



# 36 NO-PREP VOCABULARY ACTIVITIES

for instant use  
with students of all ages

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# LOOK IT UP AND WRITE A SENTENCE? NO, THANKS.

Select from any of these 36  
engaging, effortful  
vocabulary review activities.  
No prep work required,  
just basic classroom supplies  
and some words.

Need some words?  
Head to [www.MakeYourPoint.us](http://www.MakeYourPoint.us)  
to find hundreds of words worth teaching,  
with easy-to-understand definitions  
and much more.  
Sign up there for a free ready-to-teach lesson  
in your inbox daily.

FOR QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS, CONTACT:

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# WHEN YOUR GOAL IS LEARNING: BUILDING KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTIONS

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Select from the following activities when your students need to discover words and build a deep understanding of them.

## 1. SINGING AND SPELLING

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Gather the hard-to-spell words.  
Look at a word and focus on its spelling.  
Cover it up.  
Empty out your working memory:  
sing a chorus and verse of any song  
while imagining a music video.  
Now write the word down.  
Spelled it right? Move to the next word.  
Spelled it wrong? Repeat.

## 2. WHAT'S UP WITH THAT SPELLING?

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Gather the hard-to-spell words.  
Look them up on [etymonline.com](http://etymonline.com)  
and read about where the words came from.  
Try to figure out if the word's history or roots  
give a reason for the spelling. Take notes.

## 3. PRONUNCIATION PERFECTION

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Gather the hard-to-say words.  
Use an online dictionary  
to hear and repeat the audio pronunciations.  
Empty out your working memory:  
try to recall everything you've said out loud today.  
Now read each word aloud and then  
replay the dictionary audio to check.  
Said anything wrong? Repeat.

## 4. HELP OUT A DYSLEXIC FRIEND

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Gather the hard-to-say, hard-to-read words.

Make a diagram for each one  
that breaks the word into syllables  
and the syllables into sounds.

Example for “galumph:”

g...a...l  
u...m...ph

## 5. EXPLAIN LIKE I’M 5

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Select a group of words for review.

Express the definitions  
in the simplest way possible.

Try to use only one-syllable words.

## 6. THE GOLDBLOCKS OF DEFINITIONS

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Select a word for review.

Express the definition in your own words.

Now create 2 inferior definitions:

1, too vague, and 1, too narrow.

Explain why yours is better than both.

Repeat with 2 more inferior definitions:

1, too negative, and 1, too positive.

Again, explain why yours is the best.

## 7. FLEXIBLE PARTS OF SPEECH

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Select a group of words for review.  
Make a four-column chart with the labels  
“Nouns,” “Adjectives,” “Adverbs,” and “Verbs.”  
Sort your words into the chart;  
each word gets its own row.  
Fill in any possible other cells for each word.  
Example: your word is “mollify,” a verb.  
Fill in “mollification” for the noun,  
“mollified” and “mollifying” for the adjectives,  
and “N/A” for the adverb.  
If you’re not sure, guess first,  
then check a dictionary.

## 8. HEY, YOU CAN’T SAY THAT

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Select a word for review.  
Look at the definition  
and underline the most important words in it.  
Working alone? Express the definition  
without saying any of the underlined words.  
Working with a partner or group?  
Get them to guess which word it is  
as you describe it  
without saying the underlined words.

## 9. BATTLE OF THE DICTIONARIES

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Gather several words to review.  
Look up each in 2 or more dictionaries.  
Decide which dictionary wins for each word,  
based on the clarity and completeness of the definition.

## 10. CREATE THE CONTINUUM

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Select one word to review.  
Write it in the middle of a line on your paper.  
Add 2 words to each side to create a continuum of meaning.  
Your continuum might go from least to most intense,  
or from negative to positive.  
Example: polish, fix, **palliate**, maintain, mess up.

## 11. PLOT THE CONTINUA

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Select a group of words to review.  
Using sticky notes or index cards,  
or just copying the words onto paper,  
set up two meaningful endpoints of a continuum  
and place each word along that line.  
Example continuum 1:  
simplest to most complex meaning.  
Example 2: least to most likely to pop up in a blog  
about your favorite hobby.  
Example 3: most to least appropriate ways  
to describe your best friend.



## 12. LOTS OF LITTLE LISTS

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Select one word to review.

Make up 3-5 little lists that it belongs to, with 3-5 additional words per list.

Example: “bandy.”

List 1: Sophisticated verbs.

Bandy, digress, pilfer, advocate.

List 2: Rhymes.

Bandy, candy, dandy, handy.

List 3: Things I do with friends.

Bandy, laugh, confide, gossip.

## 13. COPIOUS CATEGORIES

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Select at least 10 words to review.

Using sticky notes or index cards, or just copying the words onto paper, set up meaningful categories and divide up the words.

Examples: nouns/verbs/adjectives;

happy/sad words;

casual/formal words;

easy/hard words;

fancy/plain words;

funny/serious words.



## 14. PICTURE THIS

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Select a word to review.  
Use Google Images and Microsoft Paint  
to create a collage representing the word.  
Explain why each image belongs in your collage.

## 15. PHRASES AND PATTERNS

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Gather several words to review.  
For each, look them up on [vocabulary.com](http://vocabulary.com),  
[news.google.com](http://news.google.com), or both.  
Look for the 2 or 3 most common  
phrases and sentence patterns  
that people use with each word.  
Boil them down to templates.  
Examples for “commiserate:”  
1. “Someone commiserates with someone else.”  
2. “Groups of people commiserate.”

## 16. WORDS IN THE NEWS

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Gather several words to review.  
Search for them on [news.google.com](http://news.google.com).  
Select a few sentences for each word.  
Explain what those sentences mean.  
Now try using the words  
to describe other current events.

## 17. WORDS IN STORIES

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Gather several words to review.  
Search for them on [vocabulary.com](http://vocabulary.com).  
Under “Usage Examples,” select “Fiction.”  
Explain what those examples mean.  
Now try using the words  
to describe stories you’ve read.

## 18. MY PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

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Select a word for review.  
Use it to describe something you did,  
something you’re doing,  
and something you hope to do.  
Is it impossible?  
Then describe something you never did,  
something you aren’t doing,  
and something you hope to never do.

## 19. WELL, A FUNNY THING HAPPENED

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Select words for review.  
Think of the last time you and your friends laughed.  
Retell what happened,  
using as many of the review words as possible.

## 20. #VOCAB

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Select a word for review.  
Write 3 social media posts  
with that word as the hashtag.

Example:  
“Just got my Harvard acceptance letter. #cachet”

## 21. ROLES, RELATIONSHIPS, AND RECREATION

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Select a word for review.  
Use it to describe your roles in life  
(student, professional, volunteer, babysitter...)  
and your relationships (with family members, friends,  
teachers, peers, people you date...)  
and your recreational hobbies.

## 22. WOULD YOU RATHER...?

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Select two words at a time to review.  
For each, use the word to make up  
the worst possible thing that could happen.  
Consider which of your two situations you'd choose.

Example for “abstain” and “cajole:”  
Would you rather abstain from food for a day  
or cajole your worst ex into  
getting back together with you?

## 23. MEET THE FAMILY

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Select a word for review.  
Look it up on [etymonline.com](http://etymonline.com).  
Discover the word's "parents"  
(the roots it came from)  
and figure out if it has any siblings or cousins  
(related words with the same roots.)  
Draw a family tree.



## WHEN YOUR GOAL IS STUDYING: RETRIEVING AND APPLYING KNOWLEDGE

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Select from the following activities when your students need to review and practice the words they've already encountered.

## 24. GOOD OLD-FASHIONED RECALL

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Select a group of words for review.  
Arrange the words in one column  
and the definitions in another,  
or put them on flashcards  
(words on one side, definitions on the other.)  
(Don't include the word in your definition.  
For "chronic," write "lasting a long time,"  
not "something chronic lasts a long time.")  
Empty out your working memory:  
try to list your family's birthdays in reverse order.  
Now look at the definitions and recall the words,  
or vice versa.  
If you're using flashcards, shuffle in between rounds.

## 25. EXEMPLARY EXAMPLES

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Select a group of words for review.  
Arrange the words in one column  
and a good example for each word in another,  
or put them on flashcards  
(words on one side, examples on the other.)  
(Don't include the word in your example.  
For "chronic," write "a headache that goes on for a year,"  
not "a chronic headache that goes on for a year.")  
Empty out your working memory:  
draw a mental sketch of your house or apartment  
and visualize everything in each room.  
Now look at the examples and recall the words.  
If you're using flashcards, shuffle in between rounds.



## 26. IT'S OPPOSITE DAY

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Select a group of words for review  
and list them in a column.  
In another column, list opposites.  
Not all words will have exact opposites,  
so use phrases if needed.  
Empty out your working memory:  
calculate how many days you've been alive.  
Now look at the opposites and recall the words,  
or vice versa.

## 27. MEMORY/CONCENTRATION

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Select about 10 words for review.  
Using small note cards or scraps of paper,  
put the word on one piece of paper  
and its definition, example,  
or opposite on the other.  
Shuffle the papers  
and place them all face down in a grid.  
Find pairs that belong together  
by looking at just two at a time.

## 28. BINGO!

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Select 25 words to review  
with a partner or group.  
Every player draws his own grid...



with 5 columns and 5 rows.  
(Do fewer rows  
if you only have 20 or 15 words to review.)  
Organize the words into 5 meaningful categories;  
according to your categories,  
write one word into each cell.  
Every player's organization will be different.  
On separate scraps of paper,  
write the corresponding definitions, examples,  
OR antonyms for the words.  
Use coins or smaller paper scraps  
for the game play.  
Take turns drawing and reading a scrap,  
identifying the word it goes with,  
and covering that word in your grid.  
The first to cover a full row or column  
is the winner.

## 29. QUIZ SHOW

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Draw a grid with column headings  
like "Define," "Give another part of speech,"  
"Give the opposite," and  
"Use in a sentence that shows meaning."  
Fill each column with point values  
like 100, 200... to 500.  
Take turns picking a value and column.  
Your partner or game master  
gives you an easier word for the smaller point values,  
harder for the higher ones.  
Claim the points if you get the question right.  
The winner has the most points  
by the time all the points have been claimed. ...

To play alone,  
arrange the words in their cells ahead of time,  
then use a timer,  
trying to collect all the points in record time.

## 30. WAR

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Select a large group of words for review.  
Write each word to be reviewed  
on a separate card or scrap of paper.  
Shuffle and divide into 2 stacks  
(more if you're playing with 3+ people or teams.)  
Pit the top card in each stack against each other  
and decide which word wins  
in terms of strength and power of expression.  
Say why if you're playing solo.  
Debate until you reach agreement  
if you're playing in a group.  
The winning stack (if you're playing solo)  
or the winning person or group  
claims all the cards in that round.  
The game ends when all the cards are claimed.  
The winner has the most cards.

## 31. FONTS, SIZES, AND COLORS

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Select a group of words for review  
and type them into your word processing program.  
Consider each word's meaning,  
then give that word an appropriate look  
by changing its font, size, and color. ...

Justify your choices.

Example:

**QUASH** is a bold, powerful, mean and ugly word.

## 32. THE EDUCATED AUCTIONEER, THE SMOOTH-TALKING LAWYER, OR THE TALK SHOW HOST

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Don't look at your vocab notes.

Play one of the roles listed, or create your own.

Start talking to your imagined audience,  
trying to use the words you've learned recently.

Imagine you'll sell your item,

win your case,

or finish your show

as soon as you've used

at least 5 (or 10) of your words.

## 33. SEW YOUR PARACHUTE ON THE WAY DOWN

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Don't look at your vocab notes.

Draw a large parachute, like an empty balloon,  
on paper or a whiteboard.

Set a timer for one or two minutes

and try to fill up the whole shape with written information  
about your recently learned words.

Such as: words, definitions,

other forms in different parts of speech,

examples, opposites, etc.

If your parachute still has empty spaces

when the timer goes off, splat. Try again.

## 34. HERE'S THE STORY

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Don't look at your vocab notes.  
Think of a movie you watched  
or a book you read recently.  
Start retelling the plot to yourself.  
As you do, try to call to mind  
all the words you've recently learned.  
Use them all in your retelling,  
even if you have to be silly and say "not" a lot,  
as in "The main guy is really awkward  
and does NOT have any *magnetism*."

## 35. HI, KIDS

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Don't look at your vocab notes.  
Imagine some younger kids ask you  
to teach them some smart words.  
Recall some words.  
Explain what they mean, how to say them,  
how to spell them, and how to use them.  
Your audience is young  
and needs clear, simple, repeated explanations.

## 36. TESTING, TESTING

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Look at a copy of an old vocab test.  
Use it as a template  
to write a new test on words you recently learned. ...

Now empty out your working memory:  
list 5 jobs you never want to have and why.  
(Or, put your test away until tomorrow.)  
Now try taking your test.  
Be sure to grade yourself afterward,  
referring to your notes as needed.

## \*. I'M A FREE SPIRIT

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Create your own vocabulary studying activity or game.  
Explain it to your teacher  
and justify how it will help you think actively  
to build knowledge  
or practice recalling your knowledge.  
With your teacher's approval, go for it.

# **GREAT! NOW HOW ABOUT SOME WORDS TO STUDY?**

For hundreds of words worth studying, with easy-to-understand definitions, plenty of examples, and thought-provoking review questions, head to the archives of Make Your Point, the free daily vocabulary lesson, at [www.MakeYourPoint.us](http://www.MakeYourPoint.us).

You can also sign up to receive a new ready-to-teach lesson each day in your inbox.

Please share this ebook with your colleagues.

Happy teaching!

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