

Developing vocabulary in Education

Strategies for using vocabulary in Education

As an Education student, you have opportunities to practice the skills and knowledge you gain in your university classes in the field. It is important to see yourself as not 'just a student', but as 'an emerging education professional' who has read widely in the field and can express ideas, concepts and terms of the discipline precisely, accurately and confidently.

See yourself as an emerging education professional

One way to demonstrate this is to use appropriate vocabulary in your written work, such as essays, and verbally in oral presentations, tutorials and placements.

Where can you find the vocabulary you need?

It is important to constantly expand your vocabulary specific to the discipline of education. For example, carefully consider the specialised vocabulary in an assignment question and assessment criteria and note terms that might be useful. If you are not sure of the meanings of any terms, consult a dictionary or ask your lecturer or tutor. Good sources of vocabulary include:

- course outlines;
- subject learning outcomes;
- reading packs, textbooks (especially with glossaries);
- recommended websites and journals.

Another excellent source of information can be found at the **LibGuides** section of the University Library website: go to **LibGuides** then the **Education** tab.

Other excellent sources of information can be found at the websites of relevant education bodies such as:

- Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
www.vcaa.vic.edu.au
- Victorian Essential Learning Standards
www.vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au
- Victorian Institute of Teaching www.vit.vic.edu.au
- Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
www.aitsl.edu.au

Education-specific vocabulary

Some examples of terms frequently found in educational contexts include:

Nouns: *acquisition, assessment, cohort, context, competence, curriculum, diversity, domain, engagement, equity, feedback, foundation, framework, genre, identity, language, literacy, methodology, motivation, outcome, pedagogy, phonology, practice, reflection, relationship, resource, schema, sequence, setting, strategy, tool.*

Verbs: *assess, clarify, collaborate, compare, connect, consolidate, coordinate, demonstrate, design, elicit, empower, engage, enhance, evaluate, extend, facilitate, highlight, illustrate, implement, incorporate, integrate, link, motivate, nurture, observe, preview, prompt, reflect, reinforce, remind, review, revise, scaffold.*

Adjectives: *active, appropriate, authentic, cognitive, communicative, critical, disciplinary, diverse, effective, emergent, engaging, ethical, inclusive, innovative, integrated, pedagogical, practical, reflective, relevant, specific, stimulating, supportive.*

Modifying vocabulary for a more specific meaning

The words above can be used in particular combinations to create more specific contextual meaning. Examples of this include, using an appropriate adjective before a noun, an adverb with either a verb or adjective, and prepositions with nouns.

Examples:

Adjective + noun:

*This **communicative technique** clearly illustrates ...*

Verb + adverb:

*The curriculum **functioned effectively**.*

Adverb + adjective:

*Vygotsky's ideas were **increasingly influential**.*

Preposition + noun:

*These important **elements of** the curriculum ...*

Academic Skills

Use specific verbs for accuracy

Avoid over-use of 'general' verbs such as, 'be', 'do', 'have' and 'get'. These verb forms are ineffective in accurately conveying specific ideas. It is better to use a more specific verb or verb phrase to strengthen your writing and make it more direct. Compare:

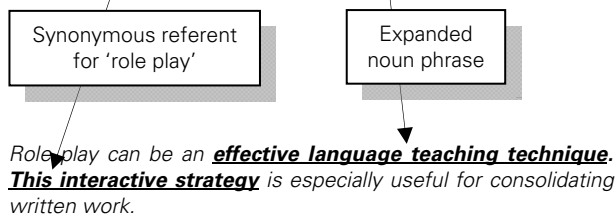
To be successful, learners need to **have** high level literacy skills.

To be successful, learners need to **develop** and **demonstrate** high level literacy skills.

Expanding vocabulary – expanding and rephrasing

Another important writing consideration is to try to avoid re-using the same expressions. Refer to key terms by rephrasing with **referents** or using **synonyms** or **synonymous expressions**. An illustration of this is shown in the second example:

Role play can be effective technique to use in language teaching. Role play is especially useful for consolidating written work.



Other suggestions to improve your vocabulary

Compile your own Education-specific word list: list high-frequency terms that you often see, **i.e.** common key words in your field. Apart from a definition, you might like to include the **word form** (noun, verb, adjective etc.), **an example sentence** for context, translation (if applicable), **synonyms** (if any) and any **collocations** (words that often go together with the word). For example:

<p>cohort: (n) a group, class or generation</p> <p><i>The first cohort was due to graduate in December.</i></p> <p>Synonyms: group, class, company</p> <p>Collocations: student cohort; first cohort; this cohort</p>

Use an online or hard copy learner's dictionary: learners' dictionaries give considerable information for each entry including, easy-to-read definitions, sample sentences, pronunciation, related words and whether a particular noun is countable (c) or uncountable (u).

An excellent online learner's dictionary is the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. This is available at: www.oxfordadvancedlearnersdictionary.com

Add variety in your writing with synonyms from a thesaurus:

A thesaurus contains **synonyms** (words with the same or similar meanings) for a word you may often use in your writing. You can access one when typing by right clicking any word and choosing 'Thesaurus'. Make sure, however, that the synonym you use corresponds to the *exact* meaning of the word that you are replacing. If you have any doubts, confirm the meaning of the word in a dictionary.

Become more familiar with frequently used words in academic contexts:

There are many high frequency words which appear frequently in academic contexts and researchers have attempted to document these.

For example, the *Academic Word List* (AWL), which was developed by Victoria University in Wellington, New Zealand, contains 570 such words. Try to note words that frequently re-occur in your readings.

Check your collocations using an online corpus: A corpus is a collection of texts which can be useful in identifying patterns of language use. If you are unsure what preposition to use after a verb, for example, you could simply type in the verb and see what prepositions appear with it in the examples provided.

An online example can be found at www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk

Read newspaper Education sections: *The Age* on Monday www.theage.com.au and *The Australian* on Wednesday www.theaustralian.com.au have Education sections: go online and read them.

Improve your general vocabulary with a 'Word a Day' email:

There are a number of these emails you can subscribe to. An example is at the **Oxford Online Learner's Dictionary** site; an excellent online resource with definitions, pronunciation, as well as an Academic Word List.

Read often: Wide reading provides you with models of common features of vocabulary, such as collocating forms and sentence patterns. Try to read educational materials and texts if you particularly want to expand your discipline-specific vocab.

Write often: The act of writing involves thinking and problem solving. Writing often in formats such as learning journals, blogs or diaries, gives you many more opportunities to practice using new vocabulary items.

<h3>Further resources</h3> <p>Academic Word List: http://www.uefap.com/vocab/select/awl.htm</p> <p>Academic Word List (Exercises): http://www.academicvocabularyexercises.com/id17.htm</p> <p>Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary: http://dictionary.cambridge.org/</p> <p>Corpus Eye (online corpus): http://corp.hum.sdu.dk/cqp.en.html</p> <p>Macquarie Dictionary (Australia's national dictionary online): http://www.macquarieonline.com.au/dictionary.html</p> <p>Thesaurus.com: http://thesaurus.reference.com/</p>

Academic Skills