

# ACADEMIC ENGLISH VOCABULARY

## Academic Vocabulary – AWL (Academic Word List)

Many words in academic English are the same as everyday vocabulary, but they are often used with a slightly different meaning, which may be specialised.

Everyday use	Meaning	Academic use	Meaning
Standards of <b>discipline</b> in schools have declined	The ability to control yourself or other people, even in difficult situations	Nanotechnology is a relatively new <b>discipline</b> .	A particular area of study, especially a subject studied at a college or university
<b>Underline</b> all the verbs from the text	To mark with a line or lines underneath; underscore	The chart <b>underlines</b> the importance of consuming more fruits and vegetables	Gives emphasis to
The lake was frozen <b>solid</b>	not liquid or gas	This provided <b>solid</b> evidence that he committed the crime.	certain or safe; of a good standard; giving confidence or support

### Exercise 1

The words in the box each have an everyday and academic use. Complete each pair of sentences using the same word in the correct form.

generate turn solid confirm identify underline character pose natural focus

- They love to \_\_\_\_\_ for photographs in front of their garden.  
The president's comments \_\_\_\_\_ a threat to stability in the region.
- I'm such a terrible photographer, most of my photos are blurred and out of \_\_\_\_\_.  
  
Children malnutrition should be the \_\_\_\_\_ of our attention in the coming years.
- I went to trivago.com and \_\_\_\_\_ my hotel reservation.  
The data \_\_\_\_\_ the hypothesis that pet owners enjoy better health.
- The power plant in Chingaza \_\_\_\_\_ electricity for the whole region.

Using movies in the class always \_\_\_\_\_ a great deal of debate among teachers.

5. The murderer was \_\_\_\_\_ from fingerprints discovered at the scene  
In this theory of history, progress is closely \_\_\_\_\_ with technology.
6. Students \_\_\_\_\_ the most important ideas when they are reading university texts.

The study \_\_\_\_\_ the fact that very little research exists.

7. He lived in close communion with \_\_\_\_\_.

Motor-racing is by \_\_\_\_\_ a dangerous sport.

8. The liquid became \_\_\_\_\_ as the temperature was lowered.

The study lacks \_\_\_\_\_ evidence and its conclusions are questionable.

### 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 because it gives you a better language rapport to interact in both daily life and academic contexts.

Neutral	More formal	Neutral	More formal
in short, briefly	in sum, to sum up,	try	Attempt
basically	fundamentally	mainly/mostly	primarily
only	solely	typical of	characteristic of
almost, more or less	virtually		

However, very informal vocabulary may be used in **spoken** academic styles in classes and lectures. Learn to understand informal 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 8.'* (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 and learn the differences between similar words, as well as typical word combinations.

**Exercise 2**

Rewrite the underlined words using more formal words and phrases.

- 1 The book is mainly concerned with the problem of policing the internet.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2 Almost every school in the country 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 Several research teams have had a shot at solving the problem, without success.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 6 The reaction is typical of the way large corporations keep control of their markets.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 7 We tried to find a new way of understanding the data.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 8 Briefly, with the loss of centrality, historical centres are transformed into historical places or neighbourhoods.  
\_\_\_\_\_

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



ANSWER KEY

**Exercise 1**

1. *Pose/pose*
2. *Focus/focus*
3. *Confirmed/confirmed*
4. *Generates/generates*
5. *Identified/identified*
6. *Underline/underlines*
7. *Nature/nature*
8. *Solid/solid*

**Exercise 2**

1. *Mainly/ primarily*
2. *Almost/virtually*
3. *Not only/solely*
4. *Basically/fundamentally*
5. *Had a shot/attempt to do*
6. *Typical of/characteristic of*
7. *Tried/attempted*
8. *Briefly / To sum up*