COMMON VOCABULARY FOR ACADEMIC WRITING

Expository prose poses several challenges for learners. This Bulletin provides specific suggestions and vocabulary alternatives for teachers to help students demonstrate greater academic writing accuracy.

1. Teach the use of nouns common to all content areas:
    affect, alternative, approach, chapter, complex, component, concept, construct, context, convert, criterion, data, dimension, element, entity, environment, guarantee, hypothesis, impact, magnitude, method, minimum, negative, period, perspective, phase, portion, potential, region, reverse, role, section, segment, sequence, sum, summary, technique, technology, tense, theory, trace, tradition, usage.

2. Help students find alternatives to the above common words with a thesaurus. For example:
    affect: feeling, emotion, sentiment.

3. Although few in number, noncount nouns play an important role in academic writing. Have students identify and organize them in groups:
    -work: homework, coursework, field-

4. Teach students to recognize certain academic words in a singular manner:
    alcohol, atmosphere, awe, biology, consent, equipment, ethics, friction, geography, geometry, gravity, hemisphere, inflation, integrity, intimacy, labor, logic, mathematics, minimum, maximum, navy, philosophy, pollution, prestige, psychology, reluctance, research, sociology, trade, traffic, vocabulary, welfare.
words that are always used in a plural manner:
clothes, glasses, grounds, jeans, odds, pants, people, savings, shorts, stairs, surroundings, tropics.

4. Teach students that certain words have irregular plural forms:
axis, crisis, criteria, emphasis, focus, hypothesis, index, matrix, overseas, parenthesis, pendulum, phenomenon, radius, series, species, strata, thesis.

5. Teach students that certain words frequently occur as objects or complements of a preposition (e.g., a way of obtaining, etc.):
way, method, means, idea, possibility, effect, problem, process, cost, experience, purpose, advantage, form, importance, practice, system.

6. Teach students to recognize certain action words are very common to academic reading and writing:
action, addition, application, association, communication, concentration, direction, distribution, education, equation, examination, formation, infection, information, instruction, cooperation, organization, population, production, reaction, situation, variation.

7. Teach students that when a verb becomes a noun, it takes "everything" with it and adds an -ing. For example:
I advise you to suggest a plan, becomes Suggesting a plan... etc.

8. Teach the use of verbs common to all subject areas:
abandon, accelerate, access, accompany, accomplish, accumulate, achieve, acquire, adhere, adjust, administer, advocate, affiliate, agitate, aid, align, allege, allude, alter, analyze, approach, assess, assume, comply, conclude, construct, consult, define, denote, derive, devise, equate, establish, evaluate, formulate, guarantee, identify, illustrate, impact, imply, indicate, interpret, involve, presume, prevail, proceed, public, pursue, require, reverse, specify, suffice, sum, vary.

9. Help students to find alternatives to two-word verbs. For example:
give up = abandon
speed up = accelerate
go in(to) = access
go hand in hand = accompany
show up = appear, emerge
pick out = choose, select
go on = continue
find out = discover, learn, determine
take up = discuss, raise
look into = investigate, research, examine

go away = leave, depart
keep up = maintain, continue
turn down = reject
look over = review
look for = search

10. Teach alternative reporting verbs to 'ask', 'say', 'speak', or 'tell', such as:
acknowledge, address, admit, advise, announce, appeal, argue, call (for), carry out, challenge, deny, describe, discuss, emphasize, encourage, explain, express, indicate, inform, mention, note, offer, point out, propose, publish, question, quote, recommend, remark, report, respond, specify, state, suggest, teach, urge, warn, write.

Extensive reading creates an intuitive understanding of the academic use of many of the above words. That said, we need to help students express themselves in academic writing more accurately through explicit teaching of specific words.

SOURCE:
Hinkel, Ei (2004). Teaching Academic ESL Writing.
Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.