The Academic Word List (Averil Coxhead, 2000): a list of 570 high-incidence and high-utility academic word families for Secondary School, Higher Education, Career

There is a very important specialized vocabulary for learners intending to pursue academic studies in English at the secondary and post-secondary levels. The Academic Word List, compiled by Coxhead (2000), consists of 570 word families that are not in the most frequent 2,000 words of English but which occur reasonably frequently over a very wide range of academic texts. These 570 words are grouped into ten sublists that reflect word frequency and range. A word like analyze falls into Sublist 1, which contains the most frequent words, while the word adjacent falls into Sublist 10 which includes the least frequent (amongst this list of high incidence and high utility words). The following ten sublists contain the headwords of the families in the Academic Word List. In other words, the ten sublists contain the most frequent form of the word, more often a noun or verb form, although there may be one or more important related word forms. For example, the headword analyze would also include analyst, analytic, analytical and analytically in the word family.

The Academic Word List is not restricted to a specific field of study. That means that the words are useful for learners studying in disciplines as varied as literature, science, health, business, and law. This high utility academic word list does not contain technical words likely to appear in only one, specialized field of study such as amortization, petroglyph, onomatopoeia, or cartilage. Two-thirds of all academic English words come from Latin, French (through Latin), or Greek. Understandably, knowledge of the most high incidence and high utility academic words in English can significantly boost a student’s comprehension level of school-based reading material. Secondary students who are taught these high-utility academic words and routinely placed in contexts requiring their usage are likely to be able to master academic material with more confidence and efficiency, wasting less time and energy in guessing words or consulting dictionaries than those who are only equipped with the most basic 2000-3000 words that characterize ordinary conversation.


1. analyze approach area assess assume authority available benefit concept consist context constitute contract data define derive distribute economy environment establish estimate evident factor finance formula function income indicate individual interpret involve issue labor legal legislate major method occur percent period principle proceed process policy require research respond role section sector significant similar source specific structure theory vary

2. achieve acquire administrate affect appropriate aspect assist category chapter commission community complex compute conclude conduct consequent construct consume credit culture design distinct equate element evaluate feature final focus impact injure institute invest item journal maintain normal obtain participate perceive positive potential previous primary purchase range region regulate relevant reside resource restrict secure seek select site strategy survey text tradition transfer

3. alternative circumstance comment compensate component consent considerable constant constrain contribute convene coordinate core corporate correspond criteria deduce demonstrate document dominate emphasis ensure exclude fund framework illustrate immigrate imply initial instance interact justify layer link locate maximize minor negate outcome partner philosophy physical proportion publish react register rely remove scheme sequence sex shift specify sufficient task technical technique technology valid volume

(Kinsella, San Francisco State University, 8/03)
4. access adequacy annual apparent approximate attitude attribute civil code commit communicate concentrate confer contrast cycle debate despite dimension domestic emerge error ethnic goal grant hence hypothesis implement implicate impose integrate internal investigate job label mechanism obvious occupy option output overall parallel parameter phase predict prior principal professional project promote regime resolve retain series statistic status stress subsequent sum summary undertake

5. academy adjust alter amend aware capacity challenge clause compound conflict consult contact decline discrete draft enable energy enforce entity equivalent evolve expand expose external facilitate fundamental generate generation image liberal license logic margin mental medical modify monitor network notion objective orient perspective precise prime psychology pursue ratio reject revenue stable style substitute sustain symbol target transit trend version welfare whereas

6. abstract acknowledge accuracy aggregate allocate assign attach author bond brief capable cite cooperate discriminate display diverse domain edit enhance estate exceed expert explicit federal fee flexible furthermore gender ignorance incentive incorporate incidence index inhibit initiate input instruct intelligence interval lecture migrate minimum ministry motive neutral nevertheless overseas precede presume rational recover reveal scope subsidy tape trace transform transport underlie utilize

7. adapt adult advocate aid channel chemical classic comprehensive comprise confirm contrary convert couple decade definite deny differentiate dispose dynamic equip eliminate empirical extract file finite foundation globe grade guarantee hierarchy identical ideology infer innovate insert intervene isolate media mode paradigm phenomenon priority prohibit publication quote release reverse simulate sole somewhat submit successor survive thesis topic transmit ultimate unique visible voluntary

8. abandon accompany accumulate ambiguous appendix appreciate arbitrary automate bias chart clarify commodity complement conform contemporary contradict crucial currency denote detect deviate displace drama eventual exhibit exploit fluctuate guideline highlight implicit induce inevitable infrastructure inspect intense manipulate minimize nuclear offset paragraph plus practitioner predominant prospect radical random reinforce restore revise schedule tense terminate theme thereby uniform vehicle via virtual visual widespread

9. accommodate analogy anticipate assure attain behalf cease coherent coincide commence compatible concurrent confine controversy converse device devote diminish distort duration erode ethic found format inherent insight integral intermediate manual mature mediate medium military minimal mutual norm overlap passive portion preliminary protocol qualitative refine relax restrain revolution rigid route scenario sphere subordinate supplement suspend team temporary trigger unify violate vision

10. adjacent albeit assemble collapse colleague compile conceive convince depress encounter enormous forthcoming incline integrity intrinsic invoke levy likewise nonetheless notwithstanding odd ongoing panel persist pose reluctance so-called straightforward undergo whereby

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