

B

READING B: The Case for Increased Rigor in Adult English Language Instruction

(Adapted from Betsy Parrish’s LINCES ESL Pro Issue Brief: *Meeting the Language Needs of Today’s Adult English Learner*, AIR 20015, available at https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/ELL_Increasing_Rigor_508.pdf.)

Academic language and access to opportunities.

Jeffrey Zwiers defines academic language as “the set of words, grammar, and discourse strategies used to describe complex ideas, higher-order thinking processes, and abstract concepts.”

In the realm of K–12 education, command of academic language allows young ELLs to access and develop content knowledge along with their mainstream peers in K–12 schools. In the case of adults, it is language that can be used in more complex interactions in work, community, and school contexts (e.g., the actual phrases used for building on another’s ideas in a discussion, such as *Another thing to consider is ...*.)

The Academic Wordlist: A Useful Tool

The Academic Wordlist, or AWL, is a list of words which appear with high frequency in English language academic texts across disciplines. The list was compiled by Averil Coxhead at the Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. The list contains 570 word families and is divided into 10 sublists, with sublist 1 words occurring with the highest frequency within texts. Most of the words on the list have multiple inflections and related words (word families), for example: **define, definable, defined, defines, defining, definition, definitions, redefine, redefined, redefines, redefining, undefined**. Having access to these words is key to learners’ understanding of complex text.

SUBLIST 1 of the AWL

analyze	contractor	finance	major	role
approach	create	formula	method	section
area	data	function	occur	sector
assess	define	identify	percent	significant
assume	derive	income	period	similar
authority	distribute	indicate	policy	source
available	economic	individual	principle	specific
benefit	environment	interpret	proceed	structure
concept	establish	involve	process	theory
consist	evidence	issue	require	vary
constitute	export	labor	research	
context	factor	legal	respond	
contract		legislate		

-
- **Work with your partner. Check your understanding of the reading.**
 - **Prepare to report what you learned to your “home team.”**
1. Locate Zwier’s definition of academic language in paragraph 1. Restate it in your own words.
 2. What’s the importance of academic language to adult learners? Support your answer.
 3. According to the article, what is the Academic Wordlist and what is its value?