

Essential General Academic Vocabulary Guide for Students in Grades 6–12

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
analyze	to examine something carefully and with focus	Analyze the passage to determine the author's point of view.
apply	to connect something you know or can do to another situation	Apply the three most essential elements of British rule to Colonial Boston's economic hardships.
appropriate	right or correct in a particular situation or context	Include three pieces of appropriate textual evidence to support your claim.
argument	an idea supported by evidence or reasoning	In your argument , please be certain that your claim is clear and your evidence sufficient.
assess	to make a judgment about	After reading the essay, assess the merit of the claim.
audience	those who receive information or a message	Your response should be appropriate for the intended audience .
cite	to mention or quote as an example to support an idea, claim, or opinion	When summarizing the reading, please cite the source, title, and author.
claim	to state a position that may go against the positions of others	Include a claim that clearly states your stand on extending the school day.
clarify	to make something easier to understand	Clarify your position on using social media in school.
closure	the act of bringing something to an end or reaching a conclusion	Your concluding paragraph should bring closure to your argument.
compare	to see what is the same or similar about two or more items or to judge which is better	Compare the causes of the Korean War with those of the Vietnam War and decide which was more justified.
compose	to create or write	Compose a letter to the editor regarding student rights.
contrast	to see what is different about two or more items or to decide which is better or worse	Contrast the poetry of Plath with that of Dickinson, and determine who was a stronger feminist.
conventions	generally accepted practices, such as in grammar or language mechanics	A strong command of English conventions is essential for a journalist.
counterclaim	a claim that goes against a previous claim	All effective arguments must address at least one counterclaim .
credible	reasonable to trust or believe	Include credible evidence in your answer.
critique	to express your opinion about the good and bad parts of something	You are to summarize the reading, not critique it.
define	to explain the meaning of something	Define your position on early voting.
delineate	to clearly show or describe	Delineate your methods for solving this equation.
design	the way in which something is planned and made	Identify the flaw in this design and explain how it resulted in failure.
detail	a fact or piece of information about something	In your response, include a sufficient number of supporting details .
determine	to decide the truth or validity of something (facts, statistics, or claims)	What steps are necessary to determine if evidence is credible?
develop	to grow or change and become more advanced	You must develop your theory in a logical and concise manner.
dialogue	a conversation between two or more people, groups, or entities	The dialogue in the passage was incredibly disturbing.
e.g.	a Latin abbreviation that means "for example"	Some paragraphs (e.g. , the first and last) are vague.
essay	a formal and focused piece of writing, usually containing multiple paragraphs	Your argument essay should be completed by Friday and include both a claim and a counterclaim.
evaluate	to determine the value, worth, or importance of something after careful consideration	Evaluate the following two speeches and determine which is more likely to sway voters.
evidence	something that proves that a claim is true or valid	Citing textual evidence , evaluate who is a worse father, Claudius or Polonius.
explain	to make clear with sufficient reasons or details	Looking at this student response, please explain what the error was.
fact	true and provable piece of information	Good writers cite facts when making arguments.

formal style	impersonal, objective, precise use of language	<i>Students should always use a formal style in academic writing.</i>
formulate	to develop and explain all the details of an idea, thought, or conclusion	Formulate your response before you answer the prompt.
infer	to use information you have been given to come to a conclusion	<i>What can you infer from the information that the government has shared with voters?</i>
integrate	to combine one thing with another to make a whole	<i>In your response, integrate the beliefs of at least two cultures we have studied.</i>
interpret	to explain or understand the meaning of	<i>Does the following graph interpret the data correctly?</i>
justify	to prove or show something to be just, right, or reasonable	<i>Please make a claim that you can verbally justify.</i>
logical	using reason	<i>Use logical sequencing in your answer.</i>
mood	the atmosphere in a situation	<i>The mood of the poem is glum.</i>
objective tone	presenting information in a way that is not emotional or biased	<i>An objective tone may be desirable in argument writing, but it might not work for persuasion.</i>
organization	the appropriate arrangement of parts in an orderly and efficient way	<i>Use chronological organization in your plot summary.</i>
paraphrase	to reword something written or spoken by someone else	Paraphrase this statement by Winston Churchill.
passage	a portion or section of a written work; a paragraph, verse, or similar	<i>Evaluate the following passage for its impact on the teenage reader.</i>
phrase	a group of words that express an idea wholly or incompletely	<i>Which phrase is more persuasive?</i>
plagiarize	to use another's words without authorization	<i>Be careful that you do not unintentionally plagiarize.</i>
point of view	the position or outlook of the author	<i>Can you determine the point of view of this writer from his use of language?</i>
precise	definite or exact	<i>Your response should be precise, not vague.</i>
predict	to say what will happen in the future	<i>Based on chapter one, can you predict the conflict?</i>
rank	relative position or standing	<i>List three main causes of the Depression in rank order.</i>
reason	basis of argument; supporting evidence	<i>You must include more than one reason to support your claim.</i>
relevant	connected to the subject	<i>Evidence is not strong if it is not relevant.</i>
source	where the information comes from, can be written, spoken, audio, video, and so on	<i>Include more than one source in your evidence.</i>
specific	precise or particular	<i>Include a specific reference to an expert in your answer.</i>
sufficient	enough	<i>Include sufficient information to solve the problem.</i>
summarize	brief restatement of important points of a written or oral statement	Summarizing is not the same thing as retelling!
support	to uphold or defend as valid or right	Support your assertion with three pieces of evidence.
synthesize	to combine a number of things into a coherent whole	Synthesize the four main ideas in this reading.
text	the whole of a written work	<i>Read the text closely before you attempt to answer.</i>
text features	elements that help the reader make sense of the text	<i>Subtitles and pull-out quotes are two common text features.</i>
text structure	how a text or a passage is organized	<i>The text structure was a problem-solution pattern with clear subheadings to assist the reader in identifying the central ideas.</i>
theme	underlying or unifying idea that runs throughout a written work; the message or the meaning	<i>How did you identify the theme of man's inhumanity to man in the novel?</i>
tone	a feeling or an attitude expressed by the words	<i>The author's tone tends to predict the theme.</i>
transform	to change something from one state to another	<i>How did the idea of civil rights transform the United States in the 1960s?</i>