



FOCUS ON  
**VOCABULARY 2**  
Mastering the Academic Word List



**Diane Schmitt**  
**Norbert Schmitt**

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# To the Teacher

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## Overview

Second-language learners have long realized the importance of vocabulary for improving language proficiency. However, very often vocabulary does not receive sufficient attention in language classrooms. Research indicates that learners need to have access to a minimum of 3,000 words in order to even begin to comprehend authentic texts (Laufer, 1992), and students wishing to study in English at the university level may need up to 10,000 words (Hazenberg and Hulstijn, 1996). In order to help students attain vocabularies of this size, teachers need to provide explicit instruction on the more frequent words, and they also must help students to develop learning strategies that will enable them to acquire less frequent vocabulary.

In addition to developing a wide vocabulary, learners wishing to operate in academic environments in English also need to become familiar with a special type of formal vocabulary that is common in academic discourse. Commonly known as *academic vocabulary*, these words are found in a wide variety of academic disciplines. They are not specific to any one discipline but are the “support vocabulary” (sometimes referred to as “sub-technical vocabulary”) necessary for speaking or writing precisely in a variety of fields. Examples include the words *analyze*, *predominant*, and *theory*. In a typical academic textbook, these words make up around 10 percent of the total text (Coxhead, 2000). In addition to facilitating the precise statement of ideas, these words contribute to the more sophisticated tone that is characteristic of academic texts.

*Focus on Vocabulary 2: Mastering the Academic Word List* assists students in learning this academic vocabulary. However, there is still the question of *which* academic vocabulary to teach. We have relied upon empirical research to determine the target words presented in this book. Coxhead (2000) compiled a corpus of 3.5 million words of written academic discourse, composed of 414 academic texts written by more than 400 authors on 28 topic areas. From this broad corpus, she identified 570 word families that are used frequently in academic texts across a wide range of topics, thus creating the Academic Word List (AWL). We have deleted 66 of the most frequent words from the AWL, which we feel students should already know (for example, *area*, *create*, *require*, and *similar*). This leaves 504 words, and these words are the ones featured in *Focus on Vocabulary 2*.

There is always a compromise between teaching many words in a cursory fashion, and teaching fewer words in greater depth. The words in the AWL constitute a significant percentage of those used in academic texts (around 10 percent). Therefore, students need to learn these words and learn them well. In order to help students gain a reasonable mastery of these words, we have drawn on the latest vocabulary research to design the most beneficial exercises. The key rationale behind the pedagogy in this book can be summarized in the following points.

- Words must be encountered numerous times to be learned. Nation (1990) reviewed the literature and concluded that it takes from five to sixteen or more repetitions for a word to be learned. In every chapter of *Focus on Vocabulary 2*, each target word appears at least four times, and most appear many more times elsewhere in the book. The Strategy Practice chapters and online Unit Tests provide additional recycling opportunities.



- Learning a word entails more than knowing its meaning, spelling, and pronunciation (Schmitt, 2000). In fact, there are a number of other types of word knowledge, including a word's collocations, grammatical characteristics, register, frequency, and associations. In order to use a word with confidence, a learner must have some mastery of all of these types of word knowledge. Some can be taught explicitly (for example, meaning and spelling), while others can only be truly acquired through numerous exposures to a word (for example, frequency and register information). Our extensive recycling can help learners gain intuitions about types of word knowledge that are best learned in context. We have provided exposures to the target vocabulary in both reading passages and in a number of exercise sentences, which model as many different contexts as possible. At the same time, our exercises focus on elements that can be explicitly taught. Every chapter focuses on meaning, the derivative forms of a word (word families), and collocation.
- Different contexts provide different kinds of information about a word. For example, it is possible to learn one meaning from a particular context (for example, *to monitor an election* in an international relations context) yet require a different context in order to learn a separate meaning (for example, *a computer monitor* in an information technology context). Because of this, we have provided exposures to the target academic vocabulary in the reading passages and in a number of different exercise types. The exercise sentences model as many different contexts as possible.
- Students learn best when their attention is focused on the material to be learned (Schmidt, 1990). To make the target words more noticeable, we have placed them in **bold** type in the chapters in which they are the target words. However, to avoid excess clutter, recycled target vocabulary is not boldfaced in subsequent chapters.
- Learners typically do not know all of the members of a word family, even if they know some of these word forms (Schmitt and Zimmerman, 2002). However, a learner must know the correct form of a word (noun, verb, adjective, adverb) for a particular context. Thus, every chapter has a section (Word Families) that deals with the derivative forms of the target words.
- Equally important for the natural use of words is collocation. These word partnerships are actually difficult to teach, but we feel that collocation is so important to the appropriate use of vocabulary that we have included a collocation section in each chapter (Collocation). The exercises explicitly teach a number of collocations for the target words. However, as it is impossible to teach all of the collocations for a word, the tasks are best seen as exercises that will help make learners more aware of collocations in general and may help students build their collocation intuitions for individual words more rapidly.
- In order to ensure that the information in this book reflects the actual usage of the target words, we have researched the 179-million-word New Longman Corpus. This has allowed us to empirically determine how the target academic words behave in real contexts. This was particularly useful in identifying the collocations of the academic words, because intuitions are often unreliable in this area. In addition, the examples and sentence exercises in this book are based on the patterns and constructions found in the corpus, and so are authentic in nature.

## Organization of the Book

The book is divided into seven units, with each unit focusing on a specific subject. Within each unit, there are four chapters—three main chapters plus a Strategy Practice chapter that presents additional information and chances to recycle the target vocabulary.

### MAIN CHAPTERS

Each of the three main chapters is organized as follows.

**Getting Started** provides warm-up questions about the chapter topic. The main purpose of the questions is to activate students' prior knowledge about the topic before they read the passage. The questions also usually ask about the students' life or ideas, so they can be used as a more general discussion starter as well.

**Assessing Your Vocabulary Knowledge: Target Words** presents twenty-four target words and asks students to assess their knowledge of each word both before and after they work through the chapter. The assessment test is taken from Schmitt and Zimmerman (2002) and views vocabulary learning as incremental. Thus, even if students do not achieve productive mastery of every word by the time the chapter is finished, the test can show partial improvement (e.g., from *no knowledge* to *receptive knowledge*). By avoiding a *no knowledge / full mastery* dichotomy, the test can show smaller degrees of learning. We would expect every student to learn enough about the target words to show some improvement on this test, which should maintain and enhance their motivation.

**Reading** presents an academic reading passage, usually from an actual college textbook. We have simplified some of the non-academic vocabulary and the phrasing in the passages, but otherwise they remain authentic. Exposure to academic vocabulary in extended, nearly authentic texts is beneficial. There is a great deal of academic vocabulary in these texts that is not specifically targeted in the chapter, and this provides natural recycling (in new contexts) of words students have already studied. Also, students appreciate that the readings closely match their expectations of what academic reading is like.

- **Reading Strategies** includes a variety of activities aimed at developing students' awareness of text structure and the linguistic features writers use to achieve cohesion. Other activities provide opportunities for students to recognize an author's point of view, to summarize, to synthesize information from multiple readings, and to consider how information they gain from reading might be used in other areas of their study. Although there is a strong relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension, successful academic reading requires that students not only be able to read for basic comprehension, but also to connect new information with background knowledge, to integrate information from a single text with information from other texts, and to apply ideas that they have learned from reading. This section helps them develop these skills.

**Focusing on Vocabulary** features the following sections.

- **Word Meaning** features a variety of exercises designed to help students learn the meaning of each of the twenty-four target words. Some of the tasks are deductive in nature, and some are inductive, catering to a range of learning styles.
- **Word Families** provides practice in recognizing and using the various derivative word forms that make up a word's family (*access, accessible, accessibility*).
- **Collocation** exercises are designed to improve students' intuitions about the collocations a word takes (*emotional stability, political stability*).

**Expanding the Topic** provides various reading, discussion, and writing activities that recycle the target words and expand students' word knowledge in new ways.

## STRATEGY PRACTICE

The fourth chapter in each unit includes the following features.

**Using Your Dictionary**—Dictionaries are the one resource students worldwide use to improve their vocabulary. However, many students never learn to use them systematically. This section provides tips and practice for using dictionaries effectively.

**Strategy**—This section provides an introduction to a number of different vocabulary learning strategies, such as *using affixes* and *the keyword technique*, along with advice on how to use the strategies effectively.

**Word Knowledge**—In the main chapters, we focus on meaning, derivatives, and collocation. In this section of the Strategy Practice chapters, we explore other kinds of word knowledge, including frequency and academic phrases.

The Strategy Practice section also provides additional chances for students to use the academic words they have studied.

## Answer Key and Unit Tests

*Focus on Vocabulary 2* is accompanied by an online Student Book Answer Key and Unit Tests. The tests give students additional vocabulary practice and assess their word knowledge.

*Focus on Vocabulary 2* draws on our vocabulary research and many years of experience teaching vocabulary. We hope that you enjoy using it in your classes and that it helps your students learn the academic vocabulary they need to flourish in an academic environment. Good luck!

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