

# Vocabulary Enrichment Through Word Association

## **Levels**

Intermediate +

## **Aims**

Raise awareness of  
word associations  
Explore words in  
greater detail

## **Class Time**

15–30 minutes

## **Preparation Time**

10–20 minutes

## **Resources**

List of high frequency  
words  
Charts

Students cannot always give definitions for words for which they have a good sense (at least receptively). Likewise, they may be able to give a definition of a word quite easily, but not be able to use the word. Having students give as many associations as they can provides insight in both these areas and can indicate to students where they may need to explore words further.

## Procedure

1. Prepare charts with 10 words for associations, such as the following:

Word	Associated Words (in 30 seconds)
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- |          |  |
|----------|--|
| 1. drink |  |
| 2. store |  |
| 3. etc.  |  |

2. Put students into a circle, and for a few minutes play a word association game. In this game, say a word and then ask each student to say the first word to come to mind. Students can listen to each other's first words and try to understand how the association was made. (An option would be to have students write the first word that comes to their minds for each of 10 words the you say. In either case you may want to have students share their answers, to raise awareness of varied associations made.)
3. Pass out a sheet with 10 words, and tell students you will give them 30 seconds for each word, in which they should write as many words associated with the given word as they can.
4. Tell the students to begin, and at the end of 30 seconds call out, "Next word." Continue to do this until all 10 words have been covered.

5. Have students go back through the list and circle any words for which they could not get many associations. Tell them that these words are ones that warrant spending time with their dictionaries (e.g., noting alternate meanings, phrasal uses, collocations). You may want to allow class time for this.

Some words lend themselves to alternate meanings and a large variety of associations, while others are much more limited. Therefore, it is advisable to have a native speaker (or other successful user of the language) do this exercise with each sheet of 10 words before you give them to the students, to give yourself an idea of reasonable expectations for each word in the list.

## Contributor

*Kenny Harsch is Director of English Education at Kobe YMCA College, Japan. He is interested in learner autonomy, student-centered curriculum development, and helping students discover their own uses for English. He also believes in developing students' ownership of the direction their learning takes. The idea for this activity came from a discussion with Norbert Schmitt, who is currently doing his doctoral dissertation on a related aspect of vocabulary acquisition.*