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Know vs Understand vs Learn vs Find Out vs Figure Out

These verbs are used to talk about having or obtaining knowledge, but often one is a better choice than the others to talk about certain objects or to express different meanings. These verbs have other meanings (for example, “learn” is also used for students) but those meanings are not included here.

Know/knew/known (have knowledge)

- Thank you for offering to explain, but I know this information already.
- I don't know which word is correct.
- You lied, but I know what really happened.
- She didn't have to explain; I knew what she meant.
- He must not have known who I was; otherwise he would have spoken to me with more respect.
- You ought to know by now that that professor is a harsh grader.

Understand/understood/understood (comprehend, “get it”)

- He has explained it a couple different ways, but I still don't understand his point.
- I didn't know why he was doing that at the time, but now I understand his motivations.
- I read all the instructions, but I still don't understand how it works.

Learn/learned/learned (come to know, more formal version of “find out”)

- He didn't learn that he was adopted until adulthood.
- She learned early on that her co-workers were not trustworthy.

Find out/found out/found out (discover, go get new information)

- Did you ever find out who sent you those flowers?
- I just found out my favorite band is in town this weekend.
- I don't know if it's working, but I can find out.
- I'm curious to find out what this city has to offer.
- If we can figure out how they installed this heater, we'll understand how to fix it.

Figure [it] out/figured out/figured out (use reason to deduce)

- Did you ever figure out who borrowed your shovel?
- I can't figure out how to use their website.
- It didn't come with any instructions, but I figured it out.