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Reading and Vocabulary for Academic Achievement

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Contents

Dedication.....	iii
Contents.....	v
To the Instructor.....	1
Acknowledgments.....	7
Lesson 1.....	9
Save the Forest.....	9
Lesson 2.....	15
The Benefits of Reading Books.....	15
Lesson 3.....	21
The Fox and the Goat.....	21
Lesson 4.....	27
10 Ways to Manage Stress.....	27
Academic Vocabulary 1.....	33
Lesson 5.....	35
Lotfizadeh: Short Biographical Sketch.....	35
Lesson 6.....	43
The International Manager.....	43
Lesson 7.....	49
Ali and the Sultan's Saddle.....	49
Lesson 8.....	53
Culture of Book Reading Vanishing in Iran.....	53
Academic Vocabulary 2.....	59
Lesson 9.....	61
Evil Allures, But Good Endures.....	61
Lesson 10.....	67
10 Tips for Picking Up a Second Language.....	67
Lesson 11.....	73
Amin and the Eggs.....	73
Lesson 12.....	79
How to Make an Impression.....	79
Academic Vocabulary 3.....	85
Lesson 13.....	89
Changing Status?.....	89
Lesson 14.....	95
Studying Without Borders.....	95
Lesson 15.....	101
The Lion and the Mosquito.....	101
Lesson 16.....	107
The Gratitude Club.....	107
Academic Vocabulary 4.....	115
Extensive Reading.....	119
Extensive Reading 1.....	121

Breakfast at McDonald's	121
Extensive Reading 2	125
Excuses, Excuses: An Excerpt from Teacher Man	125
Extensive Reading 3	133
The One Day War	133
Extensive Reading 4	139
God Sees the Truth, But Waits.....	139
Possible Responses	149
Vocabulary Building	151
The Most Useful Words in English	155
An English-Persian Glossary of Academic Vocabulary	171
Pronunciation Key for Academic Vocabulary	189
Short Forms and Labels Used in the Book	190
References	191

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To the Instructor

Reading and Vocabulary for Academic Achievement is a textbook designed to introduce the 2,000 most frequent, thus useful, words as well as academic vocabulary to Iranian university students, especially first-year students majoring in English courses. However, the book can be used effectively with non-English majors, at the undergraduate level, and even the graduate level, who seek to develop a solid foundation in English proficiency, prior to embarking on their specialized English courses in their own field. The major aim of this book has thus been to draw attention to how starting with frequency-based vocabulary can foster reading comprehension and vocabulary development.

Many corpus-based analyzes (Chen & Ge, 2007; Martínez, Beck, & Panza, 2009; Nation, 2004; Vongpumivitch, Huang, & Chang, 2009; Wang, Liang, & Ge, 2008) show that the 2,000 most frequent words in English approximately cover 75 percent of the running words in a sample text. Academic words, associated with Coxhead (2000), make up about 8–12 percent of the token words in a sample academic text. As a result, the most useful words and academic words combined provide a lexical coverage of up to 85 percent or even more vocabulary of the whole text, depending on the type of the text. For instance, there are totally 7,369 words in the reading passages of the 16 lessons of the current textbook. The most useful words and the academic words combined account for 90.75 percent of the running words in our 16 reading passages included in this book.

Prior to the beginning of technical courses and specialized studies in English at the tertiary level, the book intends to ensure that Iranian university students have grasped the core meaning and behavior of the most useful as well as academic words, irrespective of their field of study. Therefore, the most useful words and academic words are the point of departure.

Most frequent words make up the high proportion of every text. Academic words, however, mostly occur beyond the 2,000 most frequent words and appear in every discipline and text. For these reasons, they have been incorporated in the exercises directly or

indirectly. We incorporated every academic word appearing in the lessons and then included the words from the 570 academic word families compiled by Coxhead (2000) but not appearing in our lessons. Different types of exercises were utilized in the book for this purpose.

In order to obtain optimal academic achievement, instructors should try to ask their students to check their knowledge of the most frequent, and thus useful, 2,000 words in English that are indexed at the end of the book. They should try to ask the students to give a list of the words they do not know from among the most useful words. Instructors should encourage the students to find their meanings and also make sentences with the unknown words.

A language learner encounters texts of various types and topics in the real world. Therefore, lessons have been organized accordingly but they are of general nature so that the interest of only a specific group is not favored. Texts have been taken or adapted from various sources. The sources for the 16 lessons have specifically been provided at the end of the book, indicating the titles and pictures used and the sources where they were taken from. However, the sources for the short texts with no titles, mainly found in the activities, are only given at the end without indicating which short text was taken from which source. It is worth noting that a simple search including a sentence from the intended short passages, within the internet search engines, will take you directly to their sources where they were taken from. Besides, example sentences were taken from the dictionaries cited at the 'references' section. Utmost care has thus been taken to acknowledge the sources of the contents of the book and to avoid being charged with plagiarism.

Each lesson in *Reading and Vocabulary for Academic Achievement* is structurally organized into something similar to the following: a reading passage and five or six activities or corners. There is an academic vocabulary section after every four lessons. Thus, within 16 lessons, there are four academic vocabulary sections. Likewise, the section on extensive reading includes four reading passages to allow reading for pleasure. As

the interest for any innovative activity falls thin after the activity is repeated a few times, attempts were then made to avoid any repeated pattern of exercises throughout the book. Furthermore, the number of items in each activity, or so-called corner, were kept to minimum in order to avoid boredom and only to raise the awareness of the students in dealing with reading and vocabulary development for better gains. The main activities and exercises, or as we call them 'corners' here, include the following, among others:

- **Discussion Corner.** Based on a common theme, this activity raises thought-provoking discussion and questions on the text, or related to the text, in order to motivate the students and create an opportunity for them to speak in the classroom.
- **True/False Statement Corner.** It is concerned with the comprehension of the text.
- **Reading Comprehension Corner.** This exercise is also concerned with reading comprehension in the form of multiple-choice questions. It intends to check how the students understand the passage.
- **Vocabulary Comprehension Corner.** This activity tries to expand the vocabulary proficiency of the Iranian university students. It includes activities, such as guessing the meaning of unknown words, finding synonyms for certain words, matching words with their definitions, and so on.
- **Academic Words Corner.** This exercise specifically intends to familiarize students with the academic vocabulary that prevails many disciplines and types of texts. Academic vocabulary is incorporated in such activities as word analysis, finding derivations, meaning familiarity, and so on.
- **Reading and Vocabulary Corner.** It intends to check how students use words to complete reading comprehension.

- **Word Analysis Corner.** This activity tries to improve the vocabulary knowledge of the Iranian students through working on the affixes.
- **Collocation Corner.** It will introduce how the words in English go together.
- **Reading Analysis Corner.** This activity is related to different aspects of the reading skill. Each lesson aims to check the global reading comprehension of the students by engaging them in one specific reading activity.
- **Humor Corner.** Humor helps language learners learn the hidden part of a nation's culture. Teachers can often use jokes in the ESL/EFL classroom to teach culture, grammar, and vocabulary. This is mostly accomplished by understanding the subtleties of the language of that nation, especially the nuances of the meaning of the words. In addition, a context like that of a short joke would serve as a helpful device to raise the awareness of the learners to lexical and grammatical points. Besides, it is rewarding for the teachers to see their students finish a lesson with a smile on their faces and at the same time know that they have learned new vocabulary, structure, and function.

Given the fact that this volume focuses the attention of language learners on academic words, there are reasons for compiling an amalgam of various types of texts, academic and non-academic, especially stories, in such a volume. For one thing, this book is intended for my students, majoring in English Literature, at the University of Qom where I work. Therefore, this is the reason I have included a number of stories, since these types of students expect more literary stuff to read, even at the beginning of language learning. Besides, compiling a variety of texts favors the interests of a larger group of university students. Furthermore, it is easier to obtain a suitable collection of various texts than a specific collection of academic texts, given the existing constraint on our time, budget, and resources. Also, understanding material of the sort is comparably easier than that of the academic texts once language learners use this book independently for self-study.

In case there are possible weaknesses or shortcomings, that I humbly admit there are many, your feedback will be much appreciated. Therefore, you are kindly requested to send your criticisms, comments, and suggestions for further improvement to me at Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, University of Qom, Qom, Iran (PO Box No. 37185-396, Qom, Iran), or email them to me at i-akbarian@qom.ac.ir or ishaaq.akbarian@gmail.com. Your feedback means that the game is worth the candle.

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