

*Teaching Multilingual and International Students:
Strategies, Resources, and Advice for Faculty*
October 6, 2015
Word Choice & Vocabulary Development

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Why It's So Complicated (E-mail Margi Wald for answers to the quiz below!)

1. One strategy students can use to learn new vocabulary in a reading is to accurately guess any new word's meaning from context. On average, what percentage of the context words does a student need to know in order to guess a word's meaning in that context?
2. What rule accounts for these different noun word form endings?
 - believe belief
 - bereave bereavement
 - retrieve retrieval
 - passive passivity
 - inform information
 - precise precision

BONUS: Why is the plural of "belief" not "believes" when the plural of "leaf" is "leaves"?

3. What is the rule that explains why we use the different prepositions in the following list?
 - a. elaborate on
 - b. agree with
 - c. interested in
4. Which of the following sounds awkward? Why?
 - a. We won by a narrow margin.
 - b. It was a narrow victory.
 - c. We won by a wide margin.
 - d. It was a wide victory.
5. What sounds most accurate and academic to you?
 - a. Researchers have compiled tons of evidence to support this claim.
 - b. Researchers have compiled a lot of evidence to support this claim.
 - c. Researchers have compiled a great deal of evidence to support this claim.
 - d. Researchers have compiled numerous evidence to support this claim.
 - e. Researchers have compiled considerable evidence to support this claim.
6. Why is it considered accurate to write b. and not a.?
 - a. His unemployment dwindled his savings.
 - b. His savings dwindled due to his unemployment.

Most Common Error in First-Year College Student Writing

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In 2008 Lunsford & Lunsford conducted a study in which hundreds of first-year college students' essays were collected from across the US and analyzed for error types.

Lunsford, A. & Lunsford, K. (2008). "Mistakes Are a Fact of Life": A National Comparative Study. *College Composition and Communication* 59 (4): pp. 781-806.
<http://www.csudh.edu/ccauthen/575S12/Lunsford.pdf>

What type of error do you think was most frequent? See link below for the answer.

http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/easywriter4e/#518364_523173

Yes, that's right. The "wrong word" was by far the most common error across diverse student populations. It is important to help students understand what they need to know about a new or less-familiar word in order to use it correctly in a sentence.

What can I do?

- Keep in mind that the written form of US academic English is no one's first language.
- Help students to understand why the thesaurus-method of composing and revising is not successful unless they already know how to use the words they find in the thesaurus.
- Let students know it can be better to write with words they can use accurately than to seek to approximate academic discourse by using words they are not familiar with.
- Support students by giving them tools to edit their own writing and acquire more academic vocabulary.
- Educate yourself about how complex the task of choosing the right word can be, and help students understand the type of extensive word study they may need to do in order to increase their word choice accuracy.

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10 Things You Need to Know to Use a Word Accurately

1. Definition

See [online dictionary links](#) on next page.

2. Spelling & Pronunciation

See [online dictionary links](#) on next page—with audio functions and US vs. British spelling.

3. Collocation

See [corpora/concordance](#) link on next page.

A. What words follow the verb?

argue about something with someone vs. argue that something is true

emphasize something vs. place emphasis on something

B. What words do we tend to use together?

downward spiral, severe economic hardship, socioeconomic status, from my perspective

4. Idiom

As far as I'm concerned

To level the playing field

5. Connotation (positive, negative, neutral, sexual, scientific, etc.)

blame someone for something vs. give someone credit for something

6. Register (level of formality, discipline-specific, technical)

kid vs. child vs. offspring

7. Word Form (part of speech)

economy (n.) economist (n.) economics (n.) economic (adj.)

vs. economical (adj.) economically (adv.)

8. Frequency of Use

Is it an extremely rare word or a word from another era?

9. Grammatical Environment

See [corpora/concordance](#) link on next page.

A. Is it a transitive (discuss something) or intransitive verb (talk about something)?

B. Is it a verb that takes a gerund (suggest doing) or an infinitive (expect to do)?

C. Is it a countable noun (5 studies) or a non-count noun (much research)?

D. Does the noun require an article (a/the precedent) or not (society)?

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10. Pragmatics (politeness protocol/cultural expectations/tones)

Is it the right word for the sociocultural context?

How We Can Help Students Develop Accuracy in Word Choice

Refer students to online resources for word choice:

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English

<http://www.ldoceonline.com/>

Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary Online

<http://dictionary.cambridge.org>

Onelook (to research dictionaries that provide additional information on learning words)

<http://onelook.com>

Oxford Learner's Dictionary

<http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/>

Oxford Collocations Dictionary

<http://www.ozdic.com/>

A Thesaurus (to look up definitions of near synonyms)

<http://www.thefreedictionary.com>

Corpus of Contemporary American English (concordance to look up words in context)

<http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>

Longman Language Activator (print reference book)

<http://www.amazon.com/Longman-Language-Activator/dp/0582415489>

Give students feedback that enables them to edit for word choice in subsequent drafts:

- 1) Provide written feedback to students on word choice, such as circling an incorrect word or underlining a word and then circling an incorrect collocation (a word that is co-located with the first word and sounds awkward or wrong).
- 2) If the word choice is quite idiomatic, consider writing in the right word or phrase.
- 3) Consider sometimes accepting a vivid but unusual word choice that gets meaning across.

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- 4) Help students identify recurring word choice errors and propose strategies to edit for such errors (e.g., keeping a list of collocations—words that are co-located together and using the FIND function to locate such words in a draft—or making a list of non-count nouns that cannot be pluralized, such as “evidence” and again searching for these in a draft).

How We Can Encourage Students to Increase Their Academic Vocabulary

Suggest enrolling in College Writing Programs Courses:

CW 1, CW W1, CW 9, CW20, CW21, CW25AC
<http://writing.berkeley.edu>

Share Online Resources:

The Academic Word List (AWL)
<http://www.esldesk.com/vocabulary/academic>
<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/resources/academicwordlist/>

The AWL Explained and Applied (Click on BUILDING in left menu bar.)
<http://www.uefap.com/vocab/vocfram.htm>

AWL Words with Links to Definitions
<http://www.uefap.com/vocab/select/awl.htm>

Practice Exercises for the AWL and Much More
<http://www.englishvocabularyexercises.com/AWL/index.htm>
<http://www.saccity-online.org/nuttalg/vocabulary/>

AWL Vocabulary Profiler
<http://www.lex tutor.ca/vp/eng>

AWL Highlighter
<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/alzsh3/acvocab/awllhighlighter.htm>

How We Can Encourage Students to Learn Discipline-Specific Vocabulary

Provide Online Resources:

Discipline Vocabulary Lists (beyond the AWL):

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- <http://www.uefap.com/vocab/select/selframs.htm>
- <http://helpwithenglish.pbworks.com/w/page/48795600/Discipline> (Click on Search Item)