Language Support for Migrants
A Council of Europe Toolkit

Tool 35 - Techniques to aid vocabulary learning

Aim: **To offer suggestions for helping migrants to learn and use new vocabulary and to review and reflect on their learning.**

People have different learning preferences, and it is important to offer learners different pathways to learning the target language. This tool illustrates some different ways that learners can begin to assemble a personal resource to help them learn and practise new words and phrases.

Vocabulary learning

Material

- between five and ten words/expressions, e.g. from last meeting / week / month or about a certain topic (e.g. food, health, …): vocabulary cards, notebooks.
- other learning material, e.g. texts, notes…
- template (see below).

Aims

To help learners of all ages:

- to learn new vocabulary in the language they are learning
- to revise and use these new words and expressions
- to organise their vocabulary notes so that they will be useful outside the learning situation.

Description

Learners note new words/phrases then indicate by a tick ✓how they have remembered/used the words.

As a group, they can:

A. Make the words visible, e.g. produce a poster / pictures with these words or write them on cards.
B. Each time learners come across or use one of them, they mark it with a little sign – an asterisk, a smiley face, a coloured dot etc. This will help them to see how often the words are used and how familiar they become.

Next steps

Remember that learning new words takes time and it is most important to create opportunities for new vocabulary to be put to use.

- Organise opportunities for learners to revise and use the words/phrases.
- Encourage them to use post-it stickers, cards, vocabulary apps etc. as an aid to learning the words in their own way.

Making a personal vocabulary collection

A. Using a notebook

When learning a new language, many learners collect vocabulary in a list or notebook. The number of words, phrases and expressions can grow very rapidly, so it is important to help learners organise their vocabulary notes from the very beginning. It is also motivating for the learner to see how their bank of vocabulary grows.

For example, a notebook can be organised by scenario or by topic so that all words related to that topic are written down in the same place. Each page in the notebook can be divided so that the learner can add additional information. A loose-leaf folder is very useful for this purpose because it is more flexible and allows for pages to be removed when the vocabulary has become familiar and additional pages can be added.
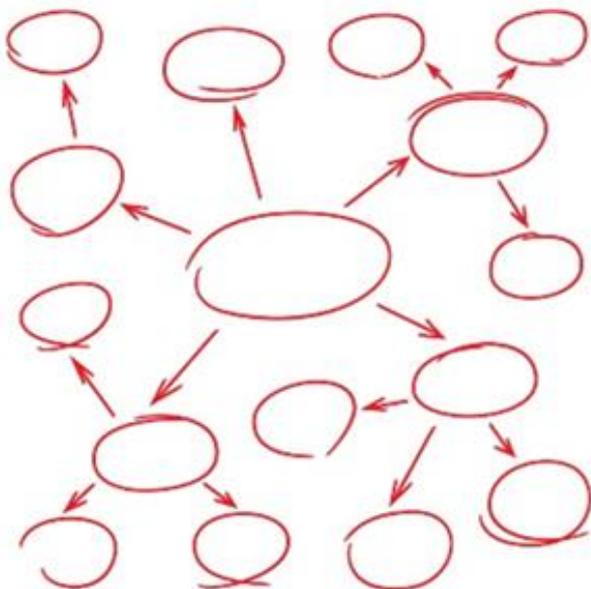
Example:

Topic:		
Word or phrase	In my language	Where/how I can use this word or phrase

B. Using a mind map

A mind map is another way of making notes by connecting and grouping words in a memorable way.

When you introduce or revise vocabulary for a specific topic, learners can organise them in a mind map like the one below. They use a new page in their notebook and write the word for topic or word family in the middle of the page. For example, they can put 'FOOD' in the middle, then draw connections to different categories of food around it, such as 'fruit', 'vegetables', 'meat', 'bread and pastry' etc. Then around each category they can group some examples, e.g. for fruit, apple, orange, melon, pineapple, and so on.

When they later learn new words in the same family, they can add them to the mind map for that topic.

C. Using a table to record, revise and think about new vocabulary

Below is an example of a table which could be copied and used in loose-leaf folders. Vocabulary for a particular scenario, topic, purpose etc. can be organised so that it can be found easily. Learners can return to the table from time to time and can indicate their progress in using the item of vocabulary until it becomes a natural part of communication. In the example below, one or more ticks (✓) are used to show this gradual process of learning. Each time learners use the words a tick is inserted to indicate where the vocabulary was used and how well they were able to remember or use it.

Tick (✓ or ✓✓ or ✓✓✓) as appropriate or note the date / context				
Word / expression	**I recognized it in a conversation, a TV programme, an SMS, a sign, ...**	**I remembered its meaning without using my vocabulary notes etc.)**	**I remembered how to say (and write) this in the new language**	**Notes**
Good morning!	✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓	
Timetable.	✓✓	✓✓	don't need to.	
Bus.	✓			
Ticket.	✓			

D. Using vocabulary cards

Small cards are used by many learners to remember new words. The example below shows how learners can use cards to record their learning of vocabulary as it progresses.

Method

- Learners write only one word or expression on each card.
- They can use the back of the card for a translation into one or more other languages if they wish.
- If they draw 4 or 5 small rectangular boxes at the top of each card these can be used as follows. They can:
    1. Tick the first box when they first hear or see and recognize the word.
    2. Tick the second box when they can remember its meaning out of context (i.e. by just looking at the vocabulary card).
    3. Tick the third box when they can remember this without looking at the card.
    4. Tick the fourth box when they use the word or phrase appropriately in spoken or written communication.
    5. Tick the ☺ box when they feel you know and can use this word/expression.

You can copy the template on the next page or invent your own cards for use by learners.

Example

A learner has been receiving medical treatment. The word 'doctor' is now very familiar, and s/he can recognise it when s/he hears it.
S/he has also learnt the word 'prescription' but has a problem remembering it. But s/he can understand it when the doctor or nurse says it and gives her/him a prescription.
S/he knows the word 'pharmacy' because that is similar to the word used in the first language.

Next steps

Remember that learning new words takes time and it is most important to create opportunities for learners to use new vocabular.

Organise opportunities for learners to revise and use the words/phrases.

Encourage them to use post-it stickers, cards, mind maps vocabulary apps etc. as an aid to learning the words in their own way.

				☺					☺					✓☺
✓	✓	✓			✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	
	doctor					prescription					pharmacy			
				☺					☺					☺
				☺					☺					☺