

Listen
& learn

THE 500
MOST COMMON
ENGLISH WORDS

SECOND EDITION



HILARY PLATT

LISTEN AND LEARN THE 500 MOST COMMON ENGLISH WORDS

Second Edition

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Illustrated by
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adept  **english**

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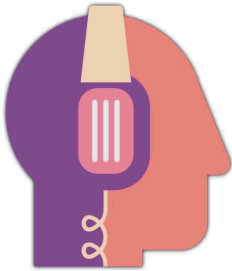
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Preface

USING THE MOST COMMON 500 WORDS, 8 EXTRA WORDS AND ONE PHRASE



In the chapters of the 500 Most Common Words, I use only the 500 most common words in English. This preface and the introduction, use a few other words just to help me get across to you what I mean. But I will keep those words to the very few. And at the end of this book, you will find two more chapters, which use only the 600 most common words in English – just to help you grow the number of words you know.

So the words I've used in this preface, which are not included in the most common 500 words are these:-

- chapter
- preface
- introduction
- acquisition
- fluent
- immersive

- immersed
- context
- [foreign]

and the phrase 'the most bang for your buck'.

That's so that if you need to look up these words, you can.

So, the Preface. The idea of the 500 Most Common Words came from a number of places. One of them to be sure, was the experience of just how difficult it is to learn a new language. I'm not just talking here about being able to order food on your holiday. I'm talking about actual language acquisition, where you can understand and speak, have a conversation with another person or read a book, just because you enjoy it. Where you can read, write, speak and understand, without having to think about it.

I went to a very good school in the UK, and my experience there formed who I am and has helped me in all kinds of areas in my life. However, even though I studied languages in school, I found that I could not understand or speak the languages I'd learnt in a 'live' conversation, when I visited the country where the language was spoken. Being able to do this takes time and hard work, lots of it. And the way that languages are learned in school does not make time for this kind of learning, where you read and hear the language used so much, that you understand without thinking about it.

The only time this does happen is when the person learning goes to live in the country, whose language they are trying to learn. In the UK, this only happens, if you continue to study a language after you have completed school. Those who continue to study a language by living in a different country for their 'year out' will usually be able to become fluent. Being fluent means that you have full language acquisition and the language comes easily, like your first language.

But the fact is that most people don't become fluent in a language because they don't have this time, this experience of building up their language, learning carefully, step by step. If you don't go on to study

a language after you complete school, then learning a language like this may not seem important to you, until the time when you find you need it. So many people stay with knowing some words, knowing perhaps some sentences in a different language, or being able to 'get by' when they're in a different country.

Speaking or reading their second language remains a difficult experience, like climbing a mountain, rather than something that they find easy. Many people never experience that nice feeling which comes with that greater understanding. If you hear and see the words enough times, you get to know them so well that you become fluent. This means that the words just come into your head – you don't even have to think about it. You can enjoy the written word or enjoy a conversation just as well. Reading and speaking a language is easy, if you are fluent. This is what we mean by language acquisition.

This problem interests me and it has taken more study in order to understand it. Why is language learning so difficult? What are the differences between first language acquisition, which happens as a part of our nature, normally as a part of our growing up and second language acquisition which seems so difficult? This has been an area of interest for me. What seems to be very important is what we call 'immersive' language experience – like that each of us has when we learn our first language. 'Immersive' means we are 'immersed', as though we are under water. We hear and see nothing but our own language.

If we want to understand and be understood, our own language is all we have when we're children. There is no other way. But given that most of us cannot have that complete, immersive experience when learning our second or third language, how shall we go forward? Adept English hopes to give language learners something of that immersive language experience.

And why the 500 words? My children have been to school in the UK and each has become able to read and write well, so that they're free to get on with the rest of their schooling and their lives, without being held back by difficulties in reading or writing. Of course, UK

schools work in the main on reading and writing, as English for most children is first language, so listening, understanding and speaking English are not a problem, and are learnt as children go through normal life. But for children in school in the UK, ages 4-11 years, who are working towards being able to read and write well, each year group has 'word lists'.

These are lists of all the words which a child must know well – to be able to read and use with correct spelling in their written English. And using word lists like this comes from much experience, a lot of lessons learned by schools. Schools do it this way because it works. And it works because children learn the most common words first, the words which make the biggest difference to their reading and their writing. To use words you might hear in America, you could say it gives 'the most bang for your buck', if you like. And it is this idea of making sure that the most common words are learned first, which sits behind the 500 words. These are the words which you will use most of all.

The fact is that the most commonly used 500 words make up more than 50% of most spoken or written English. So I'm certain it is a good plan to work especially on these most commonly used words. Also I wanted to use the rule which we use for the rest of Adept English – that of 'learning through context', learning words in a meaningful context, where you can work out what words mean from how they're being used. Also important is that the same words are heard lots of times, so that they stay in your head, so that they are easier to remember. It was quite a test also for me, to write interesting material, using only these 500 words. But I enjoyed doing it and I hope you enjoy what came out of my hard work!

In the 500 Most Common Words Course, I set out to make language learning easier for normal people, who are short on time, but who want to learn English or build on the English language base they already have. The Most Common 500 Words helps you work on what words you need most. Because you can speak with people in different languages online, there has never been a better time to learn

a foreign language. I hope that the 500 words will play a useful part in your learning of the English language.

Hilary Platt

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