

Table of Contents

- I. **The Importance of Learning Academic Vocabulary**
- II. **What is the Academic Word List?**
- III. **How to Use the Academic Word List**

I. The Importance of Learning Academic Vocabulary

One of the most important areas of English that international students planning to study in North American universities need to focus on is vocabulary expansion, especially academic vocabulary. Here are some interesting statistics for you to ponder:

- *A vocabulary base of 2000 common words in English will only allow you to comprehend about 80% of the words in an academic text.*
- *A vocabulary base of 3000 words will only increase that to 85%.*
- *Although there are about 54,000 word families in English, comprehension of about 3-5000 is considered the minimum for success at the university level.*

With this information in mind, the question of *which* words to study to reach that 3-5000 word level is quite legitimate. Fortunately, there is a good answer to that. The **Academic Word List** (or **AWL**) is a compilation of commonly used words within an academic context. These are probably very useful words to learn if you intend to take the TOEFL® iBT Test to enter a North American university.

II. What is the Academic Word List?

The **Academic Word List** (also referred to as the AWL), developed by Averil Coxhead at Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand, consists of vocabulary that students are likely to encounter in most academic subjects. It consists of the 570 most common word families in academic texts, excluding about 2000 basic English words such as *the, in, of, about, under, dog, cat, that*, and so on. English learners who learn and practice the words on the AWL before attending university are likely to be able to master academic material with more confidence and speed, wasting less time and effort in guessing the meaning of words or consulting dictionaries than those who only know the basic 2,000-words, which characterize ordinary conversation. An added feature of the AWL is that by learning one word on it, there are often a number of other frequently used forms to learn as well. For example, the word '*analysis*' from the AWL has a number of other forms that are useful to know:

<i>analyze</i>	<i>analyzing</i>	<i>analysis</i>
<i>analyzed</i>	<i>analytically</i>	<i>analyst</i>
<i>analyzer</i>	<i>analytical</i>	<i>analytic</i>
<i>analyses</i>		

When learning these words you should also learn their pronunciation. You need to recognize them when you hear them spoken and you need to be able to pronounce them correctly. In some cases, the part of the word or syllable that is stressed might change. For example:

analyze (The underlined letters in bold show the stressed syllable)
analysis

Mastering the word families on the AWL can quickly help you reach that 3-5000 word family goal needed for success at the university level in an English-speaking country. Learning the first 2000 basic English words and the 570 word families from the AWL will allow you to comprehend about 90% of the words encountered in academic text. Keep this in mind:

“If, instead of focusing on the AWL, a student moves on to the third 1000 most common everyday English words, instead of an additional 10% coverage there would be only an extra 4.3% coverage of the essential vocabulary needed for academic success.”

-Nation, P. (2001) Learning Vocabulary in Another Language. Cambridge; Cambridge University Press.

Clearly then, if you are an ESL learner intending to study at the university level in an English-speaking country, the Academic Word List is worth studying.

The 570 Words of the Academic Word List
(in alphabetical order)

abandon	assess	commence	context
abstract	assign	comment	contract
access	assist	commission	contradict
accommodate	assume	commit	contrary
accompany	assure	commodity	contrast
accumulate	attach	communicate	contribute
accurate	attain	community	controversy
achieve	attitude	compatible	convene
acknowledge	attribute	compensate	converse
acquire	author	compile	convert
adapt	authority	complement	convince
adequate	automate	complex	cooperate
adjacent	available	component	coordinate
adjust	aware	compound	core
administrate	behalf	comprehensive	corporate
adult	benefit	comprise	correspond
advocate	bias	compute	couple
affect	bond	conceive	create
aggregate	brief	concentrate	credit
aid	bulk	concept	criteria
albeit	capable	conclude	crucial
allocate	capacity	concurrent	culture
alter	category	conduct	currency
alternative	cease	confer	cycle
ambiguous	challenge	confine	data
amend	channel	confirm	debate
analogy	chapter	conflict	decade
analyze	chart	conform	decline
annual	chemical	consent	deduce
anticipate	circumstance	consequent	define
apparent	cite	considerable	definite
append	civil	consist	demonstrate
appreciate	clarify	constant	denote
approach	classic	constitute	deny
appropriate	clause	constrain	depress
approximate	code	construct	derive
arbitrary	coherent	consult	design
area	coincide	consume	despite
aspect	collapse	contact	detect
assemble	colleague	contemporary	deviate

device	equivalent	framework	inevitable
devote	erode	function	infer
differentiate	error	fund	infrastructure
dimension	establish	fundamental	inherent
diminish	estate	furthermore	inhibit
discrete	estimate	gender	initial
discriminate	ethic	generate	initiate
displace	ethnic	generation	injure
display	evaluate	globe	innovate
dispose	eventual	goal	input
distinct	evident	grade	insert
distort	evolve	grant	insight
distribute	exceed	guarantee	inspect
diverse	exclude	guideline	instance
document	exhibit	hence	institute
domain	expand	hierarchy	instruct
domestic	expert	highlight	integral
dominate	explicit	hypothesis	integrate
draft	exploit	identical	integrity
drama	export	identify	intelligence
duration	expose	ideology	intense
dynamic	external	ignorance	interact
economy	extract	illustrate	intermediate
edit	facilitate	image	internal
element	factor	immigrate	interpret
eliminate	feature	impact	interval
emerge	federal	implement	intervene
emphasis	fee	implicate	intrinsic
empirical	file	implicit	invest
enable	final	imply	investigate
encounter	finance	impose	invoke
energy	finite	incentive	involve
enforce	flexible	incidence	isolate
enhance	fluctuate	incline	issue
enormous	focus	income	item
ensure	format	incorporate	job
entity	formula	index	journal
environment	forthcoming	indicate	justify
equate	found	individual	label
equip	foundation	induce	labor

layer	nevertheless	policy	react
lecture	nonetheless	portion	recover
legal	norm	pose	refine
legislate	normal	positive	regime
levy	notion	potential	region
liberal	notwithstanding	practitioner	register
license	nuclear	precede	regulate
likewise	objective	precise	reinforce
link	obtain	predict	reject
locate	obvious	predominant	relax
logic	occupy	preliminary	release
maintain	occur	presume	relevant
major	odd	previous	reluctance
manipulate	offset	primary	rely
manual	ongoing	prime	remove
margin	option	principal	require
mature	orient	principle	research
maximize	outcome	prior	reside
mechanism	output	priority	resolve
media	overall	proceed	resource
mediate	overlap	process	respond
medical	overseas	professional	restore
medium	panel	prohibit	restrain
mental	paradigm	project	restrict
method	paragraph	promote	retain
migrate	parallel	proportion	reveal
military	parameter	prospect	revenue
minimal	participate	protocol	reverse
minimize	partner	psychology	revise
minimum	passive	publication	revolution
ministry	perceive	publish	rigid
minor	percent	purchase	role
mode	period	pursue	route
modify	persist	qualitative	scenario
monitor	perspective	quote	schedule
motive	phase	radical	scheme
mutual	phenomenon	random	scope
negate	philosophy	range	section
network	physical	ratio	sector
neutral	plus	rational	secure

seek	tape	visible
select	target	vision
sequence	task	visual
series	team	volume
sex	technical	voluntary
shift	technique	welfare
significant	technology	whereas
similar	temporary	whereby
simulate	tense	widespread
site	terminate	
so-called	text	
sole	theme	
somewhat	theory	
source	thereby	
specific	thesis	
specify	topic	
sphere	trace	
stable	tradition	
statistic	transfer	
status	transform	
straightforward	transit	
strategy	transmit	
stress	transport	
structure	trend	
style	trigger	
submit	ultimate	
subordinate	undergo	
subsequent	underlie	
subsidy	undertake	
substitute	uniform	
successor	unify	
sufficient	unique	
sum	utilize	
summary	valid	
supplement	vary	
survey	vehicle	
survive	version	
suspend	via	
sustain	violate	
symbol	virtual	

III. How to Use the Academic Word List

The words from the Academic Word List can be learned in several ways, such as:

- i) By reading academic texts and listening to academic lectures and discussions as much as possible.
- ii) By taking part in academic discussions and writing academic texts.
- iii) By directly studying words from the AWL using word cards and doing intensive study of short academic texts.

The following are some more general suggestions for learning academic vocabulary:

► **Read, Read, Read!** Most vocabulary words are learned from context. The more words you're exposed to, the better vocabulary you will have. While you read, pay close attention to words you don't know. First, try to figure out their meanings from context. Then look the words up. Read and listen to challenging material so that you'll be exposed to many new words. If you're preparing for the TOEFL® iBT Test, you should not only study the Academic Word List but also read English newspapers, college textbooks, and magazines on a regular basis. When you come across an unknown word, write it down in a notebook. Use a good learner's dictionary to find the definition and write it in the notebook along with any derivations (i.e.: other words formed from the same root) and the part of speech (e.g.: noun). Try to use the word in an example sentence. Then write the new word on one side of a 5" x 7" index card, and the definition on the other side. Try to make 7-10 flash cards per day, and group them into categories (e.g.: biology, government, law, geography, history, etc.). Review them frequently. If you can learn 10 new words a day, that's 300 new words a month!

► **Improve your context skills.** Research shows that the vast majority of words are learned from context. To improve your context skills pay close attention to how words are used. Doing a search on a word using *dejanews.com* (for searching newsgroups) will give you many examples of how that word is used in context.

► **Practice, practice, practice.** Learning a word won't help very much if you promptly forget it. Research shows that it takes from 10 to 20 repetitions to really make a word part of your vocabulary. As we just mentioned, it really helps to write the word - both the definition and a sentence you make up using the word – in a notebook or on an index card that can later be reviewed. As soon as you learn a new word, start using it.

► **Make up as many associations and connections as possible.** Say the word aloud to activate your auditory memory. Relate the word to words you already know. For example, the word GARGANTUAN (very large) has a similar meaning to the words gigantic, huge, large, etc. You could make a sequence: small, medium, large, very large, GARGANTUAN. List as many things as you can that could be considered GARGANTUAN: Godzilla, the circus fat lady, the Tokyo Dome, etc. Create pictures of the word's meaning that involve strong emotions. Think "the GARGANTUAN creature was going to rip me apart and then eat me!"

► **Use mnemonics (memory tricks).** For example, consider the word EGREGIOUS (extremely bad). Think EGG REACH US - imagine we've made a mistake so bad that people are throwing eggs at us and a rotten EGG REACHes US. Humorous little word pictures in your mind will help you remember what words mean, and they're fun to make up. Also, find out which learning style suits you best. Everyone learns differently!

► **Get in the habit of looking up words you don't know.** If you have a dictionary program on your computer, keep it open and handy. America Online and other Internet services have dictionaries and thesauruses on their tool bars. Find them and look up any word you are not absolutely sure of. Use a thesaurus when you write to find the word that fits best.

► **Play with words.** Play word games like Scrabble or Boggle, and do crossword puzzles. These and other word games are available for the computer, so you are not dependent on a partner to play. Also, try out the Franklin Electronic Dictionary that features built-in word games.

► **Study Latin!** Study Latin root words, prefixes, and suffixes to further expand your vocabulary, and to help you make educated guesses about the meaning of unknown words in a test situation.

► **Get excited about English words!** Try to appreciate the subtle differences between words. Do you know the difference between something that *denotes* something else and something that *connotes* something else? If not, go look it up. Learn to say what you really mean and discover the joys of being able to express yourself in writing. Your future can depend on how rich your vocabulary is. It will also determine the quality of your communication. Let building your vocabulary be a lifelong proposition.

► **Study relevant word lists.** In addition to studying the AWL, be sure to get a copy of ESL Pro System's [1000 Key English Words & Idioms](#) CD-ROM. With this essential ESL vocabulary builder, your English will improve faster than you could ever imagine!