

# Which 100 words of English should Fabio learn? Some help from the sidelines

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Following the media coverage of England football manager Fabio Capello's claim that he only needs '100 words of English', Cambridge Dictionaries Online has used its corpus to establish which 100 he would need to aim for.

Fabio Capello has recently come under criticism in the UK media for his poor grasp of English despite being in the job for over three years. He claims he requires "maximum 100 words" to communicate tactics to the England footballers.

But is Capello's statement so absurd? Can people get by in English with a limited vocabulary? Well, as many have pointed out, people need to know far more than 100 words to communicate effectively in English – just the most basic words such as the, to, be, of, in, etc. amount to far more than that. But, assuming that Capello was not including these function words in his putative 100 and that he was in fact referring only to the content words, those nouns, verbs and adjectives that provide the meat on the bones of communication. Is it really possible to talk [football](#) with only 100 of these?

Cambridge Dictionaries Online (CDO) maintains a vast database of English texts, called the Cambridge International Corpus, which contains over 1 billion words of [English](#) in any form in which it occurs – newspaper articles, emails, transcribed conversations, websites and books. Every such document is coded for the subject area it deals with, allowing CDO to automatically pull out all the documents relating to

football – that’s over 8.5 million words’ worth of football-talk.

Smart corpus analysis software is then used to compare these documents with the rest of the corpus to extract those words most used in football. The resulting list makes for interesting reading, but which ones are really needed to coach footballers?

There’s the absolute basics, for starters: ball, cup, player, game, match, win, lose, play, team. He would need to refer to their various positions, of course: so that’s goalkeeper, defender, fullback, midfielder, winger, striker, forward as well as groups – defence, midfield and attack.

Footballers wouldn’t be able to get very far without knowing what to call different areas of the pitch – the goal, made up of the goalposts and the crossbar (collectively the woodwork), the box, the touchlines, and of course left and right. Then there are the actions players do in the game – kick, pass, tackle, cross, dribble, shoot, strike, score, equalise, foul, defend, attack, header, touch, mark and of course dive (not suggesting England players are ever instructed to do that!). That makes 44 words so far.

Then there are words referring to the laws of the game and their enforcement: referee, linesman (these days referred to as the assistant referee), offside, handball, free-kick, penalty, corner, goal-kick, caution, suspension, plus the yellow and red cards (though they could probably get by without knowing any other colours). As international football is all about tournaments, he would need to refer to the various stages of the competition: the friendlies, the qualifiers, the group stage, quarter-finals, semi-finals and the final itself – probably by means of a penalty shootout somewhere along the way. That gets the list up to 70.

Then there are the words relating specifically to tactics and training: formation, possession, pressure, defensive, attacking, patience, fitness; the different parts of the game, first-half, second-half, half-time, injury-

time, extra-time. Words describing footballers' qualities: physical, technical, clever, pace, skill, talented. Then those elusive qualities that the viewing public, the fans or supporters, always demand: passion, spirit, pride, excitement. Which leaves just four more, and no list of essential football vocabulary list would be complete without the inevitable defeat, disappointment, humiliation and the one word football managers live in fear of: sack.

So there it is: international football in 100 words.

Provided by Cambridge University

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