



MEI NEWS

ISSUE 7 • SPRING 2016

THE FRONT PAGE

It's Spring Again

The poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote of spring that it's the time of year when "The earth is like a child that knows poems by heart." It's the season when everyone wants to spend time outside, enjoying earth's colorful outpouring. The quad on campus fills up with students studying, sleeping, playing, or just enjoying the sun.

Here at MEI, we look back at the passing semester, say goodbye to our recent graduates and hello to those students coming to join us this summer.

In this, our Spring 2016 issue, we celebrate the two-year anniversary of our newsletter with three features to help you with your English language learning.

The first, this issue's Vocabulary Corner, offers insights into building your word power by working with collocations, connotation, and context.

The second, a feature on "What Good Language Learners Do," gives you ten practices that have been proven to help language learners gain fluency and confidence in a new language.

In the third, we revisit the theme of service learning, a great way to improve your English. You'll discover the many opportunities available on campus to make new friends, feel more connected to the community and - of course - to improve your English!

We hope you enjoy this newsletter. To all our alumni from last semester - good luck! And to our new students coming in this semester - have a great summer!

Your Friends at MEI

If you have photos of you and your MEI classmates at MEI events or traveling together that you would like to submit to the newsletter, send them to ask-mei@umd.edu with the word "photos" in the subject line.

Visit us at mei.umd.edu or on Facebook at facebook.com/meiusa



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THE ENKINDLED **SPRING**

D. H. LAWRENCE, 1885 - 1930

This spring as it comes bursts up in bonfires green,
Wild puffing of emerald trees, and flame-filled bushes,
Thorn-blossom lifting in wreaths of smoke between
Where the wood fumes up and the watery,
flickering rushes.

I am amazed at this spring, this conflagration
Of green fires lit on the soil of the earth, this blaze
Of growing, and sparks that puff in wild gyration,
Faces of people streaming across my gaze.

And I, what fountain of fire am I among
This leaping combustion of spring? My spirit is tossed
About like a shadow buffeted in the throng
Of flames, a shadow that's gone astray, and is lost.



WHAT'S UP AT MEI

UPCOMING DATES AND EVENTS

- April 13** 1:00-3:00 **Cherry Blossom Festival**
3:00-4:30 **International Coffee Hour, Dorchester Hall**
- April 20** 1:00-3:00 **Trip to the National Zoo**
3:00-4:30 **International Coffee Hour, Dorchester Hall**
- April 27** 12:30-2:00 **Ropes/Challenge Course**
3:00-4:30 **International Coffee Hour, Dorchester Hall**
- May 11** 10:30-2:30 **Final Conferences with your teachers**
3:00-5:00 **Final MEI Ceremony**
- June 6** 9:00-12:00 **New Student Testing for the Summer 2016**
- June 7** 9:00-3:00 **Classes begin for Summer 2016**

THE MEI

VOCABULARY CORNER

Every issue, we look at a specific topic connected to English grammar or vocabulary.
In this issue and the next, we look more closely at how to increase your vocabulary.

If you have a question you would like us to address in a future column, send it to us at ask-mei@umd.edu.

LET'S BUILD OUR WORD POWER

BY RAY SMITH

Most people would agree that one of the most important keys to academic success is having a large vocabulary. However, there is more to word power than just knowing a lot of words. You also have to know a lot of information about the words that you know. In this column, we will examine the importance of collocations, connotation, and context.

Collocations

supplies

Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines "supplies" as "things (such as food, equipment, fuel, etc.) that are needed for a particular purpose and that will be used by a particular person or group." While this definition may be helpful, it may not give you a totally clear idea of what "supplies" really means or how it is used. To gain a fuller understanding of the word, it is helpful to look at what words collocate (go together with) supplies. Here are some examples:

- **school supplies** - paper, notebooks, folders, pens, pencils
- **office supplies** - copier paper, ink cartridges, pens, pencils, staples, sticky notes
- **cleaning supplies** - soap, bleach, latex gloves
- **medical supplies** - bandages, aspirin / painkillers, disinfectant
- **beauty supplies** - shampoo, soap, makeup, nail polish
- **emergency supplies** - bottled water, canned food, batteries

crave

The dictionary (again, Merriam-Webster's) defines "crave" as "to want greatly" or "to yearn for". But how is the word really used? Again, looking at some collocations will be helpful:

- crave chocolate
- crave sugar
- crave sweets
- crave dessert
- crave attention
- crave approval
- crave intimacy

As you can see, **crave** is frequently used to describe a desire for food, especially sweet food. The word is also frequently used to describe emotional needs.

As an international student living here in the US, you may sometimes crave food from your home country or your hometown!

Connotation

The connotation of a word refers to the meaning of a word that is suggested or implied beyond the basic dictionary definition. A connotation can often be positive or negative. Let's look at a couple of examples:

skinny/slim

The words **skinny** and **slim** are both synonyms of thin. So, are the two words interchangeable? In other words, can you always substitute one word for another? The answer is no, you can't. This is because **skinny** and **slim** have different connotations (implied meanings). Look at these examples:

- Mario had been in bed sick for almost a month. When he finally came back to work, he looked pale and skinny.

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THE MEI VOCABULARY CORNER *(continued)*

- When the prisoners-of-war returned home after the conflict, everybody was shocked at how skinny they looked. It was clear that they hadn't been fed well in prison.
- Yesterday I saw Julia for the first time in over a year. She looked great! After joining the gym and going on a diet, she was really slim.
- People who walk on a daily basis and who eat a plant-based diet tend to be slim, whereas those who drive everywhere and eat unhealthy foods are more likely to be overweight.

Do you see a pattern? **Skippy** has negative connotations - bad health, unattractiveness, not eating enough. On the other hand, **slim** has positive connotations - being attractive, good health, exercising, taking care of your body.

Context

rife

Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines "rife" as "*prevalent especially to an increasing degree.*"

Again, the dictionary definition of the word is a good place to start; however, your understanding of the word will be helped by looking at the contexts (situations) in which the word is used:

- The state government is *rife with corruption*.
- The design for the new building is *rife with problems*.
- Some areas of the city are *rife with crime*.
- The office was *rife with rumors* that the boss was going to resign.
- Finance newspapers are *rife with speculation* about the future of the stock market.

Again, do you see any patterns? **Rife** is often used to describe bad situations, such as those involving corruption and crime. It is also frequently used to describe situations where there is some uncertainty, leading to rumors and speculation.

Notice also which word comes after rife in all of the sentences: **with**. In fact, it is very common to find **rife** followed by **with**. In the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) at <http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>, you can find 200 random samples of the word **rife** used in context. Among the 200 samples, you can find the combination **rife with** 148 times. So we can guess that "rife" is followed by "with" about 75% of the time!

FEATURE STORY

GIVING BACK: VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES IN THE AREA

ADAPTED FROM AN ARTICLE BY JULIE LAKE, PH.D. THAT FIRST APPEARED IN OUR SPRING 2015 NEWSLETTER

WHAT IS VOLUNTEER WORK?

Alice Walker, a famous novelist and peace activist, said "Activism is my rent for living on the planet" (https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/7380.Alice_Walker). "Activism" means being active in bringing about change in the society. She called that "rent for living on the planet." You probably pay rent for living in your apartment. So what do you think Ms. Walker means?

I think she is telling us that it is our duty to make the world a better place. How can we do that? One way is to volunteer for causes that we care about, such as ending homelessness or protecting the planet from environmental destruction.

When you volunteer, you agree to work without being paid for your work. Many Americans volunteer because they are passionate about helping to solve a problem they see in their community. Leonardo DiCaprio, a film actor, is one example. DiCaprio is very concerned about environmental issues, and since 2000 he has been working in various ways to protect the planet. He serves on boards of environmental organizations, hosts Earth Day celebrations, and helped start The Leonardo DiCaprio Fund at California Community Foundation to educate people about different environmental problems. DiCaprio is just one example of volunteerism in the United States.

WHY SHOULD MEI STUDENTS VOLUNTEER?

You might be asking yourself why you should volunteer. The answer is: Volunteering has many benefits. Not only does volunteer work benefit your community, but it also can help you as an English language learner improve your language skills. When you volunteer, you interact with many different people, which can help improve your listening and speaking skills. Volunteering can also help you improve your understanding of the culture. And most volunteers gain a great sense of satisfaction from their work.

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WHAT VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES ARE AVAILABLE AT UMD?

There are many volunteer opportunities at the University of Maryland. You can look into OrgSync, where you can find organizations like the Blue Drop Initiative (BDI). BDI works with middle school and high school children through peer mentoring. Point your browser to http://orgsync.umd.edu/browse_student_organizations, and check out “Browse Student Organizations”, and “Advocacy/Service.”

The organization that has the most opportunities on campus is the Organization for Leadership & Community-Service Learning (LCSL). If you are interested, Alice Bishop, the Program Administrative Specialist for LCSL, recommends you visit their website (http://thestamp.umd.edu/leadership_community_service-learning). If you have any questions about volunteer opportunities, email Alice Bishop directly (ambishop@umd.edu).

Some service opportunities include:

- **TERP Service Days** - TerpService Days are days of service targeted at the campus community. There are two more TerpService Days scheduled this semester: April 9 and April 23. For more information, contact LCSL at 301-405-9044 or by email at lclassistant@umd.edu.
- **A Wider Circle** has the mission to end poverty, and they have plenty of tasks that volunteers can help with. Find out more at <http://awidercircle.org/get-involved/>.
- **Cultural Academy for Excellence (CAFÉ)** is a youth development organization that supports children’s learning through arts and academic enrichment. Volunteers can help students of all ages. Find out more at <http://cafeyouth.org/>.

Check out all the great volunteer opportunities at your fingertips! Getting involved in your University of Maryland community will help you:

- make new friends,
- feel more connected to the community, and
- improve your English!

To learn more visit:

http://thestamp.umd.edu/leadership_community_service-learning/service_opportunities.

FEATURE STORY

WHAT GOOD LANGUAGE LEARNERS DO

BY CHARLES DUQUETTE

There's no such thing as a being born good at languages. However, there are people who learn languages well. But that has nothing to do with them being naturally good at it. It has to do with their attitude and the way they approach their learning.

1. GOOD LANGUAGE LEARNERS AREN'T AFRAID TO TAKE RISKS.

A Dutch friend of mine speaks English, Spanish, German, French, and, of course, Dutch. I asked her once what she thought was most important in learning a language. She answered immediately: courage.

Good language learners are willing to face the fear of making mistakes. They experiment and take risks. For example, they try out different ways of learning vocabulary until finding the way that suits them best. They are not afraid of making mistakes because they know that with every mistake, they gain a small victory toward improving their language.

2. GOOD LANGUAGE LEARNERS FIND A STYLE OF LEARNING THAT SUITS THEM.

You may already have heard or read about learning styles. The idea is that everyone has their own style of learning that suits them best. You want to figure out how you learn best and apply your preferred learning styles to your language learning.

When you learn something new, do you like to talk about it or think about it? Do you prefer to get new information in pictures or words? Do you find it easier to learn facts or to learn concepts? These are just a few of the questions that help you discover how you best learn. Visit <http://www.engr.ncsu.edu/learningstyles/ilsweb.html> for more.

3. GOOD LANGUAGE LEARNERS ARE ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN THEIR LEARNING PROCESS.

Good language learners take responsibility for their own learning. Besides regular language classes, they create opportunities to use the language. They know practice is very important. And they are willing to take risks and to appear foolish if necessary.

Good language learners are independent. They do not expect to learn English just by sitting in the classroom, and they do not rely on their teacher for all their language learning. They are organized and active. They look for creative ways both inside and outside the classroom to test out what they have learned.

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4. GOOD LANGUAGE LEARNERS TRY TO FIGURE OUT HOW THE LANGUAGE WORKS.

Good language learners try to understand the language as a system. They pay attention to form and look for patterns. They develop good techniques for improving their pronunciation, learning grammar and vocabulary. They welcome mistakes as a way of learning more about the language.

5. GOOD LANGUAGE LEARNERS KNOW THAT LANGUAGE IS USED TO COMMUNICATE.

Good language learners pay attention to meaning. They have good techniques to practice listening, speaking, reading, and writing. They push themselves to speak and try to become fluent. They look for opportunities to talk with native speakers.

6. GOOD LANGUAGE LEARNERS ARE LIKE GOOD DETECTIVES.

Good language learners are always looking for clues to help them understand how the language works. They make guesses and ask people to correct them if they are wrong. They compare what they say with what others say. They keep a record of what they have learned and think about it while they monitor themselves.

7. GOOD LANGUAGE LEARNERS TRY TO THINK IN THE LANGUAGE.

It may not be easy at first, but thinking in English is worth cultivating as a vital skill that will improve all areas of your language learning. To help you think in English, carry on a dialogue with yourself in English when walking along, sitting on a bus, or taking a break from other studies. Use English whenever and wherever you can.

8. GOOD LANGUAGE LEARNERS REALIZE THAT LANGUAGE LEARNING IS NOT EASY.

Good language learners know that it takes time and effort to become proficient, and that there will be periods where progress seems very slow. They are realistic in setting learning goals. They are able to assess their own strengths and weaknesses, and to evaluate their own approach to learning. If their learning method isn't working, then they find a better method.

9. GOOD LANGUAGE LEARNERS ARE ALSO GOOD CULTURE LEARNERS.

Good language learners have a good attitude toward the culture where the language is spoken. They know that learning a language means learning the culture as well. They learn the customs of nonverbal behavior and the important values of the culture. They learn how to behave in stores and restaurants, how to behave with strangers, and how to behave in society. They learn courtesy conventions; for example, they learn that "How are you?" is a greeting formula in English, not a real question. A good language learner knows that language and culture are two sides of the same coin.

10. GOOD LANGUAGE LEARNERS HAVE A LONG TERM COMMITMENT TO LANGUAGE LEARNING.

Good language learners work through their feelings of frustration and their lack of confidence. They are able to cope with the challenges of language learning; they can live with having good language days and bad language days. They don't let themselves give up, instead reminding themselves how important it is to keep going - even when they don't feel like it.

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