

Word Power Made Simple

Peter Funk and Mary Funk

- Learn the secrets of better writing and speaking from the author of *Reader's Digest* "Word Power" column.



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WORD POWER MADE SIMPLE

Peter Funk and Mary Funk

**A MADE SIMPLE BOOK
DOUBLEDAY**

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First Things First—How to Make This Book Work for You

It has been proved again and again that if you merely add new words to your vocabulary, this simple act in itself will enrich your entire life.

Power Words

| | |
|---------------|----------------|
| aborigine | marauder |
| abscond | mellifluous |
| acrimonious | modus operandi |
| allege | neophyte |
| antithesis | nostrum |
| apprehend | omnipotent |
| biodegradable | ostensible |
| boor | pandemonium |
| buoyant | partisan |
| curtail | perspicacious |
| debacle | picayune |
| deft | propitiate |
| demagogue | recourse |
| docile | retrogressive |
| eschew | scrupulous |
| fecund | subservient |
| fiasco | tryst |
| homage | ubiquitous |
| insipid | ulterior |
| judicious | voracious |
| languid | xenophobic |
| literal | zealot |
| loath | |

The Good News About Words

"A rich vocabulary is one of the most invaluable possessions of the leaders in every profession, in every commercial enterprise, and in every department of active living." These words of Wilfred Funk, a pioneer in modern vocabulary development, have been proved to be true.

The more precisely you use your words, the more likely you are to get the results you want.

With a greater understanding of words, you can make better decisions and evaluations. Success in school and your career is more certain when you have the words you need.

Because the new facts and words you absorb translate into brain growth, your mind has the ca-

capacity to expand throughout your entire life. Scientists have come to the momentous conclusion that you can actually become smarter as you grow older. Increasing your word power is one of the surest and most enjoyable ways of expanding your brain-power.

When you use *Word Power Made Simple*, you will learn how:

- to increase your active vocabulary;
- to pick up new words constantly from reading;
- to develop an effective style of writing and reading;
- to recognize good usage and to develop it in yourself;
- to find the enjoyment and pleasure of increasing your vocabulary through word study.

How to Get the Most Out of This Book

Word Power Made Simple is divided into fifteen specialized chapters on different areas of vocabulary, usage, roots, synonyms, and other important topics in the development of your word dynamics.

At the beginning of each chapter you will find thirty power words of a general nature plus fifteen additional power words (except in Chapter 1) that are more specifically related to the topic of that particular chapter. All forty-five fall into the category of general vocabulary. Power words are incisive ones you will want to know. They form the basis of *Word Power Made Simple*. You will find them valuable in your daily life, helping you to speak, write, read, and understand more effectively.

Each chapter takes up one or more areas of our vocabulary and language, ending with a summary and an entertaining and immensely helpful Word-Power Test on many of the power words. You will find the answers at the end of each section of the test.

Finally, there are three review quizzes. You will find out quickly the words about which you are uncertain and will want to review.

When you have finished *Word Power Made Simple*, you are going to discover a major improvement in your understanding of words. We are sure you will experience a whole new enjoyment of them.

Doors that have been closed will open for further study of the intriguing English language.

In computer jargon, we have tried to make this book "user friendly."

Now that you know the layout of the book, go over the list of power words, using the dictionary, before you take each test. If you don't have a dictionary at the moment, you can use the one at the end of the book. It is based on the Doubleday Dictionary.

Word-Power Test

When you finish the games in this test, and in all the others in the following chapters, write your answers and scores on a separate piece of paper.

In this test and all others, the answer may require a plural answer although we only list the singular form.

I Pick the target word that describes the people in this game from the following words:

✓ partisan, zealot, demagogue, aborigine, neophyte, boor.

1. "I've never seen anyone so rude and ill-mannered," Jane said. He's a
2. If an experienced person is a professional, a beginner is a
3. Someone who has just arrived in a country is a newcomer. But the earliest known inhabitants of a place are
4. The man is a political agitator, a seeking power by playing on the emotions and prejudices of the people.
5. Sometimes the in their fanatic pursuit of a goal exhaust you.
6. George Washington warned the nation against people who were uncritical and strong supporters of a person, a group, or a particular faction. Such people are

ANSWERS: 1. boor; 2. neophyte; 3. aborigines; 4. demagogue; 5. zealots; 6. partisan.

II Which is the word opposite in meaning to the following power words? Match the two columns.

- | | |
|------------------|-------------|
| 1. perspicacious | a. picky |
| 2. acrimonious | b. clumsy |
| 3. insipid | c. dull |
| 4. voracious | d. kind |
| 5. deft | e. exciting |
| 6. languid | f. vigorous |

ANSWERS: 1. c; 2. d; 3. e; 4. a; 5. b; 6. f.

III Match the power word with the appropriate answer.

- | | |
|---------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. debacle | a. appeal for help in trouble |
| 2. curtail | b. disaster |
| 3. abscond | c. leave suddenly and secretly |
| 4. recourse | d. present everywhere |
| 5. ubiquitous | e. shun |
| 6. eschew | f. cut short |

ANSWERS: 1. b; 2. f; 3. c; 4. a; 5. d; 6. e.

IV Pick the word or phrase closest in meaning to the power word.

1. antithesis A: unfriendliness. B: agreement. C: direct opposite.
2. buoyant A: flat. B: extremely deep. C: able to float.
3. loath A: unconcerned. B: hesitant. C: unwilling.
4. pandemonium A: relating to a Greek god. B: great fear. C: wild uproar.
5. picayune A: generous. B: sharp. C: petty.
6. fecund A: fruitful. B: barren. C: weak.
7. docile A: angry. B: easily managed. C: stubborn.
8. xenophobia fear of A: snakes. B: spiders. C: strangers.

ANSWERS: 1. C; 2. C; 3. C; 4. C; 5. C; 6. A; 7. B; 8. C.

V Fill in the blank with the correct power word chosen from the following words:

literal, apprehend, marauder, judicious, fiasco, biodegradable.

1. By making products out of materials, we could reduce environmental pollution.
2. He lost the notes for his speech, he showed up late, and he knocked over the podium. The evening was a
3. A judge listens to the various arguments and considers the facts carefully.
4. The enemy burned houses and plundered the town.
5. The young man was advised he could a criminal with a citizen's arrest.
6. The author made a translation of

the story following the exact words of the original.

ANSWERS: 1. biodegradable; 2. fiasco; 3. judicious; 4. marauders; 5. apprehend; 6. literal.

VI Pick the word or phrase that best fits the meaning of the power word in the sentence, from the three selections below it.

1. During the tryst she accused him of infidelity.
 - a. rehearsal for a play
 - b. meeting
 - c. dance
2. The ostensible object of the visit was to welcome the new neighbors, but they just wanted to see their house.
 - a. polite
 - b. apparent
 - c. planned
3. The board members were scrupulous in their decisions.
 - a. devious
 - b. painstakingly honest
 - c. pleasing
4. The subservient people allowed the demagogue absolute freedom.
 - a. submissive
 - b. uneducated
 - c. impoverished
5. The polititian had a nostrum for every problem in the county.
 - a. excellent solution

- b. cure-all, quack remedy
 - c. an allotment
6. The blackmailer's modus operandi was to demand more than they could pay.
 - a. criticism
 - b. schedule
 - c. manner of working

ANSWERS: 1. b; 2. b; 3. b; 4. a; 5. b; 6. c.

VII Which are true? Which are false?

1. A mellifluous sound is described as having great variety. True or false?
2. When you probitiate someone's anger, you increase it. True or false?
3. If civilization is retrogressive, it is moving backward. True or false?
4. Ulterior motives are as clear as glass. True or false?
5. When the witness alleged the papers were stolen, she asserted this was true but had no proof. True or false?
6. She took control and ran the large company as if she were omnipotent. True or false?

ANSWERS: 1. false; 2. false; 3. true; 4. false; 5. true; 6. true.

Your Score

| | | |
|-------|-------|-------------|
| 44-40 | | Word master |
| 39-27 | | Very good |
| 26-20 | | Fair |

Empire

Dik shuh ner eez

"As sheer casual reading matter, I still find the English dictionary the most interesting book in our language."—Albert Jay Nock.

Power Words

| | |
|------------|-----------------|
| abet | panorama |
| assuage | predatory |
| astute | remorse |
| auspicious | ribald |
| baroque | sinecure |
| cursor | statutory |
| definitive | subtle |
| denizen | taciturn |
| extricate | <u>tenuous</u> |
| ferret out | <u>unctuous</u> |
| innocuous | unique |
| latent | vacuous |
| mawkish | whimsical |
| nuance | windfall |
| opaque | wry |

Special Words on Words

| | |
|------------|-------------|
| allude | extrapolate |
| ambiguous | glossary |
| anthology | graphic |
| archaic | lexicon |
| coherent | misnomer |
| colloquial | obsolete |
| compendium | paraphrase |
| etymology | |

General Dictionaries

A list of dictionaries and reference books does not read like a best-selling novel. So bear with us in this chapter. The reason for it is that people ask us frequently to recommend a "good" dictionary. So this is what we have done in this chapter.

Dictionaries are a necessity for anyone even remotely interested in words and successful living. A dictionary is probably one of the most important books you will ever buy. In its vast collection of words, you will find a repository of the world's history, of science, life-styles, business. Virtually all of what we know about the world and its inhabitants

is found in the words listed in the various general and specialized dictionaries.

Buy a dictionary if you don't have one. If you have an old one, give it to a flea market. Let someone else buy an unusable antique. What you don't want are antiquated definitions. And if you bring home one of the cheap varieties, you deserve to have knowledgeable friends raise an eyebrow when you pull it out. Having a poor dictionary is just about as bad as not having any dictionary. Get yourself a good one. The major dictionary publishers have paperback versions. And so, if price is a consideration, they've made it possible to have the best for a modest sum.

Here is a list of the reputable dictionaries. First, however, remember that the name Webster is a generic name (juh NER ik) and refers to a whole class or type and is not protected by a trademark. Anyone can use the word Webster. So, just because you see Webster on a dictionary does not mean it is well regarded. Get a "Webster's" from a reputable publisher.

1. Desk Dictionaries

- Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language (William Collins + World Publishing Co., Inc.). A splendid, up-to-date dictionary with excellent etymologies. Used by the New York Times as the house desk dictionary.

- Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (Merriam-Webster Inc.).

- The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (Houghton Mifflin Co., Inc.).

- Random House Dictionary of the English Language.

- Funk & Wagnalls Standard Dictionary. The most comprehensive and up-to-date paperback dictionary.

- Oxford American Dictionary (Oxford University Press). Concise meanings, and excellent pronunciation style.

- Doubleday publishes Webster Illustrated Contemporary Dictionary. Well-organized, easy-to-read, concise definitions. In addition, this dictionary has biographies of important people, grammar and

usage, spelling, business law and wills, and much more. It is a miniencyclopedia.

- Collins English Dictionary is from England and is among the authors' favorites. The definitions and etymologies are first-rate. The only drawback is that the pronunciation relies on the International Phonetic Alphabet, useful only to orthographic experts.

- Harper & Row publishes various dictionaries.

To help you make a selection, we thought we might list some of the items we look for.

1. Check the publishing date. Our language is changing; an up-to-date dictionary is going to list the most recent additions.

2. Are the definitions full? Are there examples of usage when the word is somewhat more difficult?

3. Are the pronunciations relatively clear and simple?

4. What about origins? Not all dictionaries give etymology, but it is not only interesting, it may also help you to remember the word and to have a better understanding of it.

5. Are there usage notes? That is, some words may be confused with a look-alike or a sound-alike.

6. Are there idiomatic phrases for certain words such as "business is business" and the like?

7. Some dictionaries do a splendid job of listing and defining synonyms.

8. Some dictionaries have a wealth of information about language in the Introduction. Or they will have a section at the end giving instructions on how to write letters and address people, lists of weights and measures, and similar information.

2. Unabridged Dictionaries

Like language, most of us take dictionaries for granted. We not only relish the satisfaction of searching for and finding the meanings of troublesome words, but also the fun of browsing through the closely packed pages.

What about paniculation? You and I probably paniculate almost every day at some point. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, paniculation is "An instinctive movement, consisting in the extension of the legs, the raising and stretching of the arms, and the throwing back of the head and trunk, accompanied by yawning; it occurs before and after sleeping. Sometimes loosely used for yawning." I'm glad to have a name for what I do naturally!

You don't hear flibbertigibbet being used today. A hundred years ago it was common parlance. It's

fun just to say the word, and its sound seems almost to fit its meaning: an irresponsible or silly person. Its original meaning of "gossip" is now archaic. Linguistically, archaic means no longer in common use. Words often have their heyday and then gradually fade out of the language.

You don't have to settle for just one dictionary. Many families have several. The desk dictionaries are fine as far as they go, but they are limited by size. Out of necessity, they leave out words, the definitions are shorter, and there are not many illustrations of usage.

And so we come to that most satisfying of all reference books, the unabridged dictionary. What a plethora of material! The largest American ones have more than 600,000 entries. The Oxford English Dictionary contains many more, as it includes the obsolete and the archaic.

Arranged in alphabetical order, the ones to consider are

- New Standard Dictionary of the English Language (Funk and Wagnalls);

- The Random House Dictionary of the English Language (Random House);

- The Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford University Press). This one deserves special mention. You can buy the dictionary either in sixteen volumes including four supplements to update it, or as two volumes read with the aid of a magnifying glass. The supplements would be additional. The OED, as it is known, is one of the great dictionaries of the world. It is expensive. But, for a word buff, worth every penny. When you are at your public library, scan it for a few moments. Among other fascinating items, you will find the date at which a word first appeared in English print (a feature also of Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary);

- Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language (Collins + World);

- Webster's Third International Dictionary (Merriam-Webster Inc.).

Special Dictionaries

Synonyms, Antonyms, and Usage

- Webster's New Dictionary of Synonyms (Merriam-Webster Inc.). This book compares similar words carefully, giving antonyms as well as synonyms. Each synonym is used in an illustrative sentence.

- Roget's International Thesaurus (Harper & Row). An indispensable book for anyone writing—

GUIDE WORDS

are shown in large type at the top of each page and indicate the first and last entries on that page.

syllabication

SYLLABICATION

is indicated by syllabic dots dividing main entry words.

entry

MAIN ENTRY

is shown in boldface and consists of a word, phrase, abbreviation, prefix, suffix, or combining form.

PRONUNCIATION

is shown in parenthesis in phonetic equivalent.

inflected

INFLECTED FORMS

are given when there is an irregularity of form. They consist of the past and present participles of verbs, the plural of nouns, and the comparative and superlative of adjectives and adverbs.

USAGE

information is included where necessary.

homographs

HOMOGRAPHS

are words identical in spelling but having different meanings and origins and, sometimes, pronunciations. They are differentiated by superior figures.

slippery

slip·per·y (slip'ər-ē) *adj.* **per-l-er, per-l-est** 1 Having a surface so smooth that bodies slip or slide easily on it. 2 That evades one's grasp; elusive. 3 Unreliable; tricky. —**slip'per-ness** *n.*

slippery elm 1 A species of small **elm** with mucilaginous inner bark. 2 Its wood or inner bark.

slip·shod (slip'shod') *adj.* 1 Wearing shoes or slippers down at the heels. 2 Slovenly; sloppy. 3 Performed carelessly: **slipshod** work.

slip·stream (slip'strēm') *n.* **Aeron.** The stream of air driven backwards by the propeller of an aircraft.

slip·up (slip'up') *n.* **Informal** A mistake; error.

slit (slit) *n.* A relatively straight cut or a long, narrow opening. —*v.t.* **slit, slit-ting** 1 To make a long incision in; slash. 2 To cut lengthwise into strips. 3 To sever. [**ME slitten**] —**slit'ter** *n.*

slith·er (slith'ər) *v.i.* 1 To slide; slip, as on a loose surface. 2 To glide, as a snake. —*v.t.* 3 To cause to slither. —*n.* A sinuous, gliding movement. [**OE slidrian**] —**slith'ery** *adj.*

sliv·er (sliv'ər) *n.* 1 A slender piece, as of wood, cut or torn off lengthwise; a splinter. 2 Corded textile fibers drawn into a fleecy strand. —*v.t.* & *v.i.* To cut or be split into long thin pieces. [**ME sliven** to cleave] —**sliv'er-er** *n.*

slob (slob) *n.* 1 Mud; mire. 2 **Slang** A careless or unclean person. [**Ir. slab**]

slob·ber (slob'ər) *v.t.* 1 To wet with liquids oozing from the mouth. 2 To shed or spill, as liquid food, in eating. —*v.i.* 3 To drivel; slaver. 4 To talk or act gushingly. —*n.* 1 Liquid spilled as from the mouth. 2 Gushing, sentimental talk. [**ME sloberen**] —**slob'ber-er** *n. —**slob'ber-y** *adj.**

sloe (slō) *n.* 1 A small, plumlike, astringent fruit. 2 The shrub that bears it; the blackthorn. [**OE slā**]

sloe gin A cordial with a gin base, flavored with sloes.

slog (slog) *v.t.* & *v.i.* (**slogged, slog-ging**) 1 To slug, as a pugilist. 2 To plod (one's way). —*n.* A heavy blow. [?] —**slog'ger** *n.*

slo·gan (slō'gən) *n.* 1 A catchword or motto adopted by a political party, advertiser, etc. 2 A battle or rallying cry. [**Scot. Gael. sluagh** army + **gairm** yell]

slo·gan·eer (slō'gə-nīr') (**Informal**) *n.* One who coins or uses slogans. —*v.i.* To coin or use slogans.

sloop (slōop) *n.* A small sailboat with a single mast and at least one jib. [**Du. sloep**]

slop¹ (slop) *v.* **slopped, slop-ping**

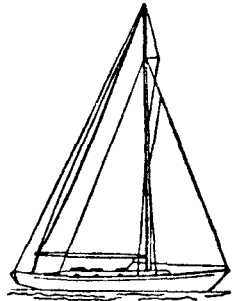
v.t. 1 To splash or spill. 2 To walk or move through slush. —*v.t.* 3 To cause (a liquid) to spill or splash.

4 To feed (a domestic animal) with slops. —**slop over** 1 To overflow and splash. 2 **Slang** To show too much zeal, emotion, etc. —*n.*

1 Slush or watery mud. 2 An unappetizing liquid or watery food. 3 *pl.* Refuse liquid. 4 *pl.*

Waste food or swill. [**ME sloppe mud**]

slop² (slop) 1 A loose outer garment, as a smock. 2 *pl.* Articles of clothing and other merchandise sold to sailors on shipboard. [**ME sloppe**]



Sloop

slug

an organization, or a place in a sequence. —*v.t.* **slot-ting** To cut a slot or slots in. [*<OF esclot* the hollow between the breasts]

sloth (slōth, slōth, sloth) *n.* ① Disinclination to exertion; laziness. ② Any of several slow-moving, arboreal mammals of South America. [*<slow*]

sloth-ful (slōth'fəl, slōth'-, sloth'-) *adj.* Inclined to or characterized by sloth. —**sloth'ful-ly** *adv.* —**sloth'ful-ness** *n.* —*Syn.* lazy, indolent, sluggish, shiftless.

slot machine A vending machine or gambling machine having a slot in which a coin is dropped to cause operation.

slouch (slouch) *v.i.* 1 To have a downcast or drooping gait, look, or posture. 2 To hang or droop carelessly. —*n.* 1 A drooping movement or appearance caused by depression or carelessness. 2 An awkward or incompetent person. [?] —**slouch'y** *adj.* (-'er, -'est) —**slouch'ly** *adv.* —**slouch'ness** *n.*

slough¹ (slou; slō *esp. for def.*) 2) *n.* 1 A place of deep mud or mire. 2 A stagnant swamp, backwater, etc. 3 A state of great despair or degradation. [*<OE slōh*] —**slough'y** *adj.*

slough² (sluf) *n.* 1 Dead tissue separated and thrown off from living tissue. 2 The skin of a serpent that has been or is about to be shed. —*v.t.* 1 To cast off; shed. 2 To discard; shed, as a habit or a growth. —*v.i.* 3 To be cast off. 4 To cast off a slough or tissue. (ME *slouh*) —**slough'y** *adj.*

Slo-vak (slō'vāk, slō'vak) *n.* 1 One of a Slavic people of nw Hungary and parts of Moravia. 2 The language spoken by the Slovaks. —*adj.* Of or pertaining to the Slovaks or to their language. Also **Slo-vak'i-an**.

slov-en (sluv'ən) *n.* One who is habitually untidy, careless, or dirty. [ME *sloveyn*]

Slo-vene (slō'vēn, slō'vēn') *n.* One of a group of s Slavs now living in nw Yugoslavia. —*adj.* Of or pertaining to the Slovenes or to their language. —**Slo-ve'n-i-an** (*adj., n.*)

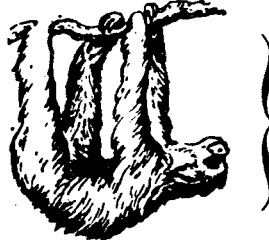
slov-en-ly (sluv'ən-lē) (*adj.*) -'er, -'est Untidy and careless in appearance, work, habits, etc. — (*adv.*) In a slovenly manner. —**slov'en-ly-ness** *n.*

slow (slō) *adj.* 1 Taking a long time to move, perform, or occur. 2 Behind the standard time: said of a timepiece. 3 Not hasty: *slow* to anger. 4 Dull in comprehending: a *slow* student. 5 Uninteresting; tedious: a *slow* drama. 6 Denoting a condition of a racetrack that retards the horses' speed. 7 Heating or burning slowly; low: a *slow* flame. 8 Not brisk; slack: Business is *slow*. —*v.t. & v.i.* To make or become slow or slower: often with *up* or *down*. —*adv.* In a slow manner. [*<OE slāw*] —**slow'ly** *adv.* —**slow'ness** *n.*

slow-mo-tion (slō'mō'shən) *adj.* 1 Moving or acting at less than normal speed. 2 Denoting a television or motion picture filmed at greater than standard speed so that the action appears slow in normal projection.

sludge (sluj) *n.* 1 Soft, water-soaked mud. 2 A slush of snow or broken or half-formed ice. 3 Muddy or pasty refuse, sediment, etc. [?] —**sludg'y** *adj.* (-'er, -'est)

slue¹ (slō) *v.* **slued, slu-ing** *v.t.* 1 To cause to swing, slide, or skid to the side. 2 To cause to twist or turn. —*v.i.* 3 To



Three-toed sloth

definition

DEFINITION

is the meaning. The order in which the different senses of the word are listed is based on frequency of use.

ILLUSTRATION

is to clarify the definition.

RUN-ON ENTRY

consists of words derived from the main entry by addition or replacement of a suffix. They are syllabified and stressed where needed.

etymology

ETYMOLOGY

is indicated in brackets following the definition. It gives the origin of the word.

PARTS OF SPEECH

follow the pronunciation. The labels, in italics, are abbreviated as follows: *n.* (noun), *v.* (verb transitive), *v.i.* (verb intransitive), *adj.* (adjective), *adv.* (adverb), *prep.* (preposition), *conj.* (conjunction), and *interj.* (interjection).

Dictionary excerpts from The Doubleday Dictionary. Copyright © 1975, Doubleday & Co., Inc., Garden City, New York. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

letters or otherwise. The antonyms and synonyms are carefully grouped according to subject matter.

- The Doubleday Roget's Thesaurus in Dictionary Form (Doubleday & Co., Inc.). The target words are listed from A to Z with synonyms and antonyms listed under each one. By far the quickest and easiest one to use.

Other Specialized Dictionaries and Vocabulary Builders, listed alphabetically:

- The Barnhart Dictionary of New English Words Since 1963 (Barnhart/Harper & Row, two volumes). An important and fascinating series. Covers all the technical, slang, jargon, and candidates for the general dictionaries. Buy it if you can.

- Bernstein's Reverse Dictionary (Quadrangle Books). If a word is on the tip of your tongue, but you can't pull it out, this book will help. An interesting approach.

- A Dictionary of Contemporary American Usage, by Bergen Evans and Cornelia Evans (Harper & Row). A helpful compendium of information, well written and authoritative.

- Harper's Dictionary of Contemporary Usage, by William Morris and Mary Morris (Harper & Row). A panel of experts in consensus, though not always 100 percent, guides you to using your words well. Often amusing reading as well as instructive. One of the best of its kind.

- It Pays to Increase Your Word Power, by Peter Funk (Bantam Books). A vigorous vocabulary builder with interesting and helpful information on words and language.

- Success with Words; A Guide to the American Language (Reader's Digest Association Press, Inc.). Up-to-date; easy to read; covers an amazing amount of information including regional dialects, black English, words from foreign countries adopted by Americans, as well as discussions on words and usage.

- Word Memory Power in 30 Days, by Peter Funk and Barry Tarshis (Dell). The book, easy to use and work with, combines memory techniques and expanded information on selected and important words.

- Word Power, by Peter Funk (Warner/Network for Learning). A forty-five-minute cassette on techniques to build a stronger vocabulary. You can use it in your car or at home.

- Word Origins and Their Romantic Stories, by Wilfred Funk (Harper & Row). One of the most enchanting books concerning the origins of words. Each one is a story. Good bedtime reading!

Now, What Was That Word Again?

Using a dictionary is basic, but what about remembering that word you've just looked up?

All of us, at any age, experience some difficulty in remembering the new words we encounter. But there are ways to get around this sometime problem.

First of all, if you find yourself without a dictionary at some point, try to work out the word's meaning in context. The Oxford American Dictionary describes context as "The words that come before and after a particular word or phrase that help to define its meaning."

In other words, try to get an inkling of what the sentence means and see if you can work out the meaning of the word from the meaning of the sentence. In any case, mark the word to look up later. If it's a newspaper, tear out the section and save it. Later:

1. Write down the word on a 3 × 5 card.
2. Give its pronunciation.
3. Note the word's origin, for sometimes this can be a help to the memory. Also, some origins are fascinating. We have fun with origins in another section of this book.
4. Write down the meaning. Sometimes there are more meanings than one you will want to know.
5. Write the sentence in which the word appears. But be alert, because sometimes writers misuse words. You may have to write your own or look in the unabridged dictionary for a usage example.
6. Keep the cards in alphabetical order.
7. Make a practice of looking at them frequently. Don't take too many at a time; it's better to take one word a day and overuse it so it sticks in your memory. Or put the card in your mirror or wherever you'll see it. Periodically review your words to see if you are using them. Our experience is, *Use them or lose them.*
8. This system works!

Points to Remember

1. A good, modern abridged (desk) dictionary is a must. Avoid, as if a virus, outdated, inauthentic dictionaries.

2. Read the introductory matter of dictionaries. You will learn a lot about language per se as well as the reference book you are about to use.

3. When you need more definitive information concerning a word, consult the unabridged dictionary.

4. If you have an opportunity, look over the list

of special books. You may want to buy some for your use. The list here is only a partial one, but it is a good starter. The money we spend on one dinner at a restaurant will buy any one of those books, and it will last you many years, rather than just one evening.

Word-Power Test *11/24/52*

Before you try this series of quizzes, you will want to look up the words you are not certain of in the list at the beginning of this chapter.

I You may find this quiz particularly difficult, but it will let you find out just how well you do know the word. We give the dictionary definition of a word. Choose the power word you think fits.

1. Vividly effective and detailed
2. Of, like, or characteristic of a style of art, architecture, and music that flourished in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe, characterized by elaborate and profuse ornamentation
3. Rapid and superficial; hasty; with no attention to detail
4. To search out by careful investigation
5. A shade of difference in tone or color or in anything perceptible to the mind
6. Pertaining to a legislative enactment (a law)

ANSWERS: 1. graphic; 2. baroque; 3. cursory; 4. ferret out; 5. nuance; 6. statutory.

II Find the word or phrase closest in meaning to the given word.

1. paraphrase A: a restatement of the meaning of a passage, work, etc. B: roundabout way of saying something. C: afterthought.
2. extrapolate A: to estimate or infer beyond facts. B: use too many words. C: examine page by page.
3. archaic A: difficult to understand. B: about public records. C: belonging to a former period.
4. obsolete A: slangy or informal. B: out of fashion. C: new.
5. glossary A: list of technical words. B: frontispiece. C: table of contents.
6. lexicon A: vocabulary specific to a subject or author. B: many-sided geometric figure. C: simplified spelling list.
7. compendium A: long, heavy book. B: brief, comprehensive summary. C: comparison of two works.
8. anthology A: research into the past. B: an analysis. C: collection of selected writings.

9. coherent A: at the same time. B: logically consistent. C: harmonious.

ANSWERS: 1. A; 2. A; 3. C; 4. B; 5. A; 6. A; 7. B; 8. C; 9. B.

III Pick the power word from the following list that fits the description:

wry, mawkish, whimsical, ribald, predatory, astute.

1. Helen Von Gipper, the legendary field-hockey coach, is a shrewd and sagacious judge of young athletes. Gipper is
2. Our cat is so laid-back and kindly, he refuses to catch mice or moles. I wish he were what most other cats are—that is,
3. Here I was, a young girl, walking down the street, minding my own business, when the construction workers began making those coarse, offensive, and indecent jokes. The humor was
4. Poor old Frank. Give him one beer and he gets all teary-eyed and foolishly sentimental when he thinks of the "good old days" at college. Frank is
5. We never knew what my aunt would do next—wearing her fanciest dress when she went shopping, sneakers to church, lemon *and* cream with her tea. She had many odd notions and fancies. She was what we call
6. Though he smiled, his lips and face twisted in a kind of grimace, so I knew he was displeased with my newest concoction: a peanut butter omelet. You might describe the expression on his face as

ANSWERS: 1. astute; 2. predatory; 3. ribald; 4. mawkish; 5. whimsical; 6. wry.

IV Answer *yes* or *no* to each question.

1. You propose to the love of your life and she gives you an *ambiguous* answer. Are you happy about that? Yes or no?
2. When you *extricate* yourself from a sticky situation, you are in even more trouble. Yes or no?
3. Do you believe that a speech by the President of the United States of America should be *colloquial*? Yes or no?
4. If offered, do you believe most people would accept a *sinecure*? Probably yes, probably no?
5. When Harry introduced me to his beautiful date, he confided she had a *vacuous* mind. Did he mean she was intelligent and her mind filled with information? Yes or no?

6. Are you absolutely positive that *etymology* is the study of words and not insects? Yes or no?

ANSWERS: 1. no; 2. no; 3. no; 4. yes; 5. no; 6. yes.

V Pick the sentence a, b, or c that corresponds to the numbered sentence.

1. The woman tried to *assuage* her distraught friend by strumming a familiar tune on her guitar.
 - a. She tried to interest her in music.
 - b. She thought some exciting tune might distract her friend.
 - c. She tried to quiet her friend.
2. When they cast shadows on the rocks, the *denizens* of the deepest water make interesting subject material for photography.
 - a. Old shipwrecks in deep water make unusual photographs.
 - b. Old shoes, tires, and fishing rods lost in deep water are excellent material for modern photography.
 - c. Creatures in the depths of the ocean, photographed skillfully, will make fine pictures.
3. Though the man seemed *innocuous* as he wandered down the street, he proved not to be.
 - a. He seemed dreamy.
 - b. He seemed lost.
 - c. He seemed harmless.
4. No one thought the Queen had enough *latent* power to quell the revolt.
 - a. Her authority seemed questionable.
 - b. Most of the Army had deserted to the revolutionaries.
 - c. The Navy seemed insufficient.
5. One sparkling morning, we saw a mist from the river winding through the valley, creating an unforgettable *panorama* from our window high on the mountainside.
 - a. It gave the final evidence of pollution.
 - b. The mist was filled with multicolored reflections from the sun.
 - c. The extensive view was memorable.
6. Their *remorse* for their part in the crime remained.
 - a. They managed to keep the money.
 - b. They were constantly nagged by their consciences.
 - c. They concealed the evidence so well no one would ever find it.

ANSWERS: 1. c; 2. c; 3. c; 4. a; 5. c; 6. b.

VI Match the power word with the appropriate answer.

- | | |
|---------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. unique | a. conclusive; final |
| 2. tenuous | b. wrongly applied name |
| 3. definitive | c. having no equal |
| 4. windfall | d. unexpected piece of good luck |
| 5. misnomer | e. refer to indirectly |
| 6. allude | f. thin; insubstantial |

ANSWERS: 1. c; 2. f; 3. a; 4. d; 5. b; 6. e.

VII Fill the blank spaces in the sentence with the correct words from the following selection:

subtle, taciturn, opaque, abetting, auspicious, unctuous.

1. Tommy, the computer whiz kid, didn't realize he was his friend Joe in a crime when they broke into the research company's data bank.
2. Frances felt at last she'd win the beauty contest, since all the signs of success were there.
3. The cavernous room was dark and gloomy, for the high, windows kept out the light.
4. (Both blank spaces contain the same word, which has several meanings.) We hid in the dark corner. When she walked by, we could just barely catch the faint, fragrance of her perfume. "Ah! I recognize the perfume and who the person is who wears it," my detective friend said, his mind putting the facts together; "I know now who committed the murder."
5. "So maybe your dog does talk," the theatrical agent said. "The trouble is, he only says a few words at a time. He's too We can't use him."
6. The ambassador, bowing and smiling repeatedly, assured the President in soothing, persuasive words that his country had only peaceful intentions.

ANSWERS: 1. abetting; 2. auspicious; 3. opaque; 4. subtle, subtle (each blank in this sentence uses the same word, using a subtle difference in meaning); 5. taciturn; 6. unctuous.

Your Score

- 45-40 correct Word master
- 39-27 correct Word craftsman
- 26-20 correct Word novice

So You Want People to Hear You!

Like Eliza Doolittle, in George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*, you might improve your life by improving your speech habits.

Power Words

| | |
|------------|-------------|
| acumen | mendacious |
| adamant | mode |
| banal | onerous |
| blatant | parable |
| cajole | promulgate |
| concise | querulous |
| dour | sagacious |
| erudite | thwart |
| expiate | uncouth |
| fatuous | ungainly |
| flamboyant | utilitarian |
| gingerly | vagary |
| ineffable | valid |
| jaunty | vapid |
| levity | vertigo |

Special Words Concerning "How We Use Words"

| | |
|------------|-------------|
| captious | plausible |
| delineate | prolix |
| discursive | remonstrate |
| ephemeral | strident |
| lampoon | tacit |
| nebulous | truncate |
| obdurate | tumid |

Remember Eliza Doolittle, in the musical *My Fair Lady*? She was based on George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*. At first she spoke with a cockney accent using the street vernacular. Her mentor, Professor Higgins, regarded her language as vulgar. He knew he would never get this pretty girl out of her environment unless she learned to speak properly. The professor vowed that by altering her speech habits he would change her life.

After a period of relentless work, he proved his point when he introduced her at a fashionable party. The magical moment swept over her. Everyone thought she belonged to royalty because of the way she used and pronounced her words. Though the

play may be only a story, it is based on a deep linguistic truth.

As people tend to judge us by our clothes, they will also make certain decisions about us based on the way we speak and write.

For example, to go to work in an office in a T-shirt, cut-off jeans, and bare feet is certainly the exception, rather than the rule. Nor it is normal to go to a very casual party dressed in a three-piece suit or a formal dress. We try to fit our clothes to the circumstances. We treat our language usage in much the same way.

Over the past five hundred years or so, English has more or less settled into certain levels of usage in the following descending order: (1) standard, or formal; (2) informal, or colloquial (*col-*, an alteration of *con-*, "with," and *loquor*, "to speak"); (3) slang; (4) jargon and cant (the slang and technical vocabulary or shoptalk of a particular group such as lawyers, doctors, astronauts, thieves et al.); (5) nonstandard or substandard (words and phrases such as "ain't" and "can't hardly ever").

These levels frequently overlap, of course, because our language is not fixed by some authority. It is the result of a worldwide unofficial consensus about the way language should be used. The public thinks of a dictionary as an arbiter of language. It is not. It merely records the way people speak now.

Levels, however, are a helpful guide through the thickets of usage—of when and where. The following are a few thoughts about these various levels of usage, as Standard English, colloquial, substandard, and language that tends to be pompous.

Standard Language (Formal)

This is language dressed up in its Sunday best. It's been defined as the "prestige English." When do we use it? Tonight listen to a TV or radio newscast. Chances are that most of it will be delivered in Standard English. Business letters, reports, the majority of speeches, magazine articles, textbooks, and the like utilize Standard English. And most of the time, Standard English is clearer, and more explicit and descriptive, than slang or jargon and,

therefore, especially important to us. The vast majority of words used to communicate our thoughts and feelings belong to this level.

The following write-up, by Pamela Fiori, of a hotel along the Amalfi coast in Italy appeared in *Travel and Leisure*. It's an example of Standard English.

"All the guests at the San Pietro seemed to be on honeymoons, whether first, second or 25th. The crowd—primarily Italian, British, German and American—was sophisticated and decidedly un-snobbish. There were even a few celebrities on view. A famous producer, his wife and friends stopped by for dinner while their chartered yacht lay anchored in the harbor. Two well-known actors arrived the day we left. Another star was there but, for some reason, stayed in her room most of the time. Nobody asked for autographs—probably too busy having their own good time."

Colloquial Usage

Here is our everyday, natural speech we wake up with and end the day with. We use it to write personal letters, to talk to ourselves or to others, and conduct our mundane affairs. We use colloquial language 90 percent of the time. It is a more relaxed and informal English.

Bergen and Cornelia Evans, in *A Dictionary of Contemporary American Usage*, write: "It used to be said that colloquial English was like a good business suit and literary English like a formal dress. The analogy still holds. But one should remember that times have changed, that a good business suit is seldom out of place, and that formal dress, where it is not required—at a picnic, for example—may be ridiculous."

Let's take another look at that honeymoon Shangri-la from the viewpoint of a friend telling you about the Hotel San Pietro.

"Hey, Jane. Bob and I just got back from a fabulous honeymoon at a place in Italy. It's called San Pietro. It's loaded with atmosphere. And everyone else seemed to be on a honeymoon also. I guess some could have been on their 25th! People from all over—Italy, England, Germany, even some of us from America. And no one was at all snobby. There were some famous people there too. A producer had this huge yacht, and he and his friends ate dinner at the hotel. And then there were some movie stars. But, you know, no one asked for auto-

graphs. I guess we were all too busy doing our own thing."

If you were writing a letter to the same friend, you could certainly express your thoughts in an equally informal manner.

Such words as great for something impressive, nice for whatever is pleasant, funny when you mean strange, dumb for stupid, or fillers such as kind of, sort of and such contractions as isn't, aren't and the like are colloquial, and all right, up to a point.

The snare of informal language, however, is that we can become lazy with our vocabulary, opting for what seems to be the easy word, rather than the more accurate one. This can create something of a ripple effect. Though we may not realize it, our thoughts become more nebulous. We can't really describe clearly what we think and feel, and we tend to become discursive.

A woman with marital difficulties said: "I'm going from pillar to post. I'm like a bouncing ball." What did she mean exactly? We have a sense of the way she feels but nothing that describes the reality of her situation. And she goes around and around the same problem year after year, frustrated and complaining. One of her problems is that, because she can't describe what is happening to her verbally, she doesn't know how to resolve her situation.

Pomposity

What a descriptive word! Doesn't it sound as though it's about to blow off the page? Pompous writing or speaking is a misunderstood concept of formal English, and its style is apt to be turgid. It's a way of trying to impress people, or simply to fool them with high-sounding words. But the writer ends up looking foolish. It's just another form of substandard expression, and you will find too much of it in bureaucratic-type writing. Dr. Bunk might expound in the following way:

"The luxurious ambience of this exotic setting, which we chanced upon during our desultory peregrination south along the Amalfi Coast, is found in the Hotel San Pietro, a charming edifice. All the guests seemed to be on a nuptial holiday, whether the first or the 25th. The place had a number of luminaries who were not at all condescending. Among the distingué guests was a producer with his entourage, who came in from their palatial yacht and dined at the hotel . . ." and so forth!