

Increase Your Selling Power by Increasing Your WORD Power

By Alexandria K. Brown

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Although it's painfully obvious that a poor vocabulary won't keep you out of the White House, people do judge you by the words you use -- making assumptions about your intelligence, education, and capabilities.

Having a vast "stable" of words that you are confident in using allows you to choose just the right one when you need it. This can help make your copywriting, client conversations, arguments, and sales presentations incredibly powerful and concise. And it never hurts to appear smarter than you are. ;)

In grade school, we were given vocabulary lessons and quizzes that forced us to learn the meanings of new words. But now, as grown-ups in our increasingly "dumbed-down" society, it's not easy to keep learning new words without working at it. The six-o'clock news and "People" magazine won't do much to increase your word power.

So how can you increase your vocab without spending hours studying your dictionary or a book on the subject? Here are a few easy ways that I've found helpful:

1. Read more publications.

"The New York Times" and even news magazines such as "Time" and "Newsweek" often throw in words that fall above the country's average 6th grade reading level. (That sounds mighty low, I know, but that's the target for most publications aimed at the general public.) Keep a small dictionary with you, and when you come across words you're not familiar with, look them up. Don't be embarrassed about not knowing them -- just learn them!

2. Get your "Word of the Day."

Dictionary.com offers a daily e-mail that gives you interesting and useful words, along with their definitions, pronunciations, and three examples of their usage. Since it's easier to learn in small bits, this is an ideal way to pick up new words you can really use. For example, yesterday's nugget was: "pervicacious \pur-vih-KAY-shus\, adjective: Refusing to change one's ideas, behavior, etc.; stubborn; obstinate." (I'm sure we know many people who are pervicacious.)

Sign up at www.dictionary.com . (By the way, bookmark this site, or do what I did and make it your browser's home page. It's wonderfully handy to look up a word by typing it in your keyboard instead of lugging that eight-pound Webster off your bookshelf.)

3. Listen and learn.

If you want to go on a vocabulary crusade whole-hog, order the Verbal Advantage audiotope program, that aims to help you "amass a Harvard Graduate's Vocabulary in just 15 minutes a day." I enjoy listening to these tapes on long drives and find that I truly retain what I hear. The great thing about learning by *listening* is that you really learn how to *pronounce* the word. There's also a quick quiz after every 10 words learned.

The narrator also gives examples of usage and touches on common usage errors to help you avoid embarrassing mistakes in conversation. One example: Many people say the word "unequivocable," but the word is "unequivocal." (One less syllable!)

The company offers a two-tape "trial offer" for less than \$30 that gives you many useful words to get started. Check it out at <http://www.netofficetoolbox.com/app/adtrack.asp?AdID=8904> I think you'll like it! (Can someone please order it for "Dubya"?)

Now, all you have to do is remember to use what you know! Although you shouldn't try *too* hard to pepper your conversations with words that will stump your colleagues (think of Dennis Miller on Monday Night Football), you'll enjoy being able to pull just the right word out of your proverbial hat when you need it.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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