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Academic Vocabulary **in Use**

50 units of
academic
vocabulary
reference and
practice

Self-study and
classroom use

Michael McCarthy
Felicity O'Dell

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Working with academic vocabulary

- 1 What is special about academic English? *discipline, virtually, quantify*
- 2 Key nouns *theory, model, pattern*
- 3 Key verbs *attempt, establish, explain*
- 4 Key adjectives *relevant, abstract, significant*
- 5 Key adverbs *comparatively, eventually, simply*
- 6 Phrasal verbs in academic English *put forward, go through, write up*
- 7 Key quantifying expressions *a substantial amount, in excess of, no fewer than*
- 8 Words with several meanings *set, accommodate, issue*
- 9 Metaphors and idioms *shed light on, remain in the dark, the battle against*

Word combinations

- 10 Nouns and the words they combine with *heated debate, pivotal role, to collate results*
- 11 Adjective and noun combinations *important contribution, major concern, widespread support*
- 12 Verbs and the words they combine with *loosely based on, examine the evidence, suggest an alternative solution*
- 13 Prepositional phrases *in conjunction with, on behalf of, for the most part*
- 14 Verbs and prepositions *focus on, consent to, account for*
- 15 Nouns and prepositions *dissertation on, rationale for, progress towards*
- 16 Fixed expressions *in a variety of ways, with the exception of, be that as it may*

At academic institutions

- 17 Applications and application forms *entry requirements, referee, deadline*
- 18 College and university: the UK system *student union, tutorial, research student*
- 19 Systems compared: the US and the UK *dormitory, freshman, fraternity*
- 20 Academic courses *diploma, credits, defer*
- 21 Study habits and skills *reading speed, mind map, rote learning*
- 22 Online learning *online community, username, subject header*

Ways of talking about ...

- 23 Sources *primary source, draw on, body of literature*
- 24 Facts, evidence and data *distort the facts, hard evidence, empirical data*
- 25 Numbers *random, tally, estimate*
- 26 Statistics *standard deviation, correlate, proportion*
- 27 Graphs and diagrams *pie chart, intersect, decline*
- 28 Money and education *student loan, cost of living, receipt*
- 29 Time *century, simultaneous, in the near future*
- 30 Cause and effect *trigger, give rise to, chain reaction*

Opinions and ideas

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 31 Talking about ideas | <i>movement, hypothesis, stance</i> |
| 32 Reporting what others say | <i>pinpoint, cast doubt on, implication</i> |
| 33 Analysis of results | <i>deduce, outweigh, critical</i> |
| 34 Talking about meaning | <i>transparent, comprehend, misinterpret</i> |
| 35 Research and study aims | <i>objective, to further, instigate</i> |
| 36 Talking about points of view | <i>impartial, ideology, hold views</i> |
| 37 Degrees of certainty | <i>tendency, likelihood, allegedly</i> |

Functions

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 38 Presenting an argument | <i>beyond the scope of, furthermore, the extent to which</i> |
| 39 Organising your writing | <i>with a focus on, at this point, respectively</i> |
| 40 Making a presentation | <i>address a topic, handout, take questions</i> |
| 41 Describing research methods | <i>carry out a procedure, case study, replicate</i> |
| 42 Classifying | <i>component, consist of, marital status</i> |
| 43 Making connections | <i>correlate with, mutual, interaction</i> |
| 44 Comparing and contrasting | <i>distinction, similarly, whereas</i> |
| 45 Describing problems | <i>experience difficulties, deal with, resolve a problem</i> |
| 46 Describing situations | <i>context, integral, stable</i> |
| 47 Processes and procedures | <i>simulation, to supplement, output</i> |
| 48 Describing change | <i>expansion, diminish, perceptible change</i> |
| 49 Evaluation and emphasis | <i>inadequate, contradictory, acknowledge</i> |
| 50 Summary and conclusion | <i>bring to a close, in the final analysis, finally</i> |

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We acknowledge with gratitude the pioneering work on academic word lists done by Averil Coxhead. In planning this book we made considerable use of her lists at <http://language.massey.ac.nz/staff/awl/index.shtml>.

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Michael McCarthy & Felicity O'Dell
Cambridge, April 2007

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To the student and the teacher

Who is the book for?

This book is for anyone who wants or needs to learn the kind of English which is used in academic contexts. It deals with the kinds of language used in academic textbooks and articles as well as in lectures and seminars. It also presents vocabulary relating to being a student at a university or college in that it covers such topics as *Applications and application forms*, *Money and education* and *Academic courses* associated with university life. It will be particularly useful for students preparing for IELTS or any other examination aimed at assessing whether candidates' English is at a high enough level to study in an academic institution where English is the medium of instruction. It will be helpful for people who need to attend – or indeed give – lectures and presentations in English or to participate in international conferences. It will enable students who have to prepare assignments or write up a dissertation in English to do so in a much more natural and appropriate way.

What kind of vocabulary does the book deal with?

The book presents and practises the kind of vocabulary that is used in academic speech and writing regardless of which discipline you are concerned with. So it considers words and expressions like *concept*, *cast doubt on*, *put forward a theory* and *come to a conclusion*. It does not deal with the specialist vocabulary of any particular subject such as medicine or physics. Such specialist terms are often relatively easy to master – they will be explained and taught as you study the subject and these words may indeed sometimes be similar in English and your own language. However, it is the more general words used for discussing ideas and research and for talking and writing about academic work that you need to be fully familiar with in order to feel comfortable in an academic environment. Despite the fact that they are much more frequent than specialist words, these more general words are often felt to be more difficult to learn. It is, therefore, extremely useful to approach them in the systematic way suggested by this book.

One positive aspect of this kind of academic vocabulary is that there are relatively few differences depending on whether you are studying in London or New York, Delhi or Sydney, Johannesburg, Dublin, Wellington, Singapore or Toronto or indeed any other place where you may be using English for academic purposes. Academic English tends to be a truly international language and the units of the book focus on vocabulary that will be essential for you regardless of where you are studying now or may study in the future. There are some differences between the words used to describe people and places and these are highlighted in Units 18 and 19. References 3 and 4 also focus on some vocabulary and spelling variations. In the units of the book we use British English spelling conventions except when quoting texts which originally used American spelling.

Much of the vocabulary in the book is neutral in the sense that it is equally appropriate for both written and spoken contexts. We indicate those instances where a word or expression is too formal for use in speech or too informal for use in academic writing.

How was the vocabulary for the book selected?

The academic vocabulary focused on in this book was all selected from language identified as significant by the Cambridge International Corpus of written and spoken English and also the CANCODE corpus of spoken English developed at the University of Nottingham in association with Cambridge University Press. These enormous corpora include large collections of written and spoken academic text and so it was possible to identify language that is distinctive for academic contexts. We also made considerable use of the Cambridge Learner Corpus, a corpus of tens of thousands of learner scripts from students taking Cambridge ESOL exams all over the world. From this corpus we were able to learn what kinds of errors students taking, for example IELTS, were typically making.

In planning this book we made considerable use of Averil Coxhead's work on developing academic word lists. Her lists can be found at <http://language.massey.ac.nz/staff/awl/index.shtml> and we would highly recommend that students of academic vocabulary investigate this site.

How is the book organised?

The book has 50 two-page units. The left-hand page presents the academic vocabulary to be focused on in the unit. You will usually find examples of academic vocabulary presented in context with, where appropriate, any special notes about their meaning and usage. The right-hand page checks that you have understood the information on the left-hand page by giving you a series of exercises practising the language that was presented.

The units are organised into different sections. The first introductory section includes nine units which look at basic aspects of academic vocabulary such as what is special about academic vocabulary, key verbs and key quantifying expressions. The second section devotes seven units to how words typically combine with one another in academic English. The third section has six units focusing on aspects of life at academic institutions. The fourth section provides eight units discussing ways of talking about such things as numbers, time and cause and effect. Then we have seven units exploring aspects of opinions and ideas and finally there are thirteen units with a functional focus such as organising a text, comparing and contrasting and describing change.

Towards the end of the book you will find six reading texts relating to different academic disciplines with exercises based on the vocabulary in those texts. We hope that you will find these useful examples of how to use texts to expand your knowledge of academic vocabulary in English and would recommend that you read these texts and do the exercises on them even if they relate to an academic subject that is very different from your own.

There are six reference sections dealing with some key areas where we felt it would be useful for you to have lists of items that could not be presented as fully in the main body of the book, i.e. *Formal and informal academic words and expressions*; *Numbers, units of measurement and common symbols*; *British and North American academic vocabulary*; *Spelling variations*; *Word formation* and *Abbreviations*. Where appropriate, these reference sections provide space for you to add further examples of your own.

At the end of the book there is a Key with answers to all the exercises and an Index of all the key words and expressions, indicating the units where they can be found. The pronunciation is provided for standard British English.

How should I use this book?

We recommend that you work through the nine introductory units first so that you become familiar with key aspects of academic vocabulary and how best to study it. After that you may work on the units in any order that suits you.

What else do I need in order to improve my academic vocabulary?

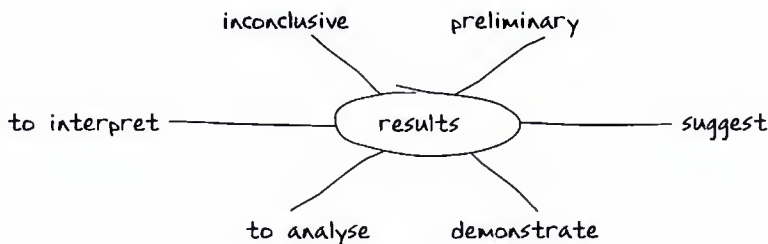
You need a notebook or file in which you can write down all the academic vocabulary that you study in this book as well as any other words and expressions that you come across elsewhere. In your vocabulary notebook it is important to record such things as:

- examples of the word or expression in use
- typical word combinations – you might, for example, note down adjectives or verbs typically associated with a noun that you want to learn or nouns, adverbs or prepositions associated with a verb
- any special features of the word (e.g. is there anything special about its grammar or pronunciation, or is it particularly characteristic of either written or spoken English?).

You may also find it helpful to record such things as:

- any other information that might help you to learn the word (e.g. is it similar to any word in your own language, or does it, perhaps, share a root with a word that you already know?)
- any additional vocabulary that learning this word may help you to learn (e.g. does a verb have a related noun, or what is the opposite of an adjective?)
- any extended uses of the word being focused on (e.g. can it be used metaphorically, or does the same word have other meanings in the way that so many English words do?).

One very important aspect of learning vocabulary is to *organise* the words and expressions you meet; this will help you remember them better. You can do this in a number of ways. In recording words many learners find it helpful to include little diagrams such as *word bubbles*, for example:



or *word forks*, for example:



You also need to have access to a good dictionary. We strongly recommend the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* as this provides exactly the kind of information that you need in order to be able to understand and use English vocabulary. Through its example sentences it provides you with the information you need about how the word is used in practice and which other words it typically combines with. The dictionary also helps you with difficult items such as phrasal verbs, for example, indicating whether the object can come before the particle (*set up the apparatus / set the apparatus up; go through a set of calculations, but not go a set of calculations through*). This dictionary is available as a book and on a CD-ROM and can also be accessed online at www.dictionary.cambridge.org. You will need a specialist dictionary relating to your own subject area as well. Your teacher may also be able to recommend other dictionaries for your specific needs.

As well as working through the units in this book you should read as much English as you can in the subject areas that are most relevant for you. If you are new to studying in English, you could start by reading a textbook aimed at students at a slightly lower level than you are at as far as the subject area is concerned; or you might prefer to read the latest articles in your field from a journal or the internet. If you have easy access to the web, then there is an enormous wealth of material available for you to study and learn from; many universities and other academic institutions have extensive websites, for example, as do professional organisations and journals.

So, good luck with your work in academic English. We hope that the materials in this book will help you to enjoy and to benefit fully from your studies. We hope you will be able to share ideas in a creative, exciting way with scholars from all over the world and we wish you the very best for a successful and rewarding academic life in English.