

A great way to improve your reading and essay-writing skills is to improve your vocabulary. The more words you know on the day of the test, the easier it will be. It's as simple as that. For this reason, it's important that you get to work on your vocabulary immediately. We suggest that you mark any words you don't know in the chapter and make flashcards for yourself.

THE HIT PARADE

The Hit Parade list consists of the words that show up most often on the AP English Language and Composition exam. Each word on the list is accompanied by its definition, a pronunciation guide, and a sentence that uses the word. Your vocabulary-building program should start with these words.

LEARN THE WORDS IN GROUPS

This Hit Parade has been arranged into groups of related words. Learning groups of related words can help you better remember each word's meaning. After all, even if you don't remember the exact meaning of a word, you may remember what group it's from. This will give you an idea of the word's meaning, which can help you use POE to get to an answer.

Make each group of words a part of your life. Rip out one of the group lists, carry it around with you, and use the words throughout your day. For example, on Monday you may feel like using words of *disdain* (see the "If you can't say anything nice" list), but on Friday you may wish to be more *affable* (see the "Friendly" list).

DON'T MEMORIZE THE DICTIONARY

Only a tiny percentage of all the words in the English language are ever used on the exam. Generally speaking, it tests the kinds of words that an educated adult—your English teacher, for example—would know without having to look up. It tests the sorts of words that you encounter in your daily reading, from a novel in English class to the newspaper.

HOW TO MEMORIZE NEW WORDS

Here are three effective methods for learning new words.

- **Flashcards:** You can make your own flashcards out of 3 x 5 index cards. Write the word on one side and its definition on the other. Then quiz yourself on the words, or practice with a friend. You can carry a few cards around with you every day and work on them in spare moments, like when you're riding on the bus.
- **The Image Approach:** The image approach involves letting each new word suggest a wild image to you, then using that image to help you remember the word. For example, the word *enfranchise* means, "to give the right to vote." Women did not become enfranchised in the United States until 1920, when the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution guaranteed them the right to vote in state and federal elections. The word *franchise* may suggest to you a McDonald's franchise. You could remember the new word by imagining people lined up to vote at a McDonald's. The weirder the image, the better you'll remember the word.

- **Mnemonics:** Speaking of “the weirder, the better,” another way to learn words is to use mnemonics. A mnemonic is a device or trick, such as a rhyme or song, that helps you remember something. “In fourteen hundred ninety-two Columbus sailed the ocean blue” is a mnemonic that helps you remember a date in history. The funnier or stranger you make your mnemonic, the more likely you are to remember it. Write down your mnemonics (your flashcards are a great place for these).

Although you may not be able to think of a mnemonic for every Hit Parade term, sometimes you’ll end up learning the word just by thinking about the definition and a suitable mnemonic long enough.

LOOK IT UP

Well-written general publications—like the *New York Times* and *Sports Illustrated*—are good sources of vocabulary. You should read them on a regular basis. When you come across a new word, write it down, look it up, and remember it. You can make flashcards for these words as well.

Before you can memorize the definition of a word you come across in your reading, you have to find out what it means. You’ll need a real dictionary for that. ETS uses two dictionaries in writing the AP English Language and Composition exam: the *American Heritage Dictionary* and the *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*. You should own a copy of one or the other. (You’ll use it in college too—it’s a good investment.)

Keep in mind that most words have more than one definition. The dictionary will list these in order from the most to least common meanings of the word. ETS will also often trip you up by testing the second, third, or even fourth definition of a familiar-sounding word. For example, the word *pedestrian* shows up repeatedly on the exam. When ETS uses it, however, it never means a person on foot—the definition of *pedestrian* you’re probably most familiar with. ETS uses it to mean common, ordinary, banal—a *secondary* definition.

Very often, when you see easy words on hard AP English Language and Composition exam questions, ETS is testing a second, third, or fourth definition that you may not be familiar with.

Here we go!

ARE YOU TALKIN’ TO ME?

assertion uh SUR shun
a declaration or statement

We could not believe John’s assertion that he had never seen *Star Wars*.

clarity KLAR uh tee
clearness in thought or expression

Carol spoke with such clarity that her two-year-old understood exactly what she wanted him to do.

cogent KO jent
convincing; reasonable

Christina’s argument was so cogent that even her opponents had to agree with her.

coherent ko HEER ent

logically connected

The old prospector's story was not coherent; he rambled on about different things that had nothing to do with one another.

cohesive ko HEE siv

condition of sticking together

Eric's essay was cohesive because each point flowed nicely into the next point.

didactic dy DAK tik

intended to instruct

The tapes were entertaining and didactic because they amused and instructed the children.

discourse DIS kors

verbal expression or exchange; conversation

Their discourse varied widely; they discussed everything from Chaucer to ice fishing.

eloquence EH lo kwens

the ability to speak vividly or persuasively

Cicero's eloquence is legendary; his speeches were well-crafted and convincing.

emphasize EM fuh size

to give special attention to something, to stress

During English class, our instructor emphasized the importance of learning vocabulary.

fluid FLOO id

easily flowing

The two old friends' conversation was fluid; each of them was able to respond quickly and easily to what the other had to say.

implication im pli KAY shun

the act of suggesting or hinting

When your mother asks, "Were you raised in a barn?" the implication is that you should close the door.

lucid LOO sid

easily understood; clear

Our teacher does a good job because he provides lucid explanations of difficult concepts.

rhetoric RET uh rik

the art of using language effectively and persuasively

Because they are expected to make speeches, most politicians and lawyers are well versed in the art of rhetoric.