

Teaching Vocabulary in Business English Classes by Marjorie Rosenberg

One of the main areas of difference between teaching general or business English lies in the vocabulary which needs to be taught and learned. Learners who are fluent in English may still have a lack of knowledge of specific vocabulary used in the business world and even in their own fields. These learners may be students learning at institutions of higher education or for specific exams or they may be business people who need English for their current or future jobs. In both cases, the motivation for learning this vocabulary is generally high. Their needs, timetables and access to authentic materials and speaking situations may vary greatly, however. Therefore, business English teachers have to find a wide variety of ways to help their learners acquire, retain and be able to use the words they need in their professional lives.

One way to begin to think about methods for teaching vocabulary is to first consider what it means to *know* a word. Do we have to know what it means, use it correctly in context, understand where it came from, pronounce it correctly, know if it has a positive or negative meaning or if it is formal or informal, and so on? Depending on the type of learners you teach, a variety of definitions for knowing a word may be applicable to your situation. Opening up this discussion to learners has the benefit of getting them to think for themselves about what they really need. Then they can find ways to record vocabulary, search for it using different sources and find out how they themselves can best move vocabulary from a passive usage to an active one.

It is also important to realise that individuals learn and retain vocabulary differently. This often depends on their learning styles. One model which can be looked at is the visual, auditory and kinesthetic model. Visual learners need to see words or pictures and often have to write the word down to make sure it is spelled correctly. They may need to read the word in a sentence in order to remember it. Auditory learners need to hear the word or phrase said aloud. They concentrate on the sound of the word and the pronunciation is important for them. They may also need to put the word into a sentence and practise saying the sentence out loud or to themselves. Kinesthetic learners may need to move about or even make gestures while learning vocabulary. They may connect words with movements or feelings. For them, the positive or negative connotations of words can be very important and help them remember new words and phrases.

How does all of this apply specifically to business English? Lately, the economic crisis has been the major topic in a number of business English lessons. In reading through authentic material it is interesting to note that a large number of idioms are used. In looking at the idioms more closely, it is interesting to observe that there is a group of phrases connected to water. Terms such as bailout, to go under, waterfall payments, sink or swim, to buoy profits or to keep one's head above water are just some of the ones which have recently come up. Presenting these words visually and/or kinesthetically has greatly helped some of my adult learners. As vocabulary in English changes so rapidly, it is important to help learners find ways which they can employ themselves to retain some of the words they need. When they begin to store words in more than one sensory channel, they find that their access to the word has also increased and the word comes to them more easily when they need it.

Letting learners choose which words they want to work on themselves is another important technique. Here several different activities work quite well. After working through vocabulary in the form of lists, cards, discussions, reading texts, etc., each group is given a specific assignment of vocabulary to search for. They write down ten words and then must ask their partner a question in order to get the partner to

say the word. This is timed and at the end of the game they have to see how many of their words they were able to get their partner to say. Even lower level learners enjoy this because they are able to choose the words themselves and find a way to describe them, something they need to do as well in their jobs. A second technique is to play a form of the game "Outburst" with students. They get a list of topics and have to look through their materials in order to find four to six words (which is determined by the teacher at the beginning of the activity) that they associate with their topics. They read out their topic and the other group has to guess which five or six words they have chosen. The learners become extremely involved in trying to find out what the other group has written down and shout out lots of words which can then be collected as well. After one minute the guessing is stopped and the group which has written down the words tells the second group how many they guessed, what the words were and which words they didn't guess, a part of the activity which often surprises the group guessing the words. The group which guesses the most words is the winner. This game has proved to be successful in a wide variety of teaching situations and levels. In addition, the groups are so proud of the vocabulary they can say (even out of context) that it gives them motivation to go on learning new words.

A more kinesthetic activity involves the whole class. The learners receive cards with business words on them and they walk around to find out who knows the word they have. This is a standard game, but the second part of it then involves giving them the definition in the form of a domino game in which the whole group has to solve. Each person has a word and definition which do not go together and the group must form a circle to complete the domino. The third step, however, is also vital. When the first two activities are finished, the learners are given a worksheet with the definitions and have to write in the words they had. This is a form of revision for the group but also provides a written record which they can take with them out of the classroom. If they are preparing for an exam, they can use it to study, if they need the words for their jobs, they can learn the words they feel they need.

These are just some of the possibilities of teaching vocabulary in the business English classroom. As classes are made up of a variety of people with different learning styles and needs and each teacher is also an individual, it is necessary to find different activities for different groups. Remaining flexible, allowing both yourself and your learners to experiment with ideas and new methods can be rewarding for both you and your course participants.

Water activity

Match the word to the definition and the original meaning.

expression or term	original meaning	financial use
bailout	1) to sink below the surface	A) to pay back interest and principal to some creditors and just interest to others till the more expensive loans have been paid
to go under	2) to empty a boat of water	B) to keep profits or earnings up
to sink or swim	3) a force of water falling from a higher area to a lower one	C) to help out a company with funds
waterfall (payment)	4) to stay afloat in water and be able to breathe	D) to go bankrupt
to keep one's head above water	5) to keep something from sinking	E) to try your best or to fail
to buoy (profits / earnings)	6) to survive by staying above the surface or to drown	F) to have enough money to live and pay your bills

Key

bailout 2, C

to go under 1, D

to sink or swim 6, E

waterfall (payment) 3, A

to keep one's head above water 4, F

to buoy (profits / earnings) 5, B

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