

Second Language Acquisition Course

vocabulary

This post lays out a compact, practical plan you can use today. If you're learning or teaching a second language course, you'll find clear routines, simple exercises and tools to make vocabulary learning both efficient and communicative.

Why vocabulary learning is different

Vocabulary is the building block of any language, but it doesn't behave the same way as other parts of language learning. While fluency and grammar development tend to follow a fairly linear path — words → phrases → sentences → paragraphs — vocabulary acquisition is messier and non-linear. You'll recognise some words instantly, forget others, and suddenly recall previously unknown chunks when they become relevant.

“Learning vocabulary is not necessarily a linear process.”

Learning a language is not a linear process.



Because vocabulary is context-driven, avoid learning words only by arbitrary thematic lists (for example: “school words” or “home words”) as your main method. Those categories are useful for review, but they won’t give you the communicative chunks you need to function in real situations.

Chunking: learn language in meaningful pieces

One of the most effective shifts you can make for a [Second Language Acquisition Course](#): Vocabulary is to learn in chunks — phrases and short patterns that fulfill tasks. Think of useful chunks like “I need...” which can be used at a market, in a shop, or at home. Chunks stick because they are meaningful and immediately usable.



Learning Vocabulary

- Don't rely on studying categories of words.
- It needs to be used as review and enrichment, not as your main method of learning new words.
- Apply chunking
- Acquiring vocabulary is not a neat and linear process.
- What will actually stick with you is what you use in a meaningful way.

I need can be used in many different contexts

Input vs output: structure your cycles

Input (what you listen to and read) is where most vocabulary learning happens. Output (what you say and write) is how you test and consolidate knowledge. Aim for roughly twice as much input as output: more time absorbing authentic language, less pressure while practising producing it.

"I like to do twice as much input as I do output."

Practical input sources:

- Pimsleur-style audio lessons for beginners (dialogue-driven, with built-in prompts).
- Short videos, podcasts, Yabla videos, films and magazine articles for intermediate learners.
- Regular conversation lessons with native speakers (e.g., via platforms like italki) to combine input and immediate output.



Output

- We learn languages from our input. We assess ourselves with our output.
- Keep doing the cycle between the two to fill the gaps in your fluency.
- The more time invested, the faster the results come.

Organisation: task books and task-based goals

Design a task book for the real-life scenarios you're likely to face. Moving through tasks helps you identify gaps and gives purpose to further study. A good beginner task is "surviving in a restaurant" — it contains greetings, courtesy phrases and food-related vocabulary that transfer to many other contexts.

Quick task-based routines

1. Choose a task (restaurant, taxi ride, returning an item).
2. Collect the chunks and phrases you'll need for that task.
3. Use input (audio/dialogue) to absorb the language, then practise output with a tutor or a partner.

Practical study tools

Vocabulary columns

Vocabulary columns are a fast, paper-based way to learn sets of 10-15 target words

or chunks. Steps:

1. Write 10–15 target items in one column.
2. Test recognition, study items you didn't know.
3. Fold the paper so only your source language is visible, try to recall and write the target items in the next column.
4. Repeat across 6–8 columns (both sides of the paper) until the set sticks.



The Task Book

- The task book mentioned in the previous chapter is also helpful in developing your vocabulary
- One way you can do this is to write the name of the task in your notebook, at the top of the page. Fold the page into two columns. Then you write down, in one column, all the words you need to know in the target language.
- Test yourself. Translate the list in the target language to your native language.
- Test yourself again. This time translate the list in the native language to the target language.

Communication cards (task cards)

Make index-card-sized task prompts on a metal ring. Each card contains the language needed to complete a specific action (e.g., give your address in a taxi, buy a SIM card, return a purchase). Keep them holistic — no grammar lectures — and practise them as small dialogues with a partner. Remove cards you've mastered and keep rotating the rest.

Communication cards

- Take a big index card or a piece of paper and group words in a task.
- Join the cards with a metal ring (traditional) or use them on your mobile device (electronic) and practice language for any task you choose.
- You might choose to add written language into the mix, or you might choose to focus on being able to complete the communicative task.
- There are no grammatical explanations in the communication cards. Everything is presented holistically and in a communicative context, just as it is done in real life.



The Gold List method

The Gold List is a gentler alternative to intensive columns: you write down target words in a relaxed setting (music, comfortable chair), mark which ones you'll likely recall, and carry forward only those you can't recall. It's low-pressure, regular, and surprisingly effective for long-term retention. If you want a deeper explanation, look for resources by Lydia Makova who explains the technique well.

Goldlist Method

- Notebooks with columns of words and phrases of vocabulary to learn.
- Link in lecture text.

You write down words and columns knowing that you're

Putting it all together in your Second Language Acquisition Course: Vocabulary

Build a weekly routine that centres on input with scheduled opportunities for output. Example week:

- Daily: 30–60 minutes of input (audio, videos, reading).
- 2× per week: 30–60 minute conversation lessons to convert input into output.
- 2–3 short study sessions: vocabulary columns or Gold List for task-focused chunks.
- Ongoing: task cards for immediate communicative practice.

Track progress through tasks. When you can't complete a task, that gap gives you a targeted reason to learn more meaningful chunks and recycle them into new input.

Conclusion

Design your own language course: acquire vocabulary around meaningful tasks, strong input habits and deliberate output. Focus on chunks, keep a 2:1 input-to-

output ratio, and use practical tools — vocabulary columns, communication cards and the Gold List — to turn passive knowledge into real communicative ability. Start with one task (restaurant or taxi), build a small ring of cards, and schedule regular input sessions; you'll see progress faster than with detached word lists.

If you want to follow the full lesson visually, watch the original video summarised here to see examples and demonstrations.

5 Weeks of No and Low Prep Fun

Need quick, engaging activities for your class? This free guide includes **25 no-prep and low-prep ideas** to save time while keeping students excited about learning.

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