USING CORPORA RESEARCH TO HELP IN ACADEMIC WRITING

This Bulletin identifies adjectives and prepositional phrases common to precise academic writing. The lists below are derived from the relatively new field of corpora research (computer-generated word counts) across the content areas. The lists should be introduced when grade- and content-appropriate and should be practiced frequently in academic writing.

ESSENTIAL ADJECTIVES
*abnormal, abstract, academic, accurate, adequate, adjacent, amorphous, angular, annual, anonymous, appropriate, approximate, automatic, averse, aware.
*capable, civic, classic, cogent, colloquial, concentric, consequent, constant, contingent, contrary, corporate, credible, crucial, crystal, cumbersome.
*deficient, definite, dense, distinct, diverse, divine, domestic, drastic, dynamic, deficient.
*elaborate, eloquent, empirical, equidistant, equivalent, eventual, evident, explicit, external.
*feasible, federal, fertile, final, finite, fluent, fundamental.
*genuine.
*homogenous, hostile, huge.

*identical, imperial, implicit, incessant, incompatible, inconsistent, indigenous, ingenious, inherent, initial, innate, intelligent, intense, intermediate, internal, inverse.
*judicial.
*kindred.
*legal, legitimate, liable, linguistic.
*magnetic, major, material, maternal, mature, mental, minor, mobile, moist.
*negative, neutral, novel, nuclear.
*obvious, odd.
*partisan, passive, perpendicular, perpetual, physical, positive, potential, pragmatic, precise, preliminary, previous.
*radical, random, rational, reluctant, respective, rigid, rudimentary, rural.
*secure, similar, simultaneous, solar, sophisticated, spatial, spontaneous, stable, stationary, subjective, subordinate, subsequent, subtle, superficial, superior, supreme, synthetic.
*tangible, temporary, tense, tentative, thermal, tiny, transparent, trivial, tropical.
*ultimate, unduly, urban, utter.
*vague, valid, vast, verbal, vertical, virtual, visual, vital.
Teaching suggestions:
1. Substitute words for each of the above essential adjectives to increase learner academic vocabulary. For example, accurate can lead to exact, meticulous, precise, thorough.
2. When engaging students in a writing assignment, ask them to use selected words from the above list. Always model beforehand the use of these words.

The following adjectives are the most common of all and can be used both to describe (e.g., An able person) and to act independently after the verb be ("He is able):
able, available, better, clear, common, different, difficult, great, high, important, impossible, large, likely, long, low, necessary, new, possible, small, sure, true.

The following adjectives are commonly used and have specific functions:
Intensifiers: even, very, quite, more, well.
To hedge: sometimes, often, usually, relatively, probably, perhaps, generally.
To restrict: only, especially, particularly.
To add: also.

PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES
Prepositional phrases particularly characterize academic writing because of their ability to compact information. The overwhelming (90%) majority of phrases begin with the following prepositions:
of, in, for, on, to, with

Of plays a special role, because it can be used as a quantifier (one/two of the...
a set/number of), possessives (the role of the government), class of nouns (type/kind/class of cars), containers (a bar/box of chocolates), measures (quart of milk), direction or position (the front of the house), and time (the end of the chapter). In addition, of helps to limit words which have a broad meaning (the manner of communication, the style of writing, the role of participation, etc.). Additional features of prepositional phrases to keep in mind:
*many are idiomatic, thus requiring specific use and learning.
*a common language structure after the verb be is a prepositional phrase (It is in process).
*prepositional phrases often interrupt the subject and the verb in the sentence, thus obscuring subject-verb agreement (The process of producing chlorophyll is complex).

Finally, the following are the most common two- and three-word prepositions used in academic writing:
according to, in accordance with, in line with, based on;
ahead of, in front of, prior to;
because of, due to;
contrary to;
except for, apart from, aside from, with the exception of;
instead of, in lieu of, in place of;
prior to;
subsequent to;
by means of;
in (the) case of;
in (the) process of;
in spite of;
in view of, in light of, due to.

Teaching Suggestion
Reading is the best and most appropriate way to develop an intuitive knowledge of the above prepositions; that stated, it will be necessary to model use of these prepositions as they occur specifically in sentences, especially when conducting individual- or group-oriented writing workshops with students.

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