KEY NOUNS IN ACADEMIC ENGLISH
Academic Vocabulary – AWL (Academic Word List)

Of all the parts of speech, nouns are perhaps the most important. A noun is a word that identifies a person, animal, place, thing, or idea. Here, we'll take a closer look at what makes a noun a noun, and we'll provide some noun examples, along with some advice for using nouns in your sentences.

- **Person** – A term for a person, whether proper name, gender, title, or class, is a noun.

- **Animal** – A term for an animal, whether proper name, species, gender, or class is a noun.

- **Place** – A term for a place, whether proper name, physical location, or general locale is a noun.

- **Thing** – A term for a thing, whether it exists now, will exist, or existed in the past is a noun.

- **Idea** – A term for an idea, be it a real, workable idea or a fantasy that might never come to fruition is a noun.

General nouns referring to ideas

She wrote an article on the **subject** of 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**. (specific subjects that someone discusses or writes about)

There was a lively debate on the **issue** of globalisation. (important subject or problem)

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. (description of a system or process which explains how it works)

The book is called 'The **Nature** of Intelligence'. (basic character of something)

Human behaviour is based on the **principle** of least effort. (basic idea or rule that explains how something happens or works)

More specific nouns connected with ideas and phenomena

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 that something has)

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. (a regularly repeated arrangement)

During 2005, the **number** of violent attacks increased to an alarming degree. (amount or level)

A. Choose the best 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 *nature / topic / theory* of evolution.

4 The professor decided to take moral courage as the *issue / theme / model* for his inaugural lecture.

5 Economists used a *model / principle / topic* of human behaviour to help them forecast likely inflation trends.

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.

B. Match the beginnings and endings of the sentences.

1 The study revealed a regular.	a scope of your research.
2 The research focuses on one particular.	b awareness of the problem.
3 The writer makes a powerful.	c issues facing the world today.
4 The writers take an original.	d into the environmental effects of nanoparticles.
5 Until recently there was little.	f aspect of modern society.
6 I think you should broaden the	g pattern of changes in temperature.
7 To date, there has been little research.	e approach to their theme.
8 There are many important	h case for restructuring parliament.

C. Correct the mistakes in the underlined phrases.

Recent researches that were carried out for a report by a government agency showed that local police can play an important role in crime prevention. The report makes 2 a strong case of boosting the numbers of community police offi cers although it warns against increasing police presence on the streets to an alarming degree. 3 Its methodological was based on a range of interviews asking members of the public for 4 their views in how best to prevent crime. Unfortunately, how to implement this recommendation was 5 out of the scope of the study but at least it serves a useful purpose in 6 raising awareness to the issue.

Nouns and the words they combine with

Nouns often combine with specific verbs, for example carry out research, pay attention, or with specific adjectives, for example medical research, undivided attention

Noun	Adjectives that often combine with it	example
contact	useful, valuable, personal, constant, close, frequent	Colombians like personal contact
debate	considerable, heated, intense, public, animated	Students has an intense debate about globalization
energy	excess, nuclear, sufficient	Nuclear energy is energy that is stored within the nucleus of atoms
phenome non	common, isolated, natural, recent, universal	A third phenomenon observable in stich healing tissues is the increased flow and accumulation of plastic materials at the seat of injury.
results	Conflicting, conclusive, unforeseen, preliminary, encouraging, interim	Sometimes, the data isn't as helpful and you're left with non-conclusive results.
role	decisive, challenging, conflicting, influential, key	She played a key role in campaig ning for equal opportunities in the workplace.
in… terms	Absolute, broad, relative, general, practical, economic	People are better off in economic terms
way	alternative, efficient, fair, practical, convenient, proper, acceptable	There is no acceptable alternative to dialogue and negotiation when differences arise.

*Adapted from Academic Vocabulary in Use, Michael McCarthy, Felicity O'Dell, 2016.