Getting started at uni
Academic vocabulary

L3: Language, Literacies and Learning
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There are two types of vocabulary we know

1. **receptive vocabulary**: words that we recognise and have some idea of the meaning, but don’t use

2. **productive vocabulary**: words that we recognise and actually use

At university, we should aim to expand both types of vocabulary. Why?
What is involved in ‘knowing’ a word:

- pronouncing the word accurately
- understanding its meaning
- using it accurately in relation to:
  - meaning
  - grammar
  - spelling
- associating the word with other words that are frequently used with it

For example: “Epistemological”

- How do you pronounce it?
- What does it mean?
- How would you use it in a sentence?
- What words do you associate it with?
What research shows

Factors which influence how well we learn new words:

- **frequency** - how often the word is encountered
- **repetition** - repeated practice
- **timing** of retrieval – taking a longer time period over which we practise and use them
- avoiding **interference** – avoiding learning words that look or sound similar together (e.g. dependent, dependant)
- **generation** – trying to *use* instead of just remembering meaning
- learning the **word family** – e.g. analyse, analysis, analytical, analytically, analyst
- learning with **collocations** - words that commonly occur with the word (*solve*: problem, question, equation)

Adapted from Coxhead (2006)
Sources for new words

Reading

• What type of texts should you read to learn new words? (e.g., textbooks, newspapers, magazines, journal articles, online material)
• What kinds of vocabulary will you find in these different sources? (Consider the purpose of the texts and whether they suit your needs)

Dictionaries

• For example: printed and online; learners; advanced; discipline-specific; thesauri

Do you have any other suggestions to share?
Learning new words: using context

The ‘… approach to abstraction has several consequences for the theory of abstraction and for the promotion of abstraction in schools. A first consequence to be mentioned here is the epistemological change from an essentialist to an inferentialist position. The quality of a concept, notion, or point of view is no longer based on the assumption of essential mirroring of the world, but on the basis of the inference…’

(van Oers 2012, p. 149)

Look at the word ‘epistemological’ in the above paragraph

Can you guess the meaning from contextual cues?

Look at the ideas in the previous and/or following sentences to try and guess what it might mean.
Learning new words: using dictionaries

Once you have analysed the word in context of the paragraph, check the meaning using a dictionary.
Coxhead’s Academic Word List (AWL) consists of 570 academic high frequency words.

The AWL is divided into 10 lists, with List 1 containing the most commonly occurring academic words.

The AWL is compiled from university textbooks.

Visit the website: http://www.englishvocabularyexercises.com/AWL/
Learning new words: corpus concordance search

A corpus:

• is a massive collection of real language (texts);
• shows how words are used in sentences and in context (not just as isolated words);
• can consist of spoken or written language.

Visit the website:
http://www.lextutor.ca/concordancers/concord_e.html
Learning new words: corpus concordance search

1. Type in your word (e.g. epistemological)
2. Choose a corpus
3. Click here to get the concordance
Learning new words: corpus concordance search

You can also open an electronic dictionary to check meaning

View the word **contextually** to determine its **meaning** and **grammatical role** in a sentence.

*Analyse how it is used with other words:*
- Here we can see **epistemological** is an **adjective** (describing word) as it describes ‘grounds’ and ‘issues’
Learning new words: make a dictionary

Learn it **in a phrase or sentence** (i.e. in context)

There are a number of *epistemological perspectives* on learning and development.

Learn **collocations** (words which go together)

epistemological *importance*, epistemological *standpoint* . . .(epistemological + *noun*)

Learn the **word family** (other parts of speech)

epistemology (noun), epistemologically (adverb), epistemologist (noun)

Learn it with other words from that **topic or theme**

The nature or limitations of: knowledge, understanding, belief (linked to education, theories, concepts, ideologies…)
## Learning new words: using word maps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Used in sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>epistemological (adjective – describing word)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members of word family</td>
<td>Associated words</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Learning new words: word association

Associate the new word with:

• a visual image
• a remembered event, place or time
• spelling with meaning
  e.g. stationery includes paper
  a stationary car
• a word in another language
In conclusion…

…what will you take from today’s session on ‘academic vocabulary’?
…what techniques will you try to increase your academic vocabulary?

Further resources:
www.unisa.edu.au/L3