

The background is a solid blue color. A large, stylized yellow key shape is positioned on the left side, extending from the top to the bottom. The head of the key is a circle containing the text 'The Key to English'. The shaft of the key is a long, narrow rectangle. At the bottom right, there is a smaller, dark blue key shape, and below that, a brown key shape. The word 'Vocabulary' is written in a serif font across the middle of the image, overlapping the shafts of the keys.

# The Key to English

Vocabulary

ENGLISH LANGUAGE SERVICES

the key  
to english

Vocabulary



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## PREFACE

This book is intended to help students bridge the gap between elementary materials, with their carefully controlled and limited vocabularies, and intermediate to advanced materials. It has been found that vocabulary presents a major problem at that particular moment in a student's progress. He has presumably become familiar with most of the grammatical patterns of the language. With the exception of unusual idioms, his main problem henceforth will be the enlargement of his word stock, both oral and written, active as well as passive.

The book can be used for private study or as part of the curriculum in an organized course. The material is divided into lessons, most of which are rather short, and all of which include exercises so that the learner can practice using what he knows and test his knowledge. Answers to the exercises are provided at the end of the book, but the learner is urged not to consult them before he has done his best to answer the problems out of his own knowledge or by consulting his dictionary.

A number of exercises are included to help the student get acquainted with his dictionary.

At the beginning of the book we suggest several ways that the learner can systematically enlarge his English vocabulary: by using the dictionary, keeping a vocabulary notebook, using flash cards or other mnemonic devices, studying words in related families (according to form, that is, derivation, as well as meaning), and, finally, "educated guessing."

After a review of the function words, occupying one rather long lesson, we go into a study of word-derivation, with emphasis on the most common suffixes and prefixes. Following this there is a discussion of English spelling and a lesson suggesting ways of using the word lists at the end of the book. A list of the symbols used in the book to represent English sounds, with illustrative words, is given on page 114.



## The Word Lists

There are two word lists, one of function words and one containing a basic 2,000-word English vocabulary. In addition, there is a list of suffixes and prefixes to be used with the 2,000-word list.

The list of function words contains about 230 words of very high frequency. They were not chosen solely on the basis of frequency, however, but on the basis of grammatical function. The list consists of articles, auxiliary verbs, prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns, noun-determiners, substitute nouns, intensifiers, and certain other specialized expressions. In general they are words whose meaning could not be very well learned by looking them up in a dictionary. They are the words that would be learned in any good elementary course in English, and it seems pointless to include them in a vocabulary list. Not *all* function words in English are included; archaic and unusual words are left out, and also prepositions of more than one word.

The 2,000-word list is one that has been prepared by the authors for use in controlled-vocabulary reading materials, with learners of English as a second language specifically in mind. It is based ultimately on the work of Thorndike, Lorge, and West, as all word lists must be, but with considerable modification in the light of our experience and the needs of our students. The principal modifications made are these:

- (i) Function words were eliminated.
- (ii) Sets of common items have been filled out, whether or not all words satisfied statistical requirements.
- (iii) New items (such as *atomic*) have been added, and old-fashioned or inappropriate ones (*bob*) deleted.
- (iv) It was assumed that the student would recognize and understand words regularly formed from base words on the list, and so many words in earlier lists could be eliminated as being automatically covered. (Example: If *black* is included, *blackness* and *blacken* are covered also.)

(v) Numerals, days of the week, and months of the year have been eliminated from the word list.

To fill out the list as a result of these deletions, words were brought up from lower frequencies to make a total of 2,000.

Many of the words in the list have more than one meaning. We expect the learner to become acquainted with their various meanings. For example, *bear* is both the name of an animal and a verb meaning 'carry'. Since this kind of ambiguity is one of the great difficulties in English vocabulary, we see no reason to disguise this feature of the language by specifying one or the other usage of the word in the list.

*The Key to English Vocabulary* is one of THE KEY TO ENGLISH series prepared for the Collier-Macmillan English Program by the Materials Development Staff of English Language Services, Inc., under the direction of Edwin T. Cornelius, Jr., and Willard D. Sheeler. This book was written by Earle W. Brockman.

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## LESSON ONE

### Introduction to Vocabulary Building

Once a student has mastered the fundamental grammatical patterns of a language, his next task is to master its vocabulary—or at least that part of its vocabulary that he needs. Nobody ever learns all the words in any language. We know and use the words that suit our particular purposes, and we continue to learn new words as long as we live.

### The Dictionary

Obviously, a language student has to have a good dictionary, perhaps two, one large and one small. If you have only one, it should be a rather large one. The little pocket-sized dictionaries, which give only one or two short definitions for each word and seldom have space to include any examples or explanations, are sometimes quite inaccurate. On the other hand, they can be used effectively if you are aware of their limitations and consult them only to find a quick definition.

### Aids to Your Memory

One of the most effective ways to control your learning of new words is to keep a vocabulary notebook. You may want to keep a small one in your pocket so that you can write down words whenever you hear or see them, and a larger one in your desk for study later on. The desk notebook can be of any convenient size, but it should have about 100 pages. You can divide it up like a dictionary, according to letters of the alphabet. Give several pages to letters like *C* and *S* which begin many words, and fewer pages to unusual letters like *J*, *K*, *U*, and *X*.



As you come across new words in your reading, or as you hear them spoken in conversations, lectures, and so on, note them in your book. Look them up in your dictionary and copy down a brief definition for each. You may use definitions in English as well as in your native language. It is always a good idea to put down an example of the way the word was used. You will often need to indicate the sound of the word. To do this, use either the symbols in this book (see page 114) or those that are used in your dictionary. This is especially necessary in case of spellings that indicate more than one sound (e.g., *lead*, *record*).

Many language students use "flash cards." On one side of a small card they write the foreign-language word and on the other side the definition. Whenever they have time, they look at the cards and see how many of the words they can remember.

## Educated Guessing

Often, especially in reading, you will find words whose exact meaning it is not absolutely necessary for you to know in order to understand the sentence. "The children sat down under the old elm. The birds were singing overhead in its branches." Let us suppose that *elm* is a word you don't know. The context clearly indicates that it is some kind of tree, since birds are in its *branches overhead*. Would it help you very much to know that the elm is a member of the genus *Ulmus*? That it is a favorite shade tree in the United States? That its leaves and flowers have certain characteristics? Of course, if you have the time, it is good to find out these things. In order to use and understand English fully, the way its native speakers do, you need to know everything that *they* know about elms. But when you are in a hurry, when there are many other things about English that you need to learn as fast as possible, you can postpone learning the details about the elm tree.



The fact that it is a kind of large tree is all you need to know at the moment.

Therefore, don't run to the dictionary every time you meet a strange word. Wait and see if something else in the context will give you a clue to its meaning. Maybe, as in the case of the elm tree, only a part of its definition will be enough for the moment. If you meet it again soon and it begins to seem more important to you, then stop and look it up. A word that is used often is obviously more important than one that is used only once or twice in a whole book.

## Study Words in Families

Words occur in families, groups, and sets, and it is always easier to learn them this way than one at a time. There are two ways you can study words in families:

(i) *Words that have a common base.* You can learn many related words if you understand the use of suffixes and prefixes. A number of lessons on this point will be found in this book.

(ii) *Words that are related in meaning.* By this we mean lists of items that naturally occur together: parts of the human body, articles of clothing, furniture, foods, words having to do with travel or sports, and so on. Each person can make many such lists, according to his interests. Your vocabulary notebook should include these lists, and you can add words to them as you find them. In this case, it is a good idea not to wait until you happen to see the words in your reading, but to search them out yourself. This is the kind of study you can easily do by yourself. First, write down all the parts of the body, for instance (in your own language). Then see if you know the English equivalent for all of them. You undoubtedly know *arm, head, hand, foot*, for example. But do you know *elbow, collarbone, shin, hip, nape* (of the neck)? Or, to take another example, you undoubtedly know a few

terms having to do with driving a car. You can say *drive*, *stop*, and *turn*. But do you know *swerve*, *pass*, *change lanes*, *apply brakes*, *accelerate*, *slow down*? You probably know *engine*, *wheel*, and *tire*. But do you know *carburetor*, *radiator*, *exhaust*, *windshield wiper*, *horn*, *gear*, *cylinder*, *battery*?

Perhaps these examples will suggest how you can set up your own lists of related words and master them.

### Function Words and Content Words

Function words are those that often have little meaning in the dictionary sense but which serve important functions in relating other words in the language to each other. Examples are: *is*, *at*, *to*, *which*, *for*, *by*, *he*, etc. Since these are the words that occur most frequently in the language, they are sure to be mastered in any good elementary language course. You simply can't say much of anything without using them, and, if you don't know them, looking them up in the dictionary is not of much use. Since they acquire most of their meaning from the sentences in which they are used, it is rather pointless to discuss them in isolation. In this book, we shall assume that the student has already mastered the fundamental function words. There is a discussion of these words in Lesson 2, and a list of them on page 98.

We might call the rest of the words in English "content" words. These words name and describe the infinite number of things, persons, events, and processes that speakers of English want to talk about. Some of them (*water*, *man*, *eat*, *drink*, *house*) are extremely old and have been used by English speakers, in one form or another, for many centuries. Others (*californium*, *meson*, *transistor*, *ski-lift*, *nylon*) have been created within the last few years.

Content words can be divided into three general classes: (i) words naming things, ideas, entities; (ii) words naming actions; and (iii) words used to describe the qualities of those things or actions. These divisions correspond closely

to the traditional parts of speech: nouns, verbs, and adjective-adverbs. When we discuss the ways we can increase vocabulary, it is from these three classes of words that we will draw our examples.

## Exercises

A. Each of the following sets of words is made up entirely of function words or of content words, with one exception. There is one word in each set that does not match the others. Write down the word in each set that is different from the others.

- |             |            |         |          |          |
|-------------|------------|---------|----------|----------|
| 1. table    | chair      | and     | lamp     | rug      |
| 2. head     | foot       | shoe    | run      | my       |
| 3. cold     | house      | where   | red      | ugly     |
| 4. who      | work       | but     | is       | around   |
| 5. over     | her        | any     | think    | will     |
| 6. their    | sing       | cat     | jump     | climb    |
| 7. bush     | themselves | before  | while    | as       |
| 8. true     | it         | false   | truth    | sleep    |
| 9. full     | empty      | cup     | any      | bear     |
| 10. about   | between    | because | saw      | him      |
| 11. through | heat       | hit     | hat      | ball     |
| 12. book    | light      | leave   | justice  | none     |
| 13. rock    | would      | writing | stone    | mountain |
| 14. may     | although   | honesty | across   | around   |
| 15. fish    | unless     | riding  | swimming | painting |

B. Can you give any words that are related to the following, using parts that come before (prefixes) or after the word (suffixes) as you see it here? (You may not know very many now, but after you have finished studying this book you should know many more.)

beauty  
bitter  
calculate  
compare  
conclude

efficient  
free  
novel  
occupy

operate  
pleasant  
sufficient  
youth



## 6 INTRODUCTION TO VOCABULARY BUILDING

C. Make lists of all the English words you know under these headings:

Articles a man carries in his pockets

Articles a woman carries in her handbag

Words having to do with travel by air (car, train, bus, ship)

Articles of furniture in an office

Names of common fruits, meats, vegetables, drinks

Words having to do with a field that interests you particularly (music, the theater, engineering, chemistry, government, etc.)

## LESSON TWO

### Function Words

By "function word" we mean a word that does not belong to one of the four major parts of speech in English (noun, verb, adjective, adverb). Their purpose is not only to express meaning but to relate other words to each other. These are the words you must know in order to speak or understand English with any fluency at all. Not only are they among the most frequent in the language, but they are also indispensable in forming sentences.

Among the function words are articles, auxiliary verbs, conjunctions, prepositions, pronouns, noun-determiners, substitute nouns, intensifiers, and other specialized expressions. They also include numerals, days of the week, and months of the year. Many of the words can be used in more than one way.

In this lesson you will find descriptions of the various types of function words. The whole list, alphabetically arranged, is on page 98. You should make sure that you not only know the meaning of these words, but also how they are used in sentences.

The list does not include all function words of every type that exist in English, however. Very old and unusual words are left out, and also prepositions and conjunctions of more than one word. Only the more common intensifiers are listed.

**Articles.** This is the traditional term for *a*, *an*, and *the*. The correct use of these little words is extremely important in English. There is a lot of difference between "man," "a man," and "the man," for instance.

*Some* should be included among the articles, since it is used before plural count nouns the way *a/an* is used before singulars: "a man," "some men."

Modern grammars usually list all of these words among the noun-determiners.

**Auxiliary Verbs.** These are the “helping” verbs that can combine with various parts of other verbs to make verb phrases. The most common are *be*, *have*, and *do*. In addition, we have the modals: *can*, *could*, *may*, *might*, *must*, *shall*, *should*, *will*, *would*, as well as *dare* and *need* under certain conditions. The phrases *ought to*, *used to*, and *(be) supposed to* are included because they resemble modals, in spite of the fact that, unlike ordinary modals, they include the word *to*. You will have to consult the section on verbs in an English grammar (see *Key to English Verbs*, in this series) to find an explanation of all the different meanings that the auxiliaries express.

**Conjunctions.** Conjunctions join various parts of the sentence together. They are of two kinds: coordinating and subordinating.

(i) *Coordinating Conjunctions.* These join matching structures; that is, they join nouns to nouns, verbs to verbs, adjectives to adjectives, and so on. In the list, they are *and*, *but*, (*either . . .*) *or*, and (*neither . . .*) *nor*.

(ii) *Subordinating Conjunctions.* These are the words that introduce adjectival and adverbial clauses. The constructions they introduce contain subjects and verbs, but cannot stand alone as independent sentences. Here are the ones in the list:

after	lest	when
although	though	where
because	till	while
before	unless	why
if	until	

The question words *how*, *who*, *whom*, *what*, *which*, *when*, *why*, and *where* also introduce subordinate clauses of a special type, usually called indirect questions. The relative pronouns *who*, *whom*, *which*, *whose*, and *that* introduce subordinate clauses of another type, usually called relative clauses, which modify nouns.



**Prepositions.** These make up an extremely important class of function words. (See *Key to English Prepositions, 1 and 2*). They are always followed by nouns, or noun constructions, and the whole phrase thus formed modifies some other word in the sentence. There are about fifty common one-word prepositions in English, as well as a large number of phrases that function as prepositions. The prepositions in our list of function words are these:

about	but	outside
above	down	over
across	during	since
after	except	through
against	for	throughout
along	from	to
among	in	toward
around	inside	under
as	into	underneath
at	like	until
before	of	up
behind	off	upon
below	on	with
beside	onto	within
between	out	without
beyond		

Remember that most of these words may also function as adverbs, if no noun follows.

**Pronouns.** These words take the place of nouns. The meaning they have depends on the noun they replace, called the antecedent. They have *case* (different forms according to their function in the sentence), *number* (singular vs. plural), and *person* (inclusion or exclusion of the speaker and the person(s) addressed). In addition, the third-person singular pronouns have *gender* (different forms according to certain categories of meaning expressed by the antecedent: male vs. female, animate vs. inanimate, etc.).

## ENGLISH PRONOUNS

Person	Singular				Plural			
	Subj.	Obj.	Possessive		Subj.	Obj.	Possessive	
			1st	2nd			1st	2nd
1st	I	me	my	mine	we	us	our	ours
2nd	you		your	yours	(same as singular)			
3rd - M.	he	him	his		they	them	their	theirs
3rd - F.	she	her	hers					
3rd - N.	it		its					

(*Subj.* = subject; *obj.* = object; *m.* = masculine; *f.* = feminine; *n.* = neuter)

## Notes:

1. The first person singular refers to the speaker; first person plural refers to a group that includes the speaker.
2. The second person refers to the person(s) addressed, or to a group that includes the person(s) addressed. The second-person pronouns have the same form for singular and plural.
3. The third person includes all other persons or things referred to. The rules for the replacement of nouns by these pronouns are rather complicated; but, in general, male beings are referred to by the masculine pronouns, female beings by the feminine, and inanimate objects by the neuter. See *Key to English Nouns*.
4. The first possessive is the form used before nouns: *my* book, *their* friend; the second possessive is used alone: *mine*, *theirs*.

Many other words traditionally called pronouns will be found under the heading *Substitute Nouns*.

**Noun Determiners.** These are the expressions that signal the presence—or the possibility of the presence—of a following noun. (If there is no noun following, then the expression itself functions as a noun—a “substitute noun.”) It is not possible to give a complete analysis of these expressions here, as their grammar is quite complicated. See *Key to English Adjectives, 1*, for a full exposition.

### NOUN-DETERMINERS CLASSIFIED ACCORDING TO THE TYPE OF NOUN THAT MAY FOLLOW

Any kind of noun	Any sing. noun	Sing. count nouns	Mass nouns	Mass nouns or pl. count nouns	Pl. nouns
the my your his her its our their which what whose whichever whatever no	this that	a(n) each every either neither one another* many a	much (a) little a good deal of a great deal of	some any more most all (the) a lot of lots of other enough	these those many (a) few several two, three, etc. both (the)

(Sing. = singular; pl. = plural)

\* May precede plural noun if numeral intervenes: *another five dollars*.

#### Notes:

1. A count noun is a noun used in both singular and plural that can follow *a/an* or a numeral: *tree, book, man*.