Preface

A large vocabulary is always an asset. Students, teachers, politicians, salesmen, lawyers—in fact all of us—are judged by our ability to use words. The creator of admissions tests such as the Graduate Record Examination and the Law School Admissions Test consider a rich vocabulary one of the best indicators of potential academic and professional success.

It is not surprising, therefore, that many books have been written on the subject of vocabulary enrichment. These books range from brightly colored paperbacks that offer to “double your vocabulary in thirty days” to scholarly dictionaries of word-roots. Most rely heavily on memorization. The readers are supplied with lists of words or, at best, word elements that they must commit to memory, thereby “improving” their vocabulary.

Of course, some memorization is a necessary part of vocabulary building. However, the authors of the New English Dictionary estimate that there are approximately 600,000 English words, not including plural nouns or the inflected forms of verbs. So the chances of your memorizing just the right set of words—those you will come across in your reading—is small. Nothing is more tedious than memorizing a long list of unrelated words, and when you are done memorizing, you will know only the words on that list, but will not have added to your vocabulary systematically.

Fortunately, there is a more efficient and practical way to enlarge your vocabulary. Many words are composed of meaningful elements that occur again and again in English. It, therefore, makes sense to learn word elements rather than whole words whenever possible. Far from being a new idea, this is the basis of a number of vocabulary-building programs. However, many of the word elements these programs treat as separate entities are really only different forms of certain basic entities. These forms are related to each other in orderly and predictable ways.

A few relatively simple rules determine which form of a word element will appear in a given word. By learning these rules and the basic elements they affect, you can greatly enlarge the number of words at your command. This method requires much less effort than it would take to memorize all the words or even the various forms of word elements. Furthermore, learning these rules will increase your awareness of the internal structure of words and of the relationships among words.

The methods of vocabulary enrichment outlined in this book are based on modern linguistic principles. These methods will allow you to analyze words you have never seen before and to understand unusual uses of familiar words.

This book is divided into two main sections—the text and the glossary. In the text we discuss the rules for relating the different forms of word elements and take up other relevant topics such as the general structure of words and the processes by which the sounds and meanings of words change over time. At the end of each chapter are exercises to test your understanding of the preceding material and to increase your word analysis skills. At the end of the first section is a summary of the rules presented and a glossary of terms.
The second section is a glossary of the major Latin and Greek word roots and affixes that occur in English. This glossary, although comprehensive, is smaller than comparable lists in other vocabulary-building books because it contains only the basic forms of the roots and affixes: that is, those that cannot be related to another form by the rules given in the text. In addition, we have included a glossary of roots in reverse order so that you can find a root by looking up its meaning. We recommend that this book be used in conjunction with a good up-to-date desk or collegiate dictionary. A good dictionary for this purpose is the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*. The latest in the series of New Collegiate Dictionaries published by Merriam-Webster is also a good choice. It will also often be useful to consult the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which contains far more entries than a desk or collegiate dictionary. The *Oxford English Dictionary* is available for use in the libraries of many educational institutions and in many public libraries as well. It is also available online. Another dictionary with a very large number of entries is *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged*. It is also available in the libraries of many educational institutions and in many public libraries. The online version is called *Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary*.

Occasionally, students object that some of the words used in this book in exercises or as examples are obscure or not useful. However, unlike in the usual vocabulary book, our intent is not to teach individual words but rather a method for deciphering words never seen before. It would, of course, not be possible to do that using only familiar words. And something further users of this book should keep in mind is that the coinage of new words is an ongoing process. A large number of new words enter English every year, especially from the realms of science, technology, and medicine. The process of creating new words is always ahead of the recording of it in dictionaries.

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Note to teachers: The instructor’s manual for this text, which contains an answer key and additional exercises, is available by contacting Kendall Hunt Publishing.