

Essential General Academic Vocabulary Guide for Students in Grades 3–5

By Cheryl York McDonough, Collins Education Associate

General academic vocabulary is the language of school and tests. It is more likely to be used in written expression rather than speech. Using general academic vocabulary in your own writing helps create a more formal writing style.

Word	Definition	Example Sentence
accurate	correct with no errors or mistakes	<i>Make sure that your details are complete and your conclusion accurate.</i>
agree	to share an opinion or belief	<i>You need to use evidence to explain why you agree with a position.</i>
anticipate	to think about what might happen in the future	<i>After reading the first paragraph, can you anticipate what the outcome will be?</i>
assert	to state a belief in a clear and exact way	<i>In this passage, the author asserts a strong belief about democracy. Can you restate it?</i>
assess	to judge something or to assign a value to something	<i>Citing facts, assess who was a better president, Lincoln or Kennedy.</i>
assume	to decide something is true without knowing any facts	<i>If you assume that the details are complete, what do you predict the outcome will be?</i>
attitude	a way of thinking or feeling about someone or something	<i>What is the author's general attitude about our government in this excerpt? How do you know?</i>
category	a group where all of the items are similar in some way	<i>What category would you put germs in: animal, vegetable, or mineral?</i>
claim	to state a belief or theory that others may disagree or agree with	<i>Explain the author's claim and develop one counterclaim.</i>
classify	to place items in groups based on similarities	<i>How would you classify your community: urban, suburban, or rural?</i>
comparison	a description of how two or more things are alike	<i>In your comparison of vegetables and fruits, make sure to include at least three similarities.</i>
conclude	to bring something to an end	<i>A good way to conclude your persuasive writing is with a call to action for your reader.</i>
concrete	specific and clear, not general and abstract	<i>When describing the Civil War, include at least five concrete facts or details.</i>
confirm	to reinforce that something is true	<i>Confirm your position with your reader by restating it in your conclusion.</i>
consider	to carefully think about something	<i>Consider your audience when you are writing your persuasive essay.</i>
consistent	stay the same	<i>Your tone should stay consistent throughout your essay.</i>
contradict	to state the opposite or to disagree	<i>The power of this author's message is weakened by the number of times he contradicts himself.</i>
contrast	to describe how two or more things are different	<i>In contrast to earlier generations, Americans are now very concerned with the gas mileage of their cars.</i>
create	to make something new	<i>Create a diagram that helps to explain this problem.</i>
current	happening right now	<i>What current event is most important to you? Why?</i>
debate	to discuss or explore all sides of an issue	<i>When candidates debate the issues, does it change people's minds?</i>
defend	to support something with evidence	<i>How did the mayor defend his decision about closing the park?</i>
define	to tell the meaning of something	<i>How would you define the word "essential" for a third grader?</i>
detail	information or facts about a topic or subject	<i>What detail is most important in understanding lab results?</i>
disagree	to have a different opinion	<i>Which position did you most disagree with?</i>
discuss	to present ideas or information	<i>What main idea did the speaker discuss?</i>
distinguish	to see differences	<i>How do you distinguish a magazine article from a short story?</i>
eliminate	to do away with or get rid of	<i>When you edit, eliminate as many conventions errors as possible.</i>
essential	important or necessary	<i>Which fact is most essential to this audience?</i>
evidence	details or facts that help to prove a claim	<i>How did you choose your evidence for this essay?</i>
exclude	to keep out or away	<i>Exclude any details that are not supporting your topic.</i>
expand	to talk or write about something in a complete way	<i>Expand on this quote from the State of the Union.</i>

focus	the main topic or idea	What is the focus of this passage?
identify	to know or communicate who or what someone or something is	Identify the error in this equation, and explain how to correct it.
include	to put in	In your response, include three possible solutions.
information	knowledge or details about a topic	Categorize the information provided as either fact or opinion.
issue	a problem or question for discussion	What three major issues led to the American Revolution?
judge	to decide if something or someone is good or bad	How would you judge the behavior of the two main characters in the story? Who was kinder?
likely	when something is probable	What is likely to happen if the ozone continues to disappear?
maximum	the greatest quantity or degree	Using the rubric, what could your maximum score be?
minimum	the smallest quantity or degree	What is the minimum number of votes needed for a win?
oppose	to be against	Which leaders opposed Lincoln in his stand on slavery?
optional	something that is a choice; not required	Participation is expected. It is not optional .
organize	put parts together in a specific order	How is the Declaration of Independence organized ?
passage	a piece of a written or oral work	Which passage best supports your claim or belief?
persuade	to convince someone to believe a certain way	How does this ad persuade the audience? Name three devices.
possible	might be true under some circumstances	Of the three choices, only one is possible . Which and why?
presume	to suppose or assume something	Don't presume to understand if you do not have enough information.
previous	before or earlier	In the previous chapter, three laws were enacted. Name them.
primary	most important or essential	What is the primary piece of evidence in King's speech?
prior	before	Prior to being president, what did Truman do?
process	steps or actions taken to produce something or achieve a result	Is the democratic process the best way to elect a leader?
quality	a trait or characteristic	What qualities do you look for to determine if something is living?
react	to respond to words, events, or actions	How did the citizens react to the park closing?
reason	a cause for a belief, position, or claim	What is one reason for the passage of the Clean Air Act?
recall	to remember, bring back, or restate	What three facts do you recall from the film?
refer	to mention or draw attention to	Why does the speaker refer to "his people"? Who are they?
represent	to be an example or symbol of	What does the color blue represent in this poem?
require	to make something necessary	Why does the US Constitution require secret ballots?
response	a reply, answer, or reaction to words, actions, or events	In your response , include a restatement of the prompt.
result	an outcome or consequence of words, actions, or events	What result do you expect after seeing the experiment partially completed? Why?
review	to look back on and consider	Review the agenda, and predict what topic is most important.
sequence	order of words, actions, or events	List the sequence of events leading up to the battle.
significant	important	Which decision is most significant for Christopher Columbus?
source	the writing or person from which information is taken	Can you explain why you chose this source ?
specific	distinct, particular, or definite	Specific evidence is always more powerful than general statements.
strategy	a plan to accomplish a specific goal	What strategy did the Puritans use when planning their move?
structure	the way something is put together; the parts something is put together with	What is the structure of the reading? How is it put together? What are the parts?
summarize	to restate the main ideas and facts (usually of a piece of writing)	You should be able to summarize the reading from last night and not leave out any important ideas.
support	evidence or details that proves something is true or a claim makes sense	What support can you identify in the speech about protecting the rain forests?
task	a job or assignment	Identify the task in this prompt. What do you need to do?
valid	true and logical	Sort the evidence into two categories: valid and invalid.
vary	to make differences	Good writers always vary the kind of evidence and support they use.
version	a particular edition or translation of a piece of work	Which version of the story did you enjoy more? Why?