

Six Minutes of Words in Action

English learning resource · EN

Key words & expressions · English

10 learning entries

Study task: Listen again and notice the expressions you studied.

1

words in action

DEF

vocabulary used in real, natural contexts — as part of sentences, stories, or conversations — rather than in isolation as a list

Words in action is the difference between knowing a word and owning it. A word you have only seen in a list is fragile; a word you have heard in a story, a conversation, and used yourself is robust.

Seeing words in action — in real sentences — makes them stick far better than any word list.

This episode is designed to put six key words in action so that you hear them working naturally.

2

to illustrate

DEF

to make something clearer or easier to understand by giving examples, stories, or visual images; to demonstrate with evidence

Illustrate is from the Latin 'to light up' — a good illustration throws light onto an idea that was previously in shadow. In language learning, illustrating a word with a story is far more powerful than giving a definition.

Let me illustrate what I mean with a story — it will make far more sense than a definition.

She illustrated the difference between 'lend' and 'borrow' with a single funny example that everyone remembered.

3

in context

DEF

encountered or used within a sentence or real situation rather than as an isolated item

In context is the essential qualifier for vocabulary learning. A word in context carries meaning, emotion, grammar, and pragmatics all at once. A word on a flashcard carries only a definition. Learning words in context is two to three times more effective than learning vocabulary lists.

Always learn a new word in context — read the full sentence it came from, not just the definition.

She stopped memorising word lists and started learning words in context, and retention improved dramatically.

4

usage

DEF

the way in which a word, phrase or grammatical structure is actually used by real speakers in real situations

Usage is what a dictionary cannot fully capture. A word may be technically correct but wrong in usage — too formal, too informal, used in a different context than intended. Native speakers feel usage instinctively; learners must build that feeling through exposure.

Grammar rules tell you what is possible; usage tells you what is normal — focus on usage.

She looked up the word, found it was technically correct, but native speakers told her the usage was not natural.



5

to put something to use

DEF

to apply knowledge, a skill or a new word in a real situation — moving from knowing to doing

Put something to use is the action that transforms passive learning into active ability. You can know a word perfectly and never put it to use. The gap between knowing and using is the biggest gap in language learning, and it is closed only by deliberate production.

Put every new word to use within twenty-four hours — write a sentence or use it in conversation.

She put every phrasal verb she learned to use in a real message that day, and the words stuck.

6

to give an example

DEF

to provide a specific case or instance that makes an abstract idea clear and concrete

Give an example is the most powerful communication tool. Abstract ideas without examples feel distant and forgettable. Examples make vocabulary memorable — they connect a word to a real situation. When teaching or explaining in English, the best speakers use examples constantly.

Give an example whenever you explain a word — 'for instance', 'like when you', 'imagine that'.

She always asked her teacher to give an example before she accepted any grammar explanation as correct.

7

meaningful

DEF

having a real connection to your life, interests, or experience — making learning more memorable and engaging

Meaningful is the key adjective in vocabulary research. Words that are personally meaningful are retained far better than neutral words. If you learn 'resilience' in the context of a failure you personally experienced, it will stay with you. Make vocabulary personally meaningful whenever possible.

Make vocabulary meaningful — connect every new word to a real experience or personal story.

She retained words far better when she found a meaningful personal connection to each one.

8

to encounter a word

DEF

to come across a word unexpectedly in something you are reading, watching or listening to

Encounter a word is the incidental learning action. When you encounter a word rather than look it up on purpose, you have context, emotion and memory attached. Deliberately increasing the sources where you encounter English — books, films, podcasts, conversations — accelerates vocabulary growth.

Every word you encounter in a real English text is worth noting — context makes it stick.

She kept a small notebook for words she encountered in the wild and reviewed it every week.

9

collocations

DEF

pairs or groups of words that naturally go together in English and are commonly used as a unit by native speakers

Collocations are the secret of natural English. 'Make a decision' is correct; 'do a decision' is wrong. 'Heavy rain' is correct; 'strong rain' is wrong. These are not grammar rules — they are patterns. Learning vocabulary as collocations rather than single words accelerates naturalness more than any grammar study.

Learn collocations, not just single words — 'make a mistake', not just 'mistake' alone.

She stopped saying 'do a mistake' and 'strong rain' once she started learning vocabulary through collocations.



10

to sink in

DEF

for information, understanding or a new word to become fully understood and absorbed — often after a delay

Sink in is the word for the lag between hearing and understanding. You can encounter a word several times before it finally sinks in — meaning you have truly absorbed it and could use it spontaneously. This is why repeated exposure matters: the word needs to sink in, and that takes time.

Do not worry if new words do not sink in immediately — the brain needs repeated exposure.

She heard 'to get over something' a dozen times before it finally sank in and she could use it naturally.

