The University Word List

The University Word List (UWL) first constructed by Xue and Nation (1984) is a list of 836 words that are not included in the 2,000 words of the General Service List (West, 1953), but are common in academic texts. The list is presented here at 11 levels, with Level 1 containing the words of the most frequency and Level 11 the least frequency. According to Nation (1990 p.19), the words on this list account for 8% of the words in a typical academic text.

UWL Level 1

alternative analyze approach arbitrary assess assign assume compensate complex comply component concept conclude consist constant construct consult contact context criterion data define definite denote derive devise dimension distinct element environment equate equivalent establish evaluate evident formulate guarantee hypothesis identify ignore illustrate impact implicit imply indicate initial interpret involve magnitude method minimum modify negative obvious potential presume prime proceed publish pursue random range region require restrict reverse role similar specify status subsequent suffice sum summary technique tense ultimate usage valid vary vertical

UWL Level 2

accelerate achieve adjacent affect approximate assert authorize automatic aware chapter complicate comprehend conceive concentrate consequent contrast contribute convert create crucial decade demonstrate design devote distort emphasize empirical ensure entity equilibrium expand expose external feasible fluctuate focus function generate individual infer inhibit innovation intense intuitive isolate magnetic major manipulate mathematics mature notion obtain occur passive period perspective pertinent phase phenomena portion precede precise principle react respective section segment select sequence series shift signify simultaneous sophisticated species stable statistic structure technology theory trace tradition transmit undergo verbal verify

UWL Level 3

abandon accomplish adapt adequate adjust appreciate appropriate area attitude chemical circumstance classic commune conduct conflict consume convene coordinate correspond credible critic dedicate deficient deviate discrete disperse dispose drama dynamic economy estimate exclude exert explicit exploit factor feature final geography image intellect intelligent issue labor maintain manifest maximum motive network norm notate occupy orientate physical plot pole positive preposition prestige previous proprietor rational relevance rely reveal rotate satellite scheme seek source superficial task transition underlie visual

UWL Level 4

acquire administer aesthetic allege allocate alter analogy appraise assemble assure atmosphere atom attribute avail axis bomb capable cease constitute contaminate contradict culture dedicate denominator dense diagram discourse distribute diverse dominate elaborate eliminate embody emotion energy eventual forgo fragment goal heredity impress incident incompatible induce integrate internal intervene investigate judicial justify litigate logic military mobile perpendicular persist philosophy predict project proportion psychology reject release research reservoir revolt speculate sphere spontaneous stipulate subside subsidize superimpose symbol tentative text theorem upsurge

UWL Level 5

absorb abstract accurate advocate aid biology category client code compound confront contract contrary crisis deny dictate diffuse dispute duration edit electron enlighten err execute expel fraud grant graph gravity homogeneous implement impose incorporate insist institute instruct intersect interval job kindred label legitimate objective overlap parenthesis perpetrate preliminary radius respond restore retain retard rudimentary secure stimulate stress style subtle superior supplement suppress symptom synthetic tiny trait transfer transform trivial vast version

UWL Level 6

abnormal academic accompany adjective adult agitate appeal arouse aspect assist attain awe benefit civic clarify collide comment commit compute conform conjunction console contemplate contend contingent controversy converse cooperate cycle decline degenerate doctrine extract fertile found hemisphere hierarchy identical incline income instinct interact interlock interlude legal locate medium metabolism microscope minor nerve niche oblige participate planet propagate propensity prosper protest radical reign reinforce revise sanction scalar strata subjective sustain tangent terminology tone topic uniform urban virtual volume voluntary

UWL Level 7

adolescent affiliate affluence alcohol aristocrat astronomy cell collapse colloquial commodity competence concentric confer configuration congress conserve continent corporate creditor crystal cumbersome defer degrade democracy depress dissolve divine domestic ethics finance fraction friction fuse geometry horror incentive incessant intermediate invade inverse invoke migrate morphology muscle navy neutral nutrient obsolete odor parliament peasant plead policy pragmatic precipitate prevail prudence rectangle reform refute repudiate revive rhythm saint schedule score sibling sketch sociology spectrum stereotype terror texture thermal tissue transact x-ray

UWL Level 8

adhere aggregate aggression align allude ally bore bureaucracy cater circulate coincide consent correlate currency deprive detect detriment discern dissipate drug evolve fallacy finite fraternal frustrate imperial index invest launch legislate lens liable linguistic locomotion magic metaphor monarch nuclear oscillate oxygen partisan pendulum pervade postulate premise proclaim provoke rebel reluctance reproduce rigid secrete sex solar spatial subordinate supreme territory treaty trend utilize utter

UWL Level 9

acid ambiguity amorphous asset averse carbon complement condense confine construe displace diverge drastic efficient enumerate evaporate evoke exhaust faction federal frontier fund illuminate indigenous innate integer intrinsic liberate margin material matrix molecule momentum odd orbit residue reverberate rural stationary subdivide suspend unduly velocity vibrate violate vocabulary

UWL Level 10

access angular anomaly anonymous anthropology append appendix ascribe aspiration assent assimilate auspices clinic coefficient cogent comprise compulsion converge deflect deliberate dispense elevate elicit eloquent emancipate embrace emerge enhance enrich episode equidistant exponent facilitate fluent fossil inconsistent inflation ingenious inherent interrelate interview intimacy maternal myth null option outcome perpetual priority procure prohibit province purport quote recur remove render repress resident rigor saturate skeleton surplus tangible tolerate triangle vague

UWL Level 11

accumulate annual apparatus arithmetic attach battery breed bubble bulk calendar cancel capture career catalogue challenge channel circuit column communicate compel cylinder debate decimal defect diameter digest drain enable equipment expert export fare fate fluid fuel fulfill fundamental genuine germ harbor hero hostile huge import impulse inferior injure inspect instance irrigate item journal laboratory layer lecture leisure luxury mental moist novel pest pollution port process ratio resource revolve route shrink site starve survey switch tape team telescope temporary theft tire tractor traffic transparent transport tropical undertake vein vital volt withdraw

Nation, I.S.P., 1990, Teaching and Learning Vocabulary, Newbury House, New York  
West, 1953, A General Service List of English Words, Longman, London  
Xue Guoyi and Nation, I.S.P, 1984, A University Word List, Language Learning and Communication 3, 2:215-229