

Outcomes

Better Vocabulary Outcomes

Learner Training 1 Teacher's Notes

Rationale

Students need a principled approach to vocabulary development. If they are to get to a point where they have a chance of passing Cambridge First (FCE) Level – an exam usually taken at the end of Upper Intermediate – then they need to have got to grips with between 2,500 and 3,000 words. This means learning around 750 words per level – or something like 50 per unit! And of course, they don't just need to know single words and their meanings; they need to know how those words work: which other words they're often used with, any particular patterns they often take and so on. Obviously, this can seem scary – and part of our job as teachers is to be honest about the amount of work they will need to do to progress, but also to guide them towards best practice. This Learner Training exercise is designed to encourage discussion of approaches to vocabulary development – and to then give teachers the opportunity to make recommendations.

Activity

Start by telling the class you're going to be talking about how they try to learn vocabulary. You could mention that if they're going to try the FCE exam, they'll need around 3,000 words – and not just 3,000 single words, but collocations, useful expressions, and so on. This means they need to have a good approach to recording and revising vocabulary. Tell the class they're going to read some ideas about learning. Give out the worksheet.

Let students read through the sheet and ask about anything they're not sure of. Explain any new vocabulary (and maybe give extra examples on the board). Then put students into groups of three or four and give them a few minutes to discuss what surprised them – and what they think the implications of each idea is for the way they study vocabulary.

As students chat, monitor and get a sense of what students already believe about vocabulary learning – and what their study habits are. Once the conversation has peaked, stop the class and round up. Ask first if anything really surprised anyone – ask why. Then go through the ideas, asking what students think the implications are, and adding your own comments, or using the suggested answers. Ask students if they have come across any other ideas about language learning, or ask them to research alternative theories and ideas as a follow-up activity.

The sheet with suggested answers can be handed out to students at the end of the session.

You may also want to copy the accompanying advice sheet for your students.