

What is special about academic English?

A Everyday words and academic uses

Many words in academic English are the same as everyday vocabulary, but they are often also used with a slightly different meaning, which may be specialised.

everyday or academic use	meaning	academic use	meaning
Standards of discipline in schools have declined.	ability to control oneself or other people	Nanotechnology is a relatively new discipline .	area of study
Underline your family name on the form.	draw a line under it	The research underlines the importance of international trade agreements.	gives emphasis to
The lake was frozen solid .	not liquid or gas	We have no solid evidence that radiation has caused the problem.	certain or safe; of a good standard

B Vocabulary and academic style

- In writing, academics use many expressions which are neutral, but they also use rather formal expressions which are not common in everyday language. Knowing whether an expression is formal or just neutral is important.

neutral	more formal	neutral	more formal
in short, briefly, basically	in sum, to sum up	try	attempt
only	sole(ly)	mainly/mostly	primarily
almost / more or less	virtually	typical of	characteristic of

However, very informal vocabulary may be used in *spoken* academic styles in classes and lectures. Learn to understand such language when you hear it but be careful not to use it in essays and written assignments. Here are some examples of teachers using informal language. 'OK. **Have a shot** at doing task number 3.' [more formal: Try/Attempt to do ...]

'**There's no way** schools can be held responsible for failures of government policy.' [more formal: Schools cannot in any way be held ...]

- Academic language tries to be clear and precise, so it is important to keep a vocabulary notebook (see page 8) and learn the differences between similar words, as well as typical word combinations (underlined here).

The building is a prime example of 1920s architecture. [excellent in quality or value]

The group's primary concern is to protect human rights. [main / most important]

C Noun phrases

Academic language puts a lot of information into noun phrases rather than spreading it out over a whole sentence. For example, instead of saying *Radiation was accidentally released over a 24-hour period, damaging a wide area for a long time*, an academic might say *The accidental release of radiation over a 24-hour period caused widespread long-term damage*. It is therefore important to learn the different forms of a word, for example:

noun	verb	adjective(s)	adverb(s)
accident		accidental	accidentally
quantity/quantification	quantify	quantitative/quantifiable	quantitatively/quantifiably

Finally, be aware of 'chunks' or phrases which occur frequently, and learn them as whole units. Examples: *in terms of*, *in addition*, *for the most part*, *in the case of*, etc. (See Unit 16.)

Exercises

- 1.1** Each word in the box can be used in two ways, one an everyday way, the other a typically academic way. Complete each pair of sentences using the same word for both sentences and making any necessary grammatical changes.

generate turn solid confirm identify underline character pose nature focus

- 1 A She loves to for photographs in front of her fabulous house.
B The events a threat to stability in the region.
- 2 A It was difficult to the camera on the flower as it was so small.
B We should our attention on the most important issues.
- 3 A I called the airline and my reservation.
B The data my hypothesis that animal-lovers enjoy better health.
- 4 A The power plant electricity for the whole region.
B This issue always a great deal of debate among academics.
- 5 A The murderer was from fingerprints discovered at the scene.
B In this theory of history, progress is closely with technology.
- 6 A She became interested in conservation.
B The first lecture in the series was on the of human communication.
- 7 A Jim's a very interesting I hope you meet him.
B The book attempts to explain the fundamental of social life.
- 8 A I saw her to her husband and whisper something in his ear.
B Let us now to the subject of town planning.
- 9 A He always every new word when he's reading.
B The study the fact that very little research exists.
- 10 A The liquid became as the temperature was lowered.
B The study lacks evidence and therefore its conclusions are doubtful.

- 1.2** Use more formal alternatives to the words in bold. Make any necessary grammatical changes.

- 1 The book is **mainly** concerned with the problem of policing the internet.
- 2 **Almost** every school in the county had reported problems with the new system.
- 3 The work of the Institute is not **only** devoted to cancer research.
- 4 **Basically**, we believe we have demonstrated a significant link between the two events.
- 5 We **tried** to find a new way of understanding the data.
- 6 The study is a **really good** example of the way sociologists collect their data.
- 7 The reaction is **typical** of the way large corporations keep control of their markets.
- 8 There's **no way** London can be compared to Sydney as a place to live and work.

- 1.3** Read the text and then answer the questions.

The production of plastics depends heavily on petroleum, but a novel way of making plastics out of sugar could reduce our reliance on oil. The discovery that a chemical in sugar can be converted relatively easily into a substance similar in structure to the material obtained from petroleum has led to the claim that plastics could soon be produced cheaply using the new method.

- 1 Underline two verbs with adverbs after them which it would be useful to learn as pairs.
- 2 Underline two adverbs next to each other which it would be useful to learn together.
- 3 What are the noun forms of the verbs *produce*, *rely*, *discover* and *claim*?

2

Key nouns

This unit focuses on some frequent and important nouns in academic English. See also Units 10, 11 and 15.

A General nouns referring to ideas

example (with prepositions underlined)	comment
She wrote an article <u>on</u> the <u>subject of</u> class.	thing which is being discussed, considered or studied
The theme of the poem is emigration.	main subject of a talk, book, etc.
The students were given a list of essay topics .	used to refer to what one is studying or writing about
There was a lively debate <u>on</u> the <u>issue of</u> globalisation in the seminar yesterday.	subject/problem which people are thinking/talking about
Political theory is a popular undergraduate subject. Einstein's theory of gravitation has been questioned recently.	statement of the rules on which a subject of study is based or, more generally, an opinion or explanation
The model of climate change presented in the Stern Review seems to be becoming a reality.	a representation of something as a simple description which might be used in calculations
The book is called ' The Nature of Intelligence'.	main characteristic of something
Human behaviour is based on the principle of least effort.	basic idea or rule that explains how something happens or works

B More specific nouns connected with ideas and phenomena

example (with prepositions underlined)	comment
Repetition is an important aspect of speech development in children.	one individual part of a situation, problem, subject, etc.
Automatic backup is a feature of the new software.	a typical quality of something
The political motives for the government's actions are beyond the scope of this essay.	range of a subject covered by a book, discussion, class, etc.
The study revealed a pattern of results which could be interpreted in either of two ways.	showed a regularly repeated arrangement
During 2005, the number of violent attacks increased to an alarming degree.	amount or level

C Nouns referring to ways of thinking, processes and activities

Read these titles of academic books and articles. Note the key nouns and their prepositions.

Micro-organisms in water: their **significance**¹ and **identification**²

Renewable energy: a critical **assessment**³ of recent research

The Case⁴ for Change: Rethinking Teacher Education. Towards a New **Approach**⁵

Perspectives⁶ on Ecological Management: A study of public **awareness**⁷ of river pollution

Citizens' **Views** on Healthcare Systems in the European Union

Epidemiological research **into**⁸ asthma and allergic disease: establishing a standardised **methodology**⁹

¹ importance ² ability to establish the identity of something ³ judgement of the amount, value, quality or importance of ⁴ arguments, facts and reasons in support of or against something

⁵ way of considering something ⁶ different particular or individual ways of considering something ⁷ having special interest in or experience of something, and so being well informed

⁸ research is often also used with the preposition on ⁹ a system of ways of studying something



Research is uncountable. Don't say *They carried out some interesting researches*. To make it plural you can just say 'studies', or 'research studies' or 'pieces of research'.

Exercises

2.1 Look at A. Choose the most appropriate noun to complete each sentence.

- 1 Environmental *topics / issues / principles* should be at the top of today's political agenda.
- 2 In the exam students had to choose three from a choice of ten essay *subjects / theories / topics*.
- 3 There are still people who are reluctant to accept Darwin's *model / topic / theory* of evolution.
- 4 The professor decided to take moral courage as the *issue / theme / model* for his inaugural lecture.
- 5 The London underground map is best understood as a *model / principle / topic* showing how the different stations relate to one another rather than a precise representation of their distances from each other.
- 6 The Peter *Issue / Principle / Theme* states that members of a hierarchical group will usually end up being promoted to the point at which they become incompetent.

2.2 There are six phrases containing errors underlined in this paragraph. Can you correct them?

The study showed that local police can play an important role in crime prevention. It makes a strong case of boosting the numbers of community police officers although it warns against increasing police presence on the streets at an alarming degree. Its methodological was based on a range of interviews asking members of the public for their views in how best to prevent crime. Unfortunately, how to implement this recommendation was out of the scope of the study but at least it serves a useful purpose in raising awareness to the issue.

2.3 Look at these titles of academic books (A–H). Then match them to their subject areas (1–8).

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| A The Nature of Democracy | 1 economics |
| B The Significance of Dreams | 2 education |
| C The Features of Glaciated Landscapes | 3 literature |
| D The Assessment of Language Skills | 4 history |
| E An Approach to Free Verse | 5 geography |
| F The Identification of Bees | 6 psychology |
| G Perspectives on Modern Taxation | 7 politics |
| H New Perspectives on Cleopatra | 8 zoology |

2.4 Match the beginning of each sentence with the most appropriate ending.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 The study revealed a regular | scope of your research. |
| 2 The research focuses on one particular | awareness of the problem. |
| 3 The writer makes a powerful | issues facing the world today. |
| 4 The writers take an original | into the environmental effects of nanoparticles. |
| 5 Until recently there was little | approach to their theme. |
| 6 I think you should broaden the | aspect of modern society. |
| 7 To date, there has been little research | pattern of changes in temperature. |
| 8 There are many important | case for restructuring parliament. |

Key verbs

In this unit we look at some important verbs in academic English.

A Verbs for structuring academic assignments

Look at these tasks which students have been given. Note the key verbs.

Discuss some of the problems **involved**¹ in **investigating** attitudes to diet and health. Write a critical review of an investigation you have read about, or describe an investigation you yourself could **conduct**². **Consider** the advantages and disadvantages of different methods.

Starting from rest, an aircraft accelerates to its take-off speed of 60 m s⁻¹ in a distance of 900 metres. **Illustrate**³ this with a velocity-time graph. **Assuming**⁴ constant acceleration, **find**⁵ how long the take-off run lasts. Hence **calculate**⁶ the acceleration.

'The fact that nations agree to follow international law **demonstrates**⁷ that we can **identify**⁸ ideals that are trans-national and trans-cultural.' How far is this statement true? Critically **analyse** any recent event which **supports** or **challenges**⁹ the statement.

Examine¹⁰ how industrial growth has **affected** any two developing countries. **Provide**¹¹ statistical evidence where necessary and **include** a discussion of likely future trends.

¹ which are part of/included in ² organise and do ³ draw something in order to explain something ⁴ accepting something to be true ⁵ discover by calculating (see 6) ⁶ judge the number or amount of something and adding, multiplying, subtracting or dividing numbers ⁷ show, make clear ⁸ recognise someone or something and say or prove who or what they are ⁹ questions whether it is true ¹⁰ look at or consider carefully and in detail ¹¹ give

B More key verbs

These extracts from academic books contain other key verbs.

In **developing** methods to explain the significance of health status measures, one can **classify**¹ ways of **establishing**² quality of life into two main types.

The length of time spent on the tasks may **account for**³ the decrease in motivation which **was seen**⁴ in many of the participants.

The data **presented**⁵ in Chapter 3 **showed**⁶ that the age of the subjects was not the main factor.

Political theory **attempts**⁷ to build bridges between different schools of political thought.

¹ divide things into groups according to their type ² discover or get proof of ³ explain ⁴ see is often used in the passive in academic style ⁵ given ⁶ proved ⁷ (formal) tries

C Verbs which combine with noun forms of key verbs

Often in academic style, a verb + the noun form of the key verb is used.

verb	verb + noun	example
explain	give/provide/offer an explanation (of/for)	The model provides an explanation for the differences between the two sets of data.
explore	carry out an exploration (of)	Kumar carried out an exploration of music genius.
emphasise	place/put emphasis (on)	The hospital puts a lot of emphasis on training nurses.
describe	give/provide a description (of)	The book gives a description of modern Europe.



The verbs **affect** and **effect** are different. *To affect* means to influence, to *effect* means to make something happen / to bring about. *The burning of fossil fuels has negatively **affected** the global climate. The procedure has been successful and has **effected** a return to normal functioning of the engine.* See Unit 30 for more on *affect* and *effect*.

Exercises

3.1 Match each verb from A in the box on the left with its synonym from the box on the right.

affect attempt calculate challenge demonstrate
identify include investigate provide

compute distinguish give influence
involve question show study try

3.2 Choose the best verb from B or C to complete these sentences. Put the verb into the correct form.

- 1 As can from Table II, participation figures have been steadily falling since 1970.
- 2 Different authors have for the President's actions in different ways.
- 3 Mendel attempted to devise a system for the many different types of pea plant that he grew.
- 4 It is often most effective your data in a chart or table.
- 5 The data we have collected that there has been a downward trend with regard to job satisfaction over the last 50 years.
- 6 The aim of the research is a new software application which will help aviation engineers design more sophisticated aircraft.
- 7 The archaeologists should be able to use carbon dating techniques exactly how old the bones are.
- 8 Charles Darwin attempted the existence of different species in terms of evolution.

3.3 Explain the difference between the sentences in each pair.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 Greig's article supports Park's theory. | Greig's article challenges Park's theory. |
| 2 Describe the new tax regulations. | Discuss the new tax regulations. |
| 3 Lodhi provides new data. | Lodhi considers new data. |
| 4 Titova conducted four sets of experiments. | Titova examined four sets of experiments. |
| 5 Lee established why such changes occur. | Lee investigated why such changes occur. |
| 6 Okaz assumed that the data were reliable. | Okaz proved that the data were reliable. |
| 7 Illustrate the magnitude of the deceleration. | Find the magnitude of the deceleration. |
| 8 The events effected economic development. | The events affected economic development. |

3.4 Rewrite each sentence using the word in brackets and make any necessary changes to other words.

- 1 Erikson's theory explains the fluctuations in the figures for this period. (PROVIDES)
- 2 Bevan explored the relationship between family background and political ambition. (EXPLORATION)
- 3 The book describes the life and times of Abraham Lincoln. (DESCRIPTION)
- 4 Cheng's theory emphasises the importance of extensive reading in language acquisition. (PUTS)

3.5 In academic style, noun phrases can often be used instead of some of the key verbs. Complete each phrase with the appropriate noun. Use a dictionary if necessary.



- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1 investigate = conduct, carry out an into/of | 4 affect = have an on |
| 2 illustrate = provide an of | 5 attempt = make an to/at |
| 3 analyse = provide, carry out an of | 6 classify = make, provide a of |

FOLLOW UP

Using the tasks in A as a model, prepare some assignment topics for students studying any subject that you are familiar with.