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The Vocabulary of Winter Snow

It is snowing heavily (*again*) today ... so I shared my thoughts about how we '**deal with the winter snow**' with some students ... I was surprised that few really know about '**snow vocabulary**' in English.

Shovel and **Clear** are common verbs for what 'we' do.

Shovel is the most common and it refers to removing snow with a shovel:

I need to *shovel* before I leave for work.

There is an interesting noun-verb relationship: we use **a *shovel*** (the thing) **to *shovel*** (the verb). In addition, we can **shovel the snow** and we can **shovel the driveway**.

I need to *shovel the snow* before I leave.

I need to *shovel the driveway* before I leave.

As you can clearly see, the first sentence focuses on the thing that is obstructing us in our attempt to leave: *the snow*. The second sentence focuses on the thing we need that is being obstructed by the snow: *the driveway*.

Of course, we could combine them in:

I need to *shovel the snow off the driveway* before I leave.

The thing about the word **shovel** is that it 'feels' like work.

Clear is also common ... it refers to removing something or making something clear in a broader sense ... and it doesn't have the sense of 'work' that shovel does ... it also has the dual use and combined use as above:

I need to *clear the snow* before I leave. Focus on the snow.

I need to *clear the driveway* before I leave. Focus on the driveway.

The most common variation for use with **shovel** and **clear** is:

The *snow* needs to be *shoveled* (from in front of the garage).

The *snow* needs to be *cleared* (from in front of the garage).

or The *driveway* needs to be *cleared*.
The *driveway* needs to be *cleared* (of the snow that has fallen).
The *driveway* needs to be *shoveled*.
The *driveway* needs to be *shoveled* (in front of the garage).

Plow is the word we would use for large-scale removal of snow by ... snowplows ... again with the same patterns.

The city needs to *plow* the *snow* better in the winter.
The city needs to *plow* the *streets* better in the winter.
These new *snow plows* don't *plow* the snow very well.

Brush off and **Scrape** are the words you use when your car is covered with snow and the windows of your car are coated with hard icy snow. Here the patterns would most likely be:

I need to *brush off* my car before I can drive home.
I need to *brush the snow off* my car before I can drive home.
I need to *scrape my windows* before I start.
I need to *scrape the ice off my windows* before I can start.

Other Vocabulary

Of course, when we **shovel the snow**, we **push it** to the side and then **pile it up** so it is out of the way. If you don't **move the snow** away quickly, **it can start to pile up** at the end of your driveway, so make sure to get out and **clear it away** promptly.

Some people thought ahead about the winter snow and put in a system that **melts** the snow:

I need to *melt the snow* before I can go to work.
The *snow* needs to be *melted* before I can go to work.

But, ... I need to *melt the driveway* before I can go to work would be neither correct nor possible.

Ah ... more snow today. It would be nice if knowing this vocabulary would help us deal with the heavy winter snow ... but I don't think it will. In the end, we all have to **shovel away** until it is **all cleared up**.

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