



Creating a Voluminous Vocabulary

How many words do you know? According to Stephen Wilbers, a writing consultant, author and columnist, people who read frequently have a vocabulary of 20,000 to 40,000 words—or even more. Less voracious readers typically know 10,000 to 20,000 words.

Obviously, a larger vocabulary gives you more options when you write. For example, in a monthly report you might write that you fixed the computer problem. Or, you can report that you addressed the computer malfunction.

By knowing more words, you can give a more nuanced and specific message. And, a large vocabulary will make you appear more intelligent.

Of course not every message you deliver has to have a four-syllable word in it. But knowing those words gives you a secret weapon in promoting your professional image and communicating a more precise message.

Here are some ways you can begin to learn new words and expand your vocabulary.

- Pull out or print an editorial or lengthy article from the New York Times, Washington Post or other major newspaper. Take the time to read the article, circling the words you don't know. Then look up each word in the dictionary. Keep a running list of the words you look up.
- With the end of the year quickly approaching, calendars will soon be in every shopping mall. Look for a word-of-the-day calendar for your office. It's hard to resist reading a calendar that sits on your desk and will add to your well of words.
- Sign up for Merriam-Webster's Word of the Day email service at www.merriam-webster.com. You'll receive a new word and its definition in your inbox each day. Challenge yourself to use the word of the day in conversation or in writing so you really understand it.
- Instead of doing the sudoku puzzle in the newspaper, start working on the crossword puzzle. At the New York Times crossword Web page

(<http://www.nytimes.com/pages/crosswords/>) you can time yourself on completing the puzzle or solve it with a friend.

Of course, it's not enough to just read the definitions of words. You must start including new and challenging words to your speaking and writing. With a bit of practice, you'll soon be on your way to a vocabulary of 40,000 words.

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