

The 500 most useful everyday words

Word lists tend to stop where the work starts: a hundred words won't carry a conversation, and three thousand won't be learned. Five hundred is the size at which an ordinary day closes — enough to buy food, explain what hurts, arrange to meet someone, and talk about your family and your job.

Here are all 500, in 17 groups. Inside a group the order follows life rather than the alphabet, because alphabetical order is good for looking a word up and useless for remembering it. Each group ends with the short version of where these particular words go wrong.

How to use this list

- **Don't read it straight through.** Take one group at a time — that is several days of work. Seventeen groups, one a week, is four months and the whole list.
- **Learn pairs, not words.** *drink coffee, go home, catch the bus* stick better than *coffee, home, bus*, and they come out of your mouth whole. That is why every entry here sits next to a real use rather than a bare definition.
- **Test yourself in sentences.** A word you recognise in a list is not learned yet; the learned one is the word that arrives on its own when you need it.
- **Multi-word entries** — *ice cream, thank you, get up, post office* — count as one item, because they are learned and spoken as one unit.

There are no phonetic transcriptions here on purpose. The right-hand column gives a real use rather than a definition, and reading the pair aloud teaches the pronunciation and the grammar in one go.

What's in the list

Seventeen groups — jump to the one you need, or work straight through:

1. People and family — 28 words
2. The body, health and the doctor — 26 words
3. Home and the things in it — 36 words
4. Food and drink — 40 words
5. Clothes — 18 words
6. Time, days and routine — 34 words
7. Numbers — 24 words
8. Weather, seasons and nature — 22 words
9. Places in a town — 26 words
10. Getting around — 22 words
11. Work and study — 26 words
12. Money and shopping — 22 words
13. Phone, internet and devices — 16 words
14. The core verbs — 60 words
15. Adjectives — 38 words
16. Function words: pronouns, questions, prepositions — 46 words
17. Polite words and short phrases — 16 words

1. People and family (28 words)

Word	Typical use
mother	my mother's name

Word	Typical use
grandfather	my grandfather's house

Word	Typical use
father	my father works here
parents	I live with my parents
son	their son is five
daughter	our daughter Anna
child	a small child
children	we have two children
brother	my older brother
sister	my little sister
baby	a new baby
husband	her husband is a driver
wife	his wife works at a bank
family	a big family
grandmother	visit my grandmother

Word	Typical use
aunt	my aunt Ann
uncle	my uncle's car
cousin	my cousin from Almaty
friend	my best friend
man	a young man
woman	the woman over there
boy	a boy at our school
girl	a little girl
people	a lot of people
person	one person only
neighbour	our new neighbour
guest	we have guests today
name	what's your name?

People is already plural: *people **are** waiting*. Use *person* for one and *people* for more than one — *persons* survives only in notices and legal text. In-laws take **-in-law**: *mother-in-law*, *brother-in-law*.

2. The body, health and the doctor (26 words)

Word	Typical use
head	my head hurts
face	wash your face
eye	blue eyes
ear	my ears are cold
nose	a red nose
mouth	open your mouth
tooth	brush your teeth
hair	long dark hair
hand	wash your hands
arm	a broken arm
leg	my legs are tired
foot	on foot
finger	cut my finger

Word	Typical use
back	my back hurts
stomach	an empty stomach
heart	a strong heart
skin	dry skin
body	the human body
doctor	see a doctor
nurse	ask the nurse
medicine	take this medicine
pain	a pain in my back
cough	a bad cough
fever	she has a fever
ill	I feel ill
hurt	my leg hurts

Hand stops at the wrist while *arm* is the whole limb, and *foot* and *leg* split the same way. *Tooth* and *foot* go irregular in the plural: *teeth*, *feet*. Two ways to report pain: *my back **hurts*** or *I **have a pain** in my back*.

3. Home and the things in it (36 words)

Word	Typical use
house	a small house
home	I'm going home
flat	a flat on the third floor
room	a room with a window
kitchen	cook in the kitchen

Word	Typical use
sofa	a soft sofa
lamp	turn on the lamp
light	turn off the light
fridge	milk in the fridge
cooker	a gas cooker

Word	Typical use
bedroom	two bedrooms
bathroom	the bathroom is upstairs
living room	sit in the living room
door	close the door
window	open the window
wall	a photo on the wall
floor	the second floor
stairs	go up the stairs
garden	sit in the garden
key	my house keys
table	put it on the table
chair	sit on this chair
bed	go to bed

Word	Typical use
sink	wash it in the sink
shower	have a shower
toilet	where is the toilet?
towel	a clean towel
soap	wash with soap
mirror	look in the mirror
cup	a cup of tea
plate	a plate of rice
glass	a glass of water
spoon	eat with a spoon
fork	a fork and a knife
knife	a sharp knife
bottle	a bottle of water

Home doubles as an adverb — go **home**, no preposition — while *house* keeps one: go **to** the house. British *flat* is American *apartment*. Rooms take **in**: *in the kitchen*.

4. Food and drink (40 words)

Word	Typical use
food	buy some food
water	a glass of water
bread	fresh bread
milk	milk in my coffee
tea	a cup of tea
coffee	black coffee
juice	orange juice
sugar	no sugar, thanks
salt	pass the salt
egg	two eggs
cheese	bread and cheese
butter	butter on my bread
meat	I don't eat meat
chicken	chicken and rice
fish	fresh fish
rice	a bowl of rice
pasta	pasta with tomatoes
potato	potatoes and meat
tomato	a red tomato
onion	cut an onion

Word	Typical use
vegetable	fresh vegetables
fruit	fruit and vegetables
apple	a green apple
banana	a banana a day
orange	an orange, please
soup	hot soup
salad	a green salad
sandwich	a cheese sandwich
cake	a piece of cake
ice cream	ice cream for the kids
chocolate	a bar of chocolate
breakfast	have breakfast
lunch	lunch at one
dinner	dinner at seven
meal	three meals a day
menu	can I see the menu?
snack	a quick snack
bill	can we have the bill?
hungry	I'm hungry
thirsty	are you thirsty?

Bread, water, rice, meat and *cheese* are uncountable: *some bread*, never *a bread*. Portions arrive through **of**: *a glass of water, a cup of tea, a piece of cake*. You ask for *the bill* in Britain, *the check* in the US.

5. Clothes (18 words)

Word	Typical use
clothes	warm clothes
shirt	a white shirt
T-shirt	a black T-shirt
trousers	blue trousers
jeans	old jeans
dress	a summer dress
skirt	a long skirt
jacket	take your jacket
coat	a warm coat

Word	Typical use
shoes	new shoes
socks	clean socks
hat	wear a hat
scarf	a wool scarf
gloves	winter gloves
belt	a leather belt
size	what size are you?
pocket	in my pocket
umbrella	take an umbrella

*Clothes, trousers, jeans, shoes and gloves are always plural: my trousers **are** new. Count them in pairs: a pair of shoes. You wear clothes (a state) and put on clothes (an action).*

6. Time, days and routine (34 words)

Word	Typical use
time	what time is it?
day	a busy day
week	next week
month	last month
year	this year
hour	in an hour
minute	wait a minute
second	just a second
today	I'm free today
tomorrow	see you tomorrow
yesterday	I saw her yesterday
morning	in the morning
afternoon	this afternoon
evening	in the evening
night	at night
now	I'm busy now
soon	see you soon

Word	Typical use
later	I'll call you later
early	I got up early
late	don't be late
always	she's always late
never	I never drink coffee
sometimes	sometimes I walk
often	we often meet
usually	I usually work at home
again	say it again
already	I've already eaten
still	she's still here
yet	not ready yet
weekend	at the weekend
holiday	a week's holiday
birthday	happy birthday!
clock	the clock on the wall
o'clock	at six o'clock

Days and months are capitalised: **Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday; January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November, December.**

The prepositions divide by size: **at** for clock times (*at six*), **on** for days (*on Monday*), **in** for months, years and parts of the day (*in July, in the morning*). One exception, learned whole: **at night**.

7. Numbers (24 words)

Word	Typical use
zero	zero degrees

Word	Typical use
twelve	twelve months

Word	Typical use
one	one ticket, please
two	two coffees
three	three days
four	four people
five	five minutes
six	six o'clock
seven	seven days a week
eight	eight hours
nine	nine euros
ten	ten minutes
eleven	eleven years old

Word	Typical use
twenty	twenty people
thirty	thirty minutes
fifty	fifty euros
hundred	two hundred
thousand	a thousand words
million	a million people
number	my phone number
first	the first time
last	the last bus
half	half an hour
twice	twice a week

13–19 end in **-teen** (*thirteen ... nineteen*) and the tens in **-ty** (*forty, sixty, eighty*) — in speech, stress is all that separates *thirteen* from *thirty*. Ordinals open irregular (*first, second, third*) and then take **-th**. *Hundred* and *thousand* stay singular after a number: *two **hundred***.

8. Weather, seasons and nature (22 words)

Word	Typical use
weather	nice weather today
sun	the sun is out
rain	rain all day
snow	snow in winter
wind	a strong wind
cloud	dark clouds
sky	a blue sky
ice	ice on the road
storm	a big storm
spring	in spring
summer	last summer

Word	Typical use
autumn	autumn is cold here
winter	a long winter
tree	an old tree
flower	buy some flowers
river	swim in the river
sea	by the sea
mountain	high mountains
forest	walk in the forest
animal	wild animals
dog	walk the dog
cat	feed the cat

Weather takes the empty subject **it**: *it's raining, it's cold today*. Seasons take **in**: *in summer, in winter*. American English says *fall* where British English says *autumn*.

9. Places in a town (26 words)

Word	Typical use
place	a good place to eat
city	a big city
town	a small town
village	a village near the river
street	live on this street
road	cross the road
shop	the shop is closed
supermarket	go to the supermarket

Word	Typical use
pharmacy	the pharmacy on the corner
bank	the bank opens at nine
post office	send it from the post office
park	walk in the park
museum	visit a museum
cinema	go to the cinema
library	books from the library
church	an old church

Word	Typical use
market	buy fruit at the market
restaurant	a good restaurant
café	meet at the café
hotel	stay at a hotel
hospital	take him to hospital

Word	Typical use
centre	the city centre
address	what's your address?
map	look at the map
corner	on the corner
building	a tall building

At puts you at a point (*at the shop*), *in* puts you inside (*in the park*), and corners take *on*: *on the corner*. British *shop* is American *store*, and a British *pharmacy* is often a *chemist's*.

10. Getting around (22 words)

Word	Typical use
car	come by car
bus	take the bus
train	the train to Rome
plane	miss the plane
taxi	call a taxi
bike	ride a bike
metro	the metro is faster
ticket	two tickets, please
station	meet me at the station
airport	get to the airport
passport	show your passport

Word	Typical use
suitcase	a heavy suitcase
seat	is this seat free?
driver	ask the driver
trip	a short trip
way	the way to the station
left	turn left
right	on your right
straight	go straight on
stop	the next stop
platform	platform three
flight	a two-hour flight

Means of transport take **by** with no article — *by bus*, *by car*, *by train* — but walking is **on** *foot*. A specific service takes *take*: *take the 8 o'clock train*. Directions: *turn left*, *turn right*, *go straight on*.

11. Work and study (26 words)

Word	Typical use
work	I'm at work
job	a new job
office	come to the office
boss	ask your boss
colleague	a colleague of mine
meeting	I'm in a meeting
company	a small company
teacher	my English teacher
student	a good student
school	the kids are at school
university	study at university
class	the class starts at ten
lesson	an English lesson

Word	Typical use
homework	do your homework
exam	pass the exam
book	read a book
pen	write with a pen
pencil	a sharp pencil
paper	a sheet of paper
notebook	write it in your notebook
question	ask a question
answer	the right answer
word	a new word
language	learn a language
English	speak English
salary	a good salary

Work drops the article when it means the place: *I'm at work*, *go to work*. *Job* is countable and means the post: *a new job*. Institutions go bare too: *at university* (US: *at college*).

12. Money and shopping (22 words)

Word	Typical use
money	I don't have much money
price	the price is too high
cash	pay in cash
card	pay by card
change	keep the change
receipt	can I have a receipt?
discount	a ten percent discount
sale	the shoes are on sale
customer	a regular customer
bag	a plastic bag
box	a box of tea

Word	Typical use
cheap	a cheap hotel
expensive	too expensive for me
free	the coffee is free
queue	stand in the queue
shopping	do the shopping
wallet	I left my wallet at home
coin	a one-euro coin
note	a fifty-euro note
order	order a taxi
basket	put it in the basket
delivery	free delivery

Money is uncountable: *much money*, *a lot of money*, never *moneys*. Ask a price with *how much is it?* or *how much does it cost?* The preposition follows the method: *pay **by** card* but *pay **in** cash*.

13. Phone, internet and devices (16 words)

Word	Typical use
phone	answer the phone
computer	work on the computer
laptop	my laptop is slow
internet	no internet here
email	send me an email
message	I got your message
password	forget my password
app	download the app

Word	Typical use
screen	look at the screen
camera	the camera on my phone
photo	take a photo
TV	watch TV
website	visit our website
file	send the file
charger	forget my charger
online	buy it online

You *call* or *phone* someone directly — never *call to me*. *Message* takes two objects: *send **me a message***. Things happen **on** the internet and **on** your phone.

14. The core verbs (60 words)

Word	Typical use
be	I am a student
have	I have two sisters
do	what do you do?
go	go to work
come	come here
get	get a ticket
make	make coffee
take	take the bus
give	give me the key
want	I want to go home

Word	Typical use
wake up	wake up at seven
get up	get up early
wash	wash your hands
understand	I don't understand
study	study English
learn	learn new words
teach	she teaches maths
play	play football
run	run for the bus
walk	walk to work

Word	Typical use
need	I need help
like	I like this city
love	I love this song
know	I know her
think	I think you're right
say	say something
tell	tell me the truth
ask	ask a question
see	I can see the sea
look	look at this
watch	watch a film
hear	I can't hear you
listen	listen to music
speak	speak English
talk	can we talk?
read	read a book
write	write your name
eat	eat breakfast
drink	drink water
sleep	sleep eight hours

Word	Typical use
sit	sit here
stand	stand near the door
open	open the window
close	close the door
start	start at nine
finish	finish work at six
help	help me, please
wait	wait for me
meet	meet a friend
live	live in Astana
stay	stay at home
leave	leave at eight
arrive	arrive in the evening
buy	buy some milk
sell	sell a car
pay	pay by card
cook	cook dinner
call	call me tomorrow
drive	drive to work
use	use my phone

These sixty carry most of everyday speech. Their pasts are largely irregular and have to be learned as forms: *go* → **went**, *have* → **had**, *see* → **saw**, *take* → **took**, *buy* → **bought**, *make* → **made**, *give* → **gave**. Several are inseparable from a preposition — learn the pair, not the verb: *listen **to** music*, *wait **for** me*, *look **at** this*, *ask **for** help*.

15. Adjectives (38 words)

Word	Typical use
good	a good idea
bad	bad weather
big	a big city
small	a small flat
new	a new phone
old	an old house; he's ten years old
young	a young teacher
long	a long day
short	a short walk
high	a high price
low	a low table
hot	hot water
cold	cold weather
warm	a warm coat

Word	Typical use
beautiful	a beautiful city
easy	an easy question
difficult	a difficult word
fast	a fast train
slow	slow internet
strong	strong coffee
weak	a weak signal
clean	clean clothes
dirty	dirty shoes
full	the bus is full
empty	an empty room
far	is it far?
wrong	the wrong number
same	the same day

Word	Typical use
happy	a happy child
sad	a sad film
angry	don't be angry
tired	I'm tired
nice	a nice place

Word	Typical use
different	a different answer
important	an important call
ready	are you ready?
busy	I'm busy today
funny	a funny story

Adjectives sit before the noun and never take a plural: *a new phone, new phones*. Short ones compare with **-er/-est** (*older, the oldest*), longer ones with *more/most* (*more important*). Age uses *old* whatever the age: *she's three years old*.

16. Function words: pronouns, questions, prepositions (46 words)

Word	Typical use
I	I live here
you	you know him
he	he works at home
she	she is a doctor
it	it is cold today
we	we are friends
they	they live in Almaty
my	my phone
your	your turn
his	his car
her	her name
their	their house
this	this book
that	that man over there
these	these days
those	those people
what	what is this?
where	where do you live?
when	when does it start?
who	who is she?
why	why not?
how	how are you?
which	which one?

Word	Typical use
in	in the kitchen
on	on the table
at	at home; at six
to	go to work
from	from Monday
with	with milk
for	for you
of	a cup of tea
about	talk about work
under	under the table
between	between two and three
and	bread and butter
but	small but nice
or	tea or coffee?
because	because it's late
if	if you want
so	it's late, so let's go
some	some water
any	any questions?
all	all day
many	many people
very	very good
not	it's not here

These rarely translate one for one — they are what holds a sentence together. English insists on a subject (*it is cold, never is cold*) and inverts in questions: *where **do you** live?* Add *much* (with uncountables), *more, too, also* and *only* alongside them: they behave the same way.

17. Polite words and short phrases (16 words)

Word	Typical use
hello	hello, how are you?

Word	Typical use
no	no, thanks

Word	Typical use
hi	hi, it's me
goodbye	goodbye, see you
please	two tickets, please
thank you	thank you very much
sorry	sorry, I'm late
excuse me	excuse me, where is the station?
yes	yes, of course

Word	Typical use
OK	OK, let's go
welcome	welcome to Astana
congratulations	congratulations on your exam
good luck	good luck tomorrow
of course	of course you can
maybe	maybe later
see you	see you on Monday

A few entries here are set phrases rather than single words, and they are learned whole. *Excuse me* comes before you disturb someone; *sorry* comes after. *Please* usually lands at the end: *two tickets, please*.

How to get through 500 words without quitting

Five hundred words look like a mountain while you are counting words. Count groups instead: there are seventeen, and each one closes a recognisable part of a day. *Food and drink* is a shop and a café; *the body, health and the doctor* is an appointment from start to finish.

The order that works:

1. Take one group and cross out what you already know. A third usually survives — and the mountain shrinks by two thirds.
2. Build five sentences about your own day from what is left. Your day, not a textbook's.
3. Come back a day later and say those five sentences without looking. Whatever didn't come back is your real list for the week.

From here, go by theme: family, home and daily routine covers home life in more detail, numbers, time and prices covers what a trip demands, and food, cooking and eating out takes you all the way to ordering at a table.

The online version of this list, with the quiz: english.guru/500-everyday-words/