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INTRODUCTION



Building a good vocabulary doesn't mean memorizing long lists of difficult words. It doesn't mean spending long hours reading a dictionary, either. Your everyday activities present plenty of opportunities to increase your word power.

The benefits of having the "right" words at your command are obvious. People who can express themselves with precision and grace have a clear advantage over those who can't. They can count on themselves to speak confidently and write with self-assurance. In competitive situations at school or on the job, language skills are an enormous asset. In personal and social situations, the ability to communicate your needs, thoughts, and feelings can make your relationships stronger and your life less stressful.

The instruction in this book will give you access to hundreds of new and interesting words. As you complete each lesson, try to integrate as many words as you can into your speech and writing. While no amount of practice can promise *perfection*, practice does guarantee improvement! And remember that the best word to use is not necessarily long or fancy; it's the one that conveys the exact meaning you intend. Careful attention as you work your way through this book is a wise investment in your future as a "great communicator"!

1

VARIETIES OF ENGLISH

Vocabulary skill is based on a clear understanding of language itself. The language you use must be appropriate to the situation. Think about it. Would you dress for a job interview in the clothes you wore to clean the garage? Would you polish your shoes before going to the beach, or wear your favorite torn sweatshirt to a formal reception? Appropriate language is like appropriate clothing. It shows that you understand the requirements of different occasions and circumstances.

Two major categories of English are called *standard* and *substandard*. *Standard English* is the language of educated people—those who know and follow the conventional rules of grammar and usage.

Substandard English, which usually breaks accepted rules in the use of pronouns and certain verb forms, is associated with the uneducated.

EXAMPLES: **STANDARD:** I saw that movie. **He and I are friends.**
 SUBSTANDARD: I seen that movie. **Him and me are friends.**

A

Write **S** or **SS** to show whether each sentence below is written in *standard English* or *substandard English*.

1. _____ Dizzy Dean, once a great pitcher for the St. Louis Cardinals, was famous for using substandard speech.
2. _____ Dizzy's brother Paul was also a pitcher for the Cards.
3. _____ "A teacher wrote to say that she don't like the way I talk," said Dizzy.
4. _____ "She don't want me to say that a runner *slud* into second base."
5. _____ "What does she want me to say—*slided*?"
6. _____ "Me and Paul don't like to worry about that sort of stuff," said Dizzy.



B

Rewrite the sentences in standard English.

1. I noticed you was late getting home last night.

2. Haven't you got no respect for the house rules?

3. Dad don't like you staying out after midnight.

4. If Dad catches you hisself, you'll be grounded!

There are different forms of standard English. The two most important varieties are *formal* and *informal*. Formal English is used for serious purposes: research papers, literary essays, important speeches, and essay questions on exams. Characteristics of formal English include the following:

- Sentences are very carefully constructed.
- rarely contains slang
- uses words not common in everyday speech and writing
- avoids the use of contractions

Most of the time, educated people use informal language. Whether written or spoken, their sentences sound more like conversation than like lines from a formal speech. Newspapers, magazines, novels, and business letters are written in informal English. Characteristics of informal English include the following:

- includes both long and short sentences
- uses contractions
- uses vocabulary that is clear and simple rather than elegant
- uses limited slang

C

Read each pair of words. Circle the *formal* word and underline the *informal* word.

1. kids children

5. rich prosperous

2. colleagues coworkers

6. aspirations goals

3. started originated

7. balance moderation

4. propose suggest

8. assert say

2

MATCHING WORDS TO THE OCCASION

Long, difficult words are not necessarily the *best* words for all occasions. Effective communicators understand the difference between simple, everyday speech and what is called the “King’s English.”

A

Which kind of English is appropriate in each situation below?

Write *formal* or *informal* on the lines.

1. a thank you note for a gift:

2. a letter to the PTA:

3. a legal document:

4. a classroom discussion:

5. an academic journal article:

6. a newspaper article:

B

Practice writing sentences in both formal and informal English. If the sentence is written in formal English, rewrite it in informal English. If the language is informal, rewrite it in formal language. As an example, the first sentence has been done for you.

1. Van’s lame suggestion was probably a put-on.

Van’s unworkable suggestion was likely meant as a joke.

2. An overly intensive study schedule may adversely affect your social aspirations.

3. Great Britain’s royals packed the room at the uppercrust charity bash.

4. Persistent procrastination before studying is a self-indulgence students can ill afford.

