

# 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 <b>discipline</b> .	area of study
<b>Underline</b> your family name on the form.	draw a line under it	The research <b>underlines</b> the importance of international trade agreements.	gives emphasis to
The lake was frozen <b>solid</b> .	not liquid or gas	We have no <b>solid</b> 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*?