



Student: She said a lot of encouraging words to me and like make me feel good. So, I think yeah, her work is really fantastic.

[Music]

Female Voice: You are now listening to the IELTS Podcast. Learn from tutors and ex-examiners who are masters of IELTS preparation. Your host, Ben Worthington.

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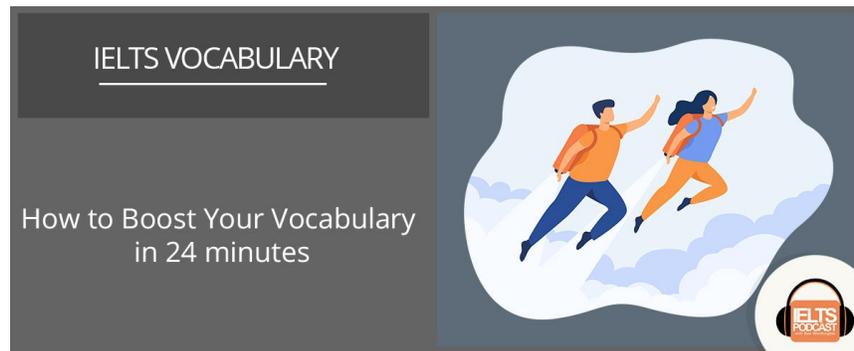
Ben: How to improve your English vocabulary. In this tutorial, we're going to have a look at some practical strategies to boost your English vocabulary. There will be a few references to IELTS in this tutorial, but it's going to take a more general approach. So, maybe you're a little bit burnt out with IELTS. It's totally understandable and so this tutorial we're just going to take a step back and have a look at some different strategies: why it's important, how to expand your



vocabulary, some word lists, some strategies, some vocabulary tests, and some of the vocabulary resources.

Now, this tutorial has been compiled not only from research but from my own practical experience. I've learned one language. I know it's nothing compared to what a lot of people do, but for an English person it's a lot, okay? For an Englishman or an American learning one language is a lot. So, give me credit here and I am learning my third language. I learned English obviously and I learned Spanish and now I'm learning Hungarian. Yes and I was going to learn Hungarian in Spanish, but then I thought why would I make the world's most difficult language that little bit harder?

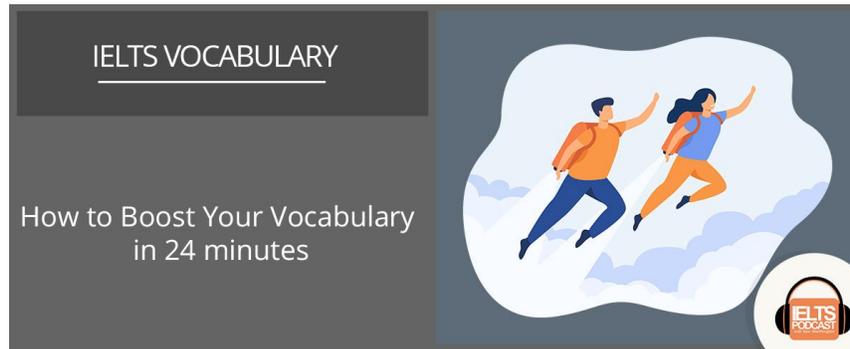
So anyway, I'll come back to that in a second about my Hungarian progression, but it is a general overview for vocabulary, but there will be quite a few references to IELTS because as you know, IELTS is what gets me up in the morning so to speak as it does you guys as well I hope.



So, before we jump in, let me just say who I am and what we do. Well, as you know, this is ieltspodcast.com. We specialize in getting students pass their exam specifically the writing exam.

This is why we've got the Jump to Band 7 or It's Free online course. There we not only give you the feedback which helps you get your language skills under control. We also focus on the exam skills. We give you frameworks, phrases-- I don't like saying tips and advice because it's a shortcut, but we give you a solid foundation and without that foundation, it's difficult to progress.

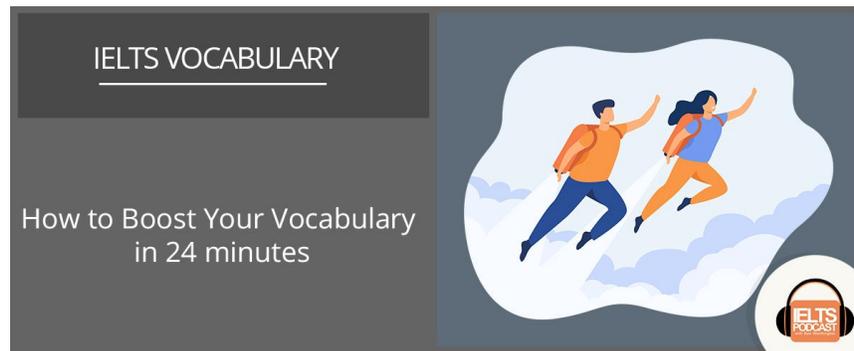
So, what we've found is that most students either struggle with language skills or exam skills and the online course kind of deals with both. We don't just give you the advice and then wish you good luck. We give you the advice and then we want you to apply it, send it in to us. We'll give you feedback whether you've applied it correctly or not and will also take care of your language skills while we are giving you that feedback.



We'll say okay, this is a wrong choice of words or we'll say excellent, but you're using the passive voice too much. We will give you that feedback and we're not only going to tell you what you've done wrong. We'll also tell you what you've done right.

Too many English tutors-- too many language tutors or too many tutors in general just focus on the negative and it's not going to help you. It's not going to get you to the next level. You need someone who's going to help you, motivate you, push you, encourage you, entice you to get to that next level and that's exactly what we do at IELTS Podcast.

Right. So, that's what we've been doing. That's my organization. My name is Ben and I'm from England. I'm from the north. I left England a long time ago. That's why I don't sound like a typical northerner so to speak. Some vowel sounds are still directly from Yorkshire as you might I have heard. However, I've smoothed my accent. It's much easier to understand.

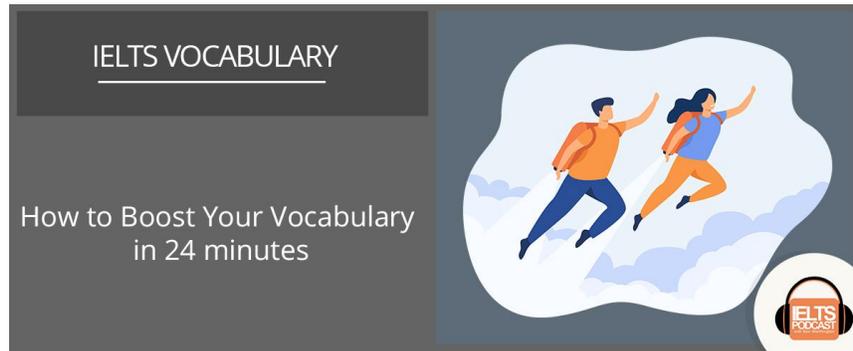


I enunciate nowadays and that came about because I was living abroad for a long time and nobody understood my northern accent and I was teaching English and it's not very fair to teach kids with a Yorkshire accent. So, I rounded it out and made it like standardized.

It's not as standardized as say Ellen's with regards to the American accent. It's definitely not as standardized as Daphne who's got this beautiful typical southern English-- not southern-- Received Pronunciation which is the gold standard I guess for teaching English.

But anyway, it's clear and that's what's important and hardly anybody doesn't understand me nowadays. If they don't understand me it's not because of my accent. It's because they don't understand English. Anyway so-- but I'm pretty sure you guys understand.

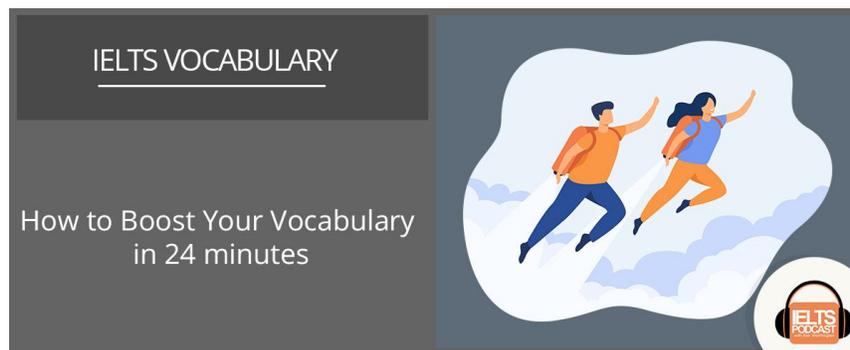
Right. Let's jump into it. How to improve your English vocabulary in a general way, but as I said we are going to be touching on IELTS quite a lot. So, first of all, a lot of people say you should learn the most common words and you will soon master the language. That will only get you so far and your conversation is going to be quite drab. It's going to be quite poor.



When you're listening to somebody who's got extensive vocabulary, it becomes much more enticing, it becomes much more interesting, and the person also sounds that little bit more intelligent as well. I remember having a friend at university and although she'd been in England for like most of her life, I noticed that she had a poor word choice and I wouldn't say it led to poor decisions, but it definitely led to poor communication which I will touch on in a second.

So, why should we improve our vocabulary? Well, it's going to help you sound a little bit more intelligent and this is helpful for your job interviews and of course, for your IELTS score. Repetition is going to cost you points in the IELTS exam. It's going to make your writing and your speaking a little bit dull especially if you're going to be using English a lot in your future.

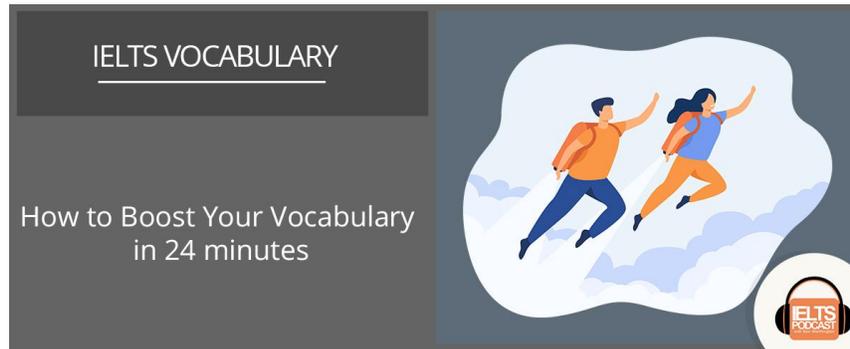
Maybe you're migrating to England, to the U.S., to Canada, to Australia, then boosting your vocabulary is not only going to help you improve your fluency. It's going to increase your reading speed. It's going to increase your capacity of communication and comprehension. So, there's just an insane amount of benefits from boosting your vocabulary.



So, what is vocabulary? Well, the dictionary says it's all the words that someone knows or uses in a target language. Now, the most common word in English is the followed by to or to if you're from Yorkshire, to if you're from the south; if you're from around Cambridge, Oxford. And, a, of, that, I, you, in, it, is, we, this, was. These are very basic words. These comprise the top 10 of the English language.

Obviously, we need more. We need more in order to communicate eloquently, efficiently, and to impress the listener or the reader. So, you could learn the top 3,000 words in the English language and you would be able to understand 90% of everyday conversations. It's not too bad. It does sound like a shortcut. Of course, you'd have to learn the grammar behind those or behind those words and how they are used in order to get a full comprehension.

However, 3,000 words to get to 90% of everyday conversations sounds like an attractive shortcut. It probably is from a comprehension point of view. From a communication point of view, you're not going to sound that competent. Basically, you're not going to sound the best--

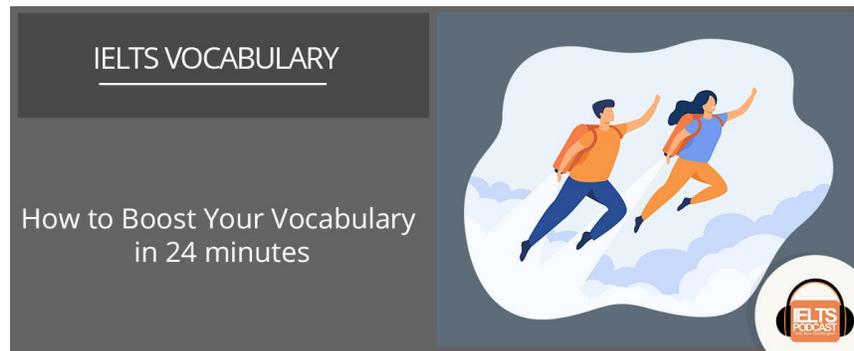


you're not going to give the most accurate description of your capability. So, it is a shortcut to learn those 3,000 words. However, especially if we're going for IELTS, we need to learn a vastly superior amount.

Now, improving your vocabulary is going to help you improve your reading comprehension, your reading speed and we all know that reading speed is essential for high stakes exams like the English exam. It's going to be important for your language development.

When I was living in Spain, I got so deep into the Spanish language that on two occasions, I could actually describe or explain a Spanish word to a Spanish friend. Now, that level of language learning brings-- it boosted my confidence insanely. After that, I felt like Cervantes you know. I felt like a master of the language. It probably couldn't happen now because my Spanish has slowly been getting poorer. However, at the time, it just felt so good.

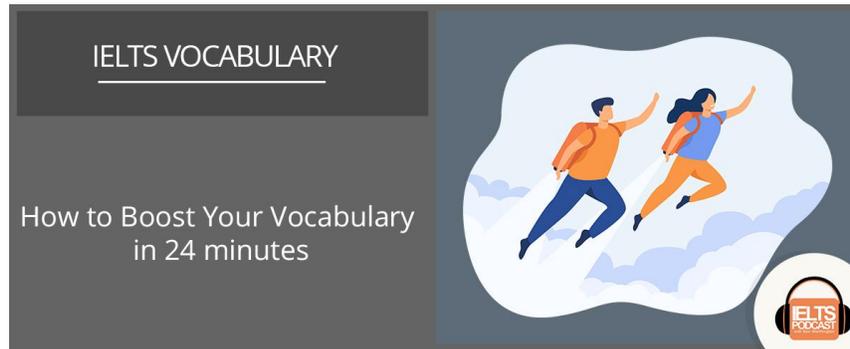
And it's happened to me once or twice where a non-native English speaker has defined a English term and I wouldn't say it was humiliating. I took it on the chin. I was kind of open to learning



new terms even if it's in my own language, but if you're speaking a non-native language your non-native language and you reach that level, it's incredibly helpful for your confidence and your ability to communicate.

Now, as you may know-- I don't know if you know this, but back in England, my dad has a supermarket like a village shop and he's always complaining about his staff. And after a while, I thought okay, there must be something wrong with his staff. They don't seem too intelligent, but I remember I was working with my dad and this is after I got more proficient with the English language; after I started teaching it.

And I went back from Spain; went back one weekend just to help him because he was short staffed and he would give me instructions of tasks. It would be like put them over there next to the other ones then get cracking on with the others when you've done that. And it's so easy to misinterpret that. Like if you're not there, you've got no idea what he's talking about. If you don't



know the context, you've got no idea. And I used to feel so stupid because I was like why am I always confused working.

Then after going to Spain and teaching English and teaching IELTS, I realized that it wasn't me. It was the poor communication. It wasn't very articulate. It wasn't very descriptive. It wasn't very precise. And these are all elements that a competent language learner be it non-native or native need to introduce into their language ability in order to improve their communication.

So, if we transform the phrase that I used to hear it would be put them over there next to the other ones then get cracking on with the others when you've done that. Now, if I translate that for somebody who's got no idea about the context or is not in the situation, it would be put the wine boxes next to the boxes of whiskey then get cracking on with the others next to the warehouse entrance that is after you've moved the previous ones, okay?

And just adding that little bit of detail makes it easier for the listener to know exactly what's going on. And it's kind of lazy for the speaker if they're just using demonstratives all the time.



Put them over there next to the other ones. It's kind of lazy because if I speak like that, I am putting the task of-- I'm assuming first that they understand and then I am transferring the task of understanding onto them. Now, they've got to deduce what they, over there, next to the other ones means.

So, it's kind of lazy. It's an idle way of speaking whereas if we get more accurate, more descriptive, it makes it incredibly easier. If we put the effort in to be more descriptive, more accurate, more precise, it makes it insanely easier for the listener or the reader to understand.

And this is so important especially for the writing because in the writing, I see so many essays-- and I used to do this as well, but I used to see so many essays that were not descriptive, that were not precise, not accurate and the task of understanding them fell on the reader. And this creates reader strain-- one example of reader strain.

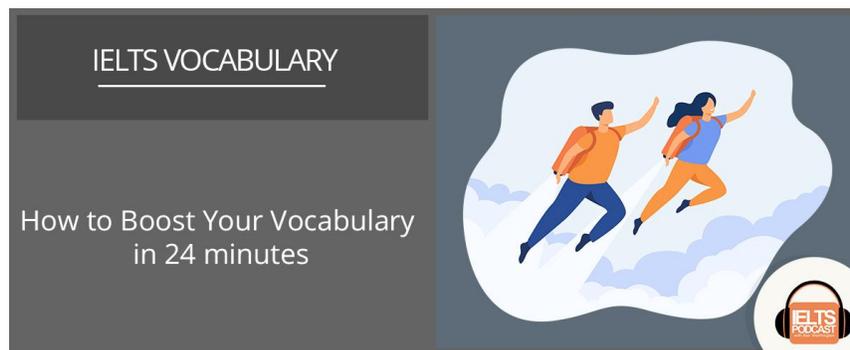
Let's have a look at how to expand your vocabulary. Now, there's a few different ways. I'll tell you a few from my personal experience. You probably agree with this being language learners



yourself, but a lot of new words can come with a story behind them. I still remember to this day learning about Donnerstag when I was learning German at school and the teacher spent five minutes explaining that donner comes from the word donor which is thunder.

Yeah, it's kind of similar to English actually but Thursday and Sunday when we had the Vikings-- when we had the Vikings and the Saxons which obviously came from-- is it upper Germany around Holland which is a Germanic language. But anyway, to this day, because the teacher explained that thunder in German is donner and Donnerstag is Thursday. I still remember it came with a story. It just makes it easier.

Another method is flashcards. Now, at the moment as you know, I'm learning Hungarian and I'm doing flashcards. I'm just hammering flashcards with my tutor, not every day, but two or three times a day and when I see a new term-- it's so random Hungarian. It's so crazy, but I have to invent a little story for every single word and it becomes taxing sometimes.



For example, the word to hear is hallgot, okay? No relation whatsoever to the English word to hear. Hallgot-- apart from the letter h. How do I remember it? Well, I remember musicians who got into the hall of fame for their music. Hallgot. That's how I remember it and I have to do this for every single word. I would suggest you do it as well especially for the longer words and the more sophisticated words. I'm on the basics as you can hear, so this is what I'm doing. It works.

You could also look at other methodologies such as the gold list method or the Callan method or even the Michael Thomas courses. Just a side note; when I was teaching English, I was teaching in one of the most developed English language markets in the world which is the Spanish one. And it's developed because it's not at the level where it is in other countries even in England, for example, but there in Spain, there were lots of competing systems and methods for learning the language.

And once it gets boiled down into a system or a method, I find it becomes insanely more effective and I'm saying this from a teaching point of view and from a language learner point of



view. So, just compare it, for example, a systemized methodology where the vocabulary you learnt on Monday is programmatically designed into the course to be repeated the very next day and then a week later and then two weeks later like Anki the flashcards; spaced repetition method.

Compare that to the average English teacher who just turns up and says how was your weekend? What do you like to do in your free time? And there's a bunch of five other students and you do that Monday and Wednesday for three months. It's going to be very challenging, very difficult very inefficient, very demotivating as a language learner. So, a methodology and a system will definitely help you.

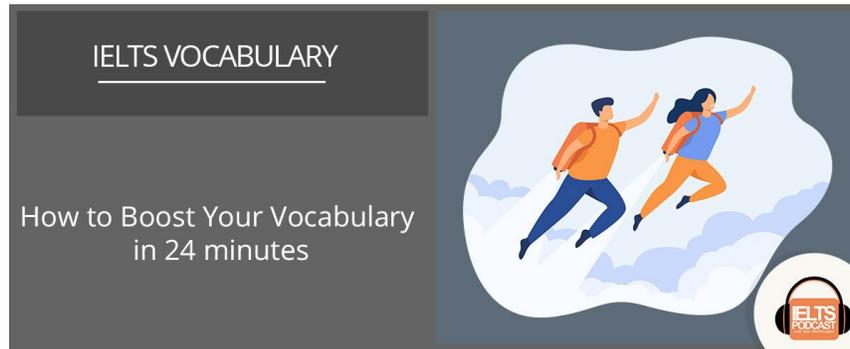
And my final word on that is that repetition is the mother of all learning. So, even if it can become a little boring, stick with that methodology. Use tools such as Focusmate or Accountability. Also throwing money at it works. Personally, if I throw money at it; if I buy a pack of 10 classes, for example, there's no way I'm going to miss those classes. I'm too tight, too



stingy. It's my Yorkshire roots I guess almost Scottish, but I just don't like wasting it. So, there's no way I'm going to not turn up for the class.

Now, although we've memorized all this vocabulary, how do we transform it? How do we move it from the receptive to the productive? Well, according to one study, some key points for moving it from the receptive to the productive is first if you've chosen that vocabulary and it's on a topic that you understand or a topic that you've chosen, it's much easier to move it from receptive to productive.

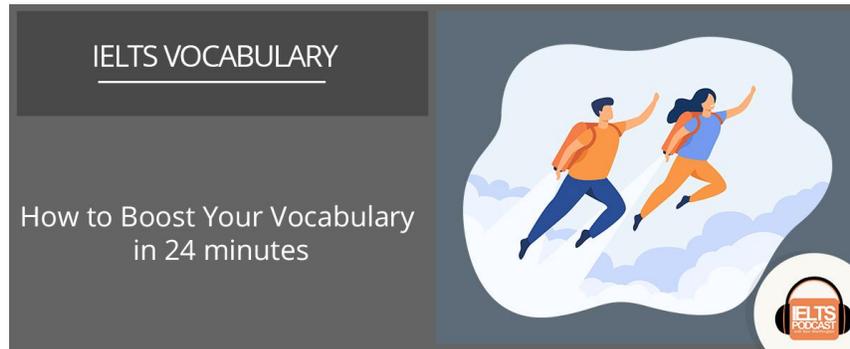
So, if you are learning from the academic word list and it's all these words, it could be more challenging because you haven't really chosen them. You haven't got a relationship. So, just be careful. I mean of course we do need to sometimes blast these topic lists or the academic word list, but if you do have the luxury of choice-- if you have the luxury of choice, then go for something that you do enjoy because it's much likely to stick in your brain.



Next one. Use it in a real situation. After you've learnt it, try and apply it in the real world; on a call with a friend, out in the shops. I remember talking to one English tutor. She had a genius technique. She was receiving students in her academy, but what she used to do is after they've done some vocabulary, it might be like learning fruit and veg or quantities of meat-- everyday vocabulary-- she would send them on a mission into her village or into her city and they would be forced to use the vocabulary they just learned.

She would say okay, go get me 200 grams of sausages and half a kilo of oranges. Then the student has to go into town and use those words. So, yeah. Using these words in authentic situations-- recycling them into authentic situations consolidates your progress significantly.

Now, another insanely valuable tool is obviously the internet. Now, eBooks are fantastic for this. I love my eBook. I use a Kindle and if I'm reading in Spanish, I tap the word and I can see a description. And this is beautiful because I read the description. I don't read the translation. I read

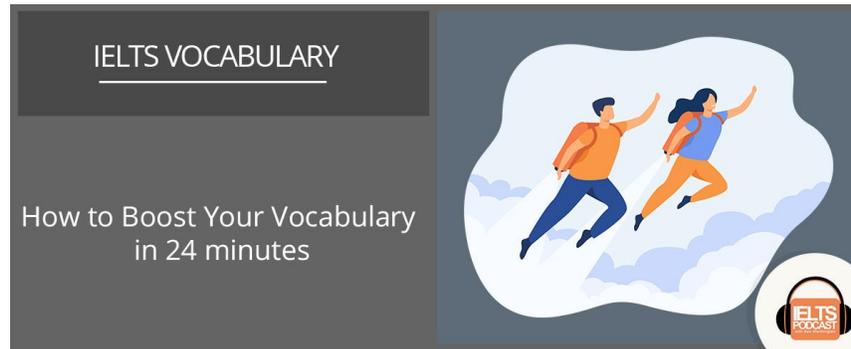


the description and that helps me to use and learn and probably review other words that I've covered in the past. It's like a next level learning technique.

Another way is to use word roots. So, when we're using the word roots, it's a shortcut to exponentially increase our vocabulary. So, the prefix, for example-- so if we learn the root like view, for example, and then we learn the prefix or the suffix-- the prefix in this case re- and now we've got review. And from learning the prefix R-E or re, we can expand the list of root words that we already know-- we can expand from the list of root words we already know.

So, we have review, recycle, reinstate and I've just doubled the amount of words I know because-- not doubled-- I've expanded the amount of words I know because I know the prefixes and I know the suffixes. Obviously, it doesn't happen for every single word, but for a lot of them, we can use these shortcuts.

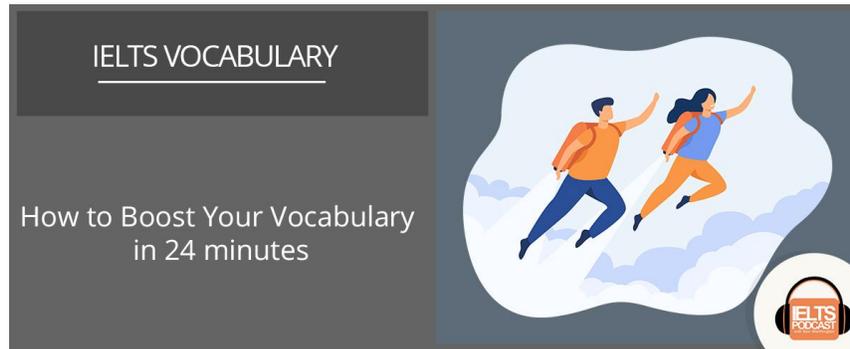
Now, final tip is immersion. Wake up listen to your podcast in English. Read your news in English. It's so easy nowadays with audiobooks, with the internet. We are surrounded-- we are



drowning in English. Now, you might not want to do this for the rest of your life, but you could definitely do it in the run-up to your IELTS exam and it's an easy passive way.

Now, just a word of warning, okay? It's easy just to-- I've done this in Hungarian. I did it in Spanish actually, but I would be like okay, I'm going to watch Game Of Thrones, for example, in Spanish and I'd put the English subtitles on and then I'd just find myself binge watching and I could justify it because hey, I'm listening to Spanish, but eventually, I just stopped listening in Spanish and just went to reading the subtitles or vice versa. I would listen in English and have Spanish subtitles like I'm boosting my Spanish vocabulary.

But I quickly realized I am fooling nobody if I do that. I'm just degenerating to a couch potato. So, don't confuse binge watching on the couch like a couch potato-- don't confuse it with intensive language immersion. They're not the same unless of course you're listening in English and possibly reading in English.

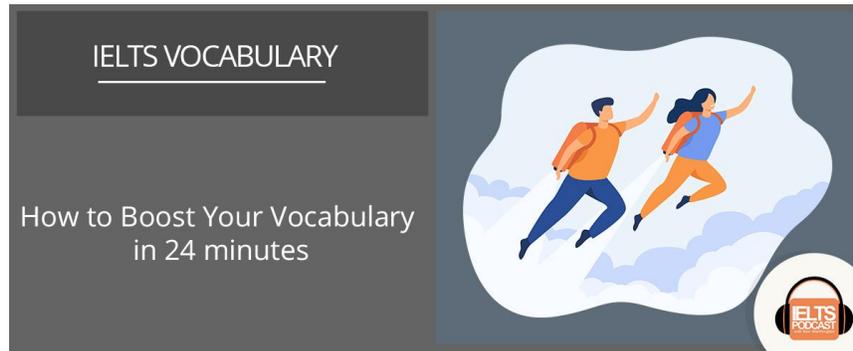


But the best way to do it I think would just be to listen in English and then maybe there's a little bit of justification, a little bit of value in your binge watching. Don't beat yourself up. We all do it I think.

Right. Let's have a look at some vocabulary word lists. First of all, there's the one that we touched on at the beginning which is the 1,000 most commonly used words in English. You can just jump online and search for that. It'll get you so far especially useful if you're starting.

For IELTS students, there is the academic word list produced by the Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand and they reviewed thousands of academic texts and identified the 570 most common word families. So, this is a full list of the most common words used in academic English which of course is going to help you if you are writing academically for the IELTS Academic and General exams especially your Task 2.

One of my favorite lists is a collection of collocations. I love collocations and in a future tutorial, I'm going to go into this in much more detail, but collocations are a group of words that are

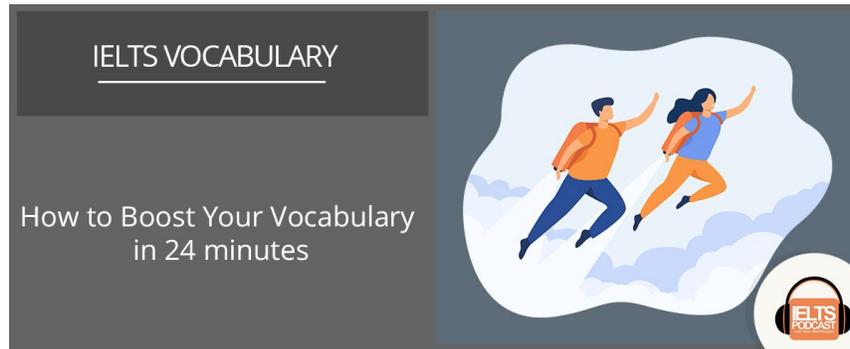


statistically more likely to be found together. Statistically higher or there's a probability that they are found together-- a statistically higher chance of them being found together than other words.

And you can use these collocations and they help you sound more academic-- sorry. They help you sound more like a native English speaker because it reduces reader and listener strain. An informal example: there's a phrase in English which is I'm going to see a man about a dog, okay? It just basically means I'm going to do something and I don't want to tell you what it is, okay?

But if somebody uses this phrase I'm going to see a man, I'm already expecting about a dog, okay? So, what are you doing on Friday, Ben? I'm off to see a man about a dog. It just means-- it's kind of a weird one, but it just means I'm going to be doing something and I don't want to share what it is, okay? But the listener when I start that sentence they already know how it's going to finish. They can switch off and there's no more strain. There's no more attention, okay?

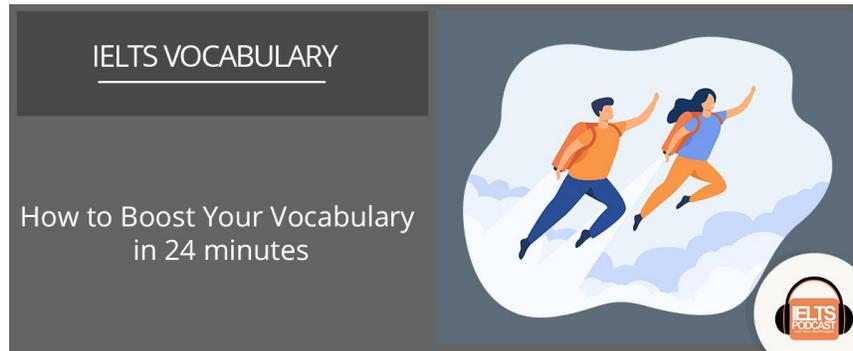
Also, we can have a look at the learner dictionary. These are the top 3,000 words and with the dictionary, it's probably more valuable because you get the definition and you get examples of



how they're used. Also, there's the business English vocabulary and if you're feeling a little bit bored with these dictionaries, you can always look at the urbandictionary.com but I didn't tell you that.

Now, before we finish, let's have a look at the top most common words of 2020. You're probably going to guess this. COVID, COVID-19, coronavirus, corona, face mask, progress, truth, social distancing, trade war-- It's all quite America centric and Donald Trump is number 17. I very much doubt he's on the next list for 2021, but these words are common. Have a brief look at those. Just do a quick search online.

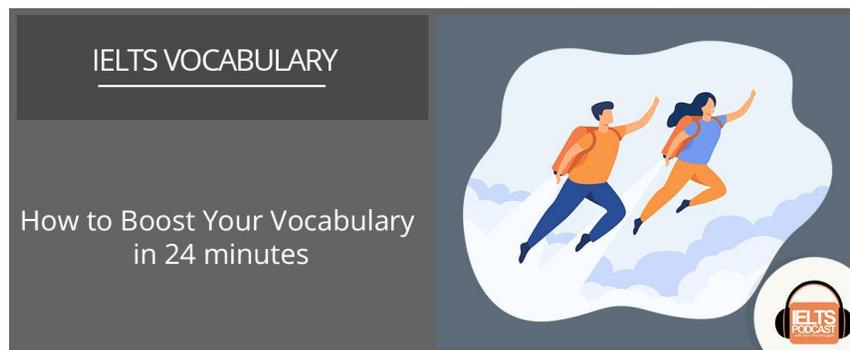
Just by looking at that list, you're going to get a good idea of possible IELTS topics. The IELTS examiners write questions about modern day topics. So obviously, there'll be a question about pandemic, about migrants which is on this list, identity politics, lockdown, sustainability, trade war, truth, Donald Trump-- I doubt there'll be a question about Donald Trump, but there might be one about charismatic world leaders, dictators; however the examiner might interpret Mr. Trump.



Now, tests are fantastic way as well. You can go to the Cambridge English test just to get a good idea of your language ability and if you want to test it against mine, I got 93%. I'm quite pleased with that. Obviously, I'd have preferred 100%, but the important thing is that you can measure. You can measure and you can see if you're improving or not.

And as you may know, that's exactly the reason why I got into IELTS because we can measure if my teaching is improving the student. Are they getting where they want to be? If you're teaching kids or adult learners one hour a week, it's not as easy. You don't get the feedback with the exam results. So, this is one of the reasons why I decided to focus on IELTS.

Now, as David Crystal famously said, vocabulary is a matter of word building as well as word using. So, well done for taking this first step of immersion and listening and improving your own vocabulary and getting that one step closer to immersing yourself in English. The next step is getting feedback and taking action be it booking the exam, putting that pressure on yourself,



buying a bunch of classes, starting with a vocabulary list, setting your goals. Whatever you do, take action and get feedback and you will find that your improvement will accelerate.

And if you're still stuck, then have a look at ieltspodcast.com. You can sign up for our newsletter and you'll get special offers on our courses and you get lots of advice and lots more tutorials in written form when you sign up to the IELTS Podcast. Also at ieltspodcast.com, you can get feedback for your essays and as I said before, it's a very fast and efficient way of improving your score. So, if you are stuck, you're not alone. We can help you get to the next level. That's exactly what we're here for. Ellen, Daphne, and myself we are all here to get you to band 7 or higher; 8 or 9. So, have a look at ieltspodcast.com. Have a great day. Keep working and good luck.

[Music]

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