

# A Brief Study on How to Improve University Students' Ability of Memorizing Words in an Effective Way

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## Abstract

As is known to us all, vocabulary plays a very important role in the process of learning English. Thus, to master vocabulary is to lay groundwork on English. With the number of English words' growing by 300,000 a year, Chinese students feel it hard to learn such huge volume of English words. Therefore, it is necessary for us to explore deeply the way to memorize English words, and then people can try to find out the optimal scheme.

## Keywords

English words; existing problems; methods of memorization.

## 1. Introduction

There are a plethora of books, lessons and mobile apps on how to remember words, but their quality are uneven. Some vocabulary products have been revised and upgraded from time to time, yet the content is not much different from the original version. Some students buy loads of books claiming that they have a quick way to master words and then hopefully learn the methods. In the end, however, they could remember nothing but the names of the various books. Overall, rote memorization is still the most common method used by most students, which leads to inefficiency and, in the end, little benefit. However, if students can master a scientific memory method, they can not only learn vocabulary with less pressure, but also fully grasp the scope of the use of words.

## 2. An analysis of English learning methods of Chinese students

At present, there are mainly the following vocabulary-memorizing ways among Chinese students.

### 2.1. Letter Spelling

Most Chinese students recite English words by their letter combinations rather than pronunciation. As we all know, Chinese is used for ideogram, that is to say, each character can express a certain meaning; English, by contrast, is a phonetic representation. Since the letters are used to represent sounds, different letter combinations and orders bring different sounds and meanings. As there are differences between the two languages, the memorization methods certainly cannot be the same. However, at present, most Chinese students are still learning English words in the way they learn Chinese, especially the beginners -- it is obviously unscientific. Although spelling letters can ensure the correctness of word writing, it has the following obvious disadvantages: first, it is inefficient. If you come across words with three or four letters like bird, flower, air, fun, etc, you may not have too much trouble remembering the meaning after you spell the letters. But remembering long words like "exhaust," "extinguished," "Encyclopedia," and "transportation" by spelling is as taxing on our brains as memorizing phone numbers. Second, the tail wagging the dog. In memorizing English vocabulary, you should focus on the meaning of the word, not the spelling. When many students memorize

words by spelling, their attention is bound to be divided into two parts, so that they cannot concentrate on the meaning of the words. As a result, some students can spell the words easily, but forget the meaning.

## 2.2. Illogical associations

Each English word has its own unique etymology and creation background, while memorizing them in the homophonic way is just to establish some illogical associations between the Chinese and English words that have the similar pronunciations. This method is the most frequently and widely used among Chinese students to memorize words, especially among English beginners. Provided that only for short-term travel abroad or to cope with the examination, it may have a certain effect. However, if taking the homophonic memory as a main way of reciting words, it is absolutely not advisable. There are two reasons as follow: first, if you use this way to remember a word, you will need time to find out the Chinese with similar pronunciation of that word, and then spend time to establish a connection between them, which forms the procedure of “vocabulary - pronunciation - homophonic - logic - meaning”. This makes both memorizing words and recalling words in the future very time-consuming, and increases the burden of memorizing. Secondly, there are many words that have the same pronunciation in English, such as “principle and principal”, “aural and oral”, as well as “assent and ascent”. If the homophonic method is adopted, it will undoubtedly not work.

## 2.3. Utilitarians

Chinese students generally learn English for the same purpose, they all want to pass exams: in elementary, middle and high schools, they learn it for entrance exams, and in universities for CET-4, CET-6, TEM-4, TEM-8, TOEFL and IELTS. So they decide to memorize the words only when they are preparing for the test, and if they pass the test, they put the words down until the next test preparation. Perseverance is the most important thing in learning any language. According to The Ebbinghaus curve, memorizing must be viewed separately, including remembering, maintaining, recognizing and recalling where any part in this process is indispensable. However, many Chinese students pay more attention to “remembering” when learning English, and few of them can do the latter three parts. If you want to remember words firmly, you must remember them repeatedly. If you only pay attention to whether you remember them at that time and ignore the maintenance and recognition at the later stage, you cannot remember words for a long time.

## 3. Methods to improve the vocabulary memorizing ability of college students

Memorizing words requires scientific methods. Here are three for reference:

### 3.1. By pronunciation

The alphabetical order of English words is not arbitrary, but closely related to their pronunciation. As mentioned above, pronunciation serves as an important role in English, so it is extremely vital to master the pronunciation rules of English words. College students have experienced the college entrance examination, and their vocabulary is basically between 3,000 to 4,000, so they have a certain vocabulary foundation. Some students with a good vocabulary foundation may find this phenomenon: when someone asks you about some new words, you can almost spell them by listening to the sounds, even if you haven't seen them before. This is because a certain vocabulary foundation makes you unknowingly master the rules between spelling and pronunciation. Thus, pronunciation is of great importance for memorizing words. Correctly grasping the pronunciation of words can greatly improve the accuracy of spelling words.

### 3.2. Image memory

Image memory is strongly associated with the right side of the brain. All words and sounds are processed by the left side of the brain, while images by the right side. Through the research and exploration of scientists, people find that the division of labor of human left and right brain is different: all the logical reasoning of things are responsible for by our left brain while the right side decides imagination. As human creativity comes from the right brain, its storage is amazing, a million times than the left. Therefore, when reciting words, we should try to create some conditions to be able to use the right brain.

In addition, nothing can express the meaning of words more intuitively than images. Learning English needs thinking in English. Living in the era of highly developed Internet, with one click of the keyboard or the screen, we can quickly learn information about other countries. Therefore, when you encounter some English words with the same or vague Chinese meanings, you can intuitively understand their differences by searching the pictures of them on the Internet. For example, "corrosion" and "erosion", both of which have similar meaning in Chinese, can be searched for pictures. Then you will find out that erosion refers to geographical weathering, while corrosion is related to chemical process. As another example, the word "eggplant" is very interesting. Why people call this vegetable that? By checking the pictures about "eggplant", the answer comes to us that the mature eggplant does not look like an egg, but in its baby-time, it looks almost like an egg hanging from the tree. Using this method to recite words not only can play the role of the right brain, but also can have a more intuitive, clear understanding of the vocabulary, greatly increasing the fun of word memorizing.

Now, some vocabulary applications in mobile phones also attach importance to the role of image memory, providing pictures related to the words. Although they save users the time of searching images to a certain extent, there are two problems as follow: first, the illustrations are not accurate and intuitive enough. In these pictures, many of the words are either tied to the picture in a far-fetched way, or the pictures are too superficial and not refined and accurate. The user cannot get any information about the word from the picture without looking at the example sentences. Second, the user is in a passive learning state. On the one hand, since all the pictures have been selected by the software, users are in a passive position to receive the picture information from beginning to end, which limits their imagination and makes their right brain not fully active. On the other hand, most of these selected pictures are unfamiliar to users, and they must be remembered in order to remember words, which also increases the memory burden.

The famous educator Bruner said that the acquisition of knowledge is an active process, and learners should not be passive recipients of information, but active participants in the acquisition process. Therefore, the most important suggestion for using the image mnemonic method is to actively look for pictures related to words. Only by arousing the curiosity about words can we have the desire to learn more about them. For those images that have been searched, it is recommended to select one and save it, and attach the corresponding words to the images through some image editing software for future review. Here are a few tips on how to keep your images: First, try to look for pictures that are exaggerated, because the more exaggerated and irrational they are, the better they will be remembered by your brain. Second, compared with static pictures, the effect of dynamic pictures will be better, especially about some English verbs, the dynamic effect will be more intuitive; Third, the more stimulating the picture content, the more obvious the memory effect; Fourth, choose what you think is interesting or interesting, remember more clearly; Fifth, the more integrated into their own feelings, resonance of the picture will remember more clearly. If accumulated for a long time, an album of words with personal characteristics will be formed. The contents of the album are all familiar or interested. Compared with the previous kind of personal vocabulary, this kind of "picture" words will be more personal, vivid and interesting.

As English vocabulary are abstract, the correct use of image memory can be very effective to abstract words into concrete. However, this does not mean that image memory is a “once and for all” method. Any memory needs to be reviewed over and over again for a period of time before it is finally remembered. Therefore, the word album made with a lot of time and energy can not be thrown away when it is finished. It needs to spend some time to recall and consolidate, and make full use of the fragmentary time in daily life. After a period of time, you can have obvious harvest by looking through these pictures like looking at a slide.

### 3.3. Affixes, roots and etymology

Many college students have mastered some English affixes. However, if they want to master more, affixes alone is far from enough. They must have a further understanding of etymology, which is also the most important point in learning English vocabulary.

#### 3.3.1 Affixes and roots

Roots play a fundamental role in the whole English word because the meaning of a word starts from them. Therefore, it is very easy to memorize words as long as you can grasp the core component of the root. Now, however, there are still many English learners learning roots and vocabulary by rote, which will produce learners' negative emotions. In fact, most English words can be divided into prefix, root, suffix three parts. Therefore, there are three steps to recognize a new word. First, judge the part of speech of the word according to the suffix, for example, “-tion” generally means the noun, and “-tive” generally means the noun or adjective, etc. Then get the basic meaning of the whole word according to the root of the word, and finally integrate the word definition with the prefix. In addition, students should learn another way to use word roots, learn to think backwards, that is, from the meaning of the word root. When encountering a word, first fully understand all the meanings of the word, and then reverse the root according to the meaning of it and remember it, if you can't push it out, you can use a tool book or the Network, and finally deduce all the words containing the root that you have mastered.

The learning process has always been gradual and slow, and the same is true for learning languages. As mentioned above, college students have basically mastered a certain amount of basic vocabulary, and these words are the simplest and most commonly used words in English. In English-speaking countries, these words are used most frequently and are the basis for learning many English words. Therefore, it will be easier to memorize those complicated and difficult vocabulary with good derivation and memorization of the roots. Below, the author gives some examples to prove the correctness of the above method. Below, the author will prove the correctness of the above method by giving some examples. For instance, “heart” is a very simple word from which the root “card-” comes. Knowing this, you can quickly deduce the meaning of cardinal. The word is composed of “card-” and the suffix “-nal”. Since the meaning is determined by the root, plus the suffix “-nal” is a compound adjective, cardinal must be an adjective, and the root plus the suffix shows that cardinal means “core”. Mastering the original meaning of a word, it is not difficult to deduce its other meanings. Thus, now you can easily memorize all the complex words that contain the root “card-”, such as “cordial” for “enthusiastic” and “cardiogram” for “electrocardiogram”.

#### 3.3.2 Etymology

Etymology explores the ins and outs of the formation of each word, and if it is popular, it is a longitudinal and in-depth exploration of the creation, development and evolution of words. Many students are full of doubts about the meaning of word roots, prefixes, and suffixes. Why does it mean that? And if you master the use of etymology correctly and scientifically, then the answer will be solved, because this is the purpose of etymology research. Understanding the origin of those roots and affixes can better remember them and maximize the memory effect. As you explore etymology, you will master more and more cognates, that is, words with the same origin or word creation angle. If you can fully grasp the etymology, then memorizing

words is like a fish in the water, and the vocabulary grows rapidly. Classifying and summarizing all words with the same provenance and finding out the inner laws can greatly reduce the burden of memory. More accumulation and summary can make skill, and later you will unconsciously find that your word memory speed is faster than others.

English vocabulary contains rich and far-reaching historical and cultural information. If the etymological stories behind these words can be recovered, we can have a more thorough understanding of the context of the words, so as to deepen the impression. For almost all Chinese students, memorizing words is boring, but if using etymology to understand the root, the story behind the etymology and the root of the word, can make memorizing words a funny thing, stimulate the interest in the words to the greatest extent, so as to eliminate the alienation and boredom. As a result, students not only can deepen their comprehension of English vocabulary, but also can learn foreign historical and cultural knowledge and broadened their horizons.

The English used today is actually the result of hundreds of years of evolution by integrating multiple national languages, such as “tofu” and “kung fu” both originated from Chinese. Absorbing foreign vocabulary not only enriches the culture of one's own country, but also makes its language more expressive. However, due to the “exotic” nature of these foreign words, they are sometimes difficult to interpret in terms of root affixes in English, making them difficult to remember. At this time, etymology can play its real role, through the interpretation and exploration of the origin of words, tell people the ins and outs of word formation, so as to deepen the understanding of words. As we all know, Western civilization originated in ancient Greece, and then ancient Roman culture also occupies a pivotal position in the entire Western European culture, and the influence of the two cultures is not only reflected in people's thoughts, customs, etc., but also shines with the afterglow of ancient Greek and Roman culture in language and writing. For example, the word “narcissism” means “the habit of admiring yourself too much”. In Greek mythology, Narcissus was the son of Cephisus and Liriope. He was handsome in appearance, but proud and proud. His favorite thing to do every day is to enjoy his reflection in the water by the lake, but he has never had a crush on other women. Echo, the forest goddess, noticed him and fell in love with him at first sight. Sadly, as a result of Hera's punishment, Echo is unable to speak as a normal person, and can only repeat what others have said, with the last note at the end of the words. Poor Echo could do nothing but follow Narcissus silently all day long, hoping that one day Narcissus would understand her. Later, she succeeded. However, Narcissus, who was proud, could not fall in love with Her because Echo only repeated other people's words. So he rejected her ruthlessly. Heartbroken and heartbroken, Echo spent his days wandering around the valley, wasting away. Slowly, her body began to disappear, until it was completely invisible, and all that remained was a hollow echo echoing through the valley. That's where the meaning comes from. Then Nemesis, the goddess of retribution, learned of this and, in order to punish Narcissus, she used her magic power to make Narcissus drink in his own reflection all day long. Slowly Narcissus grew more and more narcissistic and self-pitying, until he died, a daffodil. He stood still by the water, staring at his own reflection. From then on Narcissus became the symbol of “narcissism”.

All in all, as the author in the above put, every word has its own peculiar etymology and creation background, so when faced with a lot of English words, students can give full play to the role of the etymology, excavate the historical story behind each word by its local conditions and customs, which not only enables students to more fully understanding the words, moreover, greatly improves the interesting elements during the process.

## 4. Conclusion

Vocabulary is the key to the English world, and it is the basic and central link for English learners, so students must pay more attention to word memorizing. Chinese students must change the concept that “memorizing words is a chore” and learn to master them with a proactive attitude and scientific methods. At the same time, it should also be realized that the scientific method is important to learn any language, whether it is a mother tongue or a second language. “Repeat” is fundamental, because the former only reduces a certain learning burden, but is not a once and for all method.

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