

1. From IELTS to HE – Bridging the gap

All international students that enter Higher Education (HE) in the UK must have a determined IELTS score. This score is determined by the discipline that the students are studying. Nevertheless, when studying at UK HE institutions, international students, whether studying at undergraduate or postgraduate level, often struggle during their first year with their academic writing.

Discuss with a partner.

- Can you think of any reasons why?

IELTS vs HE written tasks

We're going to start by looking at the types of assessments that are given and which students are expected to carry out in each case. **Look at each task and make a note of the tasks most salient features.**

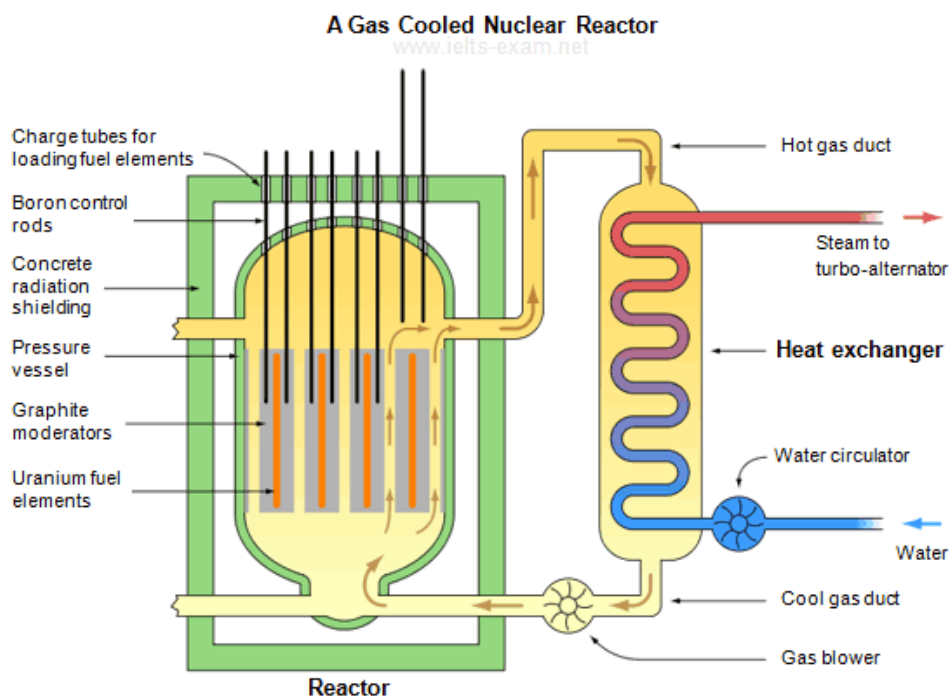
IELTS Part 1

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

The diagram below shows the production of steam using a gas cooled nuclear reactor.

Summarise the information by selecting and reporting the main features, and make comparisons where relevant.

Write at least 150 words.



IELTS Part 2

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

Some people think women should be allowed to join the army, the navy and the air force just like men.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Give reasons for your answer.

Write at least 250 words.

(Questions taken from IELTS EXAM.NET)

First year HE assessment

You have been given 4 texts to use as sources for the following essay question:

Higher education is an effective means of both obtaining employment and learning the basic prerequisites for the global workplace. Discuss.

Please use at least two of the texts provided, together with two additional academic sources.

1000 word essay

You need to include:

- Detailed essay plan
- Essay
- List of references

Procedure and Instructions:

- Write a **detailed essay plan** for the essay
- Write and Word-process your essay and use double-spacing.
- Re-read and edit your essay at least twice**
- Write your bibliography for the essay
- Add a title page with the number of words.

(Assessment taken from EAP04 module at the University of Westminster 2012)

Discuss with a partner.

- What are the main differences between these tasks? Are there any similarities?

IELTS vocabulary vs. vocabulary needed at HE

Discuss with a partner.

- Having looked at the examples above, what type of vocabulary is needed in each case?

Typical EAP material

As experienced teachers, I'm sure you recognise the importance of developing students' academic vocabulary. There are many ways that this is dealt with in EAP coursebooks. The most typical focus on the following areas:

- Differences between formal academic language and everyday language
- Phrases to refer to sources and to paraphrase or quote
- Vocabulary to organise texts
- Word building with Latin affixes
- Words with Greek and Latin roots

Discuss with a partner.

- Can you think of other vocabulary areas that you commonly teach?

While the above language areas do go some way to developing the students' general academic skills, the role of discipline-specific specialist language in the students' chosen academic field is often ignored. This is largely because the general EAP material is aimed at students before they enter their specialist field. From an economic perspective, it also makes more sense for publishers to produce material that has a larger audience. English for Special/specific Purposes (ESP) is a rather niche market. On top of this, EAP teachers usually have a background in language studies and applied linguistics, so are often themselves unfamiliar with specialist language.

Discuss with a partner.

- What problems do you have in teaching academic vocabulary?
- Do you find it difficult to identify which words will be useful for your students?

Academic vocabulary can be described as either '*technical*' or '*abstract*' in nature.

Technical academic vocabulary normally has a field specific meaning. It often needs to be defined and can be put in a taxonomic relationship with other terms in the same field e.g. *secondary school* – needs defining to distinguish it from other meanings of secondary (not as important), and is in a taxonomic relationship with *primary, higher* etc.

Abstract academic vocabulary can be described as referring to terms to do with meaning and thinking such as *idea, concept, theory*; or to non-specific concepts e.g. *problem*,

Parts of British **higher education** are **pedagogically constrained** by the **marketisation** that has **accompanied its expansion**

Most academic disciplines will have a mixture of both these kinds of vocabulary. While the technical vocabulary is intrinsic to the students' specific knowledge of their field, they will have to frame the technical vocab using the abstract vocab. Research has shown that acquisition of abstract academic vocabulary is a strong indicator of how well students learn subject specific content (Stahl & Nagy 2006; Marzano & Pickering 2005).

Discuss with a partner.

Think about the course of study your students will undertake at university.

- Do you think they will have more difficult with technical or abstract vocabulary?
- Do the resources you use focus more on one kind of academic vocabulary?
- How can you, as their teacher, make the students consciously aware of the technical vocabulary used in their discipline?

Here is an extract from one of the texts that was used with the EAP04 essay title. The text **discusses the value of a university education**.

Read the text and:

- a) **circle** technical vocabulary (in the field of education)
- b) **underline** abstract (but academic vocabulary)

With a partner highlight the words/phrases which you think would be **useful for the students in the debate**.

The role of universities in turning undergraduates into critical thinkers is being undermined by marketisation, academics have warned. Intellectual development is still a priority of the elite universities, says the paper in the journal *Teaching in Higher Education*. However, new universities' links to business via vocational courses and industry placements make them more likely to frame pedagogy purely in business terms, it adds. Rather than transforming their students into critical scholars, these institutions are simply producing "a more confident and content mass who remain a willing workforce". "Parts of British higher education are pedagogically constrained by the marketisation that has accompanied its expansion," say Mike Molesworth, Elizabeth Nixon and Richard Scullion, the authors of the report and members of Bournemouth University's Media School.

Although the sector should critically reflect on the market economy beyond campus, the paper suggests that "the emerging role" of some institutions is to "fix in students an unquestioning acceptance of the primacy of consumer desires". The authors criticise the emphasis some universities place on industry placements, which they say confirms the view of a degree as a means to a job. They also point out that institutions offering vocational courses as a route into some industries are reluctant to bite the hand that feeds them. The authors argue that institutions that treat specialist knowledge as a commodity risk undermining themselves in a world in which knowledge is shared more openly. Critiquing facts is more important than acquiring them, the academics say. "If the value of facts is reduced and complex learning is unattractive, what is left to be sold is the passport of the degree certificate," the paper adds. "Marketised education is not even an effective preparation for the workplace because it may not provide the imaginative and critical graduates who are able to deal with technological and societal change, let alone instigate changes themselves." Higher education's commodification is being driven from the top, the authors say, pointing to Bournemouth's "Get a better job, get a masters" campaign as an example. Students themselves are playing ball, arriving at university with the desire for a 2:1 "framed primarily by its subsequent bargaining power in the job market", they add. The paper, says: "Tutors must critically reflect on their role in maintaining education as personal transformation."

Newman, M., Market Value Dominates Sector. Times Higher Education. [online] available from:
<<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=407206>> 2nd July 2009.

Discuss with a partner.

- Which of the words that you highlighted are included in the Academic Word List?
- We can check using this website:
<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/alzsh3/acvocab/awlhighlighter.htm>
- Can you think of any other uses for this website?

Academic Word List – Recap

Below is a brief overview of the AWL

- Compiled from corpus of 3.5 million words of written academic texts
- 570 word families (10% of total words in academic texts)
- Arranged into 10 sublists
- Reflect word frequency & range

(Coxhead 2000)

Sublists

Here are a few words from a number of the AWL sublists.

Sublist 1

Analysis	Approach	Area
Assessment	Assure	Authority

Sublist 5

Academic	Adjustment	Alter
Amendment	Aware	Capacity

Sublist 10

Adjacent	Albeit	Assembly
Collapse	Colleagues	Compiled

To access the complete academic word list online, go to:

<http://www.englishvocabularyexercises.com/AWL/index.htm>

Word families

Each word in each sublist has a word family. For example:

<p>analyse</p> <p>analysed analyser analysers analyses analysing <i>analysis</i> analyst analysts analytic analytical analytically analyze analyzed analyzes analyzing</p>	<p>symbol</p> <p><i>symbolic</i> symbolically symbolise symbolises symbolised symbolising symbolism symbolize symbolized symbolizes symbolizing symbols</p>	<p>assemble</p> <p>assembled assembles assemblies assembling <i>assembly</i></p>
Sublist 1	Sublist 5	Sublist 10

Discuss with a partner.

Many coursebooks focus almost exclusively on words from the AWL. What are the problems or limitations of this?

Back to the value of education

- ✓ Before highlighting specific vocabulary try and think about what you want the students to do with it, and when
- ✓ Acquiring vocabulary is a process that requires exposure to the target language, so it is good idea to provide students with the opportunity to see the vocabulary again and again
- ✓ Students may need to be exposed to an item of vocabulary as many as twelve times before it 'sticks'

These are the words from the AWL that feature in the text. It probably wouldn't be very useful to just tell the students 'These are the academic words – now remember them.'

Level 1

[economy](#) [role](#) [sector](#)

Level 2

[acquiring](#) [complex](#) [institutions](#) [journal](#) [maintaining](#) [primarily](#)

Level 3

[constrained](#) [emphasis](#) [links](#) [technological](#)

Level 4

[emerging](#) [job](#) [subsequent](#)

Level 5

[academics](#) [primacy](#)

Level 6

[authors](#) [transforming](#)

Level 7

[confirms](#) [media](#) [priority](#)

Level 8

[accompanied](#) [commodity](#) [via](#)

Level 9

[route](#)

Level 10

[reluctant](#)

These are the **chunks of language** that I identified as being useful to my students for the subsequent debate:

- undermined by marketisation
- a priority of the elite universities
- vocational courses
- pedagogically constrained by the marketisation
- a degree as a means to a job
- vocational courses
- bite the hand that feeds them.
- instigate
- commodification
- playing ball
- bargaining power

And this is the follow up activity to focus on these chunks:

In small groups tell each other what you understand by the **highlighted** words and phrases in the text. Can you identify at least two idiomatic expressions in the text?

Now complete the following sentences with one of the **highlighted** words from the text:

- i. Higher degrees are a _____ tool for negotiating salary when a job is offered.
- ii. The Arab Spring revolutions could be used to _____ reforms of education systems in the region.
- iii. Going to university is supposed to be an opportunity of a lifetime as well as a _____ to _____ a better education.
- iv. The ability of India's education system to meet its goals has been _____ by a lack of adequate financial resources.
- v. _____ qualifications offer a more practical learning programme that relates directly to specific job roles or sectors.
- vi. Some have asserted that _____ is an attack on the liberal structures and values that have enabled universities to flourish academically
- vii. Increased access to adult *education is a* _____ for the government and takes many forms, ranging from formal class-based learning to self-directed and e-learning.

The purpose of this exercise is not only to reinforce the vocabulary by more exposure to it, but also to highlight more collocations e.g. bargaining power / tool, instigate changes/reforms.

Note also that the examples in the exercise above are also **in the context of education**. These are also real examples of the language taken from academic texts found using the British National Corpus <http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/index.xml>. This tool is also very useful for finding common collocations. For example, what words collocate with **priority**? You could ask students to think possibilities then use the corpus to check. Students can also use it see how a word is used in a sentence, check on dependent prepositions etc.

Time to reflect

- From what we have looked at now, how could you change or develop your teaching practices?