Academic Vocabulary for TOEFL & IELTS

1 Claims and positions

assert (state something confidently, often without presenting evidence in the same sentence.)

The report **asserts** that smaller classes improve retention, but its data cover only one institution.

contend (argue for a position that remains open to dispute.)

Some researchers **contend** that commuting time is a better predictor of job satisfaction than distance alone.

maintain (continue to hold or defend a view.)

The authors **maintain** that the benefits outweigh the administrative costs.

propose (put forward a plan, explanation or hypothesis.)

The paper **proposes** a framework for comparing local adaptation strategies.

qualify (limit or modify a statement to make it more exact.)

The conclusion should be **qualified** because the sample excludes rural respondents.

substantiate (support a statement with adequate evidence.)

Additional records are needed to **substantiate** the allegation of underreporting.

refute (show that a claim is wrong through evidence or reasoning.)

The new measurements **refute** the assumption that the two materials react identically.

2 Evidence and investigation

corroborate (provide independent support for a finding or account.)

Interview records **corroborate** the timeline reconstructed from the receipts.

infer (reach a conclusion from evidence rather than direct observation.)

From the decline in repeat visits, the researchers **infer** a change in user behaviour.

indicate (suggest or point toward something, without necessarily proving it.)

Preliminary figures **indicate** a modest recovery in demand.

demonstrate (show clearly through reasoning, analysis or evidence.)

The experiment **demonstrates** that temperature affects the rate of the reaction.

account for (explain something or constitute a stated proportion of it.)

The model does not **account for** variation in household size.

attribute (regard something as caused by or belonging to a particular source.)

The authors **attribute** the delay partly to staff shortages.

replicate (repeat a study or procedure to test whether results recur.)

A separate laboratory could not **replicate** the original result.

3 Causes and relationships

correlate (vary in a related way.)

Reported stress levels **correlate** with hours worked, but the mechanism is uncertain.

mediate (act as an intermediate process through which an effect operates.)

Access to childcare may **mediate** the relationship between income and employment.

moderate (change the magnitude or direction of a relationship.)

Age may **moderate** the effect of training on productivity.

exacerbate (make an existing problem worse.)

Unclear eligibility rules can **exacerbate** delays in accessing assistance.

mitigate (reduce the severity or harmful effect of something.)

Early warnings may **mitigate** the damage caused by severe flooding.

offset (counterbalance a cost, effect or disadvantage.)

The savings may **offset** the initial investment within several years.

stem from (originate in or be caused by.)

The discrepancy may **stem from** differences in how cases were recorded.

4 Scale and change

marginal (small or relating to an additional unit.)

The revised procedure produced only a **marginal** improvement in accuracy.

substantial (large enough to matter.)

The programme required a **substantial** investment in staff training.

incremental (occurring in small successive steps.)

The city adopted an **incremental** approach to infrastructure renewal.

fluctuate (rise and fall irregularly.)

Attendance figures **fluctuated** throughout the semester.

stabilise (become or make something relatively steady.)

Demand began to **stabilise** after the initial surge.

diminish (become or make something smaller or less important.)

The effect **diminished** as participants gained experience.

disproportionate (too large or small relative to an appropriate comparison.)

The policy placed a **disproportionate** burden on low-income households.

5 Methods and limitations

robust (remaining reliable under reasonable tests or changes.)

The association remained **robust** after the researchers adjusted for age.

representative (reflecting the characteristics of a broader population.)

The survey sample was not **representative** of seasonal workers.

bias (systematic distortion in data, selection or interpretation.)

Self-selection **bias** may have influenced the survey responses.

confound (make it difficult to distinguish the effect of one variable from another.)

Differences in prior experience could **confound** the comparison.

constraint (a restriction that limits available choices or processes.)

Limited transport access was a major **constraint** on participation.

assumption (a proposition accepted provisionally for the purposes of reasoning.)

The projection rests on the **assumption** that costs remain constant.

limitation (a feature that restricts how far conclusions can be extended.)

The short follow-up period is a **limitation** of the study.

6 Evaluation and comparison

feasible (practicable under real constraints.)

A nationwide rollout is not **feasible** without additional staffing.

viable (capable of working or continuing successfully.)

The pilot suggests that the approach may be **viable** in smaller municipalities.

equitable (fair in the distribution of opportunities, costs or benefits.)

An **equitable** allocation may require greater support for remote communities.

comparable (similar enough to permit a meaningful comparison.)

The estimates are not directly **comparable** because the definitions changed.

trade-off (a situation in which gaining one benefit entails sacrificing another.)

The design involves a **trade-off** between speed and thorough review.

plausible (reasonable or believable in light of available information.)

This is a **plausible** explanation, although the evidence remains incomplete.

tentative (provisional and open to revision.)

The results support a **tentative** conclusion about short-term outcomes.