

“If you wish to not get stuck, seek to perceive what you have not yet perceived.”

A great quote from the John Salvatier essay that Pete has shared! And very apt for what happened to me this morning.

I am taking a Latin class at the moment, hoping to get to the point where I can actually understand the citations in Lewis and Short. And in this class, I am required at the end of each chapter to memorize a list of vocabulary items. (I'm sure this task sounds familiar to everyone who works with students on their homework). One of these a few months ago was *diligo*, *diligere*, *dilexi*, *dilectum* “esteem, love.”

I have had two problems with memorizing this entry. First I kept trying to spell it as *deligo*, and second, I kept thinking of the derivative <diligent> and couldn't get from there to the given translation “esteem, love.” But I put the word into my flash cards and continued to star it every time I got it wrong. Does this sound like rational behavior from a real speller? While I always use my knowledge of English derivatives (from my own knowledge and from those provided in the list) to help myself memorize, I had sufficiently compartmentalized this course study (coarse study!) that I neglected to investigate the details of the word *diligo* to *understand* it. Here's what I found when I did:

Douglas writes in Etymonline that the sense of <diligent> evolved from "love" through "attentiveness" to "steady effort." It is easy to imagine this when you understand that the etymon of <diligent> is the present participle *diligens*, *diligentem*, which could be translated as "loving," which incorporates (gives *corporis* or “body” to!) the idea of "giving loving attention to" something.

This makes even more sense when we further analyze the Latin verb *diligere* into its constituent elements. First we have the prefix <dis> “apart”, which takes the form <di> before voiced consonants. This takes care of my <de-> problem. Then we have the familiar *lego legere lexi lectum* "select, gather", with stem vowel shift, which also came, in Latin, to mean "read." Hence <dyslexic>, with its companion form <dyslectic>.

Memory problem solved through understanding. Although I'd be hopeless at building a staircase because the details to be examined are not within my experience, I do have the skills to examine details about words to build an understanding. All I have to do is remember to apply them!