Vocabulary by Modality

Not a word list. A network of meaning.

Vocabulary is not a list but a web. Depth, precision, and the dense associations behind each word are what let a person grasp shades of meaning a sentence never states outright. **Thin words, thin thought**.

Reading

In reading, meaning holds only when almost all the words are known: studies put the threshold near 95 to 98 percent of the words on a page, and below it comprehension falls off fast. It is not enough to have met a word once, either. A reader needs it known well enough to recognize on sight, so attention stays on the idea instead of the word.

Writing

Writing draws on a smaller, harder-won store: the words a person can actually produce, not just the larger set they recognize. Precise, varied word choice is one of the more reliable marks of strong writing, because the exact word carries meaning a writer would otherwise need a whole clause to circle.

Listening

Spoken words arrive fast and cannot be replayed, so a word the listener does not know, or cannot reach quickly, is simply lost, and its absence tugs at the sentence around it. With decoding off the table, listening comprehension rides almost directly on how many words a person knows and how fast they can retrieve them.

Speaking

People understand far more words than they can produce, and using a word well takes deeper knowledge than merely recognizing it: how it combines, where it fits, what company it keeps. That depth is built through many encounters over time, in real talk and wide reading, which is why a word is not truly owned until a person can put it to use themselves.

Depth of word is depth of thought.

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