

High-Frequency Words



**What are High-Frequency Words?
How can knowing this improve
your language ability?**

High-frequency words are words that are the **most commonly found words in the English language**. Whether you are speaking to somebody, reading an article in a magazine, watching a movie, writing an email, **you'll come across these words time and time again**. Our resident linguist, Sam, looks at this important point and urges you to read on!

What do the following words have in common?

<i>the</i>	<i>he</i>	<i>be</i>	<i>but</i>	<i>your</i>
<i>of</i>	<i>was</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>some</i>	<i>when</i>
<i>to</i>	<i>for</i>	<i>one</i>	<i>what</i>	<i>up</i>
<i>and</i>	<i>on</i>	<i>have</i>	<i>there</i>	<i>use</i>
<i>a</i>	<i>are</i>	<i>this</i>	<i>we</i>	<i>word</i>
<i>in</i>	<i>with</i>	<i>from</i>	<i>can</i>	<i>how</i>
<i>is</i>	<i>as</i>	<i>or</i>	<i>out</i>	<i>said</i>
<i>it</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>had</i>	<i>other</i>	<i>an</i>
<i>you</i>	<i>his</i>	<i>by</i>	<i>were</i>	<i>each</i>
<i>that</i>	<i>they</i>	<i>hot</i>	<i>all</i>	<i>she</i>

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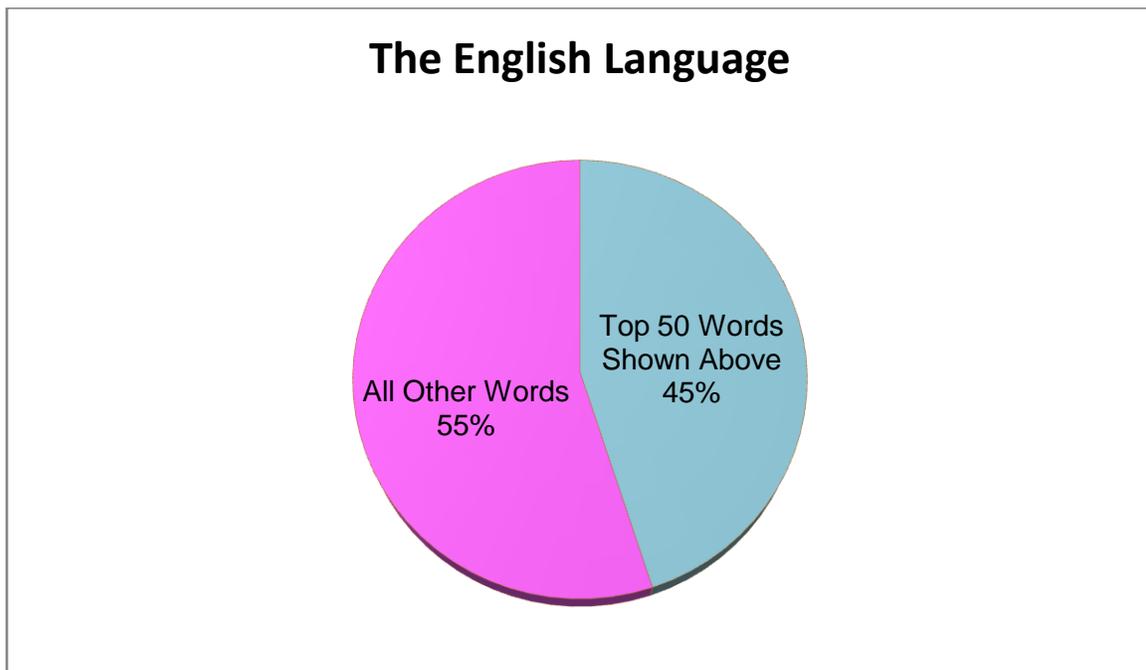


If you haven't guessed it already, these are the **50 most common words** used in English (The list changes slightly depending on what database you use).

Not sure why this is important? Well, this quote from the Encyclopedia of language should help:

“The 50 most common used words in language will make up about 45% of everything we write” (Crystal 1997)

Why is this important? Well, this means that **almost one half** of everything you write (and say) requires you **to use one of the above words**. More importantly, if you make mistakes with all of these words (I'm sure you don't!☺), then **half of your English will be wrong!**



So, ask yourself these important questions:

- *Do I know the correct pronunciation of these words?*
- *Do I know the part(s) of speech i.e. noun, verb, preposition, etc.?*
- *Do I know the meaning(s) of these words?*
- *Really???*

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What are the benefits of mastering the use of these words?

- **Mastery** means that at least 45% of your written and spoken English will be accurate.
- It will **demonstrate to any examiner** that you have a solid foundation in English which, of course, translates into a better score.
- It will improve your confidence because, let's face it, **understanding and using** the most common words correctly in any language **is a must**.

What are the difficulties in mastering these words?

- These words, as high frequency vocabulary, are such because **they have many meanings**. That means mastering these words is in fact **mastering multiple meanings**
- GRAMMAR! All of these words are important grammatically. They are **the building blocks of the language** and are part of **one or more systems**. For example, 'be' is used to construct the passive, "My computer is broken" and the progressive/continuous, "I am working on this paper for IELTS learners and teachers"
- Many of these words have **two pronunciations**, "the pen - /ðə/ and "the apple" - /ði:/. Understanding when to use which requires study.
- Some of these words belong to **different parts of speech**, compare: "That's my book!" (*determiner*) This is the book that my mother gave me" (*relative pronoun*)
- Some of these words may be unfamiliar in your native language. For instance, the use of, "a", "an" & "the", is generally very challenging for speakers of non-European languages such as Chinese Mandarin or Indonesian.



PLEASE WATCH THIS
SPACE FOR MORE
INFORMATION ON THESE
50 WORDS!

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