OVERVIEW
A central problem in language understanding is to identify the smallest meaningful units in the speech signal i.e., words and morphemes. A number of general properties of lexical access are well attested including the role of frequency, word/non-word effects, context and degradation effects and the word superiority effect.

Readings

Methods of Investigation
The variety of methods to investigate lexical processing, e.g. tachistoscopic presentation, the lexical decision task and naming—all seem to show a sensitivity to different stages in the process of accessing lexical representations. More recently, imaging techniques have provided insights into the manner in which the lexicon is organised in the brain.
Readings

Models of Lexical Access
It is possible to distinguish two distinct types of model of lexical access—one in which processing is highly interactive embracing both top-down and bottom-up effects, and one in which processing is described in terms of a serial process in which the identification of words is compartmentalised into a distinct stages. Needless, to say intermediate positions between these two extremes exist.

Readings

The Role of Context
Much current work is concerned with the manner in which context effects operate and the extent to which multiple meanings of ambiguous words are activated and the time course for the resolution of the ambiguity. Most work has been concerned with on-line
recognition of visually presented material though recognition of speech has also been addressed recently.

Readings

**Acquisition**
Children start producing their first words around their first birthday. However, they seem to make significant progress in developing a mental lexicon before this.

Readings

**Production**
Much has been learnt about the structure of the mental lexicon from the mistakes people make while talking.

Readings
Essay Questions or Presentation Topics

1. How does context affect word recognition?

2. Do we access multiple interpretations of ambiguous words during the process of word recognition?

3. Are serial and interactive models of word recognition necessarily incompatible with each other?

4. How do slips of the tongue inform our understanding of the mental lexicon?

5. How are words represented in the brain?

6. Is the vocabulary spurt a significant event in lexical development?