

(26) VOCABULARY NOTEBOOKS

How students can create beautiful vocabulary notebooks

Language focus	Vocabulary enrichment in terms of quantity and quality Learner training: active vs. passive study
Duration	Lesson 1: Introducing the strategy – 10 mins. One of the first lessons in a course. Lesson 2: Goal setting – 15 mins. The project lasts the full course.
Materials	An existing vocabulary notebook or a blank notebook. A PPT of sample pages would be useful. A PPT of learning goals if this is also being included. Some example pages: www.versatile.pub/vocabulary-notebooks . See also Pinterest.com.
Assumptions	Students understand that storing their vocabulary creatively will help them develop their general language competence.
Application	This long-term project is relevant to both ESP and general English.

Introduction

This is a long-term project to help learners to enrich their vocabulary through creating their own book full of visual representations of the relationships between their key vocabulary items. As one of the most important British linguists of the 20th century said, *You shall know a word by the company it keeps* (Firth 1957). This company is lexical and semantic: see the reference to paradigmatic and syntagmatic word relationships on p.158.

Instead of writing a list of adjectives that describe moods and feelings, students label smileys. Instead of writing a list of words that describe weather, students write them on a cline (p.171) or stick some weather forecasts from the newspaper into their notebook and annotate them. Instead of trying to find L1 equivalents of

similar words, students write their features into a Venn diagram (p.169) or a table. When writing the words that have various types of relationships with a key word, they create a word rose (p.158). Students can paste in pictures for rich labelling (p.166). Students can print out and stick in various types of word clouds from VersaText (p.142). Chapter 6 contains many more examples.

A second aspect to the vocabulary notebook is the pages devoted to types of words. Students can start a page that contains phrasal verbs with the particle *out*, for example. This is a better way to study phrasal verbs than starting with the verbs. The page might have one or two items on it at the outset, but students will return to this page during the year to add to it. The students might have a page for delexical verbs that use *take*, e.g., *take a photo*, *take a shower*. They might develop a page of words and phrases related to *one*, e.g., *ones*, *the first*, *the only*, *you're the one*. The students can copy the sentence where they met these words onto the page as well.

A third aspect is the DIY Quiz as described on p.98. Some time after creating a page, the students can revisit it and write a few quiz questions based on it.

Teachers introduce these techniques, and plenty more, as the course progresses, and encourages the students to think of their own ways of representing relationships.

Lesson 1

Step 1. Introduce the basic concept and rationale, perhaps with a PPT.

- Explain what is involved in creating a vocabulary notebook.
- Show different types of notebook pages. Maybe the teacher has a book of their own to show the students.

Step 2. Ask the learners to buy a new notebook, coloured pens and pencils, scissors and glue. And to bring them to the next lesson.

Note: My preference is for a notebook with blank pages only. But a folder in which students insert pages has advantages too.

Lesson 2

Step 1. Ask the students to do the following with their new notebooks:

- Number the pages with odd numbers on the right.
- Leave the first page for a title page – they can create this in their own time.
- Leave several pages blank at the beginning for a table of contents – they will add to this during the course of the project.

- Leave the next few pages blank for students to write their learning goals.
- The first page they start working on will be about p.10.

Step 2. Introduce learning goals: see the section starting on p.88. Writing goals can be started in class and/or set as homework.

Step 3. Do a vocabulary activity that has a visual representation that students can draw into their new Notebooks. See the index for many examples.

In later lessons

- The learners show the teacher their notebooks from time to time. The teacher can see if the learners are on the right track.
- The teacher does not need to read these closely. Tell the students that this is their own creation and it is not your business to pry.
- The teacher may make suggestions, give advice along the way.



The teacher can ask the students to show their notebooks regularly, perhaps once a month, perhaps in a book fair format.

A book fair

In a **book fair**, the students organise the tables in the middle of the classroom, without chairs. Students put the books they have been creating on their centre table for everyone to wander around and admire. This picture was taken during the British Council summer teaching training course in Suzhou 2019.

The Versatile Blank Book

Six months after the publication of this book, the *Versatile Blank Book* was also published. This is a vocabulary notebook for students that contains 65 pages of information about language and self-study activities such as those referred to here. And 100 pages for the students to write and draw on. Open the webpage using the QR for more information.

