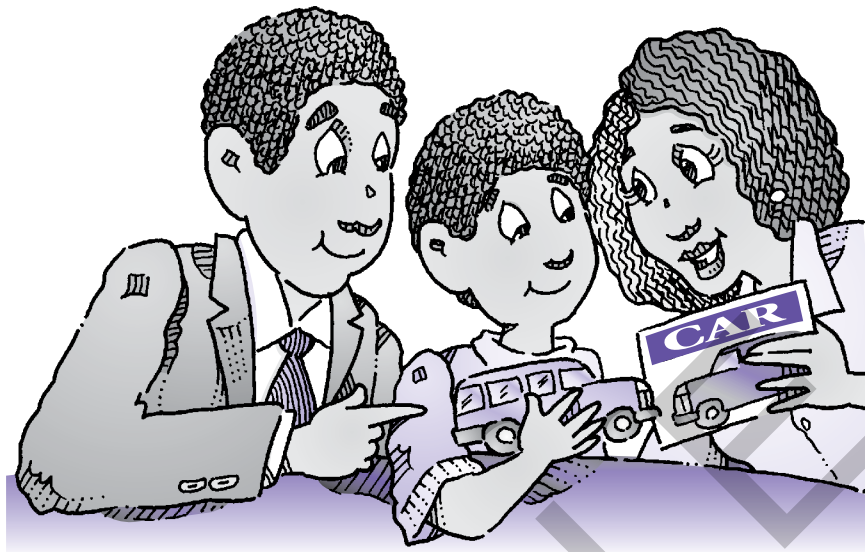


# What Parents Can Do at Home *to* Help Students With Vocabulary



One of a Series of Booklets for Parents



**V**ery young children learn hundreds of words just by listening to people around them. As they get older, it's important to learn even more words and how to use them. The more words a child knows, the better he\* can understand what other people are saying and what he is reading. And the more words he can use, the better he can express his own thoughts and ideas.

Increasing a child's vocabulary—the number of words he knows and uses—is important at any age. Since learning depends on good speech, reading, writing and communication skills, improving a child's vocabulary can improve school performance in every subject.

This booklet provides specific, easy-to-implement ideas you can use at home to build your child's vocabulary. The suggestions in the booklet can help your child develop a love for words, think more clearly and share his thoughts with other people. The tips come from parents, experienced teachers and specialists who work every day with students who want to expand their vocabularies.



*\*Every child is unique, so we often use the singular pronoun. We'll alternate using "he" and "she" throughout this booklet.*

# Help Your Child Use Context to Understand New Words

The very best way to build a good vocabulary is by reading. But sometimes, your child will encounter a word she doesn't understand. Help her learn to use the context of what she's reading to figure out what the word means. Sometimes, writers make it easy—they define a new word almost as soon as they use it. Have her look at:

- **Punctuation.** This can be a clue. A colon (:) is usually a signal that the author is going to explain a word mentioned earlier in the sentence. Here's an example:

*In the microscope we saw an amoeba: a tiny one-celled organism that lives in ponds and streams.*

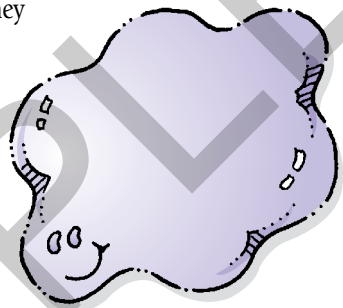
- **Key words.** Phrases such as "that is," "for example" or "for instance" let readers know that more information follows.

*He was interested in becoming a paleontologist; that is, a scientist who studies fossils.*

- **Surrounding sentences.** A new word isn't always defined clearly, but it's often possible to get a pretty good idea of what the word means. For example, your child may not know the meaning of the word *loquacious*. But by reading what comes next, she may figure it out.

*Brian was loquacious. He started talking the minute he woke up in the morning. He talked to his friend Jose as they walked to school. In class, Mrs. Johnson often had to remind him that he had to give others a chance to answer questions and to take part in discussions. And when there wasn't anyone around to talk to, Brian talked to himself!*

It's clear from this example that *loquacious* means "talkative."



## Challenge Your Child to Learn And Use Synonyms and Antonyms

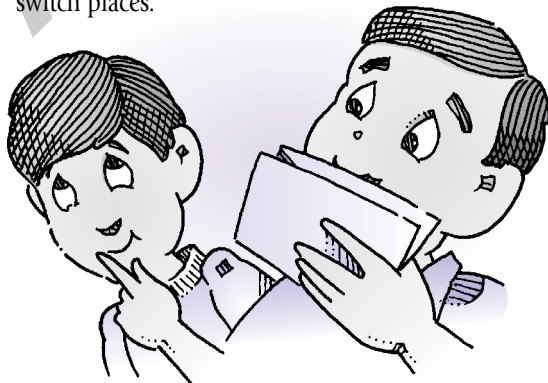
Most people use many of the same words every day. One of the best ways to expand vocabulary is to looking for *synonyms*—words that have the same or almost the same meaning—and *antonyms*—words that mean the opposite.

For example, instead of saying something is “large,” your child could say it’s *colossal* or *gigantic* or even *stupendous*. It’s also the antonym of *tiny*, *infinitesimal* or *microscopic*. A thesaurus is one of the best reference works for children who want to improve their vocabulary because it contains both synonyms and antonyms.

Here’s a list of synonyms for familiar words. Have your child add other words to this list:

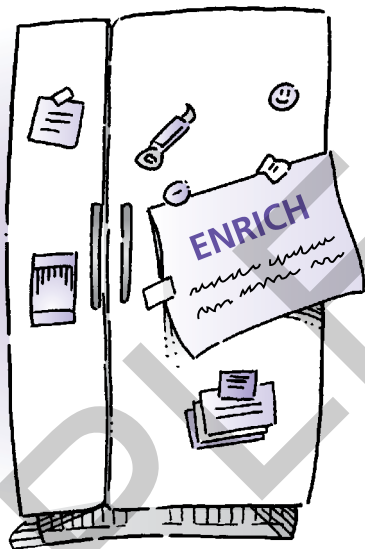
Synonyms	Antonyms
Little—Tiny	Up—Down
Old—Ancient	Happy—Sad
Stop—Halt	Sick—Well
Run—Jog	Bright—Dim
Ask—Request	Shiny—Dull
Talk—Speak	Heavy—Light

One way to encourage your child to use synonyms and antonyms is by playing a word game. You give a word and ask him to give you a synonym (or an antonym). Then switch places.



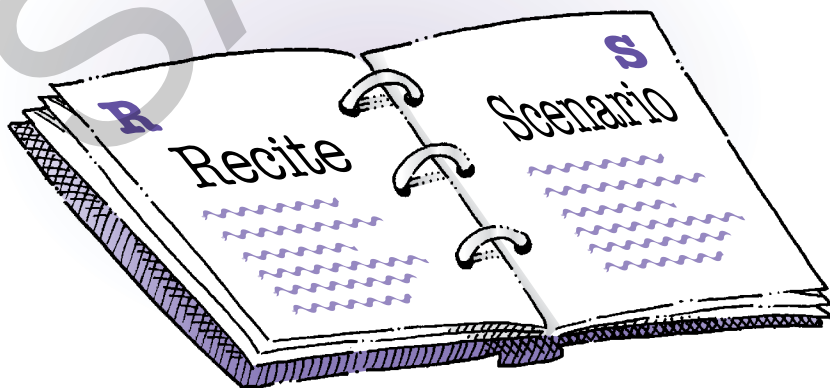
## Pick a Word of the Day

Have family members take turns bringing a new word to the supper table. Each person should be prepared to tell family members what the word means and then use it in a sentence. Post the words on the refrigerator or anywhere else they'll be in plain sight. You might offer a small reward to anyone in the family who uses a new word in a sentence the following day.

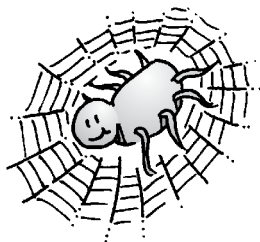


## Make a Dictionary

Help your child create a homemade dictionary. Start a page for each letter of the alphabet. When your child finds a new word she wants to remember—a spelling word, a vocabulary word or a word she's encountered in her reading—have her add it and its definition to her dictionary. Keep the dictionary in a three-ring binder so it's easy to keep adding words.



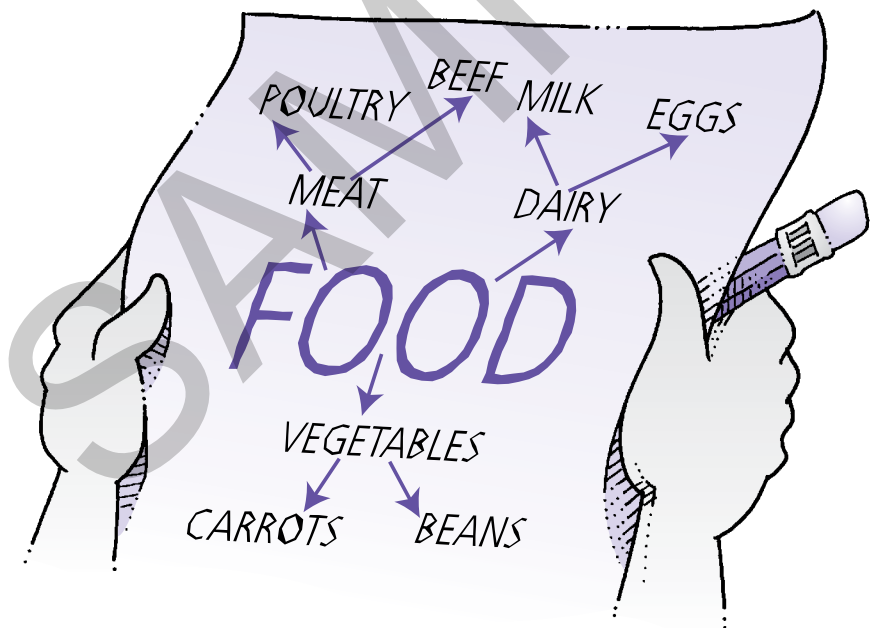
## Make a Word Web



Creating a word web is a great way to boost your child's vocabulary. Choose a word—for example, *food*. Write it in the center of a piece of paper.

Now ask your child to think of other words that tell more about the word *food*. He might think of types of food—vegetables, dairy, meat. He could then list words that make up those different types of foods—for example, carrots and potatoes for vegetables; chicken and beef for meat. He might think of the ways food is prepared—baked, sautéed, broiled, steamed. He could list words that describe the taste of foods—creamy, spicy, tangy, sweet.

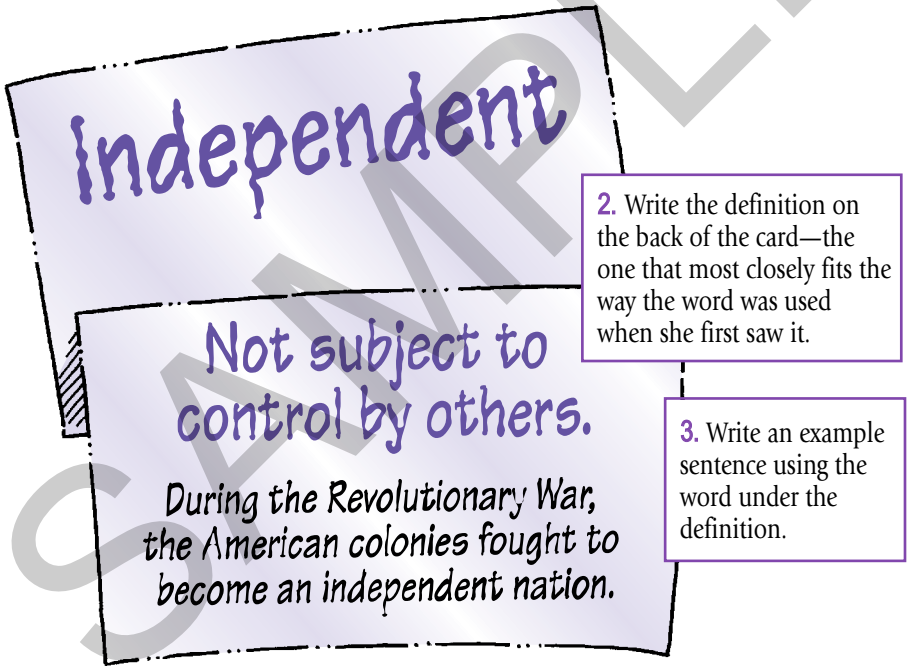
Have your child take all those words and create a word web by writing them on the paper and connecting them to the main word. This will show him how words are linked to the main word and form a "word web."



# Use Index Cards to Learn New Words

When your child has to learn new words, try using a method teachers recommend. Have your child:

1. Write each new word on an index card. These cards are small, so they're easy for your child to tuck into a pocket or a backpack—making it easy to study one or two words while she's waiting for the school bus or for a ride to soccer practice.

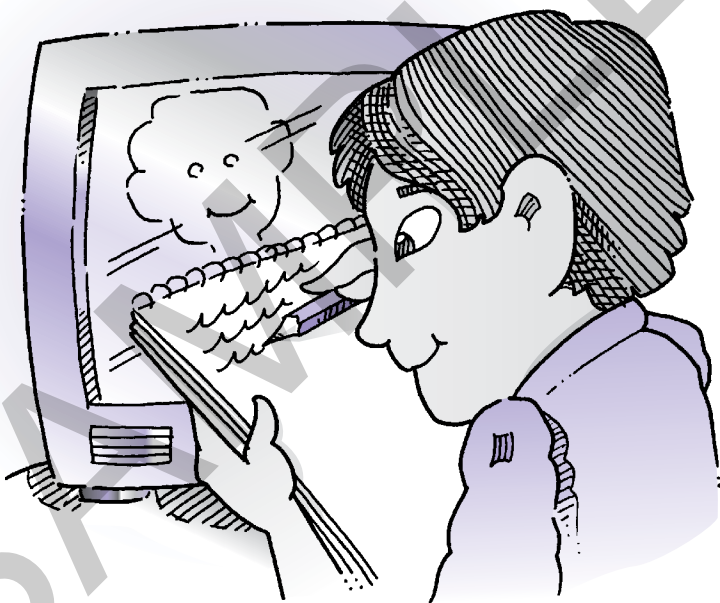


4. Use the cards to study for a test or to expand vocabulary. Have her look at the word and try to recall the definition. Then do the reverse. Put words she knows in one stack, words she doesn't remember in another. Keep reviewing until all the words are in the "know" stack.

5. Keep the cards handy. They will make it much easier for your child to review material when test time comes around.

## Try a Newspaper Scavenger Hunt

Give your child a section of the newspaper and send him on a scavenger hunt for new words. Ask him to look for and underline five interesting words. Now talk about the words. What does he think the words mean, based on how they are used in the story? Help him check the meanings in a dictionary to see if he's right. Challenge him to use at least one of these words in conversation. Or make a list of favorite words to use when it's time to write an assignment for school.



## Use TV Time to Build Vocabulary

Keep a notebook handy as your child is watching TV. Have him write down at least five unfamiliar words, doing his best to spell them. Work together to look up the words in the dictionary and use them in a sentence.



## Put Words to Work

**M**any jobs use specialized words. Your child can learn the words that relate to a job that interests her. Have her make a list of *25 Words I Could Use ...* as an astronaut, as an electrical engineer, as a clothing designer, in a mine, as a deejay, as a teacher, a race car driver, a nurse ... . Then let her role-play a situation where, in the course of doing that job, she uses the words. This way she'll also practice the correct usage of these new words.

## Prepare for College Entrance Exams

Vocabulary is a big part of the SAT and other college entrance exams. Most study guides include a list of vocabulary words that will be helpful on the test. Several months before your child is scheduled to take one of these tests, have her make flash cards of the vocabulary words.

Remember that the very best way to score high on the verbal section of college entrance exams is by reading regularly. Studies show that the test-takers who are the most consistent readers are also those who score highest on the verbal section of the exam.



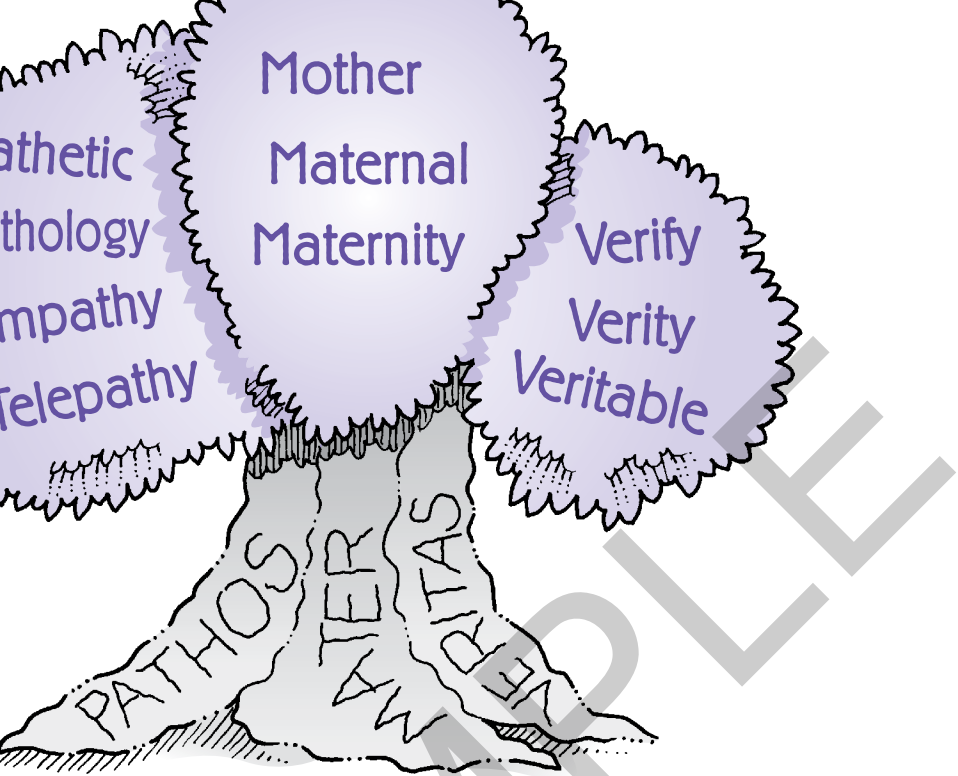
## Look for Clues in Words

**M**any words in our language come from Greek or Latin words. A child who understands roots, prefixes and suffixes can often figure out the meaning of a new word by relating it to words she already knows. For instance, a child who knows that amnesia and amnesty both come from the same Greek root (*mnes—to remember*) might be able to figure out that a mnemonic device is a way to remember something (“Thirty days hath September ...”)

Here are some Greek and Latin roots, prefixes and suffixes that appear in many English words.

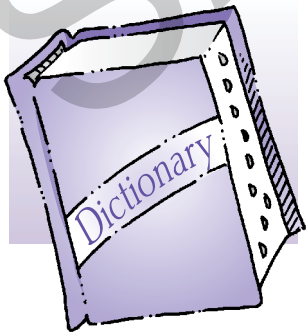
Word Part	Latin or Greek Meaning	Used in These English Words
a	(without)	Amoral, atheist, anonymous
ante	(before)	Antecedent, antedate
cand	(to burn)	Candle, candor
cred	(believe or trust)	Credible, creed, credit
err	(to wander)	Error, erratic
fid	(faith)	Confide, fidelity
man	(hand)	Manual, manufacture
min	(small)	Minute, minimum
pre	(before)	Prelude, precede, premonition
sta or sti	(be or stand in a place)	Static, obstacle, obstinate
uni	(one)	Universal, unicorn, unify
vol	(to wish)	Volunteer, volition

Help your child develop a list of word parts from other languages. Knowing these parts and their meanings will be very helpful when it's time to take college entrance exams.



## Look for Words Borrowed From Other Languages

Besides Latin and Greek, English has been enriched by many words from other languages. For example, the English word *coyote* comes from both the Aztec Indian word *coyotl* and the Spanish word *coyote*.



Use a dictionary to find the origins of these words:

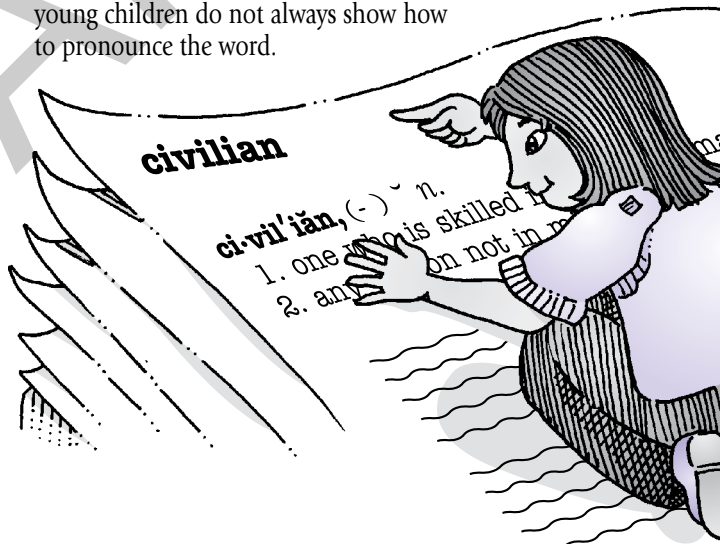
- Plaza
- Tornado
- Spaghetti
- Totem
- Bronco

Can you think of any others?

# Make Sure Your Child Knows How to Use the Dictionary

The best tool for learning the meaning of any new word is the dictionary. Make sure your child understands what can be found in a dictionary. Open the dictionary together and look for these things:

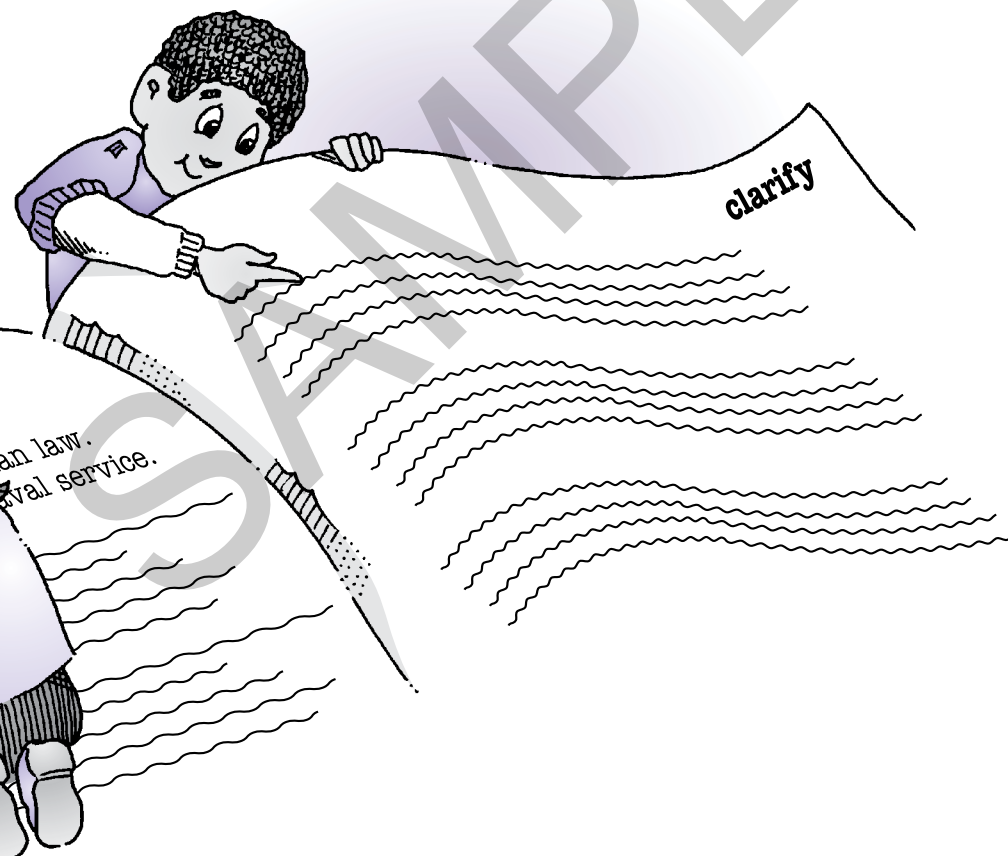
- **Guide words.** At the top of each page, you'll find the first and last word defined on the page. Usually, guide words are printed in **boldface** type at the very top of the page.
- **Main entry.** Each word that is defined is listed in alphabetical order. In most dictionaries, the main entry is also in **boldface** type.
- **How to pronounce the word.** A dictionary can tell you how to pronounce a word. For example, is it correct to say *to-MAY-to* or *to-MAH-to*? (Both are correct, but the first is preferred.) Most dictionaries use special symbols to represent how different letters are pronounced. If your child doesn't know what one of the symbols means, check the bottom of the page—you'll usually find a pronunciation guide there. Dictionaries for very young children do not always show how to pronounce the word.



- The part of speech. The dictionary indicates the part of speech:
  - noun
  - verb
  - pronoun
  - adverb
  - adjective
  - preposition
  - conjunction
  - interjection

Many words can be used as more than one part of speech. If that is the case, the dictionary will include examples of each.

- 
- **Definition.** If there are several meanings for a word, each definition will be numbered.
- 
- **Example sentences.** These show how a word may be used in a sentence.
- 
- **Syllable structure.** The dictionary shows how to divide a word into syllables. In many dictionaries, the main entry will place small dots or spaces between the syllables (*let ter*).





## See How Words Are Related

**M**any words are built on the same base. For example, the word *act* is also part of words like *actor*, *react*, *activity* and *action*. Help your child see how each of these words is related to the meaning of the word *act*.

Often, prefixes and suffixes are used to create related words. For example, the verb *govern* becomes a noun by adding the suffix *-ment* to become *government*. Have your child make these verbs into related nouns:

- Enjoy (enjoyment)
- Elect (election)
- Perform (performance)

Sometimes, the word changes its spelling slightly (*decide* becomes *decision*). But it is still easy to tell that the two words are related.

The more words you know,  
the more clearly and powerfully  
you will think ... and the more ideas  
you will invite into your mind.

—Wilfred Funk



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