necessary for a student to improve his pronunciation?

vicarage	sew
tomb	rectory
deniable	thyme
phrenology	awry
wrestle	bough
knave	dough

## 14 READER ACTIVITY

What changes, if any, would you wish to make to the language employed in the passages below, and what particular feature of vocabulary teaching do they highlight?

- 1 *On the telephone:*  
 Mrs Jones: Hello?  
 Carlo: Uh, is that Mrs Jones?  
 Mrs Jones: Yes.  
 Carlo: Oh, Mrs Jones, this is Carlo. I'm phoning because I'm going to the cinema after school so I'll be absent for dinner.  
 Mrs Jones: O.K. Carlo, that's fine. What time shall I see you, then?  
 Carlo: I think I'll arrive home at approximately ten o'clock.

2 *Memo from the Managing Director to company employees:*

It has come to our attention that **certain** employees are smoking in the workshop. We must remind **you that this is** in contravention of the fire regulations and the Health and Safety Act 1978, and failure to observe this rule could land the company in a lot of trouble. We would appreciate your full co-operation in this matter.

3 *In a host family:*

John: Hey, Hiroshi, you can't possibly work with that noise going on downstairs.

Hiroshi: Yes, it is rather loud.

John: Well, I'll go and tell them to turn the record player down a bit.

Hiroshi: No, don't disturb yourself, I'll endure it.

4 *In a shop:*

Shop assistant: Is there anything else I can get you, love?

Young foreign student: No thank you, my dear.

5 *Taken from a job reference:*

Since his promotion, Mr Roberts has made great strides. Not only has he reorganised the distribution network fantastically well, but he has also demonstrated considerable flair for managerial responsibility. I believe that if he keeps this up, he will soon become a terrific Sales Manager, and I would recommend him for this position without any reservations.

6 *A landlady talking to a foreign student who is studying in England and staying at her house:*

Landlady: What are you doing this evening, Klaus?

Klaus: I have a meeting with a class colleague in a pub.

15 READER ACTIVITY

Read the two articles which follow and decide:

- a) What is the difference between the two passages?  
b) What is the effect of this difference?

1 **A RIPPER** victim said yesterday her £20,000 compensation means nothing.

Teresa Sykes declared, "The cash cannot solve my problems."

The payout is the highest ever awarded to anyone who survived an attack by murderer Peter Sutcliffe.

But nothing can erase the memory of three years ago when

Teresa was hit on the head by Sutcliffe with a hammer.

Teresa, 19, said: "It's always worse when I am in bed. I'm so scared I sleep with a bread-knife under my pillow."

The severity of the attack left her in hospital with serious head injuries. She was there for two months. But as the physical scars healed, the emotional problems deepened.