

Fully Revised and Expanded Edition

**WORD
POWER
MADE
EASY**

*The Complete Handbook for
Building a Superior Vocabulary*

**THE MOST EFFECTIVE VOCABULARY
BUILDER IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

*The simple, step-by-step method that will
increase your knowledge and mastery of English*

NORMAN LEWIS

[STORMRG]

Norman Lewis

WORD POWER MADE EASY

*The Complete Handbook for Building a Superior
Vocabulary*

Expanded and Completely Revised



Anchor Books

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TO:

My family and friends, who accepted, without apparent resentment and with barely audible complaint, my complete self-isolation during the many months in which I totally and shamefully neglected them while working on the revision of this book.

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Whittier, California
January 1978

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK FOR MAXIMUM BENEFIT

1. this is not a reading book...

Don't read this book!

Instead, *work* with it. *Talk aloud* to it, *talk back* to it—use your voice, not just your eyes and mind.

Learning, *real learning*, goes on only through *active participation*.

When a new word occurs in a chapter, *say it aloud!* (The phonetic respelling will help you pronounce it correctly.)¹

When you do the matching exercises, keep track of your responses. (Check the key that immediately follows each exercise.)

When you do the “Yes-No,” “True-False,” or “Same-Opposite” exercises, keep track of your responses, then check with the key when you have completed the whole exercise.

When you are asked to fill in words that fit definitions, *write your answers on a piece of paper*; then check the key both to see if you have responded with the right word and also to make sure your spelling is correct.

When you do the *Review of Etymology* exercises, make sure to fill in the English word containing the prefix, root, or suffix required—use a chapter word, or any other word that comes to mind. (Coin words if you like!)

Pay special attention to the *Chapter Reviews*. Are the words still fresh in your mind? Do you remember the meaning of each root studied in the previous sessions? In these *Reviews*, you are not only testing your learning but also tightening up any areas in which you discover lacks, weaknesses, or lapses of memory.

2. master the pronunciation system!

Saying words *aloud*, and saying them *right*, is half the battle in feeling comfortable and assured with all the new words you are going to learn. Every word taught is respelled to show its pronunciation, so pay close attention to how the phonetic symbols work.

(a) *First, master the “schwa”!*

Almost every English word of two or more syllables contains one or several syllables in which the vowel sound is said *very* quickly. For example:

“*Linda* spoke to her *mother* about a *different* idea she had.”

→Read the *previous sentence aloud* at *normal conversational* speed.

Read it again. Listen to how the *-a* of *Linda*; the *-er* of *mother*; the *a-* of *about*; the *-er*

and *-ent* of *different*; and the *-a* of *idea* sound.

Very quick—very short! Right?

Phonetically respelled, these words are represented as:

1. *Linda* LIN'-də
2. *mother* MUTH'-ər
3. *about* ə-BOWT'
4. *different* DIF'-ər-ənt
5. *idea* ī-DEE'-ə

The symbol “ə,” called a *schwa*, represents the quick, short vowel sound in the five words above.

Now look back at the sentence preceded by an arrow.

The italicized words are rewritten as:

1. *previous* PREE'-vee-əs
2. *sentence* SEN'-təns
3. *aloud* ə-LOWD'
4. *normal* NAWR'-məl
5. *conversational* kon'-vər-SAY'-shən-əl

You will find ə in almost all words that are phonetically respelled throughout this book. Say the five italicized words aloud and make sure you understand how the *schwa* (ə) sounds.

(b) *Next, understand accent.*

Look at word (5) above: *conversational*: kon'-vər-SAY'-shən-əl. Note that there are *two* accent marks, one on *kon'*, another on *SAY'*. Note also that *kon'* is in lower-case letters, *SAY'* in capitals. Both syllables are stressed, but the one in capitals (*SAY'*) sounds stronger (or louder) than the one in lower case (*kon'*). Say *conversational* aloud, noting the difference.

Say these three words, taken from [Chapter 3](#), *aloud*, noticing the variation in stress between the lower-case and the capitalized syllables:

1. *egomaniacal* ee'-gō-mə-NĪ'-ə-kəl
2. *altercation* awl'-tər-KAY'-shən
3. *anthropological* an'-thrə-pə-LOJ'-ə-kəl

(c) *Be careful of the letter “S” (or “s”) in phonetic respellings.* S (or s) is always *hissed*, as in *see, some, such*. After an *-n*, you will be tempted to *buzz* (or “voice”) the *-s*, because final *-ns* is usually pronounced *-nz*, as in *wins, tons, owns*, etc. (Say these three words aloud—hear the *z* at the end?) *Resist the temptation!* S (or s) is *always hissed* in phonetic

respellings!

Say these words aloud:

1. *ambivalence*² am-BIV'-ə-ləns
2. *affluence* AF'-loo-əns
3. *opulence* OP'-yə-ləns
4. *sentence* SEN'-təns

(d) The symbol \bar{i} or \bar{I} is pronounced *eye*, to rhyme with *high*, *sigh*, *my*, etc., *no matter where you find it*. For example:

1. *fight*s F \bar{I} TS
2. *spy* SP \bar{I}
3. *malign* mə-L \bar{I} N'
4. *civilize* SIV'-ə-liz'

[\bar{I} or \bar{i} (without the top bar) is pronounced as in *it*, *sit*, *pitch*.]

(e) *All consonants have their normal sounds.*

Except for G (or g), which is *always pronounced as in give, girl, get, go*.

1. *agree* ə-GREE'
2. *pagan* PAY'-gən
3. *again* ə-GEN'

(f) *The vowel sounds are as follows:*

SYMBOL	EXAMPLE
1. A, a	<i>cat</i> (KAT)
2. E, e	<i>wet</i> (WET)
3. I, i	<i>sit</i> (SIT)
4. O, o	<i>knot</i> (NOT)
5. U, u	<i>nut</i> (NUT)
6. AH, ah	<i>martinet</i> (mahr'-tə-NET')
7. AW, aw	<i>for</i> (FAWR); <i>incorrigible</i> (in-KAWR'-ə-jə-bəl)
8. AY, ay	<i>ate</i> (AYT); <i>magnate</i> (MAG'-nayt)
9. EE, ee	<i>equal</i> (EE'-kwəl); <i>clandestinely</i> (klan-DES'-tən-lee)
10. \bar{O} , \bar{o}	<i>toe</i> (T \bar{O}); <i>concerto</i> (kən-CHUR'-tō)

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| 11. ʊ, ʊ | <i>book</i> (BʊK); <i>prurient</i> (PRʊR'-ee-ənt) |
| 12. ʊ, ʊ | <i>doom</i> (DʊM); <i>blue</i> (BLʊ) |
| 13. OW, ow | <i>about</i> (ə-BOWT') |
| 14. OY, oy | <i>soil</i> (SOYL) |
| 15. ING, ing | <i>taking</i> (TAYK'-ing) |

(g) *TH* or *th* is pronounced as in *thing*; **TH** or **th** is pronounced as in *this*.

3. a word (or words) on western and eastern pronunciation

In the New York City area, and in parts of New Jersey and other eastern states, the syllables *-ar*, *-er*, *-or*, *-off*, and *-aw* are pronounced somewhat differently from the way they are said in the Midwest and in the West.

In New York City, for example, the words below are generally pronounced as follows:

orange	AHR'-ənj
talk	TAWK
coffee	KAW'-fee
sorority	sə-RAHR'-ə-tee
incorrigible	in-KAHR'-ə-jə-bəl
disparage	dis-PAR'-əj (A as in HAT)
merry	MER'-ee (E as in WET)
marry	MAR'-ee (A as in HAT)
astronaut	AS'-trə-nawt'
Harry	HAR'-ee (A as in HAT)

In the Midwest and West, on the other hand, the same words are usually said approximately as follows:

orange	AWR'-ənj
talk	TOK
coffee	KOF'-ee
sorority	sə-RAWR'-ə-tee
incorrigible	in-KAWR'-ə-jə-bəl
disparage	dis-PAIR'-əj

merry	MAIR'-ee
marry	MAIR'-ee
astronaut	AS'-trə-not'
Harry	HAIR'-ee

Nothing so radical here that a person brought up in Brooklyn or the Bronx cannot understand a native of Los Angeles or San Francisco—it's just that each one thinks *the other* has an accent!

In California, for example, *Mary*, *merry*, and *marry* sound almost exactly alike—in New York, they are usually heard as quite different words.

(So, to be sexist for a moment, if the men at a party in Manhattan say, “Let's all make merry!”, Mary doesn't feel that she is about to be seduced by the males!)

In the phonetic respellings throughout the book, the western pronunciations of words with the syllables remarked on above are used. This is done largely because I myself have lived in the Los Angeles area for some fourteen years, and have had to retrain my pronunciation (having come from New York City, where I was born, and lived all my life until 1964) so that my friends and students would stop making fun of the way I speak.

Neither form of pronunciation is any better nor any more euphonious than the other. Throughout the country, pronunciation varies not only from region to region or state to state, but often from city to city! The changes are slight and subtle, but they do exist, and an expert can easily pinpoint the geographical source of a person's language patterns almost down to a few square miles in area.

If you are an Easterner, you will have no difficulty translating the pronunciations of words like *sorority*, *incorrigible*, *disparage*, and *astronaut* (all words discussed in later chapters) into your own comfortable language patterns.

4. why etymology?

Etymology (et'-ə-MOL'-ə-jee) deals with the origin or derivation of words.

When you know the meaning of a root (for example, Latin *ego*, I or self), you can better understand, and more easily remember, *all* the words built on this root.

Learn one root and you have the key that will unlock the meanings of up to ten or twenty words in which the root appears.

Learn *ego* and you can immediately get a handle on *egocentric*, *egomaniac*, *egoist*, *egotist*, and *alter ego*.

Learn *anthropos* (Greek, mankind), and you will quickly understand, and never forget, *anthropology*, *misanthropy*, *anthropoid*, *anthropocentric*, *anthropomorphic*, *philanthropy*, and *anthropophobia*. Meet any word with *anthropo-* in it, and you will have at least some idea of its meaning.

In the *etymological* (et'ə-mə-LOJ'-ə-kəl) approach to vocabulary building:
You will learn about *prefixes*, *roots*, and *suffixes*—
You will be able to figure out unfamiliar words by recognizing their structure, the building blocks from which they are constructed—
You will be able to construct words correctly by learning to put these building blocks together in the proper way—and
You will be able to derive verbs from nouns, nouns and verbs from adjectives, adjectives from nouns, etc.—and do all this correctly.

Learn how to deal with etymology and you will feel comfortable with words—you will use new words with self-assurance—you will be able to figure out thousands of words you hear or read even if you have never heard or seen these words before.

That's why the best approach to new words is through etymology³—as you will discover for yourself as soon as you start to work on [chapter 3](#)!

5. but what are nouns, verbs, and adjectives?

You probably know.

But if you don't, you can master these parts of speech (and reference will be made to *noun forms*, *verb forms*, and *adjective forms* throughout the book) within the next five minutes.

(a) A *noun* is a word that can be preceded by *a*, *an*, *the*, *some*, *such*, or *my*.

An *egoist* (noun)

Such *asceticism* (noun)

The *misogynist* (noun)

(Nouns, you will discover, often end in conventional suffixes: *-ness*, *-ity*, *-ism*, *-y*, *-ion*, etc.)

(b) A *verb* is a word that fits into the pattern, "Let us ___." A verb has a past tense.

Let us *equivocate* (verb)—past tense: *equivocated*.

Let us *alternate* (verb)—past tense: *alternated*.

Let us *philander* (verb)—past tense: *philandered*.

(Verbs, you will discover, often end in conventional suffixes: *-ate*, *-ize*, *-fy*, etc.)

(c) An *adjective* is a word that fits into the pattern, "You are very ___."

You are very *egoistic* (adjective).

You are very *introverted* (adjective).

You are very *misogynous* (adjective).

(Adjectives, you will discover, often end in conventional suffixes: *-ic*, *-ed*, *-ous*, *-al*, *-ive*, etc.)

And *adverbs*, of course, are generally formed by adding *-ly* to an adjective: *misogynous-misogynously*; *educational-educationally*; etc.

That's all there is to it! (Did it take more than five minutes? Maybe ten at the most?)

6. how to work for best results

If you intend to work with this book seriously (that is, if your clear intention is to add a thousand or more new words to your present vocabulary—add them permanently, unforgettably—add them so successfully that you will soon find yourself using them in speech and writing), I suggest that you give yourself every advantage by carefully following the laws of learning:

(a) *Space your learning.*

Beginning with [Chapter 3](#), every chapter will be divided into “sessions.” Each session may take one half hour to an hour and a half, depending on the amount of material and on your own speed of learning.

Do one or two sessions at a time—three if you’re going strong and are all involved—and always decide when you stop *exactly when* you will return. (I remind you to do this later in the book, since such a procedure is of crucial importance.)

(b) *Do not rush—go at your own comfortable speed.*

Everyone learns at a different pace. Fast learners are no better than slow learners—it’s the end result that counts, not the time it takes you to finish.

(c) *Review.*

When you start a new session, go back to the last exercise of the previous session (usually *Can you recall the words?* or *Chapter Review*), cover your answers, and test your retention—do you have quick recall after a day or so has elapsed?

(d) *Test yourself.*

You are not aiming for a grade, or putting your worth on the line, when you take the three Comprehensive Tests ([Chapters 8, 13, and 17](#))—rather you are discovering your weaknesses, if any; deciding where repairs have to be made; and, especially, experiencing a feeling of success at work well done. (In learning, too, nothing succeeds like success!)

Use these three tests, as well as the abundant drill exercises, as aids to learning. No one is perfect, no one learns in the exact same way or at the same rate as anyone else. Find the optimum technique and speed for *your* unique learning patterns—and then give yourself every opportunity to exploit your actual, latent, and potential abilities.

But most important (as I will remind you several times throughout the book)—develop a routine and stick to it!

¹ The system of pronunciation symbols will be thoroughly explained in Section 2 of this chapter.

² All unusual words in this chapter are taught in later chapters of the book.

³ Incidentally, Latin scholars will notice that I present a Latin verb in the first person singular, present tense (*verto*, I turn), but call it an infinitive (*verto*, to turn). I do this for two reasons: 1) *verto* is easier for a non-Latin scholar to pronounce (the actual infinitive, *vertere*, is pronounced WAIR'-tĕ-ray); and 2) when I studied Latin fifty years ago, the convention was to refer to a verb by using the first person singular, present tense.

If you are not a Latin scholar, you need not bother to read this footnote—if you’ve already done so, forget it!

Disclaimer:

Occasionally in these pages, owing to the deficiency of the English language, I have used *he/him/his* meaning *he or she/him or her/his or her* in order to avoid awkwardness of style.

He, him, and his are *not* intended as exclusively masculine pronouns—they may refer to either sex or to both sexes.

PART ONE

GETTING OFF TO A GOOD START

HOW TO TEST YOUR PRESENT VOCABULARY

*Once—as a child—you were an expert, an accomplished virtuoso, at learning new words.
Today, by comparison, you are a rank and stumbling amateur.*

Does this statement sound insulting?

It may be—but if you are the average adult, it is a statement that is, unfortunately, only too true.

Educational testing indicates that children of ten who have grown up in families in which English is the native language have recognition vocabularies of over twenty thousand words—

And that these same ten-year-olds have been learning new words at a rate of many hundreds a year since the age of four.

In astonishing contrast, studies show that adults who are no longer attending school increase their vocabularies at a pace *slower than twenty-five to fifty words annually.*

How do you assess your own vocabulary?

Is it quantitatively healthy?

Rich in over-all range?

Responsive to any situation in which you may find yourself?

Truly indicative of your intellectual potential?

More important, is it still growing at the same rapid clip as when you were a child?

Or, as with most adults, has your rate of increase dropped drastically since you left school? And if so, do you now feel that your vocabulary is somewhat limited, your verbal skills not as sharp as you would like them to be?

Let us check it out.

I challenge you to a series of tests that will measure your vocabulary range, as well as your verbal speed and responsiveness.