

Word Clusters

Build A Vocabulary That Works For You

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Introduction

Why should you want to learn more words? You're not trying to impress anybody, so what good will it do you? Those are fair questions. And here are some answers — good reasons for learning more words.

Higher Test Scores

Standardized tests have become a fact of life — not just in school, but in the workplace as well. From the time you start elementary school (and often even earlier), all the way through your application for a job or graduate school, you're judged in part by how well you score on standardized tests.

In the workplace, we find that many employers are using standardized tests for hiring, and as one criterion for promotions and selection to certain jobs.

Studies have repeatedly shown that vocabulary skills are clearly tied to better scores on standardized tests, from the PSAT to the GRE.

Better Grades

A good general vocabulary will help you express yourself in writing, oral reports, and class discussions. And improving your knowledge of words used in the subjects you're studying has obvious value. No matter what subject you're studying, learning the words commonly used in that subject will help you understand the subject, and will certainly help you make better grades.

A Higher IQ score

Does that claim sound like false advertising? It isn't. There's a lot of argument about so-called intelligence tests (or IQ tests, for *intelligence quotient*). But almost everyone who's familiar with the tests will agree with this statement: *people who have better vocabularies make higher scores on IQ tests*. Most IQ tests are made up of several subtests covering topics such as mathematical calculations, spatial relations, and vocabulary. Of all subtests, the one that is most highly correlated to the total IQ score is the one that measures vocabulary.

More Career Success, Higher Income

This is not just guessing. One of my favorite vocabulary books reported on a study, by the Human Engineering Laboratory, which said that the *only* common characteristic of highly successful people is an unusual knowledge of words. On the average, people with better vocabularies have more successful careers, get more promotions, and earn more money.

You'll Be Smarter

You won't just *appear* smarter, you'll actually *be* smarter. And this is not the same as simply increasing your IQ score. When you learn a new word, you don't just learn an isolated definition. In most cases, you are actually learning new information. Example: When you first learned the word *photosynthesis*, you didn't just learn a definition, you learned that plants use water and carbon dioxide to make sugars and other nutrients. That made you a little bit smarter. And with each new word you learn, you're increasing your knowledge.

It's Fun

Even though this one is last on the list, it's one of the best reasons for learning new words. Simply having fun is one of the most important things in life. People who make time to do things that bring them pleasure are happier, healthier, and more satisfied with their lives.

Learning words, playing with them, tossing them back and forth among your friends — this is a lot of fun. And it can keep on being fun, and paying off for you, for the rest of your life.

Unit I – People and Their Personalities

There's an old saying: "It takes all kinds of people to make a world."
And we could add: "Yes, and they're all here."

People are fascinating. How they think and act, what they're interested in, how they look, and how they treat us. We want to know these things about our fellow humans. The answers often surprise us, and always interest us.

And among the most interesting things about people are their personalities — how they act and react around other people. Are they outgoing, party-people who love to be around others? Or are they loners, people who prefer to find a quiet place where they can be alone?

How do they treat us? Are they aggressive and competitive, always trying to get ahead of us? Or do they try to be helpful? Do they make us feel liked and trusted, or do they look at us with mistrust or even hatred?

Some of these people you'll like, some you won't. But sooner or later you're going to meet all these personality types — whether you want to or not. So let's look at a few words to describe them.

Misanthrope: "*People are no good.*" You know him. And you wish you didn't. He hates everybody. He's always looking for the worst in everyone — and finding it. You mention something nice another person has done, and he'll scoff and tell you how the person was really doing it for selfish reasons. He doesn't seem to trust anybody, or to like anybody — maybe not even himself.

He's a **misanthrope**. The word's pronounced MISS-un-thrope, and it's made up of two Greek elements. The first is *misein* (meaning *to hate*, often shortened to *mis* in English words), and the second is *anthropos* (man, person).

Related word: He has a *misanthropic* (mis-un-THROP-ik) outlook on life.

Altruist: “*I love people.*” You know her, too — if you’re lucky. She loves everybody. She’s just the opposite of the misanthrope — making us feel good about her, ourselves, and maybe even the rest of the world. We’re always glad to get away from the misanthrope, and we’re just as glad to meet up with the altruist. She’s always finding the best in other people, always seeming to find something good in them, something to like.

The word is pronounced AL-true-ist. That *ist* is a common ending for words that tell us about a person — usually about what that person does, or thinks, or believes, or loves. And the altruist loves *others* — which is what the root *alter* means.

Related words: She does *altruistic* (al-true-ISS-tik) things, because she’s filled with *altruism* (AL-true-ism).

Egotist: “*Let’s talk about me.*” The two parts of this word pretty much tell it all. The *ist* means that the word refers to a person, and the *ego* (which means *self*) tells us what the person is interested in.

So the major interest of the egotist (EE-go-tist) is himself. His favorite words are *I*, *me*, and *myself*. When you’re with him, you probably won’t get to talk much, because he thinks that what he has to say is much too important to be interrupted by listening to anyone else. So he’ll take over the conversation as soon as he can. And what does he talk about? Himself, of course — what he’s done lately, how clever he is, how athletic, how handsome, how all the women like him, and on and on.

Related words: He has a big *ego*, his *egotism* can be irritating, he’s an *egotistical* person.

Gregarious: “*Let’s party.*” People usually like the gregarious (gruh-GARE-ee-us) person, because she likes people. And she likes to have people around her. Instead of staying home and settling in with a good book or video, she’d much prefer to get together with a bunch of friends.

The root of this word is *greg*, which means *herd*. Gregarious animals live in herds, while solitary animals spend most of their time alone.

Recluse: “*Two’s a crowd.*” This person is not at all gregarious — just the opposite. The recluse (RECK-loose) hates crowds — even small groups. He likes to be by himself, and tries to lead a solitary life, staying away from people as much as possible.

Related words: Another word that means much the same is *hermit*, a person who leads a *reclusive* life (pronounced re-KLOOS-iv).

Introvert: “*I look inward.*” Some people are always focused on others, on what’s going on in the world around them. The introvert (EN-tro-vert), on the other hand, spends a lot of time looking inside herself — examining her own thoughts, feelings, doubts, and wishes. But she’s not an egotist, she’s not in love with herself. In fact she may be full of self-doubt, and is often quiet and shy. Introverts may be good friends, but they are often happier being with others one-on-one or in small groups.

Breaking the word into its parts can help us understand and remember it. *Intro* means *into, inward*. And *vert* means *turn*. So the introverted person is *turned inward*.

Related words: She’s an *introverted* person, her *introversion* sometimes makes people think she’s unfriendly (but she’s probably not).

Extrovert: “*Tell me about yourself.*” Extro, the first part of this word, means outward. So the extrovert (EKS-tro-vert) is the opposite of the introvert. His attention is turned out to the world and people around him. He’s happy around others, and likes to be involved in doing things with other people.

He is not shy, but neither is he an egotist. He almost always likes other people, and is likely to be very popular himself, because he’s usually cheery, talkative, and interested in everyone he meets.

Related words: His *extroversion* (eks-tro-VER-zhun) helped make him a popular student.

Ambivert: “*Let’s talk about you and me.*” Most of us are neither introverts nor extroverts. Instead, our thoughts are sometimes turned inward, sometimes outward. So the word (AM-buh-vert) fits, because *ambi* means both. And this person looks both ways.

Instead of focusing entirely on looking inward or outward, the ambivert looks in both directions. She’s not likely to be either unusually shy or egotistical. Instead, she’s interested in other people *and* in herself.

Misogynist: “*Women are just no good.*” There’s that *mis* again, meaning *hatred* or *against*. And the *ist* tells us that it’s a person — a person who hates, in this case. Who or what does the misogynist hate? The *gyn* means *woman*, so the misogynist is a woman-hater.

To pronounce the word, say *massage* (like a back-rub), and add *un-ist*.

Related word: His *misogynistic* (massage-un-IST-ik) attitude cost him the women’s vote.

Misogamist: “*Marriage — humbug.*” Marriage may be a fine institution, but who wants to live in an institution? This word looks a lot like *misogynist*, but it’s definitely different. The *miso* and *ist* tell us that the word refers to a person who hates something or someone. But the misogynist (muh-SOG-um-ist) doesn’t hate women (and may even *be* a woman). Instead the object of hatred is marriage, which is what the root *gamos* literally means. (We find it in *polygamy*, which means plural marriage, and in *bigamy*, illegally marrying a person while already married to someone else.)

Ascetic: “*I like simplicity.*” This word comes from a Greek term meaning *monk*, or *hermit*. And if you think of the kind of life a monk may lead — a bare and simple room, plain clothes, food in small portions, and definitely not fancy — you have a good idea of what the *ascetic*

wants out of life. Just the bare essentials, with no desire for what many of us call the finer things of life. This is a person who is more likely to spend time in lonely contemplation (as in religious study) than in doing things that most of us would call fun. The word's pronounced uh-SET-ik, and may be a noun (a person, in this case) or an adjective (He leads an ascetic life).

Voluptuary: *"I love the rich life."* If the ascetic is at one end of the lifestyle yardstick, the voluptuary (vol-UP-chew-ery) is at the other. She's not into hard work, or putting up with anything that's just so-so. She doesn't shop at discount stores, or ride the bus, or eat at fast-food places, but wants the best in fancy food and fine wine, classical music, expensive art, luxury housing. In short, she wants the best of everything, and lives for the finer things of life.

Luddite: *"Who needs progress?"* According to an old story, a man named Ned Lud (or Ludd) smashed labor-saving devices that threatened to eliminate jobs. So anyone who hates technological advances may be called a *luddite* (LUDD-ite).

Exercise I – A: People and Their Personalities

Directions: In each item below, you'll find two terms, separated by a virgule (/), that are related in some way (e.g., long/short). A third ("single") term is separated by a virgule from a series of terms in parentheses. For each item, circle the term in parentheses that has *the same relationship* to the "single" term as the paired terms have to each other.

1. altruist/misanthrope = extrovert/ (*egotist, geek, ambivert, introvert*)
2. egotism/ (*shyness, self-centeredness, reclusiveness, introspection*) = rich/wealthy
3. velocity/speed = voluptuary/ (*progress-lover, people-hater, luxury-lover, woman-hater*)
4. voluptuary/ascetic = (*woman-hater, woman-lover, people-hater, people-lover*)/misogynist
5. extrovert/ (*shy guy, party animal, luddite, voluptuary*) = most/least
6. (*student, teacher, hermit, artist*)/recluse = extrovert/party person
7. misogamist/marriage-hater = (*masseuse, woman-hater, physical therapist, progress-hater*)/misogynist
8. introvert/ambivert = few/ (*most, all, none, some*)
9. happy/joyful = recluse/ (*party animal, hermit, bachelor, student*)
10. sweet/sour = technology-lover/ (*luddite, misogynist, misogamist, recluse*)

Exercise I – B: People and Their Personalities

Directions: Write a letter in each blank, to match the words in the first column with the quotes in the second column.

Who?

- ___ 1. voluptuary
- ___ 2. egotist
- ___ 3. altruist
- ___ 4. introvert
- ___ 5. extrovert
- ___ 6. ambivert
- ___ 7. misanthrope
- ___ 8. misogynist
- ___ 9. misogamist
- ___ 10. ascetic

Says What?

- a. "I like meeting and talking with people."
- b. "People are just no good."
- c. "No wedding bells for me."
- d. "I love good food, wine, and comfort."
- e. "No party, no wine, nothing fancy."
- f. "Have I told you how talented I am?"
- g. "I'm interested in my friends and myself."
- h. "I care about people, and like to help them."
- i. "Women are just no good."
- j. "I spend a lot of time on introspection."

Exercise I – C: Write the Word

1. I hate women. Most men are all right, but the female of our species is definitely *not* okay. I'm a/an _____.
2. I like members of the opposite sex okay. But don't talk to me about marriage — I hate the very idea. I'm a/an _____.
3. Some people hate women, some hate men, some hate marriage. Me, I hate *everybody*. I'm a/an _____.
4. What good's all that hate stuff? I really like people. I think they're basically good, and I like to help and encourage others whenever I can. I'm a/an _____.
5. I hate newfangled things, like new machines and computers. These so-called technological advances are a pain, and I'd like to blow them all up. I'm a/an _____.
6. I'm a somewhat shy guy (or woman). I don't like crowds, parties, or dealing with people. I can tolerate being around others, but I prefer to spend a lot of time looking inside myself. I'm a/an _____.
7. I love parties, meeting others, talking with folks. I'm a/an _____.
8. What I really like is the good life. Give me a gourmet meal, with fine wine, a soft place to sit or lie, some good music, and I'm completely happy. I'm a/an _____.

9. None of that rich living for me. I much prefer the simple life — simple food (and not too much of that), simple clothing, just the bare necessities. I'm a/an _____.
10. I don't like to be around other people at all. If I could, I'd be a hermit, and go live completely by myself. I'm a/an _____.