

# A Man for Every Purpose - Increasing Learners' Vocabulary Awareness

Rolf Palmberg

[rpalmber \[at\] abo.fi](mailto:rpalmber[at]abo.fi)

Department of Teacher Education, Abo Akademi University, Finland

We all know that a milkman delivers milk and that a postman delivers letters and parcels, i.e. post. But does a sandwichman deliver sandwiches, or a garbageman deliver garbage?

There are a numerous compound words in English that end in 'man', as the above examples illustrate. One interesting fact is that the word 'man' and its counterpart can have very different meaning relationships, which, in turn, can be used for classroom activities to increase learners' vocabulary awareness. In the sample activities presented below, the level of difficulty can easily be modified by the teacher by choosing an appropriate number of 'man' words included in the activity and by selecting such 'man' words that fit the learners' age, proficiency level and/or interests. The learners may work individually or in pairs, using dictionaries if necessary.

## Eight sample learner activities:

1. Here is a list of 'man' words and a list of definitions. Match each word with its correct definition.
2. Here is a list of 'man' words. Identify the meaning relationship between each 'man' and its counterpart. Example: X, Y and Z deliver things, whereas M and N are members of something.
3. Here is a list of 'man' words. Categorise the words according to who delivers things, who collects things, who sells things, who is something etc.
4. Here is a list of definitions. See if you can produce the correct compound word (the latter part of which is 'man') for each definition.
5. Here is a list of 'man' words. Find out which 'man' words can in fact be 'woman' words as well.
6. Here is a list of 'man' words. Find out which 'man' words are gender neutral, i.e. which do in fact refer to a 'person'.
7. Here is a list of 'man' words. Find out which words are in fact occupations.
8. Here is a list of 'man' words. Find out which 'man' words do in fact not relate to human beings at all.

## 35 'man' words (there are many more) and their definitions:

- best man - the principal groomsman at a wedding
- boatman - a man who rows a boat
- cameraman - a photographer who operates a camera for films
- chairman - a person who presides at a meeting
- clergyman - a member of the church
- con-man - a person who persuades foolish people to entrust their valuables to him
- family man - a person who is fond of home life with his family
- fireman - a member of a fire-brigade
- fisherman - a person who engages in fishing as an occupation or for pleasure
- footman - a male servant who attends the door, the carriage, the table, etc
- freshman - a student in his first year at a college or university
- garbageman - a person who collects and hauls away garbage
- gentleman - a man who shows consideration for the feelings of others
- gunman - a man who uses a gun to rob or kill people
- hit man - a professional assassin who works for a crime syndicate
- iceman - a man who delivers ice (for use in ice-boxes, etc)
- layman - a person without expert knowledge

- lineman - a person who puts up and maintains telegraph and telephone lines
- madman - a person who is mad
- milkman - a man who delivers milk from house to house
- newsman - a man who distributes or sells newspapers
- policeman - a member of the police force
- postman - a man who delivers letters and parcels
- sandman - a mythical person who makes children sleepy
- sandwichman - a person who walks about the streets with advertising boards hanging from the shoulders
- shaman - a priest who acts as a medium between the visible and spirit worlds
- snowman - a figure of a man made of snow by children for amusement
- spaceman - a person trained to travel in a spacecraft
- statesman - a person who takes an important part in the management of State affairs
- superman - a man who has more than ordinary powers and abilities
- talisman - an object thought to bring good luck
- walkman - a small portable radio or cassette player listened to by means of earphones
- waterman - a man who manages a boat for hire
- weatherman - a man who reports and forecasts the weather
- woodman / woodsman - a person who cuts down trees

---

The Internet TESL Journal, Vol. IV, No. 10, October 1998

<http://iteslj.org/>

---