

This list features academic words that you may see or hear on the reading and/or listening sections of the TOEFL and IELTS tests. Becoming familiar with these and similar words will also help you on the writing and speaking portions of the tests.

*note: this list uses British spelling. (ex. 'maximise' — not 'maximize'.)

v. = verb, n. = noun, adj. = adjective

Academic Word List	
access	verb to be able to enter, reach, approach, etc. something “He couldn’t access his email account because someone had changed his password.”
	noun the ability or right to enter, reach, approach, etc. something “I don’t have access to those files.”
accurate	adjective precise or exact; free from error (opposite = inaccurate) “The victim was unable to provide an accurate description of the criminal.”
	verb to accomplish; to reach a certain standard “As a result of her hard work, she achieved an excellent score on her final.”
acquire	verb to get or come into possession of something; to accumulate or collect “Over 20 years of collecting stamps, I’ve acquired over 4,000 of them!”
	verb to look at something closely; to examine in detail “After analysing the DNA sample, the police were able to identify the killer.”
analyse	noun a part or an element of something “Flexibility is just one aspect of being a successful gymnast.”
	verb to help or aid someone (noun = assistance) “They were assisted by an outside company when designing the program.”
assist	adjective free to help; present or in stock (in regards to inventory) “We do not have enough resources available to complete the project.”
	adjective having knowledge of something; being conscious or cognizant of something “I wasn’t aware of the problem. Thank you for informing me.”
available	verb to receive an advantage or make an improvement “Society has greatly benefited from technological advancements.”
	adjective gentle or kind; favorable; passive or inactive “The military cannot afford to be benign in this war.”
benign	verb to make a statement about something “First, I would like to comment on the current environmental situation”
	verb to give an equivalent or a return for something else “If the government expects citizens to do this, they must compensate their citizens fairly.”
comment (on)	noun a part or element of something (see also: aspect)

		“To understand the whole problem, you must look at all of its separate components.”
concentrate (on)	verb	to focus your attention on something
		“In order to move forward, we must concentrate on finding realistic solutions to the problem.”
consequence	noun	a result or effect of something
		“He was executed as a consequence for his heinous actions.”
consist (of)	verb	to be made of something; to be composed of something
		“A healthy relationship must consist of trust and mutual respect.”
constant	adjective	regular and seemingly permanent (adverb = constantly)
		“It is difficult to deal with constant disagreement when working in a group.”
construct	verb	to develop or build; to make
		“Numerous condos are currently being constructed in the downtown core.”
contribute	verb	to give to a common cause, supply, or fund
		“I contributed over \$300 to charity last year.”
convert (into)	verb	to change or transform into
		“That building was recently converted into a restaurant.”
correspond (with/to)	verb	to be similar to something; to be in agreement with something
		“The words of politicians often don’t correspond with their actions.”
crucial	adjective	very important; vital
		“The media was crucial to changing public opinion about the Viet Nam war.”
define (as)	verb	to provide a definition; to give clarity or definition to something
		“The word ‘crucial’ can be defined as ‘extremely important’ or ‘vital.’”
demonstrate	verb	to provide a demonstration or to show how something functions
		“This satellite will demonstrate the technological power of our organization”
design	verb	to create or model
		“The factory assembly line was partially designed by Henry Ford.”
disposal	noun	the act of arranging or distributing; getting rid of something
		“A general is responsible for the effective disposal of his soldiers.”
distinct	adjective	clear and having easily-identifiable or specific characteristics
		“Dark chocolate is known for its distinct smell and taste.”
emphasise	verb	to place emphasis or special focus on something
		“The media constantly emphasises the dangers of illegal drugs.”
erode	verb	to destroy slowly over time; to disintegrate
		“Many religious leaders feel that secularism has eroded morality.”
error	noun	a mistake
		“Despite constant reminders and protests, governments continue to make

	errors.”
estimate	verb, noun to make an educated guess; to give a projection “Scientists have been estimating a massive population explosion over the next two decades.”
exclude	verb to keep someone/something from entering a group, society, project, etc. “When I was in high school, I was excluded from many activities due to my disability.”
extract	verb to get or obtain something from something else “Physical torture is not an effective means of extracting information from a human being.”
flexible	adjective not rigid; able to be shaped (opposite = inflexible) “Employers need to be flexible to the needs of their employees.”
function	noun the working purpose of something; ability “Cell phones are useful because they can serve multiple useful functions.”
identical	adjective the same or alike in appearance and/or character “The problem I have with suburban neighbourhoods is that all the houses look identical.”
identify	verb to recognise or verify the identity of someone/something “Even today, scientists continue to identify new types of plants and animals.”
indicate	verb to show or give evidence of something “Research indicates that cell phones can cause cancer.”
indication (of)	noun a sign or token “High blood pressure is a clear indication of stress.”
interpretation	noun an explanation or perception of something “Religious writings can have multiple interpretations.”
item	noun a separate piece or article of something “Anthropologists have recently uncovered 200 physical items pertaining to the Incas.”
legislation	noun the act or process of making laws; the laws which have been made “The current health legislation will be difficult for all political parties to accept.”
location	noun the place of something “Niagara Falls is a popular location for tourists.”
logical	adjective able to be explained or understood clearly (opposite = illogical) “The CEO has promised to take logical steps to ensure the future success of the company.”
majority	noun the greater part or number; over 50% of the population “The majority of citizens oppose the government’s proposed budget.”
maximise	verb to use to maximum effect or potential “The goal of any business is to maximise its profits.”

minimise	verb	to reduce as much as possible
		"In any war, one of the primary objectives should be to minimise civilian casualties."
monitor	verb	to watch and give attention
		"Companies have numerous ways to monitor employee behaviour."
obtain	verb	to get or receive
		"In order to obtain respect, a person has to earn it."
obvious	adjective	clear and easy to see
		"There are some obvious similarities between French and English vocabulary."
occur	verb	to happen or take place
		"An earthquake is expected to occur here in the next 2-3 years."
option	noun	a choice; one of several possibilities to be chosen
		"When our options are limited, we are more likely to act decisively."
participate	verb	to take part in something
		"Thousands of talented athletes participate in the Olympics."
participation	noun	the act of taking part in something
		"Portugal was ridiculed for its participation in slavery."
period	noun	a portion of time; a significant interval of time in history
		"The 1700s were a period of great scientific advance."
precise	adjective	exact or definite
		"It is important for a teacher to give precise instructions."
predictable	adjective	able to be predicted (opposite = unpredictable)
		"The goal of science is to find predictable results."
prohibited	adjective,	not allowed; forbidden
	verb	
		"These days, smoking is prohibited in many public places."
proportion	noun	a part of a larger whole; the size of something
		"A large proportion of modern problems are a result of negligence."
prospect	noun	a potential candidate; a possibility of success, profit, etc.
		"I was excited by the prospect of winning the lottery."
psychological	adjective	relating to the mind or psychology
		"We must pay attention to our psychological health."
purchase	verb	to buy
		"We're planning to purchase a house next year."
pursue	verb	to chase or follow
		"Acting is a difficult career to pursue."
relevant	adjective	connected to the current situation; pertinent (opposite = irrelevant)
		"In an essay, we must only focus on relevant supporting details."
reliable	adjective	able to be predicted or trusted; dependable (opposite = unreliable)
		"Finding a reliable babysitter is difficult for most parents."
require	verb	to have need of something; to need

		"To take a masters course, one requires an undergraduate degree."
requirement	noun	something which is obligatory, demanded, or needed
		"You do not meet the requirements for this position"
resource	noun	a support, supply, or aid of something that can be used when needed
		"If you want me to do this presentation, I will need more resources."
respond	verb	to reply
		"When faced with a bully, it is important not to respond with anger."
retain	verb	to remember; to continue to use
		"The most difficult part of learning is retaining the information"
role	noun	a position or customary function
		"The role of a parent is to provide safety for his/her child."
sector	noun	a part or subdivision
		"It is the government's job to protect all sectors of society."
secure	adjective	safe; protected from harm (opposite = insecure)
		"Everyone wants to live in a secure neighbourhood."
select	verb	to choose
		"We selected the best candidate for the job."
significant	adjective	important; of consequence (opposite = insignificant)
		"Man landing on the moon was a significant achievement for science."
source	noun	any place, person, or thing from which something else comes or originates
		"We can't seem to locate the source of the problem."
status	noun	someone's position in relation to other people; the state or condition
		"His status as the top player in the game is unquestionable."
structure	noun	the organization or arrangement of something
		"The structure of the education system needs to change."
substitute	noun, verb	a replacement for someone/something
		"If you want to succeed, there is no substitute for hard work."
symbolise	verb	to represent or be a symbol for something
		"In most cultures, it is understood that the dove symbolises peace."
task	noun	a job or duty to be performed
		"Raising a family is not an easy task."
technique	noun	a specific way of doing something; a certain skill
		"Most people don't know that cooking requires hundreds of difficult techniques."
topical	adjective	pertaining to current or local events or interests
		"Global warming has been extremely topical in the first half of the 21st century."
transform	verb	to change into a different form
		"The internet has transformed the way we communicate."
trend	noun	a style that is currently popular; the general course of something

	"Fashion trends are always changing."
vary	verb to be different; to alternate; to change or alter; to diversify
	"To write a good essay, you need to vary your vocabulary."
veritable	adjective being truly or very much so
	"I felt a veritable pain in my abdomen"
visible	adjective able to be seen (opposite = invisible)
	"There has been a visible shift in public opinion towards the government."
wane	verb to decrease in strength, intensity, etc.
	"My interest in the movie waned the longer we watched it."