Abridged Academic Word List

The Academic Word List is a compilation of more than 570 word families commonly used in tertiary education.

This abridged list has taken some of the most challenging words from the original list and condensed them here. Example sentences and synonyms are included.

**Before you start:**

1. Note that this list does not go in alphabetical order.
2. Words are listed in the order of frequency that they are used.
3. Create a study plan. See page 3 for suggestions on how to study these words.
4. These are words used across disciplines. That means you might have to focus on some words more than others depending on your area of study, or consult an additional list of words for certain fields. Some career-specific word lists and writing tips can be found here:
   - Engineering: [http://www.writing.engr.psu.edu/](http://www.writing.engr.psu.edu/)
   - [https://sites.google.com/a/slu.edu/legal-esl/](https://sites.google.com/a/slu.edu/legal-esl/)

**Format:**

Sublist: This references the location of the word in the original Academic Word List.

The most common word form is at the top

Synonyms are listed in the first line

- Other commonly used members of the word family are listed here, along with synonyms. If no other word form exists, this section is omitted.
- *Example sentences are written in Italics.*
- Syllable stress is also shown by Italics.
  - Example: *constitute*: the stress is on the first syllable, as shown by italics

**Other Resources:**

For a pronunciation guide or more in-depth definitions, check the Longman Dictionary or Dictionary.com

The original Academic Word List written by Averil Coxhead can be found at: [http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/resources/academicwordlist/](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/resources/academicwordlist/)

There is also a more recent word list that can be found here:

[http://www.academivocabulary.info/download.asp](http://www.academivocabulary.info/download.asp)
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How to Use This List

1. Go through the entire packet and categorize each word as:
   - Words I know well
   - Words I’ve seen before but don’t know well
   - Words I’ve never seen before

2. Next, try picking some words from the second two categories to study. A realistic goal would be to study about 5 words per week.

3. Each week, go through the words you’ve studied and decide whether or not to re-categorize them. Do you know them well, or do you still have trouble remembering the definition? If you can’t remember how to use the word, don’t move on to new words yet. Review those words until you’re ready for the next set.

4. Keep these words in a notebook (or tablet, smart phone, etc.) to consult whenever you are reading materials for your courses. Highlight these words if you see them in a text so that you know how frequently they are used. For example, if you’ve studied a word and it appears in multiple course readings, you might want to highlight that word for extra study.

Other recommendations:

Don’t try to learn words with similar sounds, spelling, or meanings at the same time: Learning synonyms at the same time can get really confusing! Choose a variety of words each time you study a new word set.

Space out your studying. Don’t study one word over and over again in a single day. Return to that word every few days or weeks to remember it better.

Pay attention to syllable stress.

Some words in this list function as both nouns and verbs.

Usually, the rules are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2-syllable nouns: stress on first syllable</th>
<th>2-syllable verbs: stress is on the second syllable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exploit</strong></td>
<td><strong>exploit</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impact</strong></td>
<td><strong>Impact</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or more syllable nouns with suffixes</td>
<td>3 or more syllable adjectives with suffixes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(tion; ment): stress on second or third</td>
<td>(able): stress is on the second syllable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>syllable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conception</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conceivable</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sustainment</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sustainable</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distinction</strong></td>
<td><strong>Distinguished</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Learning popular suffixes will help you:
The suffixes most common in academic words include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nouns</th>
<th>Adjectives</th>
<th>Verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tion:</td>
<td>formulation; constitution</td>
<td>Able: inevitable, exploitable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ment:</td>
<td>Sustainment</td>
<td>Ity: specificity; capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ism:</td>
<td>symbolism</td>
<td>Ic: periodic; formulaic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vocabulary Study Activities

Studying vocabulary can be extremely difficult if we focus on just memorizing words. Below are a list of activities you can use with a Conversation Partner, a friend, or by yourself to learn the words.

You probably won’t remember the word without also understanding the contexts in which we use it.

Online Exercises:


http://www.englishvocabularyexercises.com/AWL/index.htm

http://flashcardstash.com/

http://www.ugru.uaeu.ac.ae/concordance/index.html

1. **Vocabulary Tic Tac Toe**: Played like normal tic tac toe, but there are words in each box. There are several variations:
   a. Each player must pronounce the word correctly to get an “x” or “o”
   b. Each player must conjugate the word correctly to get an “x” or “o”
   c. Each player must use the word in a sentence to get an “x” or “o”
   d. Each player must give a synonym to get an “x” or “o”

   The player who has three “x’s” or three “o’s” in a row wins!

   Sample Tic Tac Toe Board:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constitution</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Specific</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Derive</td>
<td>Notion</td>
<td>sustain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceive</td>
<td>Coincide</td>
<td>Undergo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. **Taboo**: Describe a word without actually saying the word. Your partner must guess the word.

3. **Create your own dictionary in your notebook, or make your own flashcards.** Sometimes, the act of rewriting a word and its definition can help you learn it better.

4. **Use word associations**: Think of every related word you can to better understand the context of a word. Here are some examples:
• Words associated with “infant”: baby, child, mother, beginner, small, new (as in, a project in its infancy)
• Words associated with “potato”: vegetable → veg → veg out → lazy → couch potato
• Words associated with “policy”: company policy, healthcare policy, laws, rules

5. “Retire” words you know. Whenever you feel confident that you know a word, add it to your “retired” list. It shows your progress and how many words you’ve learned over time. Come back and review your retired words from time to time.

6. Spelling practice: On a piece of paper, start spelling a word from the Academic Word List. If your partner guesses the word correctly, he or she must finish spelling the word. The less letters needed for the partner to guess, the more points he/she gets (you could make each letter worth one point). Take turns guessing.

Sublist 1

**CONSTITUTE (VERB); STRESS ON FIRST SYLLABLE**

Synonyms: establish, create, or organize

Other Common Word Forms:

- Constitution (noun; stress on third syllable): composition or structure
- Constituent (adjective; stress on second syllable): basic or essential; part of a whole
  - Politics: a voting member with power to appoint or elect
  - Chemistry: constituents of a liquid

*Agriculture constitutes a major portion of the nation’s imports.*

Discussion Questions:

- Who are the key **constituents** in your country’s political system?
- What **constitutes** a good study abroad experience?

**DERIVE (VERB); STRESS ON SECOND SYLLABLE**

Synonyms: originate, grow, or descend from

Other Common Word Forms:

- Derivation (noun; stress on first syllable): origin, beginning, or source
- Derivative (adjective; stress on second syllable): copied or unoriginal
  - Mathematics: measures the sensitivity of change to a quantity as determined by an independent variable
  - Chemistry: a substance that can be made from another substance; a chemical substance structurally related to another substance

*The root “script” **derives** from Latin, meaning “to write.”*
The name of the church is a derivation of the founding minister’s surname.

Polydopamine derivatives include noble metal nanocomposites and metal oxide/polydopamine core nanostructures.

Discussion Questions:

Can you think of examples of derivatives from:
- Music?
- Movies?
- Language?

**Factor (noun; stress on second syllable)**

Synonyms: reason, element, issue

Other Common Word Forms:

- Factor (verb) or factor in (phrasal verb): consider or include
  - Mathematics: a number that evenly divides another number

*Her student loans were a major factor in her decision to work full-time.*

*When calculating the company budget, it is important to factor in the cost of equipment.***

Discussion Question:

- What are some major factors that contribute to climate change?
- Name some factors that influenced your decision to study at Temple.

**Policy (noun; stress on first syllable)**

Synonyms: plan, procedure, or rule

*The new healthcare policies will start going into effect in 2014.*

Discussion Question:

- If you could change a student policy on campus, what would you change and why?

**Principle (noun; stress on first syllable)**

Synonyms: standard, value, or belief

Other Common Word Forms:

- Principled (adjective; stress on first syllable): moral

*He upholds his principles by always telling the truth.*

*She’s a very principled leader. She tries to do the right thing.*
Discussion Question:

What are some personal principles that you adhere to…

- In friendships?
- In the workplace?
- In life in general?

**REFORMULATE (VERB; STRESS ON SECOND SYLLABLE)**

Synonyms: to express or convey again in a different way

**Other Common Word Forms:**

- Formulate (verb): express; articulate, convey
- Formula (noun): plan, procedure, or method
- Formulaic (adjective): methodic; adhering to certain standards
  - Secondary meaning: uninspired; clichéd; following a rigid style

*The researchers had to **reformulate** their argument after making a new discovery.*

*Some **formulaic** writers prefer to follow an outline.*

Discussion Question:

- What’s an example of something formulaic in…
  - Writing?
  - Movies?
  - Research?

**PERIOD (NOUN; STRESS ON FIRST SYLLABLE)**

Synonyms:

1. age, epoch, or other unit of time
2. type of punctuation
3. Astronomy: the time it takes for a celestial body to rotate around its axis
4. Chemistry: a row on the periodic table
5. Physics: an interval of time between occurrences (usually a sequence) of the same state in an oscillating/rotating phenomenon (example: an electromagnetic wave)

**Other Common Word Forms:**

- Periodic (adjective): occasional

*Employees must agree to **periodic** drug tests.*

*Wigs were a popular fashion accessory in the American colonial **period**.*
Discussion Questions:

What time period would you most want to live in and why?

**SPECIFIC (ADJECTIVE; STRESS ON SECOND SYLLABLE)**

Synonyms: precise or detailed

Other Common Word Forms:

- Specification (noun): requirement
- Specificity (noun):
  - Biology: how one substance affects another; the characteristics of a substance (in other words, each species has its own unique characteristics)

*The architects must design a house that meets her specifications.*

*You will need to provide more specific examples to support your argument.*

Discussion Questions:

Describe the specificity of your favorite animal. What makes it unique? What specific characteristics does it have?

**VARY (VERB; STRESS ON FIRST SYLLABLE)**

Synonyms: differ, disagree, or contrast

Other Common Word Forms:

- Variable (noun; stress on first syllable): inconstant, adaptable, or changeable
  - Mathematics: a letter of the alphabet that represents an unknown number
  - Research: how an attribute is represented in data collection
  - Computer Science: a storage location for some unknown data
- Variant (adjective; stress on first syllable): irregular, different from the standard form
- Variation (noun; stress on third syllable): a difference or disparity

*The results of weight training may vary due to differences in height, weight, age, and gender.*

*Due to the variable weather conditions, we might have to postpone this project.*

*There are many variations of the famous fairy tale “Cinderella.”*

*There are several variants of the disease that appeared in recent patient cases.*

Discussion Questions:

What are some variables that might affect a pilot study of…

- a new weight loss pill?
language acquisition in an ESL classroom?  
American perceptions of dating?

**Sublist 2**

**DISTINCT (adjective; stress on second syllable)**

Synonyms: unique or different

Other Common Word Forms:

- Distinction (noun): difference or dissimilarity
- Distinguish (verb): to differentiate or separate
- Distinguished (adjective): famous, renowned, well-known

*Allegra has a distinct sense of style with her bright pants and vintage jewelry.*

*The general public rarely distinguishes paleontology, the study of fossils, from archaeology, which is the study of ancient humans and their artifacts.*

**Discussion Questions:**

What distinguishes you from your family members?

Who are some distinguished……

- Authors you like?
- Actors?
- Political figures?

**EQUATE (verb; stress on second syllable)**

Synonyms: Associate, compare, or connect

Other Common Word Forms:

- Equation (noun): a calculation
- Equal (adjective): identical or alike
- Equivalent (adjective): comparable, equal, or alike
- Equally (adverb): similarly

*Some people equate obesity with laziness.*

*They couldn’t solve the equation without their teacher’s help.*

*After the dry cleaners ruined her wedding gown, the bride had to find an equivalent dress to wear.*

*The disgruntled employees sent the equally disgruntled CEOs a petition for higher wages.*

What do you think of when you hear the following terms?
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**Impact (noun; stress on first syllable)**

**Synonyms:**
1. influence or effect
2. crash, collision, or force

**Other Common Word Forms:**
- *Impact* (verb; stress on second syllable): to influence or control
- *Impacted* (adjective; stress on second syllable): overcrowded; pushed closely together

*Oil spills* impact the environment by killing local wildlife.

*A truck hit a car on highway I-95, killing the driver on impact.*

**Discussion Question:**

How do each of the themes below impact you? For example, they could impact your health, your wellbeing, your views on life, etc.

- Smoking
- Global warming
- Religion
- Fashion
- Language

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**Normal (adjective; stress on first syllable)**

**Synonyms:** common, standard, or ordinary

**Other Common Word Forms:**
- *Normalize* (verb; stress on first syllable): to standardize or control; return to its anticipated condition
- *Normalization* (noun; stress on fourth syllable): a process of creating uniformity
  - Sociology: The process of things being made socially “normal”
  - Statistics: adjusting values from different scales to a nominally common scale
- *Normality* (noun; stress on second syllable): regularity
- *Abnormality* (noun; stress on third syllable): irregularity or defect

*Patients with this condition suffer from growth abnormalities that also slow their learning development.*

Many linguists argue that it is important to *normalize* non-standard English.

**Discussion Question:**

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What are some ways that the concepts below are socially **normalized**? For example, what laws, customs, marketing tactics, etc. perpetuate the **normalization** of certain ideas related to each theme?

- Education
- Study abroad
- Religion
- Marriage
- Fashion
- Slang

**PRIME (ADJECTIVE)**

Synonyms: major, main, or primary

Other Common Word Forms:

- Prime (noun): peak or pinnacle
- Prime (verb): prepare, train, or groom
- Prime number (mathematical term): a number with no positive divisors other than 1 and itself

*The gymnast’s coaches are priming her for the Olympic Games.*

*The actor was at his prime when he landed a lead role on a TV drama series.*

*March is the prime time to see the cherry blossoms in bloom.*

**Look at the phrases below. What do you think each one means?**

- In the prime of his/her life
- Primetime television
- Prime rib
- Prime rate loan
- Paint primer

**Sublist 3**

**CONVENTION (NOUN; STRESS ON SECOND SYLLABLE)**

Synonyms: 1. Agreement or contract

2. Meeting or conference

3. Custom or tradition

Other Common Word Forms:

- Convene (verb; stress on second syllable): join together or meet
- Conventional (adjective; stress on second syllable): conservative or traditional

*Thousands of people attended the Democratic convention.*

*Marital conventions in the United States are changing as Americans start marrying later in life.*

*Let’s convene again in two weeks to discuss our marketing plan.*
Discussion Question: What are some cultural conventions in your country related to…

Sublist 4
**HENCE (ADVERB)**

Synonyms: therefore

Black holes are formed from extremely strong gravity; hence, they can pull in nearby planets and stars very easily.

Sublist 5
**CAPACITY (NOUN; STRESS ON SECOND SYLLABLE)**

Synonyms:
1. Ability
2. size

Other Common Word Forms:
- Incapacitate (verb; stress on third syllable): to injure or weaken

The fall completely incapacitated him. He can’t get out of bed.

This building doesn’t have the capacity to hold two hundred people.

The dictator has the capacity to change, but he continues to commit corrupt deeds.

Discussion Question: Which phrases below refer to physical capacity? Which ones relate to mental capacity? Which ones might refer to both?

- Building capacity
- In my teaching capacity
- Maximum capacity
- Bulk size
- Output is at capacity
- Filled to capacity
- Stress capacity
- Learning capacity

**EVOLVE (VERB; STRESS ON SECOND SYLLABLE)**

Synonym: change, grow, progress, or advance

Other Common Word Forms:
- Evolution (noun; stress on third syllable): development or growth

Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution explains the process of natural selection.

The program continues to evolve as new services are created.

Discussion: Describe the evolution of:
FACILITATE (VERB; STRESS ON SECOND SYLLABLE)

Synonyms: assist, simplify, or help

Other Common Word Forms:

- Facilitation (noun; stress on fourth syllable): assistance or simplification
- Facility (noun; stress on second syllable): an ability; a space or building that provides a resource

The event planner facilitated the luncheon by setting up the invitation list, location, and entertainment.

This community facility provides art and dance therapy.

Discussion Questions:
- What makes a good group discussion facilitator?
- What makes a good event facilitator?
- What are some examples of community facilities in your neighborhood?

LIBERAL (ADJECTIVE; STRESS ON FIRST SYLLABLE)

Synonyms: 1. open-minded or tolerant
- 2. generous

Other Common Word Forms:

- Liberalize: to open or relax
- Liberalization: see above
- Liberate: to free

The liberalization of gay marriage has led to some widespread changes in U.S. state laws.

She’s liberal about social issues, but very conservative about economic views.

Discussion: Look at the phrases below. What might they mean? In what context do we use them?

- apply liberally
- a liberating experience
- the Liberal Left

- a liberalized society
- liberal with money
- a liberated society

NOTION (NOUN; STRESS ON FIRST SYLLABLE)

Synonyms: belief, idea, or concept

2. a general or minimal understanding

3. a foolish idea
The students had a vague notion of the underlying themes within the text.

Discussion: Match the phrases on the left to the examples on the right.

1. An ill-conceived notion  the belief that bloodletting cures ailments
2. A romantic notion  a plan to run a marathon with no training
3. Outdated notion  the belief that he/she will become famous
4. Fanciful notion  believing in a soul mate

**SUSTAIN (VERB; STRESS ON SECOND SYLLABLE)**

Synonyms: tolerate, endure, or stand

Other Common Word Forms:

*Sustenance* (noun; stress on first syllable): nourishment or provisions

*Sustainable* (adjective; stress on second syllable): able to endure or thrive with minimal support; able to be maintained with little effect on the environment

In order to sustain such a vigorous academic program, the hiring committee must choose highly qualified candidates.

While he was camping, he depended on wildlife for his sustenance.

Discussion Question:

Talk about the meaning of the terms below:

- Sustainable development
- A life-sustaining environment
- Sustainable energy
- Sustainable living

**SYMBOLIC (ADJECTIVE; STRESS ON SECOND SYLLABLE)**

Synonyms: figurative or representative

Other Common Word Forms:

- Symbol (noun; stress on first syllable): emblem, sign, or icon
- Symbolism (noun; stress on first syllable): the use of symbols; imagery

The bird in the novel is symbolic of freedom.

McDonald’s is a symbol of Americanization and fast food culture across the globe.

Discussion Question: Below are some common symbols used in literature, music, and advertising within U.S. culture. What might be some of their meanings? Where do you see them used most often?

1. An eagle
2. A ladder
3. Roller coaster
4. A horse
5. Skull and crossbones

**Welfare (Noun; Stress on First Syllable)**

Synonyms: well-being, safety, or health (“on welfare” is used to say that someone is receiving public assistance benefits from the government, however, the word is often used to describe general safety and care)

*The public welfare system has its problems, but it also assists thousands of unemployed and low income households.*

*The organization aims to protect the welfare of children.*

Discussion Question: Does your home country have a welfare system? How does it work?

**Whereas (Conjunction; Stress on First Syllable)**

Synonyms: while or however; in contrast to

The new public transit system is faster and more efficient, whereas the old system used outdated procedures.

**Sublist 6**

**Abstract (Adjective; Stress on Second Syllable)**

Synonym: intangible, intellectual, or theoretical

Other Common Word Forms:

- Abstraction (noun; stress on second syllable): concept, notion, or thought
- Abstract (noun; stress on first syllable): A summary of a text or description of a research project that usually appears before a scholarly article

*She studies philosophy, so she is very good at abstract thinking.*

*Modern art often requires abstract interpretations to understand its purpose and thematic elements.*

Discussion Questions: What are some examples of abstract concepts in your field of study?

What do we typically see in an abstract for a research paper?

**Aggregate (Verb; Stress on First Syllable; Pronounce “Gate” with Long A)**

Synonyms: gather or collect

Other Common Word Forms:
• Aggregate (noun; stress on first syllable; pronounce “Gate” with short I sound): the total, sum, or whole
• Aggregate (adjective; same pronunciation as verb): collective or combined

The aggregate rock is comprised of quartz, sand, and dirt.

The goal of this research project is to aggregate news content from across the internet into a single user-friendly resource.

Discussion Question: What are some examples of things that might be aggregated in…

- Biology (plants, animals, etc.)?
- Astronomy and/or physics (planets, stars, etc.)?
- Media or film?

RATIONAL (ADJECTIVE)

Synonyms: coherent, normal, or sensible

Other Common Word Forms:

• Rationale (noun; stress on last syllable): foundation or justification; used in law to explain the essential reasons for doing something
• Rationalization (noun): the system of organizing information to explain something based on reason; often used in psychology to describe someone who conceals his or her emotions with non-threatening explanations
• Mathematics: to remove radicals without changing the value or root of an equation

You must provide rationale for why you chose this research project.

Let me give you some rational advice: go home, get some rest, and then make a decision.

The street protestors offered no rationalization for their actions.

Discussion Questions: What rationale might someone offer for the following?

- Becoming a vegetarian
- Learning Chinese
- Running a marathon

What rationalization might someone offer for these behaviors? Remember, rationalization is often used to conceal our true feelings.

- Smoking
- Being late
- Speeding
**Sublist 7**

**ADAPT (VERB; STRESS ON SECOND SYLLABLE)**

Synonyms: adjust or familiarize

Other Common Word Forms:

- Adaptation (noun; stress on third syllable): adjustment or alteration
- Adaptable (adjective; stress on second syllable): adjustable or flexible

*The film adaptation of the book omits many important details.*

*Immigrants must adapt to many cultural and linguistic differences.*

**Discussion Questions:** Think of examples for the following…

- Evolutionary adaptations
- Cultural adaptations
- Modern adaptations (for example, a modern version of Romeo and Juliet)

**ADVOCATE (VERB; STRESS ON FIRST SYLLABLE; “CATE” PRONOUNCED LIKE “LATE”)**

Synonym: to condone or support

Other Common Word Forms:

- Advocate (noun; “cate” pronounced like “kit”): supporter or believer
- Advocacy (noun): support or promotion

*The mayor advocated the construction of a new public park.*

*Advocates of the oil pipeline believe that it will decrease U.S. dependency on foreign oil.*

*Community-based advocacy is crucial if we want to reform our schools.*

**Discussion Questions:** Match the examples of advocacy on the left to their corresponding phrases on the right.

1. Grassroots advocacy         lobbying for lowered pharmacy costs
2. Legal advocacy              disagreeing with someone just for the sake of debate
3. Health advocacy             relies on the general public as lobbyists
4. Playing devil’s advocate    a person is authorized to speak on a client’s behalf

**COMPREHENSIVE (ADJECTIVE; STRESS ON THIRD SYLLABLE)**

Synonym: complete, widespread, or all-inclusive

Other Word Forms:
• Comprehensively (adverb; stress on third syllable): widely or expansively

_The language course provides a comprehensive look at grammar, pronunciation, and spelling._

Discussion: Provide a comprehensive overview of…

- How to cook your favorite dish
- The education system in your country
- Your neighborhood

**DIFFERENTIATE (VERB; STRESS ON THIRD SYLLABLE)**

Synonyms: to distinguish or separate

Other Common Word Forms:

- Differentiation (noun; stress on sixth syllable): variation

*Marla couldn’t differentiate between the twin sisters.*

*His test grades show little differentiation, indicating that he is not improving.*

Discussion: _Differentiate_ the following concepts:

- Present versus past perfect
- Learning a language as a child and learning it as an adult
- Philly versus New York

**DYNAMIC (ADJECTIVE; STRESS ON SECOND SYLLABLE)**

Synonyms: energetic or active

Also used in computer science: dynamic memory refers to data storage that is affected by passage of time or absence of power

_Salespeople need very dynamic personalities to sell their products to the public._

Discussion Questions: What are some careers that require dynamic personalities?

- What do the following terms refer to? Provide examples (such as a bird being aerodynamic)
  - Thermodynamic, aerodynamic, group dynamic

**EMPIRICAL (ADJECTIVE; STRESS ON SECOND SYLLABLE)**

Synonym: practical or experiential; grounded in experimentation and observation rather than theories; evidence that can be observed by a large number of people who would all agree on what they observed

Philosophy: guided by observation rather than logic

Other Common Word Forms:
Empiricism (noun): observation or practicality

The researchers gathered empirical evidence through students’ impressions of learning a second language.

Discussion Questions: What sorts of empirical evidence are needed to prove the following? Which of these have no empirical evidence?

- Global warming
- Homelessness is on the rise
- The existence of a human soul
- Population growth
- The healing power of green tea

**FINITE (ADJECTIVE; STRESS ON FIRST SYLLABLE)**

Synonyms: limited or restricted

Other Common Word Forms:

- Infinite (adjective): limitless or endless
- Infinitely (adverb): extremely or considerably

Overpopulation is putting a lot of pressure on our finite resources.

The Universe is infinitely larger than we can ever imagine.

Discussion Questions: Which of the following are infinite? Which are finite?

- Water
- Air
- Numbers
- The Universe

**HIERARCHY (NOUN; STRESS ON FIRST SYLLABLE)**

Synonyms: order or ranking of persons or things one above the other

Other Common Word Forms:

- Hierarchical (adjective; stress on third syllable): organized by rank

The hierarchy of staff members is determined by years of experience.

The company’s hierarchical structure is evident in each employee’s professional title.

Discussion Questions: Look at the examples below. What hierarchies exist in each one? Name titles if you can (such as resident, CEO, director, etc.).

A start-up company a hospital an airline a university an Internet installation company

Examples: receptionist; installation specialist; caller; intern
**INFER (VERB; STRESS ON SECOND SYLLABLE)**

Synonyms: conclude, assume, or understand

Other Common Word Forms:

- *Inference (noun): implication or interpretation*

Based on the low enrollment, we can infer that this course is not popular with students.

In literature, readers make inferences about the characters based on contextual clues such as setting and dialogue.

Discussion Questions: What inferences can you make from the following situations?

- Someone keeps calling but hangs up when you answer
- You see a broken bike lock next to a tree
- Someone says they are in between jobs
- Your friend always says she’s busy when you ask to hang out

**PARADIGM (NOUN; STRESS ON FIRST SYLLABLE)**

Synonyms: example or model

Paradigm shift (used in the sciences): a change in ways of thinking or basic assumptions

Facebook was a new paradigm in social networking.

Discussion Questions: How did the following discoveries or inventions cause a paradigm shift?

The printing press  the Sun being the center of the Solar System  the computer

**PHENOMENON (NOUN; STRESS ON SECOND SYLLABLE)**

Synonyms: miracle or spectacle (also used to talk about an unusual or rare occurrence)

Other Common Word Forms:

- *Phenomena (plural noun)*
- *Phenomenal (adjective): impressive, incredible, or amazing*

The solar eclipse is a phenomenon that occurs when the moon moves between the Earth and the sun.

Discussion Questions: How would you explain these phenomena? Which ones have you seen or experienced?

Aurora borealis  earthquakes  ghosts  lucid dreaming  hot springs

**ACCUMULATE (VERB; STRESS ON SECOND SYLLABLE)**

Synonyms: gather or collect
Other Common Word Forms:

- Accumulation (noun; stress on third syllable): a collection or buildup

*More than three feet of snow *accumulated *last night.*

Discussion Questions: What are some examples of accumulation related to nature? The weather? Life in general (work, for example)?

Sublist 8

**ARBITRARY (ADJECTIVE; STRESS ON FIRST SYLLABLE)**

Synonyms: random or illogical

Other Common Word Forms:

- Arbitrarily (adverb; stress on third syllable): randomly or illogically

*The selection of game show contestants is completely *arbitrary.*

Discussion Questions: Which of the following do you think should be arbitrary? Which ones should not be arbitrary?

- Selecting game show contestants
- Winning the lottery
- Being pulled aside in the airport security line
- Jury duty

**BIAS (NOUN; STRESS ON FIRST SYLLABLE)**

Synonyms: prejudice or preference

Other Common Word Forms:

- Biased (adjective; stress on first syllable): prejudiced, unfair, or subjective
- Biases (plural form of “bias”)

*Gender biases still exist today in fields such as architecture and physics.*

*The paper was very biased toward conservative views on immigration.*

Discussion Questions: What are some common biases in your country related to…

- Age?
- Gender?
- Country of origin?
- Economic or social status?

**DENOTE (VERB; STRESS ON SECOND SYLLABLE)**
**Synonyms:** signify or represent

**Other Common Word Forms:**

- Denotation (noun): meaning or significance  (Do not confuse this with connotation, which is the associations we make with a word or idea)

*Her poor grades in school denoted a lack of motivation.*

*The denotation of foreign is “distant or remote,” but its connotations are quite different.*

**DEVIATE (VERB; STRESS ON FIRST SYLLABLE)**

**Synonyms:** diverge, turn, or stray

**Other Common Word Forms:**

- Deviation (noun; stress on third syllable): a divergence or nonconformity
- Standard deviation (statistics): how much a measurement differs from a fixed value, such as a mean
- Medicine: an abnormality

*The hiker deviated from the path to explore the forest.*

*Her wild behavior is a deviation from her usual shyness.*

*In this study, we evaluated the effect of a deviated septum on sinus infections.*

**Discussion Question:** Talk about a time when you deviated from the path—for example, maybe you chose a different career than expected, or did something out of the norm.

**EXPLOIT (VERB; STRESS ON SECOND SYLLABLE)**

**Synonyms:** manipulate or misuse

**Other Common Word Forms:**

- Exploitation (noun; stress on third syllable): manipulation, misuse, or abuse
- Exploit (noun; stress on first syllable): adventure, activity, or achievement
- Exploitable (adjective; stress on second syllable): able to be manipulated or used in a selfish manner for profit or personal interest

*Bill Gates’s business exploit was extremely successful.*

*The exploitation of temporary workers leads to unfair wages and dangerous working conditions.*

*Vicky exploits her coworkers to finish work that she doesn’t want to do.*

**Discussion Question:** How are some of the following groups often exploited?
FLUCTUATION (NOUN; STRESS ON THIRD SYLLABLE)

Synonyms: variation or instability

Genetics: a physical variation caused by external or environmental influence, not inherited

Other Common Word Forms:

- Fluctuate (verb; stress on first syllable): change or vary

*The* *temperatures* *this* *summer* *fluctuated* *a* *lot* *due* *to* *the* *humidity.*

*Due to the construction work, the city can expect extreme fluctuations in traffic patterns.*

Discussion Question:

- What factors might influence…
  - Economic fluctuation?
  - Weather fluctuation?
  - Tide fluctuation?
  - Fluctuating feelings?
- Describe a time when you were fluctuating between two decisions. Why was the decision so difficult to make?

INEVITABLE (ADJECTIVE)

Synonyms: unavoidable, expected, or certain

Other Common Word Forms:

- Inevitability (noun; stress on fourth syllable): unavoidability or certainty

*Some sources suggest that the extinction of honeybees is inevitable.*

*Many people fear the inevitability of death.*

Discussion Questions: Which examples below are inevitable? Which ones seem inevitable, or are perhaps negotiable?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth</th>
<th>marriage</th>
<th>death</th>
<th>career</th>
<th>having children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sleep</td>
<td>Eating healthy</td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Loneliness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

INFRASTRUCTURE (NOUN; STRESS ON FIRST SYLLABLE)

Synonyms: organization, groundwork, or setup
The country has a complex infrastructure of local military factions that form its government.

Discussion Question:

- What is the political infrastructure of your home country? What factions exist? Who has the most power? Who shares power?
- What is the infrastructure of the education system? What is the grading system like? How might you change the infrastructure to make it better?

**PREDOMINANT (ADJECTIVE)**

Synonyms: primary, principal, largest, or leading

Other Common Word Forms:

- Predominance (noun): majority or power
- Predominantly (adverb): mainly or primarily

The predominance of new couples in the neighborhood has resulted in larger numbers of students enrolled in the local school.

IPhones are so predominant that many companies, hospitals, and schools have policies against their use.

Discussion Question: What are some predominant trends in your country right now?

**Sublist 9**

**COINCIDE (VERB; STRESS ON THIRD SYLLABLE)**

Synonyms: overlap, agree, or match

Other Common Word Forms:

- Coincidence (noun; stress on second syllable): something that happens by chance
- Coincidentally (adverb; stress on fourth syllable): by chance, accidentally, or unpredictably

The fact that his friend applied to the same college is not coincidence.

Coincidentally, she saw her ex-boyfriend at the grocery store.

The results of this study coincide with our original hypothesis.

Discussion: People often confuse “ironic” with “coincidence.” Which of these situations is ironic? Which ones are coincidence?

- Running into an old friend on the street
- Finding $100 in your pocket after losing a bet
- The weather report says that it is going to be warm but it ends up snowing instead

**TRIGGER (VERB; STRESS ON FIRST SYLLABLE)**
Synonyms: cause, start, or produce

Other Common Word Forms:

- Trigger (noun): a cause or impetus

*Exercise is a common trigger for asthma.*

*The construction of a new power plant triggered a violent response from local citizens.*

Discussion: What are some examples of emotional triggers? What are some examples of physical triggers?

- For example, a poor diet high in sugar can often trigger diabetes.

**Sublist 10**

**ALBEIT (CONJUNCTION)**

Synonyms: although

*The economy is improving, albeit at a very slow pace.*

**Albeit** is a formal way of saying “although” that is often used in academic writing or formal situations. It is not used at the beginning of a sentence, but usually as part of a dependent clause.

**COMPILE (VERB; STRESS ON SECOND SYLLABLE)**

Synonyms: collect, gather, or assemble

Other Common Word Forms:

- Compilation (noun; stress on third syllable): a collection (music, documents, writings)

*This music compilation contains the greatest works of classical composers such as Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart.*

*In order to solve the case, the investigators needed to compile a list of all possible suspects.*

Discussion: In what academic fields would we use the following phrases?

Data compiler compilation of indices compilation album

**CONCEIVE (VERB; STRESS ON SECOND SYLLABLE)**

Synonyms: to comprehend or imagine; to create (also refers to becoming pregnant)

Other Common Word Forms:

- Conceivable (adjective; stress on second syllable): believable or possible

*It is conceivable that he climbed up to the roof, but I don’t believe it.*
Johann Gutenberg conceived of the movable type printing press in the mid-1400s.

Discussion Questions:

- What is an idea that people likely could not conceive of half a century ago?
- What is something that you think future generations will find inconceivable?

**NOTWITHSTANDING (PREPOSITION; STRESS ON THIRD SYLLABLE)**

Synonyms: nevertheless, in spite of, or although

The expenses notwithstanding, traveling is a very rewarding experience.

**ONGOING (ADJECTIVE; STRESS ON FIRST SYLLABLE)**

Synonyms: continuing or constant

The ongoing human rights abuses in require immediate UN action.

The construction of the bridge is ongoing, but it might be delayed by a month.

Discussion Questions:

- What are some ongoing projects you’re working on?
- What are some ongoing goals you have?

**SO-CALLED (ADJECTIVE; STRESS ON BOTH WORDS)**

Synonyms: supposed or alleged

The so-called “conservative” politician actually has some liberal views.

This so-called crime novel is actually a romance novel.

Discussion Question: Which of the phrases below is being used sarcastically? Which ones are used to describe a self-named group or concept?

- The so-called experts
- So-called mad cow disease
- My so-called friends
- So-called Millenial generation

**UNDERGO (VERB; STRESS ON THIRD SYLLABLE)**

Synonyms: experience, suffer, or feel

Most cancer patients undergo very painful chemotherapy.

Discussion Question: Describe a time you had to undergo a major life change (a move, career change, surgery, etc.)
Negative Prefixes

**DISCONTENT**

- Discontent: unhappy
- “Uncontent” is not a word, but many Americans use this word in conversation.
**DISQUALIFY AND UNQUALIFIED**

- Disqualify: to prohibit or exclude; to bar or ban
- Unqualified: without qualifications; untrained or unskilled

**Nondiscriminatory and Indiscriminate**

- Nondiscriminatory: equal; unbiased; fair
- Indiscriminate: random in selection; uncritical or unselective

**Nonspecific and Unspecific**

- Nonspecific: general; generic
- Unspecific: undefined; unclear

These two words can be used almost interchangeably.

**Valuable and Invaluable**

These two words are often confused. “Invaluable” is not a negative term, but actually means that something is so valuable that it doesn’t have a price.

- Valuable: treasured; prized; respected
- Invaluable: priceless

**Words with double “s”**

Dissatisfied: unhappy; discontent (or: unsatisfied)

Dissolution: to break something down or separate

Dissolve: to melt, soften, or fall apart

Exceptions: unsavory: disgusting

**Words with double “r”**

- Irrevocable: synonym with “irretrievable;” cannot be undone or changed
- Irreversible: permanent
- Irretrievable: synonym with “irrevocable;” cannot be taken back
• Irrefutable: convincing; undeniable; cannot be argued
• Irrelevant: unrelated; not connected to the topic
• Irreparable: cannot be fixed or repaired
• Exceptions: disreputable, unreliable, and unregulated

“Im”
Impossible
Impatient
Impotent: not fertile; powerless; helpless
Immutable: absolute; undeniable

“il”
Illegible
Illegal
Illicit
Illegitimate

Exceptions: unloved; unlucky; unleashed; unlocked

Irregular academic plurals from Latin and Greek

Words are color-coded by the academic field that uses them the most often. Words in black have a more general use.

Mathematics  Psychology  Space/Astronomy
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>MEDICINE</strong></th>
<th><strong>BIOLOGY</strong></th>
<th><strong>GENERAL RESEARCH</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDUCATION</strong></td>
<td><strong>WRITING &amp; PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is → es</td>
<td>stratus → strati</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis → analyses</td>
<td>stylus → styli</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Axis → axes</td>
<td>syllabus → syllabi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>basis → bases</td>
<td>uterus → uteri</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bias → biases</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crisis → crises</td>
<td>on/um → “a”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diagnosis → diagnoses</td>
<td>bacterium → bacteria</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emphasis → emphases</td>
<td>criterion → criteria</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hypothesis → hypotheses</td>
<td>curriculum → curricula</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neurosis → neuroses</td>
<td>datum → data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oasis → oases</td>
<td>medium → media</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parenthesis → parentheses</td>
<td>memorandum → memoranda</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>psychosis → psychoses</td>
<td>millennium → millennia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>synopsis → synopses</td>
<td>ovum → ova</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thesis → theses</td>
<td>phenomenon → phenomena</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>us → “I”</strong></td>
<td>referendum → referenda</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alumnus → alumni</td>
<td>spectrum → spectra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cactus → cacti</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>focus → foci</td>
<td>a → ae</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fungus → fungi</td>
<td>alumna → alumnae</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nucleus → nuclei</td>
<td>alga → algae</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>octopus → octopi</td>
<td>antenna → antennae</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>radius → radii</td>
<td>formula → formulae</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rhombus → rhombi</td>
<td>larva → larvae</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
minutia → minutiae
nebula → nebulae
vertebra → vertebrae

ix/ex → ices
appendix → appendices
matrix → matrices
index → indices
vertex → vertices

**Words that don’t follow the spelling rules:**
Campus → campuses
Census → censuses
Corpus → corpora
Genus → genera
Forum → forums (can also use “fora”)
Species → species
Status → statuses
Virus → viruses
Other unusual plurals: Always pluralize the primary noun in the phrase.

Example: blackbird ➔ blackbirds (not blacksbird). The birds are plural, not their color.

Passerby ➔ passersby

(people walking by, usually on the street)

Hyphenated words:

Mother-in-law ➔ Mothers-in-law

Attorney-at-law ➔ Attorneys-at-law

Unchanged plurals: Many nouns that are naturally plural stay the same in both plural and singular forms.

- Crossroads
- Deer
- Fish
- Headquarters
- Means
- Offspring
- Series
- Species

Adapted from the Academic Word List by Averil Coxhead:
http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/resources/academicwordlist/