Academic vocabulary can be difficult to define. One broad definition is the vocabulary which can be used in academic contexts. But what is special about it?

Different meanings of words
- General vocabulary can include general words which have special meaning in academic contexts. Examples include:
    - **Discipline**
        - General meaning: training people to obey rules
        - Academic meaning: a subject of study
    - **Population**
        - General meaning: the number of people living in a country/region
        - Academic meaning: all individuals who could possibly be included in a study/survey
- It is important to focus on both the meaning and usage of these general vocabulary items

Special vocabulary, academic style
- Academic writing is clear, concise, focussed, structured and backed up by evidence.
- Academic vocabulary is not simply swapping words you know for more fancy, smarter words - the main difference of academic vocabulary (and style) is in its clarity and precision - it needs to be able to communicate ideas unequivocally.
- It has a formal tone and style, but it does not require the use of long sentences and complicated vocabulary.
    - **Sentences** need to have a reasonable length (generally not more than 25 words). Long sentences can be difficult to follow.
    - It is important to avoid **redundant words** and **repetition**
    - Academic writing does not use colloquialisms or slang terms

Nominalisation (noun phrases)
- Another feature of academic vocabulary which deserves mention is the use of *nominalisation* or noun phrases
- Example:
    - (1) Acid rain erodes buildings, which is a major problem.
    - (2) The erosion of buildings by acid rain is a major problem.
    - In the first example, 'acid rain' is the subject and 'erodes' is the verb. In the second example, which many would consider being more academic, the subject has been made more complex by changing the verb into a noun and creating a noun phrase. This type of nominalisation is common in academic writing.

In sum, academic vocabulary is difficult to define, because it depends very much on what kind of context we are talking about. For example, spoken academic language differs from written academic language (though they also have much in common); the language for biology differs from the language for economics, especially in the technical language they use (though again, they have much in common).