

Seminar 1 – Academic Orientation

Below are some vocabulary and email writing exercises, and the descriptors of the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) for a B2 level student:

Listening

The CEFR Illustrative Descriptor Scales for B2 – listening

Can understand standard spoken language, live or broadcast on both familiar and unfamiliar topics normally encountered in personal, social, academic or vocational life. Only extreme background noise, inadequate discourse structure and/or idiomatic usage influence the ability to understand.

Can understand the main ideas of propositionally and linguistically complex speech on both concrete and abstract topics delivered in standard speech, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization.

Can follow extended speech and complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar, and the direction of the talk is sign-posted by explicit markers.

Can extract the main points from the arguments and discussions in news and current affairs programmes.

Can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes, documentaries, live interviews, talk shows, plays and the majority of films in the standard form of the language.

Vocabulary

The words selected for the **Academic Word List (AWL)** are those that occur frequently in a range of academic subjects, including the arts (e.g. history, psychology, sociology), commerce (e.g. economics, marketing, management), law and the sciences (e.g. biology, computer science, mathematics). AWL is useful to all second-language learners who wish to study in an English-speaking institution no matter what their field of study. The AWL does not, however, include technical words which are specific to a given field. Nor does it contain words which are of general use and very high frequency.

For more information on AWL, see <https://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/resources/academicwordlist>

To easily identify words from the AWL in a text, you can use the **AWL Highlighter** (<https://www.eapfoundation.com/vocab/academic/highlighter/>) This program will show the academic words in bold. For example:

Data was collected by the International **Labour** Office on hourly rates of pay in fifty different **occupations**, and on **consumer** prices for a sample of household **items** in about 100 countries. After **analysis**, it was shown that the worth of an hour's work, in terms of **purchasing** power, **varied considerably** from one country to another.

Task 1: Take a sample of your own text and use the **AWL Highlighter** to see what part of your lexicon is considered academic according to AWL.

The CEFR Illustrative Descriptor Scales for B2 – vocabulary

Can understand and use the main technical terminology and specialist vocabulary of his/her field, when discussing his/her area of specialization with other specialists. Has a good range of vocabulary for matters connected to most general topics.

Can vary formulation to avoid frequent repetition, but lexical gaps can still cause hesitation and circumlocution.

Can produce the appropriate collocations of many words in most contexts fairly systematically.

Lexical accuracy is generally high, though some confusion and incorrect word choice does occur without hindering communication.

Speaking

The CEFR Illustrative Descriptor Scales for B2 – speaking

Can give clear and systematically developed descriptions and presentations, with appropriate highlight of significant points, and relevant supporting detail.

Can give clear and systematically developed descriptions and presentations on a wide range of subjects related to his/her field of interest, expanding and supporting ideas with subsidiary points and relevant examples.

Can depart spontaneously from a prepared text and follow up interesting points raised by members of the audience, often showing remarkable fluency and ease of expression.

Can develop a clear argument, expanding and supporting his/her points of view at some length with subsidiary points and relevant examples. Can construct a chain of reasoned argument. Can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.

Can communicate complex information and advice on the full range of matters related to his/her occupational role.

Can communicate detailed information reliably.

Can give a clear, detailed description of how to carry out a procedure.

Writing

The CEFR Illustrative Descriptor Scales for B2 – writing

Can write clear detailed texts on a variety of subjects related to his/her field of interest, synthesising and evaluating information and arguments from a number of sources.

Can write an essay or report that develops an argument systematically with appropriate highlights of significant points and relevant supporting detail, or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view and explaining the advantages and disadvantage of various options.

Can interpret and present reliably in writing detailed information from diagrams and visually organised data in his fields of interest.

Can summarise in writing the main content of well-structured but propositionally complex spoken and written texts on subjects within his/her fields of professional, academic and personal interest

Can compare, contrast and synthesise in writing the information and viewpoints contained in academic and professional publications.

Writing Tip: We mostly use formal language when **writing in academic contexts**: academic articles, emails or reports. We also use formal language when giving lectures or presentations. The **choice of words, grammar** and tone differs greatly between formal and informal language. In formal situations the language and **tone** is less personal; we do not use casual language or colloquialisms. The tone we use with formal language is more specific and objective. The following examples will help you to recognize the informal and formal ways of saying the same:

say sorry / apologize

plus / moreover

just wanted to let you know ... / I am writing to inform you ...

You can call me if you need anything. / Please do not hesitate to contact me.

Task 2: Look at the email below and discuss how appropriate/inappropriate it is in an academic setting.

Hi!

I'm writing about the assignment you gave me last week about the European Union. You said it had to be handed in at the end of this week but I want to ask if I could have a few extra days as I'm feeling pretty ill at the moment and my doctor says I should rest.

You can call me if you want. My number is 050 570 0070

Thanks a lot

Clark Kent

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How would you change the following words/expressions into more formal ones?

INFORMAL	FORMAL
Thanks	
Sorry for...	
Can you...	
Do you know...	
I can't...	
I don't want to...	

ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL EMAILS

Email messages are generally less formal than letters, but there are still certain expectations for appropriate and successful email communication with faculty, colleagues and other professionals.

Task 3: Complete the text below with adjectives from the list:

personal, descriptive, full, kind, convenient, concise, academic, large, formal, conversational, exaggerated, grateful, lazy, willing

Critical points to remember

- In academic emails, de-emphasize the **1** _____ aspect.
- Use of polite terms and apologies does not guarantee a polite tone. Be careful not to sound arrogant or bossy.
- Keep messages as **2** _____ as possible: leave out **3** _____ details.
- Do not send **4** _____ attachments unless asked.
- Use your university email account for **5** _____ and professional correspondence.

Names

If you don't know a professor – Professor Jane Doe, for example – address her as “Professor Doe” (title + last name) until she writes back with a signature that gives you a clue to how you can address her. If she signs her response to you with “Jane Doe”, you probably need to stay with a more **6** _____ approach and use “Professor Doe.” If she writes back using “Jane,” she can (and should) be addressed in the future as “Jane”.

Formality

We may speak using the words *wanna* and *gonna*, but we don't write them unless we are reporting speech or dialect. We also avoid most abbreviations, emoticons, **7** _____ punctuation, and text-messaging short forms.

Requests

It is important to be polite when you are asking someone to help you. Some suggested phrases:

- Would you be so **8** _____ as to...
- I hope you might be **9** _____ to...
- When **10** _____ for you, could you please...
- I would be most **11** _____ if you...

Format

- SUBJECT line: concise but **12** _____ e.g. Apology for absence (**not Excuse**)
- Start with [Dear] Prof./Dr./Ms. Doe,
- End with Best regards, Regards, Sincerely, Best, Thank you
- Use your **13** _____ name in the closing of your first message
- Proofread and spell-check (spelling errors are considered **14** _____ and unprofessional) before you hit **SEND**

Adapted from: http://www4.ncsu.edu/~nmswishe/academic_email.pdf (visited on February 10, 2015)