

37 - Techniques for learning vocabulary

Aim: This tool offers suggestions for helping refugees to learn and use new vocabulary and to review and reflect on their learning.

People have different learning preferences (see Tool 14 *Diversity in working groups*) and it is important to offer refugees different pathways to learning the target language. This tool illustrates some different ways that refugees can begin to assemble a personal resource for newly-learned vocabulary and use this to 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 become aware of vocabulary in the new language.
- to revise vocabulary.
- to organise notes so that they will be useful outside the learning situation.

Description

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

As a group:

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

Next steps

- Revisit the words/phrases.
- Encourage learners to use post-its, cards, vocabulary apps etc. as an aid to learning the words
- Remember that learning new words takes time and it is most important to create opportunities for new vocabulary to be put to use.

Making a personal vocabulary collection

Using a notebook

When learning a new language, many learners collect vocabulary in a list or notebook. As the number of words, phrases and expressions encountered grows very rapidly, it is important to organise a vocabulary collection from the very beginning, and it is motivating for the learner to see how their bank of vocabulary grows.

For example, a notebook can be organised by scenario or topic so that all words connected to that topic would be written down in the same place. Each page in the notebook should be divided so that the refugee can add additional information. A loose-leaf binder is very useful for this purpose as 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 I can use this word or phrase

Using a grid to record, revise and think about new vocabulary

Below is an example of a grid which could be reproduced and used in a loose-leaf binder. Vocabulary for a particular scenario, topic, purpose etc. should be organised in the binder so that it can be accessed easily. When refugees return to the grid from time to time, they 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 indicate this gradual process of learning. Each time refugees review 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 ✓✓✓ etc.) as appropriate or note the date / context

Word / expression	Recognized it in a conversation, TV programme, SMS, a sign, ...	Remembered its meaning without clues using vocabulary card, notes etc.)	Remembered how to say this in the new language*	Used it: said it / wrote it*	
Good morning!	✓✓	✓✓✓✓	✓✓	✓	
Timetable.	✓✓	✓✓	don't need to.	don't need to.	
Bus.	✓				
Ticket.	✓				

* might not be necessary with some expressions.

Using vocabulary cards

Cards are used by many learners to remember new words and information. It is possible to use index cards or cards made by cutting up sheets of thick paper. The example below shows how refugees can use cards to record their learning of vocabulary as it progresses.

Method

Write only one word or expression on each card.

Use the back of the card for translation into another language(s) as appropriate.

Refugees can draw small rectangles or boxes at the top of each card. These spaces can be used as follows:

1. Tick the first box when you first recognize the word (in a conversation, a text, a sign, ...).
2. Tick the second box each time you remember its meaning independent from context (i.e. by just looking at a vocabulary card).
3. Tick the third box each time you can remember this without looking at the card*.
4. Tick the fourth box each time you use the word or phrase when speaking or writing*.
5. Tick the 😊 box when you feel you know and can use this word/expression.

You can print this template or simply make up your own cards.

* might not be necessary with some expressions

Example:

This refugee has been receiving medical treatment. The word 'doctor' is becoming very familiar and he can recognise it when he hears it.

He has also learnt the word 'prescription' but has a problem remembering it. He can identify it when the doctor or nurse says it to him and gives him a prescription.

He knows the word 'pharmacy' because that is similar to the word used in his home country.

✓	✓	✓		😊	✓				😊	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓😊
doctor					prescription					pharmacy				
				😊					😊					😊
				😊					😊					😊