

I

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 the 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 on the issue of 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. |

3

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.

4 Key adjectives

For any adjective it is useful to know whether it is typically followed by a specific preposition and whether it has any synonyms (adjectives with a similar meaning) or antonyms (adjectives of opposite meaning).

A Adjectives and prepositions

Here are some extracts from academic texts, with adjectives followed by *to* or *of*.

Language development is conceived as **relative**¹ *to* one's own past performance, or relative to that of others.

Some of the responses to the questionnaire were **specific**⁴ *to* young male respondents. Others were **common**⁵ *to* all the respondents.

How can we make science **relevant**² *to* environmental policy? Poor communication between scientists and politicians is **characteristic**³ *of* the situation today.

We need to plan technologies which are **appropriate**⁶ *to* the needs of small farmers. It was **typical** *of* the farmers in the study that they had a negative attitude to technology.

¹ true to a particular degree when it is being compared with other things ² connected with what is happening or being discussed ³ (rather formal) typical of ⁴ only found in ⁵ belonging to or shared by two or more people or things ⁶ suitable or right for a particular situation or occasion

B Adjectives and their opposites

Look at this abstract from a dissertation on drug abuse. In most cases you can work out the meanings of the opposites (which follow each numbered adjective), based on the definitions.

We cannot discuss drug abuse as an **abstract**¹ problem without considering **concrete** examples of abuse and their social consequences. Abuse is rarely a **simple**² issue; it usually results from a **complex** set of circumstances. Both **quantitative**³ and **qualitative** research is necessary to gain a full picture of the situation. By combining research methods, we may obtain an **accurate** picture of the causes and results of abuse, in contrast with the **inaccurate** assessments which often result from purely quantitative studies. A **significant**⁴ amount of fear and prejudice surrounds the notion of abuse, and the media have a role which is also not **insignificant** in promoting such fears. The dissertation concludes that **rough**⁵ estimates of the number of drug addicts need to be made more **precise** by properly defining addiction.

¹ existing as an idea, not as a material object; opposite: existing in a form that can be seen or felt
² having or made of only one or a few parts ³ based on numbers and statistics; opposite: usually research using non-number-based methods such as interviews, focus groups, etc. ⁴ important or noticeable ⁵ fairly correct but not exact or detailed; opposite: exact and accurate

C Other important, frequent adjectives and typical combinations with nouns

There was an **apparent**¹ discrepancy between the two sets of results.
We noted a **potential**² problem with the experimental design which we had to deal with first.
The **principal**³ cause of the failure was a sudden temperature change.
The research used a **rigorous**⁴ methodology which had been tested on many occasions.

¹ seeming to exist or be true ² possible when the necessary conditions exist ³ first in order of importance ⁴ careful to look at or consider every part of something to make certain it is correct



Remember to say *typical of*, NOT *typical for*. Learn adjectives with the prepositions that often follow them, as in A.

Exercises

4.1 Look at A. Correct the preposition errors in these sentences.

- 1 A lengthy discussion of the advantages of solar power is not relevant with an essay that required you to focus on wind turbines.
- 2 It is typical to the disease for it to start with an itchy rash.
- 3 This methodology is not appropriate about the kind of research you are planning.
- 4 The use of original metaphors is characteristic from the writer's style.
- 5 Relative with previous attempts to explain the phenomenon, this interpretation is quite persuasive.
- 6 The dark hair and eyes are common for all people from the region.

4.2 Rewrite each sentence using the *opposite* of the adjective in italics.

- 1 Karlsson checked the figures and agreed with me that they were *accurate*.
- 2 The solution to the problem is a *simple* one.
- 3 Make *rough* calculations before you begin to write up your results.
- 4 The army played a *significant* role in events.
- 5 Hernandez prefers to discuss ideas in *abstract* terms.

4.3 Match the adjective on the left with the noun it often combines with on the right.

- | | |
|-------------|-------------|
| 1 apparent | methodology |
| 2 rigorous | problem |
| 3 principal | discrepancy |
| 4 potential | cause |

4.4 Now use one of the combinations from 4.3 to complete these sentences.

- 1 There is an in your figures.
- 2 Management's refusal to listen to the workers' demands was the of the riots.
- 3 Lamaque devised a which has since been used successfully by many other researchers in the field.
- 4 We spotted a with our procedure and so we changed it in two areas.

4.5 Choose the best adjective from the box to complete these sentences.

qualitative complex potential rigorous specific

- 1 The plant is difficult to grow and needs very conditions to survive.
- 2 His tutor was critical of his work for not being enough.
- 3 In the past the northern tribes looked on the tribes of the south as enemies.
- 4 We chose a approach to our research and interviewed individuals personally.
- 5 A set of circumstances led to a civil war in 1897.

FOLLOW UP

When you come across any of the key adjectives from this unit in your reading, note it down in a phrase so you build up a set of useful phrases using the adjective.

5

Key adverbs

This unit deals with just some of the adverbs that are particularly frequent in an academic context. You will find more in other units throughout this book.

A Adverbs that compare

adverb	meaning	example
comparatively/ relatively	in comparison with something else	Our sample was relatively/comparatively small.
especially/particularly	more than usual	The process was not especially/particularly difficult.
specially	more than usual (spoken English only) for a specific purpose	The exam was specially hard this year. We used specially designed equipment.
somewhat (opposite: considerably)	(slightly formal) a little, slightly	When we tested younger boys, we obtained somewhat/considerably different results.
primarily	mainly	Amir is primarily interested in bio-physics.
mostly/largely	almost completely (but not totally so)	The research was largely/mostly successful.
directly (opposite: indirectly)	without anything else being involved	The illness is (in)directly linked to poor housing.

B Adverbs that relate to numbers or time

There are **approximately** 20 varieties of bird in this species. [roughly, about]

There are **precisely** 48 different managerial posts in the company. [exactly]

Interviewees **frequently** misunderstood one of the questions. [often]

We **eventually** obtained the results we were hoping for. [in the end, after some time]

Ultimately we plan to repeat the experiment. [finally, after other things have been completed]

C Adverbs that relate to how things are stated

Hall's latest article **essentially**¹ differs from his earlier work in that it is **explicitly**² critical of the government. **Generally**³, his disapproval of their policies was only conveyed **implicitly**⁴ in his previous writing, but here he **specifically** condemns their handling of a number of issues.

¹ referring to its main characteristics; also **basically** ² openly ³ usually, also **on the whole**

⁴ not directly, suggested or implied rather than stated

D Adverbs that restrict or limit

merely = exactly and nothing more: *The medication will **merely** make the symptoms bearable; it will not cure the disease.*

simply Note that **simply** can have different meanings. *To put it **simply**, the risks of this approach would seem to outweigh its advantages.* [plainly] *The book presents difficult ideas **simply**, in a way appropriate for the layman.* [easily; someone who isn't a specialist in the field] *The exam results were **simply** dreadful.* [absolutely, without doubt]

hardly ever = almost never: *The tribe has **hardly ever** had contact with the outside world.*



Eventually means 'in the end'. It does not mean 'perhaps/possibly'.

We will **perhaps/possibly** (NOT **eventually**) discover life on other planets in the future.

Eventually [in the end], we were able to interview all 20 children involved in the test.

Exercises

5.1 Look at A and B. Explain the difference between the sentences in each pair.

- 1 Heinrich's experiments were mostly successful.
Heinrich's experiments were most successful.
- 2 The results were somewhat surprising given the circumstances.
The results were especially surprising given the circumstances.
- 3 First-year students are directly affected by the new rules relating to tuition fees.
First-year students are particularly affected by the new rules relating to tuition fees.
- 4 The study is primarily concerned with urban alienation.
The study is ultimately concerned with urban alienation.
- 5 The team eventually obtained unpredicted results.
The team frequently obtained unpredicted results.

5.2 Choose the more appropriate adverb from the options.

What you are saying is *essentially* / *merely* true. To put it *basically* / *simply*, there is *specially* / *basically* no significant difference between the two writers' theories. However, one of them writes in a *simply* / *precisely* dreadful style while the other has *eventually* / *possibly* a more impressive style than any other contemporary scientist.

5.3 Change the sentences using adverbs which mean the *opposite* of the underlined ones.

- 1 There were roughly 350 people living in the village in 1958.
- 2 Parents seldom complained that the school authorities failed to inform them of changes.
- 3 We investigated the problem and initially found some small errors in the calculations.
- 4 The temperature was exactly half a degree lower than the average.
- 5 Singh (1998) is explicitly critical of existing theories of economic growth.
- 6 Soil erosion is specifically caused by water or wind.
- 7 Senior citizens almost always use the internet to communicate with one another.
- 8 The disease is directly linked to environmental factors.

5.4 Underline the adverbs in these texts. Then answer the questions.

Marine conservationists are currently attempting to save the world's coral reefs. One plan is to literally glue the damaged reefs back together, using coral artificially raised in underwater labs. Reefs are increasingly under attack from human activity as well as from events occurring naturally, such as hurricanes and tsunamis. A recent UN report warns that 30% of the world's coral reefs have been completely destroyed or are severely damaged.

Scientists have recently discovered that ants can remember how many steps they have taken. By carefully shortening or lengthening the legs of ants, the team observed that short-legged ants apparently became lost and could not easily find their way home to the nest. Similarly, ants with longer legs typically travelled 50% further than they needed to and were also temporarily unable to find the nest. It seems ants can definitely count their steps.

- 1 Which adverb means 'in the same way'?
- 2 Find two pairs of adverbs that mean the opposite of each other.
- 3 Which adverb means the opposite of 'a long time ago'?
- 4 Which adverb means 'more and more'?
- 5 Which adverb could be substituted by *seriously*?
- 6 Which adverb means 'for a limited time'?

FOLLOW UP

Find an article of interest to you in your discipline and underline all the key adverbs. Then check that you understand their meaning.