

# LET - Academic Writing & Language

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## Academic Vocabulary [Fact sheet]

A key feature of academic language is specialised vocabulary. Part of your development at university involves learning and using this specialised vocabulary in your writing. There are two useful ways of doing this:

- 1) pay close attention to the words used in the academic reading you do
- 2) use the Academic Word List

The Academic Word List is a list of words which appear with high frequency in English-language academic texts. The list was compiled by Averil Coxhead at the Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

Read the example of academic writing below:

The impact of uncertainty about Bank of England policy on interest rates has been analyzed both theoretically and empirically.

The underlined words in the above sentence all feature in the Academic Word List. Indeed, words like *policy*, *analyzed* and *theoretically* are typically academic.

The Academic Word List contains 570 word families and is divided into 10 sublists. Sublist 1 consists of the 60 most common words in the Academic Word List. Sublist 2 contains the next most frequently used words and so on. Each sublist contains 60 word families, except for sublist 10, which contains 30. To find these words, an analysis was done of academic journals, textbooks, course workbooks, lab manuals, and course notes. The list was compiled following an analysis of over 3,500,000 words of text.

### Where can I find the Academic Word List and how can I use it?

There are many websites and books devoted to the Academic Word List. One particularly good free online resource is the Nottingham University Academic Vocabulary website - <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/~alzsh3/acvocab/>. This website contains all 10 sublists in .doc format, so you can download them onto your computer. In addition, the website has an Academic Word List highlighter which shows you how academic your own writing is. All you have to do is copy and paste sections of your work into a text box and it will show you how many of the words you used appear in the Academic Word List.

### How 'academic' is my vocabulary?

Here's an activity to test your knowledge of academic vocabulary. Sort the words below into groups of 'academic' and 'non-academic' vocabulary (answers at the bottom of the page):

significant	big	definition	amazing	upshot	
get	distribute	cool	obtain	state	wish

Answers: **Academic** – significant, definition, distribute, obtain, state, objective, attempt.

**Non-academic** - big, amazing, upshot, get, cool, wish, try.