

Week 11 Self-learning materials

Academic writing-word level

English has a rich vocabulary, which means that its speakers usually have a choice of words available to them to express a particular idea or thought. However, words with similar meanings are not always **interchangeable**. Some words are more appropriate in informal situations, while others are used in formal or neutral contexts. In academic writing, the formal or neutral alternative is normally preferred.

The following advice will help you to make appropriate vocabulary choices:

"A research"

There is no noun phrase "a research" in English. Use "a study" or just "research", never "a research". Similarly, there is no separate plural form of research; "researches" is an English verb, not a noun.

Avoid "comprise"

Apparently the word "comprise" has now been used incorrectly so many times to mean "compose" that this usage is now becoming acceptable. But it is much safer simply to avoid "comprise" altogether, as anyone who does know what it started out meaning will be annoyed when you use it to mean "compose".

Avoid ambiguous references 二义性引用

Conversation is **replete with 充满** ambiguous words 歧义词 like "this", "these", "his", "it", "they", etc. These words have no meaning in themselves, but in conversation the meaning is usually clear from the context. In written text, however, the intended meaning is quite often not evident to the reader, because there are many possible interpretations of "it" and "this".

Often an ambiguous "this" or "these" can be **disambiguated 消除含糊意义** by adding a noun that specifies precisely the type of object or concept to which you are referring.

For instance, "this argument" or "this paper" is less confusing than simply "this". That is, do not use "this" followed directly by a verb phrase, but you can use "this" before a

noun phrase, as in "this sentence is a good example of the use of the word 'this'".

Avoid using any of these words, if you do not know the difference.

Avoid using the verb 'get'

For example

Colloquial/idiom: The settlers **got ill** after drinking polluted water.

Formal/neutral: The settlers **became ill** after drinking polluted water.

Colloquial/idiom: The study participants reported that they **got better** after the first course of treatment.

Formal/neutral: The study participants reported that **their health improved** after the first course of treatment.

Colloquial/idiom: Doris Lessing **got** the Nobel Prize in 2007.

Formal/neutral: Doris Lessing **was awarded** the Nobel Prize in 2007.

Avoid colloquialisms and idioms

Colloquial terms, such as furphy (rumor), heaps of (lots of), are only understood locally; slang e.g. bloke (man), knock off sb (murder sb), and idioms e.g. nest egg (money saved to use in the future), snowed under (忙得不可开交) are often interpreted differently by different readers.

For example:

Colloquial/idiom: Her paper made a **tremendous** contribution to the field.

Formal/neutral: Her paper made a **major** contribution to the field.

Colloquial/idiom: The community managed to **scratch a living 艰难度日** from the poor soil.

Formal/neutral: The community managed to **survive** by farming the poor soil.

Colloquial/idiom: The **hit-and-miss 时好时坏的** performance of the financial markets is causing increasing concern.

Formal/neutral: The **erratic 不稳定的** performance of the financial markets is causing increasing concern.

Original: It was so noisy, I couldn't hear myself think.

Revised: The noise made concentrating difficult.

Original: Group work can be problematic because a chain is only as strong as its weakest link.

Revised: Group work can be problematic when not everyone contributes equally, causing the project's quality to suffer.

Original: I worked hard on the assignment because I didn't want to **screw up** 失败.

Revised: I worked diligently on the assignment because I wanted to succeed.

Avoid two-word verbs 短语动词. Use the single-word equivalent instead:

For example:

Colloquial/idiom: The proposal for regional representation was **turned down**.

Formal/neutral: The proposal for regional representation was **rejected**.

Colloquial/idiom: Scientists are **looking into** the production of biofuels using non-food crops.

Formal/neutral: Scientists are **investigating** the production of biofuels using non-food crops.

Colloquial/idiom: Biofuels based on non-grain crops have the potential to **bring** food prices **down**.

Formal/neutral: Biofuels based on non-grain crops have the potential to **reduce** food prices.

Colloquial/idiom: Most of the patients reported that they **put on** weight after taking the new medication.

Formal/neutral: Most of the patients reported that they **gained** weight after taking the new medication.

"But" and "however" are not interchangeable

The words "but" and "however" have similar meanings, but they are **not** interchangeable. If you take a grammatically correct sentence containing "but" and replace it with "however", or vice versa, the result will almost always be incorrect,

mainly because of comma punctuation.

Correct examples:

"I like oranges, but I do not like tangerines 橘."

"I like oranges. However, I do not like tangerines."

"I like oranges; however, I do not like tangerines."

"I, however, do not like grapefruits 葡萄柚."

"I like oranges however they have been prepared 不管怎么做."

If you exchange any of these "but"s and "however"s, then the sentences would become incorrect, and in some cases meaningless.

Avoid everyday words

Some everyday words in English are clearly associated with an informal or 'chatty' spoken style. Below are some examples:

Informal word	Possible alternatives
big	large, great
little	small, lesser
tiny	extremely small, minuscule
like (adverb)	such as e.g. 'fruit, such as apple and pears'
kind of	somewhat, to an extent, e.g. it was kind of
successful	
kind, sort	type, category, class
thing	object, concept, idea, issue
good	high quality, suitable, effective
bad	inadequate, unsuitable, ineffective

A wide range of intensifiers, or expressions that indicate degree, are also very informal:

Informal intensifiers	Possible alternatives
hardly, barely any, not much, not many	few
pretty, e.g. 'pretty stable'	quite, rather

really	very, extremely, highly, especially
lots of, heaps of, plenty of	several, considerable, plentiful
a lot, e.g. 'it is used a lot'	frequently, often, extensively

Watch out for homonyms 同形同音异义词

Spell checkers are wonderful, but they are absolutely useless for detecting misused homonyms or near-homonyms. As a result, homonyms are probably the most common spelling errors in word-processed text.

		new, knew
		illicit 违法的, elicit 引出
it's, its	affect 动词, effect 名词	
their, there, they're	discrete 离散的, discreet 谨慎	complement 补足 ,
whether, weather	的	compliment 赞扬
to, too, two	forth, fourth	extent 程度, extend 延伸
site, cite, sight	past, passed	obtain, attain
waste, waist 腰	roll, role	pair, pare 消减
whole, hole	lead, led	personal, personnel 人事
fare 票价, fair	lie, lye 碱液	部门
great, grate 壁炉	throughout, through out	
	seem, seam 缝	suit, suite 套房
		principal, principle
		bear, bare

Words often confused

The English language has many pairs of words with similar spellings but different meanings. Using the wrong word in the pair may be seen as evidence of carelessness, lack of attention to detail and poor proofreading.

The list below should help you to avoid this type of error.

adapt	To adjust to a new use or situation
-------	-------------------------------------

adopt	To take as your own
advice	In British English, this is a noun; eg: I will follow his <i>advice</i> .
advise	In British English, this is a verb; eg: He <i>advised</i> me to wait.
affect	This is a verb meaning to have a consequence or bring about change; eg: The bad weather <i>affected</i> the crops. Excessive drinking <i>affected</i> his health.
effect	A noun meaning result, consequence; eg: The government underestimated the <i>effect</i> of the new policy. Although less common, it can also be used as a verb meaning cause to occur; eg: The government <i>effected</i> some radical changes.
allude	To refer to
elude	To avoid, to escape from
allusion	Indirect mention, reference
illusion	Erroneous perception or belief
beside	Next to
besides	In addition
complement	To add, to supplement. Can also be used as a noun.
compliment	To praise or congratulate. Can also be used as a noun: He paid me a <i>compliment</i> .
council	Administrative or advisory body
counsel	Advice or guidance; also lawyer
criteria	Standards, rules; plural of criterion
criterion	Standard, rule; 'criterion' is a singular noun.
discreet	Reserved, respectful
discrete	Individual, distinct, separate
eminent	Distinguished, prominent

imminent	About to occur, impending
its	Possessive, belonging to it
it's	Contracted form of 'it is'
lead	As a verb: to guide; when used as a noun, pronounced [led], it is a heavy metal
led	Past tense form of the verb 'to lead'
loose	Free, not fastened
lose	To be unable to find, mislay
palate	The roof of the mouth
palette	The board artists use to mix colours
practice	In British English, this is a noun; e.g.: I need more <i>practice</i> .
practise	In British English, this is a verb; e.g.: He <i>practises</i> the piano for two hours every day.
principal	Main, chief
principle	A rule or standard
quiet	Silent
quite	Somewhat, rather: It's <i>quite</i> good. It can also mean entirely, totally: You're <i>quite</i> right.
stationary	Not moving, standing still
stationery	Writing paper
their	Possessive, meaning belonging to them. Do not confuse with the contracted form of 'they are', which is <i>they're</i> .
there	Opposite of 'here'
your	Possessive, meaning belonging to you
you're	Contracted form of 'you are'