**Three games to recycle vocabulary in the English language classroom**

[**https://www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/three-games-recycle**](https://www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/three-games-recycle)

To understand a text, we need to understand between 95 per cent and 98 per cent of its words. That's according to research by Norbert Schmitt in the journal [*Language Teaching Research*](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1362168808089921) , which Penny Ur referred to in her book *A Course in English Language Teaching.*

The researchers Rick Zahar, Tom Cobb and Nina Spada wrote in the [*Canadian Modern Language Review*](https://utpjournals.press/doi/abs/10.3138/cmlr.57.4.541) that, to learn a word, we need to encounter it between six and 16 times.

The more learners use a word, the more easily they will use it. That's why it is important for teachers to recycle vocabulary in the English language classroom.

Here are four rules that I follow and three activities that I use to recycle vocabulary, based on what has worked in my classroom.

**Four rules for recycling vocabulary**

Provide both written and spoken form of the new item, to show spelling and pronunciation.

Link vocabulary to learners' own lives and experiences. For example, if you are introducing the verb ‘to accept’, ask learners ‘Have you ever accepted a job offer?’, and encourage them to tell the class about it.

Ensure tasks and games have a clear learning objective.

Avoid complicated instructions.

**Activity 1: Weekly Quiz**

Divide learners into teams of four. Write a word that you introduced last week on the whiteboard, like:

* loyal (adjective)

Ask learners to agree on:

* the definition (faithful, devoted to someone/something)
* the noun (loyalty)
* the negative form (disloyal)
* a common collocation (a loyal friend, a loyalty card)
* the plural (loyalties).

Divide learners into teams of four, and write a new word on the board.

Tell the teams that they will get one point for each correct example of the definition, a noun, the negative form, a common collocation, and the plural of the new word.

Give your learners a time limit, based on their language level.

When their time is up, ask learners to pass their answer sheet to the team on their left to mark. Ask the teams for the answers, and write the responses on the board, either rewarding a point, or not.

**Activity 2: Dictogloss**

You can use a dictogloss task to practise all four skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking), along with grammar or lexis.

If the topic of the week is sport, create a short text about sport, which includes the lexical items you want to recycle and revise. For example:

* Many *sports people* are extremely *competitive* and love nothing more than *beating* their *opponent*.

Ask learners to listen only, while you read the text aloud.

Read the text for a second time. Before you read, ask learners to take note of vocabulary related to sport which they have already used during the week or term.

Read the text a third time. This time, learners should write down extra words related to sport they hear, that will help them recreate the text afterwards. When you have finished reading, ask learners to reconstruct the text, as close to the original as possible.

**Activity 3: Vocabulary ‘Post Box’**

Ask learners to create a box for the classroom. Add one word each day or three words per week.

At the end of the week, ask a learner to take a word from the box. Ask them to write the word and mark its stress on the whiteboard. Then, they can ask another learner to say it.

Next, the learner who chose the word can tell the class everything they have learned about it. For example:

* My word is a verb, ‘to refuse’. It’s a regular verb, so the past form is ‘ed’.
* You must use infinitive + 'to' with this verb. For example, ‘I refused the invitation to go to the party with him’.
* The opposite of ‘to refuse’ is ‘to accept’.
* There are two syllables and the stress is on the second syllable.

Then, another learner can do the same. Limit this to seven turns per lesson.