

Successful speakers... use a wide range of expressions

At Trinity College London, we have studied the scripts from hundreds of our speaking exams. We wanted to find out what makes some test takers more successful than others. One thing that test takers who perform better do is use a wide range of vocabulary and expressions. Please note that some words are underlined on this worksheet as they are to be used in activity 4.

There are many reasons for increasing your vocabulary and how you can express yourself in English.

- ▶ When you have more vocabulary and expressions to choose from, you can be more precise in explaining what you are thinking. It is then easier for other people to understand you.
- ▶ You can choose to speak in a style that is comfortable to you.
- ▶ A wide range of vocabulary helps you to rephrase what you have said (say it again in another way). This is especially useful when someone does not immediately understand what you have said.
- ▶ You can change the way you speak to different people and in different situations

How can you build up your vocabulary?

- a) Expose yourself to a wide variety of English; films, books, songs, videos, spoken conversations, magazines, newspapers (online and paper)
- b) Notice new words and expressions
- c) Practise them

In this worksheet we will be looking at **b)** and **c)**.

Activity 1

Here an examiner <E> and a test taker <TT> are discussing the film ‘Titanic’.

Corpus extract

- <TT> The first thing that comes to mind after watching this film has to do with these highly qualified professionals who made mistakes.
<E> Mm
<TT> The shortage of lifeboats.
<E> Mm
<TT> One of the most astonishing moments was the musicians' behaviour. They kept on playing to relieve the passengers' anxiety while they watched the ship was turning into.

Now find words or phrases which have similar meanings to:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| a) I'm thinking of | d) amazing/surprising |
| b) did things wrong | e) continued |
| c) there were not enough | f) becoming |

Are any of these phrases new to you? Have you used them in your own conversations?

Trinity tip

Sometimes we recognise words and phrases but we do not use them. This means that they are in our ‘passive vocabulary’ (we understand them) but not in our ‘active vocabulary’ (we understand them and use them). To increase your ‘word-power’ you need to turn passive vocabulary into active vocabulary.

Increasing your vocabulary

Practise saying the new phrase or word repeatedly

Think of it in the same way as you do physical exercise. When you want to build up your strength, you exercise every day again and again. You can do the same thing with new vocabulary; say the word or phrase again and again.

Activity 2

Say these sentences aloud, completing them with your own ideas:

- a) The first thing that comes to mind when I hear the words school dinners/sinking ship/cheap clothes/luxury holidays/extra homework is...

For example: *The first thing that comes to mind when I hear the phrase sinking ship is the Titanic.*

- b) Now that you have got used to using that phrase, change the tense of the verb and make new sentences.

The first thing that came to mind when I saw him was...

The thing that is coming to mind as I look at this picture is...

Look and listen

When you hear or read a new-to-you phrase, try to remember how it was used – you might want to make a note of it. Then you can practise again!

Activity 3

Now do the same with these words and phrases:

- a) In our school/In our town/In his office/In some hot countries there's a shortage of...
- b) I kept on/running/working/reading/exercising/practising until I...
- c) I thought...was really astonishing.
- d) I make a lot of mistakes when I....
- e) I think my friend/my school/this project/our plan for our holiday is turning into...

Find other ways of saying the same thing

Notice synonyms for words and phrases you already know and use (ie the ones in your active vocabulary).

Activity 4

Look at the underlined words on this worksheet. Find words or phrases which mean:

discover	.....	talking about	.....
increase	.....	saying it in a different way	.....
repeatedly	.....	pay attention to	.....
other ways of saying the same thing			.....

Now play this game: for each of the topics below say the first thing that comes to mind.

- ▶ pizza with anchovies
- ▶ waiting in a long queue
- ▶ bungee jumping
- ▶ being on the beach in the summer
- ▶ my grandmother

For example: chocolate ice cream – *I really like chocolate ice cream*

Then think of other ways of expressing yourself. Play around and have fun. Don't be afraid of making mistakes.

For example: *Chocolate ice cream is absolutely delicious/I adore chocolate ice cream/I'm mad about chocolate ice cream/ I'd give anything to have some chocolate ice cream right now!*

Finally, listen to each other. Have some of the other students in your class (your fellow students) used vocabulary which you like and which is new to you? Make a note of it and then start to use it yourself.