

Every student at some time or the other faces the question "How do I increase my vocabulary?" This is because, people who might otherwise be very fluent in spoken English do not really take care to use new words, since, for the purpose of communication, the current register of words is deemed enough. An unfortunate fallout of this nonchalant complacency is that when these people actually face questions examining their vocabulary and its extent, they are all at sea. An easy example will bear this out. Everyone knows that when we are asked to name the tip of a mountain or the highest point of something, we use the word 'peak'. But not everyone would know that words like zenith, apogee, crest and summit may be replacements for the same word. So the same meaning used in the form of another word might leave the student totally flummoxed. Therefore, it is important to start working on one's vocabulary as soon as possible for success in any competitive exam.

Given below are a few tips on the accepted methods and practices used to improve one's vocabulary:

(a) **The practice of reading** - This is, sadly, lacking in most aspirants. With the advent of Television, reading has almost become passe. Reading is important not just because it increases general knowledge. That it definitely does; in addition what it does is help a student get into the habit of reading. It is also important to read a variety of subjects, because each subject has its own register of language and words are used with differing connotations in each register. So, for success in competitive exams, perusal of a few different sources of reading material is mandatory. The sources are:

- 1) A general magazine e.g. India Today, Frontline, Outlook, Reader's Digest, Time, etc.
- 2) A business magazine e.g. Business Today, Business India, Business World, etc.
- 3) The daily newspaper e.g. The Times of India, The Hindu, The Indian Express, etc.

(b) **Using a dictionary-the almost-extinct habit** - Even though the idea of using a dictionary does nothing to enthuse the common student, every one owns a dictionary but treats it like a sacred cow, not to be touched and defiled; of course, not that they are to be blamed too much for it; it is almost a habit now; but should be considered a necessary evil. A dictionary should be kept with the student while reading anything, so that an incomprehensible word can be looked up immediately. Procrastination invariably leads to the words remaining incomprehensible due to forgetfulness in looking up the word in the dictionary.

(c) **Self-help books** - Quite a few self-help books claiming to improve Verbal Ability are to be found in the open market, and one or two are actually helpful in this regard. Students are welcome to consult these books but are advised to do so after consulting discriminating people who have experience in this regard e.g. experienced English teachers or the English faculty, since they have better idea of the relative efficacy of these books.

(d) **Thesaurus-the viable alternative** - If using a dictionary seems to be too boring to be considered for any length of time, using a thesaurus may be a more interesting alternative. In theory, it is the reverse of a dictionary, and basically gives the various synonyms and the types of usage of a word e.g. as a verb, adjective, noun etc.. So it gives a lot of information about each word. If the student can remember even some of it, it will be a great advantage. The most commonly available thesaurus in the market is the Roget's Thesaurus, usually now used as a generic name by most publishers.

(e) **The Word List** - The Word List is a comprehensive compendium of the words most commonly asked or used in the Management Examination question papers. Studying the Word List will also give the student a lot of information about the origin of various words, their roots etc. This is a particularly useful method of studying because knowledge of etymology helps the student gauge the meaning and usage of other words having the same roots, regardless of whether the student has come across the word earlier or not.

(f) **Flip-Cards** - We strongly advocate this technique which is another tool to memorize words from the list. These are blank cards approximately double the size of your standard visiting card. After isolation of the exceptionally difficult words from the Word List, the student should write approximately five words on one side of the card and the corresponding meanings on the other. The advantages of using this type of tool are that (1) Cards are portable and the student can carry a card around with him/her any where and glance at it anytime. (2) The embarrassment factor which carrying a Word List around entails is absent here, and (3) At the time of the final run-up to the examination, the student, instead of revising the whole Word List, can just go through the set of Flip Cards that he or she has collected. The only problem is getting started and, to mix metaphors, once that initial hurdle is overcome the rest is smooth sailing!

(g) **Gauging meanings** - This logically follows from the earlier method. It is advisable for the student to try and gauge the meaning of a word from the context of the sentence. This is an extremely effective method and very frequently, it is possible to find out the meaning of a newly seen word just by reading the whole sentence and getting the meaning of the sentence as a whole. e.g. in the sentence 'All of us tried our best to persuade him but he remained adamant'. Even if a student does not know the meaning of the word adamant per se, it is still possible to gauge the meaning from the context of the sentence i.e. unmoved, firm, intractable, etc. It should be kept in mind by the students that none of the above methods are absolute in themselves. It is a combination of all these, or at least some of these, which will give one the best results.

Exercise

DIRECTIONS: In each of the following questions you are given one or more blanks. Each question is followed by four choices, only one of which fits the blank(s) appropriately. That correct choice is your answer. In case there is more than one blank, each answer choice has more than one filler which should fit the blanks in their respective order.

1. To ____ time, please go ____ foot and not by bus.
(1) spend, with (2) kill, towards
(3) utilise, on (4) gain, on
2. After a recent mild paralytic attack his movements are ____ restricted; otherwise he is still very active.
(1) entirely (2) slightly
(3) nowhere (4) frequently
3. Among the factors ____ to the low productivity in agriculture, the first place is occupied by irregular water supply.
(1) producing (2) showing
(3) resulting (4) contributing
4. Despite his ____ he had to suffer.
(1) punishment (2) fault
(3) negligence (4) innocence
5. The two brothers look so ____ that it is difficult to tell one from the other.
(1) identical (2) same
(3) similar (4) resembling
6. His most striking ____ is the enthusiasm which he brings to everything he does.
(1) factor (2) attitude
(3) characteristic (4) character
7. Renu is a _____. You can lead her by the nose.
(1) novice (2) woman
(3) blind (4) simpleton
8. Women should be paid the same as men-when they do the same job, for surely, what is sauce for the ____ is sauce for the ____
(1) goose, gander (2) cock, hen
(3) fox, vixen (4) buck, doe
9. Ravi was always ____ of the good fortune of others.
(1) miserable (2) irritable
(3) greedy (4) envious
10. Survival of mankind itself is in danger due to ____ of atomic weapons.
(1) perpetuation (2) regularisation
(3) provocation (4) proliferation
11. Though fond of many acquaintances, I desire ____ only with a few.
(1) introduction (2) cordiality
(3) intimacy (4) encounter
12. The Director pointed out in favour of the manager that the profitability of the plant had ____ since he had taken over.
(1) arisen (2) increased
(3) developed (4) declined
13. Cellular phone service has ____ in a new phase of communication.
(1) called (2) ushered
(3) resulted (4) started
14. The present ____ has not prevented the railway minister from announcing an increasing number of superfast trains.
(1) crisis (2) syndrome
(3) generation (4) stability
15. When I listened to his cogent arguments, all my ____ were ____ and I was forced to agree with his point of view.
(1) doubts, confirmed
(2) friends, present
(3) question, asked
(4) doubts, dispelled
16. His remarks were filled with ____, which sounded lofty but presented nothing new to the audience.
(1) aphorisms (2) platitudes
(3) bombast (4) adages
17. Nabeesa was not ____ by the criticism and paid no ____ even when her best friend talked against her.
(1) threatened, warning
(2) troubled, mind
(3) deterred, heed (4) bothered, attention
18. When indecision grips a nation, free men feel the need for an ____ ruler and are prepared to throw democracy overboard.
(1) optimistic (2) autocratic
(3) eccentric (4) energetic
19. India has the ____ of high saving and low growth rates.
(1) irony (2) similarity
(3) difference (4) paradox
20. Few countries can ____ India in variety, colour and richness of dance-forms.
(1) rival (2) depict
(3) pravall (4) fight
21. She was a devoted wife and looked ____ her husband very well.
(1) after (2) at
(3) for (4) upon
22. It is a penal ____ to bribe a public servant.
(1) charge (2) offence
(3) code (4) tight

23. The teacher _____ the boy's comic which he was reading during the Mathematics period.
 (1) possessed (2) procured
 (3) abandoned (4) seized
24. The entire village condoled _____ the jawan's widow in her bereavement.
 (1) in (2) for
 (3) to (4) with
25. He became the Governor of a Province _____.
 (1) by and large (2) in the course of time
 (3) at times (4) little by little
26. This is a _____ translation of the speech.
 (1) literary (2) literal
 (3) verbal (4) verbatim
27. The battalion operating from the mountain was able to tie _____ three enemy divisions.
 (1) up (2) down
 (3) on (4) with
28. She put _____ a brief appearance at the end of the party.
 (1) on (2) in
 (3) across (4) up
29. Once he has signed the agreement, he won't be able to back _____.
 (1) up (2) in
 (3) at (4) out
30. The master dispensed _____ the services of his servant.
 (1) up (2) with
 (3) from (4) through
31. His answer was such _____ I expected him to give.
 (1) that (2) which
 (3) as (4) like which
32. That charming girl was the _____ of all eyes.
 (1) target (2) cynosure
 (3) doggerel (4) ambition
33. His attitude to his boss was so _____ that it caused a good deal of repulsion.
 (1) refulgent (2) arrogant
 (3) sycophantic (4) hybrid
34. His fears were explicitly betrayed by his _____ voice.
 (1) phonetic (2) tremulous
 (3) tenuous (4) malodorous
35. The influence of the environment on man is revealed by an _____ study.
 (1) anthropological (2) ecological
 (3) epigraphic (4) numismatic
36. She had a terrible night caused by a(n) _____ during her sleep.
 (1) incubus (2) debility
 (3) obsession (4) delusion
37. Alexander Solzhepitsyn's works will be _____ by every lover of liberal thought and they will bring home to him how restrictive freedom is in the Russian system.
 (1) rejected (2) skimmed
 (3) compiled (4) perused
38. A great literary or artistic work is known as _____.
 (1) par excellence (2) bete noire
 (3) peccadillo (4) magnum opus
39. He has a _____ tongue; his pinching sarcasm has _____ everyone who has come into contact with him.
 (1) wanton, immunised
 (2) vitriolic, alienated
 (3) pungent, animated
 (4) recalcitrant, humanised
40. In spite of her other _____, Kasthuri still managed to find time for her hobbies.
 (1) occupations (2) preoccupations
 (3) predilections (4) business
41. The journey may be made by sea or _____ by road.
 (1) alternately, (2) alteringly
 (3) conversely (4) alternatively
42. AIDS is not a disease that can be _____ through the air or by insects.
 (1) circulated (2) transferred
 (3) transmitted (4) conducted
43. The official _____ the Chief Minister of the situation in the town.
 (1) apprised (2) informed
 (3) appraised (4) asked
44. Opinions concerning him had remained nearly _____, his daily habits had presented scarcely any visible change.
 (1) static (2) biased
 (3) limpid (4) stationary
45. _____ at the major ports has led planners to develop satellite ports near them.
 (1) Density (2) Containment
 (3) Transportation (4) Congestion
46. His residence is on the _____ of Hyderabad.
 (1) Rim (2) core
 (3) periphery (4) outskirts
47. The carriage foundered in a snowdrift and it took two hours to _____ it.
 (1) exert (2) pillage
 (3) exacerbate (4) extricate
48. Since the British were masters of the seas, no _____ power could venture into Indian waters under British rule.
 (1) territorial (2) continental
 (3) maritime (4) geo-political

Hints

SOLUTIONS

REMEMBER: Words and their usage are best learnt only by referring to them again and again.

1. (4) A clever way to tackle this question would be to see the second as a prepositional usage. You go on foot. So, our choices narrow down to (3) and (4). Now, would you be utilising time if you go on foot? Perhaps not. So, (3) is eliminated. If you do something in order to gain time you do it in order to give yourself enough time. For what? To think of an excuse or a way out of a difficult situation.
2. (2) Note that the paralytic attack was mild, which gives us the clue that its effect would be slight. This is further substantiated by the second part of the sentence: "...otherwise he is still very active" means there is some (slight) trouble but not much.
3. (4) If something contributes to an event or situation, it is one of the causes of it. Here factors has been used in the sense of causes. If you contribute money or resources to something, you give them to help achieve a particular purpose.
4. (4) As a matter of rule, who should suffer? The guilty?. But the word despite points to the contrary. Hence, innocence.
5. (1) If two persons are similar, you will point out to certain likenesses. Yet you can easily tell one from the other. In other words, you can differentiate between the two. But the given sentence says differentiation is difficult. Which means the resemblance is to a very high degree. In other words, identical.
6. (3) We are talking of his most striking (remarkable) quality. The characteristics of a person, thing are the qualities or features that belong to them and make them recognisable.
7. (4) You can lead Renu by the nose. That is, you can have complete control over her. Now, this is possible only when Renu be a simpleton. A simpleton is a person who is not very intelligent and can easily be fooled.
8. (1) What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander means what is acceptable for one person in a particular situation should be acceptable for another person in a similar situation.
9. (4) When someone else has good fortune (luck), the general feeling is: "Why is he the favoured one? Why not I?" This is a feeling of envy.
10. (4) If you are even moderately interested in news, you must have heard of the NPT. It stands for Nuclear non-proliferation Treaty — a treaty which aims at halting the proliferation (increasing in number very quickly) of nuclear (atomic) weapons.
11. (3) The correct choice should have a meaning similar to acquaintances but have a greater intensity. An acquaintance is a person whom one knows, especially through work or business, but who is not a close (intimate) friend.
12. (2) (d) is rejected because the word should suggest that the fact goes "in favour of" the manager. If the profitability declines it would go against the manager. A good manager adds to the profitability. In other words, the profitability increases.
13. (2) Ushered (show or guide somewhere) seems to be the most appropriate in the context of the sentence.
14. (1) Only something negative can prevent a good measure. We have two choices representing negativeness: (1) and (2). But (2) is not applicable: A syndrome is a medical condition that is characterised by a particular group of signs and symptoms.
15. (d)
16. (2) An aphorism is a short witty sentence (not lofty) which expresses a general truth or observation. Bombast is the use of long, important sounding words with little meaning in an attempt to impress others. (Note that the definition is silent on presented nothing new".) An adage is something which people often say and which expresses a general truth about some aspect of life. (It need not be lofty.)
17. (3) (3) and (4) are close choices. Both heed and attention are acceptable for the second blank. Now, on to the first blank. You are bothered with or about something, but you are deterred by it.
18. (2) Autocratic is the adjective from autocracy (autos = self + kratos = power). An autocratic ruler concentrates all power in himself. He makes decisions without asking anyone else's advice.
19. (4) Common sense tells us that high saving rates should lead to (greater investment and therefore) "high" growth rates. But here it is "low". This is a paradox
20. (1) If A rivals B, both A and B are of the same standard or quality. In other words, A matches B. "Few countries can rival India" means there is hardly any country that can match India. India is almost unique.
21. (1) Let us look at the look phrases. If you look after someone, you do what is necessary to keep him healthy, safe, or in good condition. If you look after something, you are responsible for it. It is your duty to see that it functions all right. If you look ahead you think about what is going to happen in the future; you make plans for the future. On the contrary, if you look back you think about things that happened in the past. If A looks down on B, A considers B to be inferior or unimportant. If you look forward to something that is going to happen, you want it to happen because you think you will enjoy it. If you look into a problem you try to find out about it; you examine the facts related to the problem. If you look on while something happens, you watch it happening without taking part yourself. If you look up a fact or a piece of information, you find it out by looking in a reference book, list etc. If you look up to someone, especially someone, older than you, you respect and admire him.

22. (2) The word penal means “punishable by law”. Hence, offence is the correct choice. An offence is a crime that breaks a particular law and requires a particular punishment. A sin, on the other hand, is a moral wrong. If you sin, you break the laws of God.
23. (4) The “comic”: (comics book) changes hands - it goes from the boy to the teacher. Only (b), (c) and (d) give this sense of change of hands. Of these, seized is the most appropriate. If someone in authority (here “the teacher”) seizes your property (here “the boy’s comic”), they take it from you, often by force. Of course, no boy would willingly part with his “comic”
24. (4) You condole with a person on/over his or her great misfortune.
25. (2) If something changes or becomes true in the course of time, it has so become over a long period of time.
26. (2) A literal translation is one in which you translate each ‘word of the original work. Since each language has its own idiom, a literal translation leads to awkward usage. A literal translation is therefore not considered good. A good translation gives the meaning of each expression, sentence or paragraph, using words that sound natural.
27. (2) If you tie down someone, you restrict his freedom in some way.
28. (2)
29. (4)
30. (2)
31. (3) ‘I expected him to give’ denotes the kind (category) of the answer; it is not the result of ‘his answer’. So use as, not that.
32. (2) If you are the cynosure of all eyes, you are a centre of attention or interest.
33. (3) Easy
34. (2) “Fear” makes your voice tremble. In other words, it becomes tremulous.
35. (2) Ecology is the pattern of relations of plants, animals and people to each other and their surroundings (environment). Anthropology is the scientific study of the human (Greek anthropos = man) race, including its different types and its beliefs, social habits and organisation, etc. Epigraphy is the study of inscriptions. An inscription is writing carved into something made of Stone or metal, for example, a gravestone, monument, or medal. Numismatics is the study of coins or medals. ‘Ecumenical activities, ideas, and movements try to unite different Christian Churches.
36. (1) An incubus is a male devil supposed to have sex with a sleeping woman. Broadly, incubus means a very worrying problem. In literary usages, as in the given sentence, it means a bad dream and is synonymous with incubus.
37. (4) Peruse means to read. A perusal (reading) of “Solzhenitsyn’s works” will “bring home to him” (make him understand) the truth about “Freedom” in Russia — that freedom is only nominal; it is, in fact, “restrictive”. Note that Russia here is a part of the USSR, not the post-1991 Russia. (3) gives the sense of reading hurriedly”.
38. (4) Magnum means ‘big’ (or great). (Hence a magnifying glass makes things appear big.) Opus means ‘work’. (When you operate something, a computer for example, you make it work.) Combining the two, we get magnum opus great work. But it is used only in the sense of “a great literary or artistic work”.
39. (2) Go for the second blank first. What is sarcasm? It is saying the opposite of what you mean. One gets sarcastic in order to mock or insult others. Take an example of sarcasm: You meet an ugly girl. She asks you to accompany her. Repelled by her ugliness, you tell her sarcastically, “I don’t go around with beautiful (obviously, you mean ugly!) girls.” Such a statement pinches the girl. A girl whom you have treated with such “pinching sarcasm” will never be friendly or sympathetic to you in future. You have thus alienated her. Those who are thus “pinchingly sarcastic” have a vitriolic tongue. That is, their words are full of bitterness and hate, and so cause a lot of distress and pain.
40. (2) Your preoccupations are the activities that take up your attention (or time), leaving little room for other things.
41. (4) What is the difference between alternately and alternatively? Alternatively implies that you have a choice (alternative)—either by sea or by road. In the given question conjunction “or” gives us the clue. When we say alternately it means first by sea then by road, the third time by sea again, the fourth time by road again, and so on. Since both the routes are being used in this case, the conjunction should be “and”.
42. (3) If A transmits a disease to B, A has the disease and causes B to have it. Here, “disease” gives us the clue.
43. (1) Both (1) and (2) are correct but apprised is a formal usage. Such formal usages are preferred when the persons involved include “the Chief Minister” himself - a stately personage.
44. (4)
45. (4) If there is congestion in a place, the place is extremely crowded and blocked with traffic or people. The problem of congestion is thus essentially a problem of space. It could be got rid of through addition of space (by developing “satellite ports”). Blockade is slightly different. It is the action that is taken to prevent goods or people from entering or leaving it. The problem here is political - blockades are the creation of strikers or political groups. And the problem could persist even at the newly-developed satellite ports.
46. (4) The outskirts of a city (here “Hyderabad”) or town are the part that are farthest away from its centre.
47. (4) When a ship founders, it fills with water and sinks. Similarly the carriage foundered (that is, sank) in the snowdrift (deep pile of snow formed by the wind). The trapped (sunk) carriage then had to be freed from the snowdrift. In other words, it had to be extricated.
48. (3) Maritime is used to describe things relating to the sea and to ships.