Chapter 2

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Academic Vocabulary

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a) **Academic Vocabulary vs General Vocabulary**

b) **Subject-specific Words and Technical Terms**

c) **Word Formation**

(Activity Sheets)

What is Academic Vocabulary?

Academic vocabulary refers to words used in academic contexts. It includes:

> ➢ **formal words** which are less often used in daily casual conversations (e.g. "observe" and "identify" instead of "watch" and "find"); and

> ➢ **subject-specific words** and **technical terms** that are crucial to understanding the content of the subject (e.g. photosynthesis, carnivore, isthmus) and often appear in information texts and textbooks.

Developing knowledge in academic vocabulary and acquiring relevant vocabulary building strategies can facilitate students' understanding of classroom instruction and task requirements, as well as their comprehension of texts across different subject areas.

2a: Academic Vocabulary vs General Vocabulary

Words used in academic texts are often more formal and precise in meaning. Colloquial expressions (including some phrasal verbs) tend to be avoided. Compare the following sentences:

Everyday English	Academic English
Viruses and germs are passed from one person to another through touching, coughing and sneezing.	Viruses and germs are transmitted from one person to another through touching, coughing and sneezing.
Scientists try to find the root cause of the pandemic.	Scientists try to identify the root cause of the pandemic.

Practice

Activity 1

The box below shows some examples of academic vocabulary. Replace the underlined words in the following sentences with suitable words from the box. Each word can only be used ONCE.

access   allocate   analyse   facilitate   indicate   investigate   maintain   seek

Answers

1.   With advancement in technology, people can instantly **get**
      information from the internet with mobile phones.   _____

2.   The survey data **show** that there is a rise in teenage drug
      abuse.   _____

3.   Cutting taxes may **help** economic recovery.   _____

4.   The government has decided to **give** $240 million to post-
      secondary education.   _____

5.   Forensic scientists **(a)** **look at** evidence from crime scenes   (a) _____
      and make use of forensic tools to **(b)** **look into** crime cases. (b) _____

Activity 2

Some phrasal verbs are considered more conversational and less appropriate for use in academic texts, which require a more formal tone. Replace the highlighted phrasal verbs in the sentences below with more formal verbs. Choose the most appropriate answer for each sentence.

1. Many countries are keen to explore renewable energy sources as natural resources in the world might be **used up** one day.
   - ○ finished
   - ○ gone
   - ○ exhausted
   - ○ sustained

2. Unnecessary details can be **left out** in a gist and a synopsis.
   - ○ cancelled
   - ○ taken
   - ○ neglected
   - ○ omitted

3. The German government approached the United States to **ask for** an armistice in 1918.
   - ○ request
   - ○ raise
   - ○ surrender
   - ○ arrange

4. The United Nations has **set up** a mechanism to investigate alleged use of biological and chemical weapons.
   - ○ launched
   - ○ established
   - ○ restored
   - ○ cancelled

5. Doctors and patients should **think about** the pros and cons of each option before reaching any healthcare and surgical decisions.
   - ○ discover
   - ○ identify
   - ○ seek
   - ○ consider

6. One advantage of hosting the Olympic Games is that it helps to **speed up** the infrastructure development of the host city.
   - ○ accentuate
   - ○ accelerate
   - ○ emphasise
   - ○ fasten

2b: Subject-specific Words and Technical Terms

Subject-specific words and technical terms are words related to content knowledge and key concepts of different subjects. Here are some examples:

Personal, Social & Humanities Education Subjects	Renaissance, totalitarianism, universal suffrage, plebiscite, Gini coefficient, expansionary monetary policy, Gross Domestic Product (GDP)
Science Education Subjects	photosynthesis, electromagnetism, genetic polymorphism, thermodynamics

Words commonly used in everyday life may have very different and specific meanings in the contexts of other subjects. Here are some examples:

Words	General English Meanings	Subject-specific & Technical Meanings
appreciation	(n.) recognition of the good qualities of someone or something	In <u>Economics</u>: (n.) an increase in value (as in currency appreciation)
mean	(v.) to express an idea (adj.) not kind	In <u>Mathematics</u>: (n.) the average
class	(n.) a group of students who are taught together at school	In <u>History</u> and <u>Economics</u>: (n.) a group of people in a society who have the same social and/or economic position In <u>Biology</u>: (n.) a group of plants or animals with similar biological characteristics

Practice

Activity 3

Decide which of the two meanings should be adopted for the **underlined words** in the following sentences.

1. The modern generation of composers discarded traditional ideas of melody and **harmony**.
    o   a pleasant musical sound made by different notes being played or sung together
    o   a situation in which people are peaceful and agree with each other

2. Luxury goods tend to have a more **elastic** demand and are more sensitive to price changes.
    o   capable of returning to original size and shape after being stretched or compressed
    o   responsive to changes in other economic factors

3. **Worms** are often transmitted through vulnerabilities in software. They can also be sent through instant messages or spam emails.
    o   creeping limbless animals with a tube-like body
    o   malware programmes that are able to replicate themselves and spread to other computers

4. Biomedical engineering is a new **discipline** which is closely related to science, engineering, medicine and biology.
    o   a particular area of study
    o   the ability to control yourself or other people, even in difficult situations

5. The current decrease in Africa's elephant **population** is due to illegal poaching and the increasing demand for ivory products.
    o   all the people living in a particular area
    o   a group of similar organisms and species living in a particular area

6. Climate and **relief** impact on the soil formation and vegetation growth of a place.
    o   a feeling of comfort or ease
    o   the elevation and shape of land
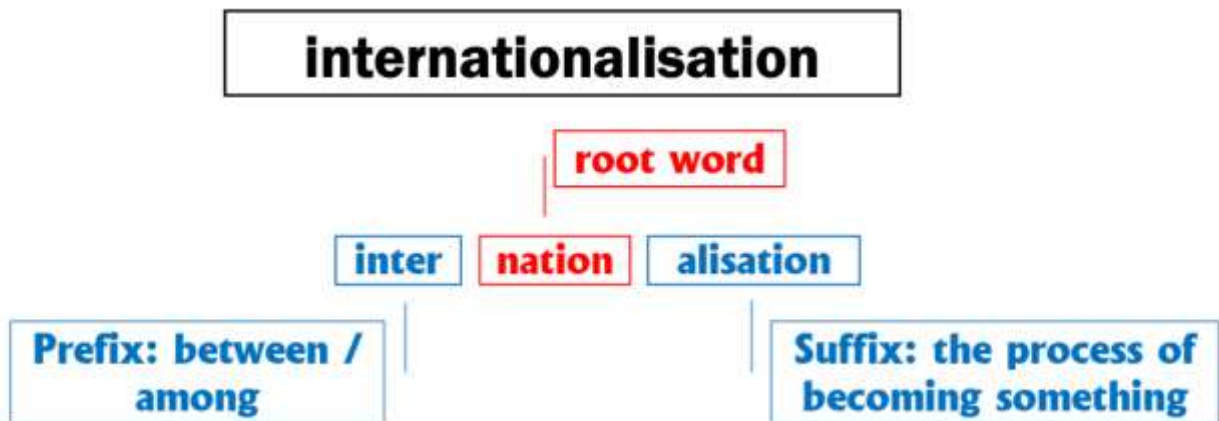
2c: Word Formation

We often come across new words or technical terms in different subjects. An awareness of word formation processes enables us to work out the meaning of unfamiliar words in academic contexts.

This part will introduce the following common word formation processes:

i)   **affixation (prefixes and suffixes)**

ii)   **compounding**

iii)   **clipping**

iv)   **blending**

v)   **borrowing (loan words)**

i) Affixation

Affixation is the most common way of making new words in English. An **affix** is a word element which can be added to alter the meaning or form of a root word. It usually comes in the form of either a **prefix** (which is put *before* the root word) or a **suffix** (which is put *after* the root word). The diagram below helps to illustrate this:

A **prefix** is a word element added to the beginning of the word to convey extra meaning. The table below shows some prefixes commonly seen in academic contexts and their meanings.

Prefixes of Number		
Prefixes	*Meanings*	*Examples*
semi-	**half**	semi-circle semiconscious
uni- mono-	**one**	uniformity monopoly
bi- di- du-	**two/** **double**	bipolar dioxide duplicate
tri-	**three**	triplicate tripod
quadri- quadru-	**four**	quadrilateral quadruple
multi- poly-	**many**	multi-purpose polygon

Prefixes related to Order, Space and Degree		
Prefixes	*Meanings*	*Examples*
pre-	**before**	prehistory premature
post-	**after**	post-glacial post-war
trans-	**across/** **through**	transnational transplant
over-	**above/** **too much**	overgrazing overestimate
under-	**below/** **not enough**	undergrowth underestimate
inter-	**between/** **across**	interpersonal international
intra-	**within/** **inside**	intrapersonal intramuscular

Practice

Activity 4

Identify the meanings of the common prefixes with reference to the examples provided. Put the correct letters (A-K) in the spaces provided. Each answer can be used ONCE only.

A. all	B. badly/wrongly	C. with/together	D. removing/away
E. again	F. not	G. outside	H. over/too much
I. more than	J. against	K. before/front	

	Prefixes	Examples	Meanings
e.g.	*re-*	*re*gain, *re*store, *re*build	*E*
1	co- com- con-	**co-**ordinator, **co-**operate, **co-**exist **com**bination, **com**pile **con**verge, **con**glomeration	
2	de-	**de**colonisation, **de**forestation, **de**hydrate	
3	anti- counter-	**anti-**social, **anti**biotic, **anti-**clockwise **counter-**argument, **counter**act	
4	mis- mal- dys-	**mis**carriage, **mis**lead, **mis**match **mal**function, **mal**nutrition **dys**functional, **dys**genesis	
5	un- dis- il- in- im- ir-	**un**true, **un**employed, **un**ethical **dis**loyal, **dis**continue, **dis**agree **il**legal, **il**logical **in**appropriate, **in**complete, **in**direct, **in**humane **im**moral, **im**mortal, **im**mature **ir**relevant, **ir**responsible, **ir**regular	
6	fore-	**fore**sight, **fore**cast, **fore**ground, **fore**legs	
7	hyper-	**hyper**tension, **hyper**active	
8	ex- extra-	**ex**ternal, **ex**terior **extra**terrestrial, **extra-**curricular	
9	omni-	**omni**vore, **omni**scient, **omni**potent	
10	out-	**out**number, **out**perform, **out**weigh, **out**live	

A **suffix** is a word element added to the end of the root word to convey extra meaning. It often changes the part of speech of the root word too. The table below shows some suffixes commonly seen in academic contexts and their meanings.

Common Adjective Suffixes		
Suffixes	*Meanings*	*Examples*
-able	**having the ability to**	sustain**able** inflamm**able**
-less	**without**	stain**less** weight**less**
-ive -ous -ic	**having the nature and quality of**	addict**ive** corros**ive** poison**ous** infecti**ous** acid**ic** carcinogen**ic**

Common Verb Suffixes		
Suffixes	*Meanings*	*Examples*
-ate		pollin**ate** activ**ate**
-en	**become/ made into**	moist**en** soft**en**
-(i)fy		pac**ify** emuls**ify**
-ise		digital**ise** modern**ise**

Common Noun Suffixes		
Suffixes	*Meanings*	*Examples*
-ant -ent -eer -er -ee -or (ess) -ian -ist	**a person**	consult**ant** resid**ent** engin**eer** employ**er** employ**ee** govern**or** (**ess**) histor**ian** econom**ist**
-ance -ence -cy -ness -ment	**quality/ state of being**	domin**ance** converg**ence** deficien**cy** competitive**ness** enhance**ment**
-ity	**degree**	probabil**ity** elastic**ity**
-ism	**belief/ system/ practice**	Darwin**ism** mechan**ism** terror**ism**
-sion -tion	**process/ condition**	ero**sion** evapora**tion**

Practice

Activity 5

Add a suitable suffix to each of the following words to form a new word. The new word should fit the part of speech and meaning given. Put your answers in the spaces provided.

	Root Words	Parts of Speech		Words with a Suffix		
				Meanings	Parts of Speech	Answers
1.	**vegetable**	noun	➔	a person who does not eat meat	noun	
2.	**accessible**	adjective	➔	the degree or quality of being easy to reach	noun	
3.	**broad**	adjective	➔	to make wider	verb	
4.	**intense**	adjective	➔	to make more intense	verb	
5.	**condense**	verb	➔	the process of changing from gas into liquid	noun	
6.	**consumer**	noun	➔	a belief that happiness comes from purchasing material goods	noun	
7.	**resist**	verb	➔	the ability to withstand a force	noun	
8.	**enhance**	verb	➔	the state of being better/ the process of improving	noun	

ii) Compounding

Compounding is another common word-forming process in English. A **compound word** is formed by combining two words. Compound words can appear as a single word (e.g. homework), a hyphenated word (e.g. high-rise) or two separate words (e.g. real estate). Below are more examples.

Compound Words	Examples
one-word: (also known as **closed compound words**)	greenhouse, milestone, upstream
hyphenated:	long-term, two-fold, up-to-date, full-time
two-word: (also known as **open compound words**)	side effect, middle class, cell phone

<u>**Practice**</u>

Activity 6

Use the words in the left column to make six compound words with reference to the meaning provided.

Words	Compound Words	Meanings
capital set end cost snow living throw ball high- over punishment mind	1)	(n.) a way of thinking
	2)	(n.) the death penalty
	3)	(adj.) very expensive and of good quality
	4)	(n.) the amount of money needed to cover basic expenses such as housing and food
	5)	(v.) grow bigger quickly
	6)	(v.) remove someone from power

iii) Clipping

A **clipped word** is a shortened word extracted from a longer original form. Clipped words can be formed based on one or two words. Here are some examples:

Original Words	Clipped Words
influenza	flu
Internet	net
gymnasium	gym
dormitory	dorm

Clipped words are considered less formal and the original form tends to be used in academic contexts.

e.g. **Influenza** is a contagious illness caused by viral infection of the respiratory system.

<u>**Practice**</u>

Activity 7

Turn the clipped words underlined in the following sentences into their original form to suit the academic contexts.

Sentences	Answers
1. According to Zeidner (1998), students' stress and anxiety increase when they are required to complete time-constrained **<u>exams</u>**.	
2. **<u>Sci-fi</u>** is a literary genre that typically deals with an imagined future and space travel.	
3. There has been a steady decline in **<u>lab</u>** tests on animals over the last decade because of criticism from animal rights activists.	
4. A **<u>memo</u>** is a written message typically used in a professional setting. In a legal context, it can also mean the record of transaction or contract terms.	
5. Celebrity endorsement is an effective strategy widely used in **<u>ads</u>** to gain customer attention and incite their desires to buy the products.	

iv) Blending

A **word blend** is a new word created by combining two words. Here are some examples:

Word 1		Word 2		Blended Word
web	+	log	=	blog
breakfast	+	lunch	=	brunch
Chinese	+	English	=	Chinglish
global	+	local	=	glocal

Practice

Activity 8

Complete the following table with suitable words to show how the blended words are formed. One has been done as an example:

Word 1		Word 2		Blended Word
e.g. stagnation	+	*inflation*	=	*stagflation*
1. information	+	graphics	=	_____
2. _____	+	fog	=	smog
3. net	+	citizen	=	_____
4. emotion	+	_____	=	emoticon
5. education	+	entertainment	=	_____
6. _____	+	_____	=	Eurasia
7. information	+	_____	=	infodemic

Academic
Use of English

v) Borrowing (Loan Words)

A **loan word** is a word borrowed from another language. It is often pronounced in a similar way to their counterparts in the source language. Here are some examples:

Words	Origins	Meanings	Sample Sentences
entrepreneur (n.)	French	a person who starts a business	Elon Musk, the CEO and product architect of Tesla, is one of the most famous **entrepreneurs** in the world.
kindergarten (n.)	German	a pre-school for children (children's garden)	**Kindergartens** should provide a stimulating environment to help children cultivate positive attitudes and good habits.

Practice

Activity 9

Complete the sentences with the loan words provided in the table below. Put the correct letter (A-F) in the space provided.

Loan Words	Origins	Meanings
A. paparazzi	Italian	(n.) a group of photographers who take pictures of celebrities for magazines or newspapers.
B. bourgeois	French	(n.) middle-class people (adj.) belonging or relating to the middle class
C. genre	French	(n.) a style of art
D. tsunami	Japanese	(n.) an extremely large wave caused by a violent movement of the Earth under the sea
E. fjord	Norwegian	(n.) a long, narrow strip of the sea between steep cliffs
F. laissez-faire	French	(adj.) free from interference and control

1. A _____ is commonly found in regions where the present or past glaciations are below the current sea level.

2. The actor launched legal proceedings against the _____, claiming harassment and invasion of privacy by a tabloid press.

3. Some 12,000 households were affected by the volcanic eruption and subsequent _____ that hit the islands of Tonga on 15 January 2022.

4. _____ capitalism is an economic system based on private property rights and free markets.

5. Dystopian fiction is a _____ of science fiction.

6. In America, a traditional _____ family consists of two parents, two children and a family pet.

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