



Carol was a good student. She wrote everything her teacher said in her notebook. However, Carol had a problem. When she tried to speak English at meetings, words wouldn't come to her mind. I asked her how she studied, and she explained that she memorised expressions from a list but never practised them. I reminded Carol that you don't really know a concept until you've actually learnt how to use it and advised her to change the way she learnt. How could she do that?

Learn Words Properly

Understanding expressions is very different to knowing them.

Words are not useful until we have incorporated them naturally into our language. To do this, we need to go through a learning cycle.

- Understand the word's meaning.
For example, can you explain or translate it?
- Pronounce the word properly.
Has a native speaker checked your sounds?
- Place the word in context so we know when we can apply it.
Could you use it with your friends? And with you boss?
- Produce an example and have someone check it.
Can you put the word into a sentence?
- Repeat the word until it comes automatically to your mind.
Will you recall it in the middle of a discussion?

I always remember an English textbook called *Practice and Progress* by LG Alexander, where vocabulary was presented in an introductory paragraph, explained afterwards, included in the book's listening comprehension activities and lastly in a list where students had to write

sentences. I must say that almost everyone learnt those words! Most other English books, unfortunately, do not pay such close attention to vocabulary so students need to make a special effort to learn words.

When presented with a new expression, ask your teacher to go through the learning cycle. You can, for instance:

- Explain the word to your teacher to make sure you understand it. As a result, the meaning will be clear in your head. Then, say the word and ask your teacher to check your sounds. In this way, you'll remember the way it's pronounced.
- Ask your teacher if this is a formal or informal expression. If it's common in written or in oral English. You'll immediately realise whether you can, for example, use it in a report to a manager or when talking to a colleague.
- Make up a sentence and tell your teacher to correct it so as to check whether you are using the vocabulary properly. Lastly, write the word in your notebook and review it several times. You'll memorise it and the expression will be ready when you need it.

Let's see how Carol has changed her learning style by reading this recent dialogue between her and her teacher:

"I'm not sure about the meaning of *deliver*. Is it the same as *send*?"

"In this context they have the same meaning, Carol."

"The pronunciation is *deliver*, right?"

"Perfect."

"Is it more or less formal than *send*?"

"It's more formal. For instance, you could use it in a business report."

"Thanks. Can I say "We'll deliver the parcel tomorrow?"

"Correct, Carol. Now write it in your notebook and revise the word until you've memorised it."

Andrew's comment? You don't know something until you've used it properly, so make sure you've gone through the whole learning cycle.



Want to improve your English? Learn at your office with English for Business. Contact us at www.englishforbusiness.es or at 902 108 127.
