
ACTIVITY TWO: WRITING CHECK WITH THE ACADEMIC WORD LIST

[The Academic Word List \(AWL\)](#) is a list of 570 of the most commonly found vocabulary words in academic texts (Coxhead, 2000). When English language learners in academic settings focus attention on wordlists such as AWL, they have an opportunity to expand the vocabulary necessary to communicate in academia.

In this week's activity, students will use the AWL to check and revise their own written work using an online tool called an [AWL highlighter](#). AWL highlighters are an easy way for teachers to identify target vocabulary and for students to check their own written work for correct use of words from the AWL. Simply copy and paste the text to be reviewed in the online highlighter. Once you submit the text, a new version of the text is given with any AWL words highlighted. The text can then be used as a way to check vocabulary use or give students a chance to revise their own work focusing on academic vocabulary.

The number of AWL words that students use in their own writing will vary. If teachers are teaching vocabulary from the AWL and/or want to ensure that students are using academic vocabulary, students can always be given a set number of words to use. For example, a typical academic text run through the AWL highlighter might have 1 to 10 AWL words. Depending on your student's level, their vocabulary knowledge, and the essay length, a manageable target is to ask each student to include 5 to 7 AWL words in their writing.

LEVEL

Advanced

LANGUAGE FOCUS

Writing

GOALS

During this activity, students will be able to:

- Identify AWL vocabulary in their writing using an online AWL highlighter tool.
- Use online resources and learner dictionaries to revise AWL vocabulary used in their writing.

MATERIALS

- Computer with internet access
- [AWL Highlighter](#): This AWL Highlighter can process 2400 characters at a time, which means students might have to run portions of their text through separately.
- Student writing (best with longer text) that has the AWL words highlighted
- Paper/pencils
- Online dictionaries or print copies, thesauruses, learner dictionaries, online corpora (corpora are collections of written and/or spoken text that linguists use to examine how words are put together and used)

PREPARATION

- Before class (or in class, if computers are available), ask students to input a draft of their essay into the AWL highlighter; directions are provided at the end of this lesson with screenshots.
- Students must bring a printed version of their writing assignment to class. The students must run this writing through the AWL before class, so that every student has a printed copy with the AWL words highlighted.
- Write the following steps on the board:
 - Read the first sentence with an academic word aloud.
 - Look up the word in the dictionary to ensure that the definition of the word matches the intended meaning of the word in the sentence.

- Together, read the sentence again. What part of speech is necessary for the word to fit correctly in the sentence?
 - If necessary, change the word to the correct part of speech using the dictionaries and additional tools if available. Make the correction on the paper.
 - When finished with one paper, check the other.
- Pair students according to their writing abilities, with students of similar levels working together or stronger students working with weaker students.

PROCEDURE

1. Begin class by putting students into pairs.
2. Once in pairs, give them a dictionary and offer any other materials on hand for vocabulary work.
3. Tell students that they will look at and revise their writing together.
4. Have students look at one essay first. Review the steps already written on the board.
5. As students work through their essays, teachers can circulate to assess how well the task is going.
6. Upon finishing, teachers can choose whether to collect the corrected papers or continue revising the essay for other issues.

VARIATIONS

An alternative to this activity is to prep the students for the activity by reviewing a piece of writing together as a group. Prepare a text the students are familiar with and run the text through the AWL highlighter online. Print enough copies for the students to use as you work together through the article. First, model the activity by working together as a large group on two words. Then, assign students to groups of three to four and have each group work on an assigned word. If the text you are examining has only a few AWL words, have each small group examine all of the included AWL words. When finished, bring students back together and ask each group to share their findings.

EXTENSIONS

This activity can be extended after pairs of students have checked both of their essays. One pair of students can give their essays and corrections to another pair of students. The pairs go through the steps on the board for the new essays that they have been given. Ask the new pairs to make any necessary changes before returning the essays to the authors. If there are disputes, encourage them to discuss their differences of opinion and come to an answer as a group of four.

REFERENCES

Coxhead, A. (2000), A new Academic Word List. *TESOL Quarterly*, 34: 213–238. doi:10.2307/3587951

APPENDIX A

Use the screenshots below as a guide to using an AWL Highlighter online.

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL www.nottingham.ac.uk/alzsh3/acvocab/awlhighlighter.htm. The page title is "The AWL Highlighter".

1. Copy text into the box here. A red arrow points to a text input box containing the following text: "Are you assessment literate? What does that mean—to be assessment literate? Assessment is something that we as teachers must do all the time, but many of us feel unprepared or uncomfortable when it comes to testing our students. Teachers often reuse tests without analyzing or revising them and seldom use statistical procedures to see how a test—or a test item—is actually performing. Assessing students often means reaching for a test or quiz that is already prepared, whether it be a test included with a textbook, something another teacher prepared, or a standardized test produced by a major testing organization or our institution. These aren't necessarily bad choices (and sometimes it may

2. Mark the circle for 10 to ensure that all 570 words on the list are checked. A red arrow points to a row of radio buttons labeled 1 through 10. The radio button for "10" is selected.

3. Click Submit A red arrow points to a "Submit" button.

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File produced at level 10

Are you **assessment** literate?

What does that mean%97to be

assessment literate? **Assessment**

is something that we as teachers

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Teachers often reuse tests without

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Note the words in bold are the ones pulled from the AWL

Print this document or bold the words in the original document using this as a guide.