

Vocabulary and Syntactic Versatility

Semantics refers to what words mean. *Syntax*, another word for *grammar*, refers to how words function within word groups and sentences. *Syntactic versatility* is the ability to say essentially the same thing in several different grammatical ways. Writers who can do this are syntactically versatile. Being able to control syntax provides a communicator with the options often required for full communicative effectiveness.

Syntactic versatility has implications for vocabulary development. It's good to learn lots of new words, but it's often better to learn some words well. This means not only learning what a word means but also how to use it in all its forms: noun, verb, adjective, and adverb.

The word *acquiesce* is a good example. It means *to passively accept* or *to comply without objection*. Here are four contextual sentences which preserve this meaning but which are *syntactically versatile*:

1. John responded to the teacher's demand with obedient *acquiescence* and avoided a reprimand. (noun)
2. John obediently *acquiesced* to the teacher's demand, avoiding a reprimand. (verb)
3. John's *acquiescent* response to the teacher's demand avoided a reprimand. (adjective)
4. John responded *acquiescently* to the teacher's demand and thus avoided a reprimand. (adverb)

FOR YOUR LISTENING AND READING VOCABULARIES, LEARN LOTS OF WORDS. FOR YOUR WRITING AND SPEAKING VOCABULARIES, YOU SHOULD CONCENTRATE ON LEARNING FEWER WORDS WELL.