

Background

Vocabulary tests are rare opportunities to easily earn A's on tests. Consider the following:

1. Research done at UCLA over 30 years ago tells us that vocabulary words become a part of our vocabularies after an average of 17 exposures (hearing, seeing, saying, writing). Some words require more exposures while some particularly evocative words are remembered after just one exposure.
2. Students who study lists of words with dictionary definitions forget the words soon after study, and those words do not become a part of the students' vocabularies.
3. When a group of students is given two different tests drawn from a particular word list, one test with the words in the same order as on the supplied list and the other test with words presented in a different order, students score more correct answers on the first test. Word order is a context clue which helps on the test but is unrelated to long term use of the word. You should study the words in scrambled order.
4. Students who use vocabulary flash cards score higher on tests than students who do not. Flash card use can make studying more efficient because previously learned words are not studied.
5. When students are given vocabulary tests with the definitions worded differently than on the word/definition list, students score many fewer correct answers than students given tests with the same wording for the definitions as on the list. If a student has a deep understanding of the meaning of the word, alternate wording for the definition should make little difference.

6. Students learn words when they have significant experience with the words in a variety of contexts.

Conclusions

1. Students should study the vocabulary words in various contexts, in literature if possible.
2. Supplement actual experience with the words with flash card study.
3. Study alternate dictionary definitions.

4. Do not study words only from the word/definition list: that is a waste of time in terms of long-term retention of the words.

Study Plan

1. Make/use vocabulary flash cards. Study the cumulative stack of cards; that is, always review all the cards, and study the ones you do not know.

2. Look up alternate wording for definitions and study the similarities and differences.

3. Use vocabtest.com to find our vocabulary words and practice tests.