

Topic Page: [Dictionaries & Thesauri](#)

Summary Article: **What is a thesaurus and how is it used?**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Background

English students are encouraged to use a wide vocabulary in their writing. This adds interest and variety to a piece of written work, and gains extra marks in an examination. A wide vocabulary will also help in reading and understanding most texts.

Full answer

Developing a wide vocabulary There are several ways for students to increase their vocabulary, including reading widely. One of the most useful ways to improve vocabulary knowledge when writing is to use a **thesaurus**.

Using a thesaurus A thesaurus is similar to a dictionary but, instead of providing meanings of words, a thesaurus provides a list of words with the same or similar meaning. For example, the entry for the word 'big' in a thesaurus might include 'large', 'sizeable', 'huge', and 'massive', as well as many other options.

Regularly using a thesaurus will help students expand their vocabulary. For example, a student may check his or her writing before completion and find that the word 'good' is used four times. A thesaurus provides many alternatives to this commonly used word. The student can replace 'good' with four different words, adding **variety** to the work.

Points to be careful of when using a thesaurus It is important to ensure that the replacement word has the right meaning. Not all of the words given in the thesaurus will be appropriate in every sentence. Sometimes the word may not make sense in a particular context, or the meaning may not be exactly the same, or the emphasis may be wrong. For example, the entry for 'lovely' may include 'wonderful, beautiful, attractive, and enjoyable'. In the sentence 'We had a lovely time', 'lovely' could be replaced by 'wonderful' or 'enjoyable', but not by 'attractive' or 'beautiful'. Using a dictionary with a thesaurus can help to avoid this.

In short

- A wide vocabulary is important when writing and reading English.
- There are several ways for students to widen their vocabulary.
- Using a thesaurus can add much interest to written work.
- When using a thesaurus, students must be careful that the replacement word has the right meaning or emphasis.

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What is a thesaurus and how is it used? (2018). In Helicon (Ed.), *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. Abington, UK: Helicon. Retrieved from <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/dictionary>



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