

## How to learn vocabulary



Vocabulary is one of the fundamental elements and critical indicators in children's language development. The quantity and diversity of vocabulary affect children's abilities in sentence syntax, narration and writing. Most importantly, the quantity of vocabulary is greatly affected by life experiences.

Nevertheless, children with language disorder often face the following difficulties in vocabulary learning:

1. slow in picking up new vocabulary
2. having insufficient vocabulary, for example: frequently using contextual pronouns like "this" or "that" instead of specific names when referring to objects
3. over-generalization of vocabulary meaning, for example: using the category noun "car" refer to "taxi"
4. weak organization of vocabulary network, failure of connecting lexicon in a systematic and logical manner, for example: unable to associate "corn/ carrot/ tomato" as "vegetables "or connect carrot with rabbit as rabbit likes eating carrots
5. inefficient retrieval of lexicon, for example: saying "something red and small" instead of "strawberry"
6. weak in acquiring abstract expressions, for example: "brave" or "proud"

Parents might have to go to extra lengths to boost children's vocabulary acquisition abilities. There are several ways in helping children to acquire new vocabulary and one of them is "Categorization". Firstly, parents can help children in observing the characteristics of different objects and grouping those with common characteristics into one category. Children can try identifying high frequency category (e.g., fruits), then proceed to identifying low frequency category (e.g., musical instruments). When distinguishing objects of the same category, external features like color or size should be considered first, then followed by internal features like taste or temperature.

For example, "shirt" and "trousers" are something that we wear, and they are categorized as "clothing". Visual cue like putting real objects / pictures of the same category can be used effectively in helping children to build relevant vocabulary networks.

Another training method is divergent naming (listing appropriate vocabulary based on different conditions), which can range from single to multiple conditions (e.g., animal → four-legged animal with horns), from specific (e.g., has legs / no legs) to abstract (e.g., land / marine animals). Parents are encouraged to first guide children to list common categories (e.g., name ten animals), then list items with distinct characteristics (e.g., physical traits → habitat/behavior). After that, the number of characteristics could be increased. Parents can use visual prompts, such as displaying pictures of possible answers (e.g., photos of various animals). Moreover, they can provide different examples as demonstrations and give a more detailed description of a specific answer to reinforce the child's impression of the object's characteristics.

It is believed that enriching children's life experiences, combining the above training methods, and appropriately using visual prompts can help them systematically memorize and integrate vocabulary, and at last storing it in their vocabulary bank.

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#### **Reference:**

Vocabulary Learning Series -- Fun with Vocabulary Learning (n.d.). <https://www.heephong.org/eng/tools-and-resources/publications/child-development/3099>