

Introduction

Aims of a Lexis-Based Course

Lexis-based language courses give priority to the learning of vocabulary and to the precise use of what has been learned. A lexis-based writing course concentrates on developing vocabulary that is useful in writing. Its ultimate goal is no different from that of a structure-based course, a process-based course, or any other common type of writing course: *Students should become better writers by successfully applying what they learn in class.*

A lexis-based writing course is especially appropriate for high-intermediate to advanced students. Most have already learned in their previous English language classes how to build an essay that meets the expectations of an academic audience. When asked to name the way in which they can best improve their English, such students routinely respond, “increase my vocabulary.”

I think these higher-level students are right. They need more practice with grammar and organization, but they rarely need more instruction in them. Many of their apparent grammar problems are actually lexico-syntactic faults: The student either uses a vocabulary item that does not go well with other sentence elements or uses an effective item but does not know which structures or collocations should go with it. For example, a student who writes **Only a few scientists accepted to work on the development of nuclear bombs* seems to have made a grammar mistake. Remediating that sentence, however, does not require a grammatical change. Simply changing *accepted* to *agreed* would fix everything. The basic problem is that the student chose a verb that cannot have an infinitive as its direct object, not that the grammar of the sentence is flawed.

Theorists have difficulty determining what it means to “know” a word or phrase. The generally accepted stance is that there are many levels at which a vocabulary item can be “known.” Very basic levels are predominantly *receptive*, involving simple recognition of the item and a general idea about what it means. The highest levels involve *productive* ability as well. At this level, the speaker commands the item precisely in his or her own use of the target language and might even be able to make puns or clever turns of phrase involving the item. Precise use demands a deep knowledge of what other vocabulary or grammatical structures can surround the target item. Manipulation of the item to make an effective joke requires an ability to see connections between the target item and other terms. Take, for example, a pun once made by the comic novelist Peter DeVries: “My wife’s fondness for garage sales is making us baroque.” Whether or not you think the joke is funny, you would probably acknowledge that anyone able to construct that pun has a deep understanding of *baroque* and sees its connection to other lexical items—notably the near-homophone *broke*.

Building Academic Vocabulary (BAV), and any writing course in which it is used, is best suited to moving an item beyond a student’s receptive vocabulary and into his or her productive vocabulary. Most high-intermediate or advanced students have encountered almost all the key vocabulary before, and many of them have a relatively firm understanding of what these items mean. For example, most students at that level would be familiar with *consist of*. They have seen it in what they have read, and it poses no obstacle to their understanding. Using it in their own writing, however, is another matter altogether. To do that correctly, they have to know that its subject must be a whole thing and its object must represent all parts of the whole. The verb cannot be in a passive form (**is consisted of*) or a full-verb progressive form (**is consisting of*). The list of constraints could go on and on, all of them triggered solely by the properties of this vocabulary item.

The overall aim of a *BAV*-directed, lexis-based writing course is to make important constraints on the key vocabulary explicit, thereby making a student aware of many features that are implicit for (and perhaps not even recog-

nized by) native speakers of North American English. A course using *BAV* gives the students ample practice in using what they have learned and places heavy emphasis on both paraphrasing and essay assignments designed to bring out the key vocabulary. Because many constraints on usage are founded in metaphor, *BAV* also notes the image(s) influencing the properties of a given lexical item. For example, *diverge* calls up the image of going in different directions after sharing a common path, an image founded in the Latin roots of the item. It does not matter whether students know anything about those Latin roots, but it does matter that they recognize the image.

A high-level student armed with this information—and given opportunities to use it—is very likely to learn a great deal in a lexis-based writing course.

Structure of *Building Academic Vocabulary*

Each of the nine chapters in *Building Academic Vocabulary (BAV)* concentrates on one area of meaning, such as “including” or “links and correlations.” The areas have been chosen for their relevance to certain modes commonly taught in university-level introductory writing courses—*describing* (especially describing a system), *comparing/contrasting*, and discussing *causes and effects*.

In fact, these three general categories form the basis for three blocks of chapters in *BAV*. Chapters 1 and 2 contain key vocabulary for describing a system, object, or person. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 present vocabulary useful in writing about similarities or differences. Chapters 6 through 9 deal with causation and its often-neglected, logically distinct cousins, correlation and facilitation. Because this book is meant for students who already have considerable experience with English, the logical distinctions signaled by vocabulary items are emphasized. There is no point in learning so much about a lexical item and then employing it to make wrong-headed claims.

The key vocabulary in each chapter is divided into groups, depending on meaning or lexico-semantic properties. Each key item is introduced and gram-

matically classified (countable noun, complex preposition, etc.); any commonly used related forms are also noted. For example, related forms of the adjective *diverse* are *diversity* (noun) and *diversify* (verb), but (as *BAV* notes) *diversion* is not part of the family. The key item is then shown in two different contexts, each of which is accompanied by a restatement to help the students build semantic networks. A Usage Clues box (shaded) forms the heart of the lesson about each vocabulary item—notes about its implications, possible contexts, common collocates, any fixed phrases in which it appears, and so forth. Some terms for which clear mnemonic devices exist are also followed by a short section called To Help You Remember.

Each chapter contains two types of exercises. After every two or three sections, a set of Consolidation Exercises helps students work with and understand a small roster of key vocabulary. Near the end of each chapter is a larger set of Comprehensive Review Exercises to allow students to work with all the key vocabulary in the chapter. The Answer Key to *BAV* (pages 223–30) provides definite or suggested answers to all the exercises in a chapter.

At the end of each chapter is a section called Writing Projects. This contains several options for writing that could be treated in a short form (500–600 words) or in a longer paper of about 2,000 words. The scope and sequence in this teacher’s guide recommends that the student write three longer, multi-draft essays in a course of about 14 weeks. This implies one essay per multi-chapter block, so that the student may choose among the proposed writing projects for all the chapters in the block. The teacher is completely free to require more or fewer major papers—whatever the teacher feels is the best workload for everyone concerned. *BAV* gives ample suggestions, any number of which could be used.

One last notable feature in each chapter is the set of additional vocabulary. These provide an optional second tier of learning. The additional terms are underlined where they occur in the text of the chapter, but they are not explained. They are pointed out for their broad academic usefulness or their

cultural interest, so that students who want to add volume to their vocabularies can draw from a list of good suggestions. The student, however, will probably have to consult a good dictionary for more information about any interesting items and will have to work independently to infer usage constraints. One matching and one fill-in exercise in each chapter test the student's understanding of additional vocabulary. The teacher is free, however, to compose production-oriented exercises that encourage a deeper knowledge of these terms.

A Sample Scope and Sequence for a Lexis-Based Writing Course

- The following sequence below assumes a 14-week term with three or four instructional hours per week. In such circumstances, the material could be covered in 42 to 56 hours of instruction. The sequence of lessons can easily be compressed into a ten-week term or expanded to fill 16 weeks.
- *BAV* is an abbreviation for *Building Academic Vocabulary*.
- The material from *BAV* is divided into three blocks of increasing length. The first two blocks take up the first half of a typical college semester, and the third block takes up the second half.
- The last element in each chapter is a set of possible writing assignments. The point of doing such writing is to use the key vocabulary correctly in an academic context. For each block, the student should do only one long essay, so each block's writing assignment offers the student at least five choices of topic and approach.
- For each chapter, this teacher's guide gives one metaphor/idiom exercise and five quizzes—four about key vocabulary and one about additional vocabulary. Teachers are free to use whichever quiz best reflects their expectations for the students. Some teachers may want to use two or even three quiz options for some chapters. That is why this scope and sequence refers to “quiz(zes).”
- Most important, this scope and sequence provides only a suggested approach to the material. Teachers should feel free to customize it to suit the needs of their students.

Block 1

Describing a System/Optional Review of Essay Structure and/or the Writing Process

Time	Content	Some Activities
Weeks 1–4 (12 to 16 hours of instruction)	<p>BAV Chapters 1 and 2; if necessary, some review of essay structure and the writing process (see pp. 1–20 in this guide)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Briefly, the parts of an essay (optional) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unscrambling Essay Parts exercise Choosing the best thesis statement Discussion of key vocabulary in Chapter 1 (including) and Chapter 2 (excluding) Metaphor/idiom discussion for each chapter Discussion of additional vocabulary for one or both chapters (optional) <p>Writing-Process Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of basics of writing process (optional) Peer editing on first draft of system-description essay Teacher feedback on first draft of system-description essay (via marginal comments on the paper, ideally followed by an individual or pair conference) Grade on final draft of system-description essay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exercises in <i>BAV</i> as appropriate for homework or in class Other exercises as the teacher sees fit (composed by the teacher) Quiz(zes) about <i>BAV</i> Chapter 1 Quiz(zes) about <i>BAV</i> Chapter 2 <p><u>Essay:</u></p> <p>One of the writing projects at the end of <i>BAV</i> Chapter 1 (p. 21) or Chapter 2 (p. 44), or an alternative essay assigned by the teacher</p>

Block 2

Writing about Similarities or Differences (Comparison/Contrast)

Time	Content	Some Activities
Weeks 5–8 (12–16 instructional hours; additional time may be planned for a midterm exam, if necessary)	<p>BAV Chapters 3, 4, and 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some reminders about essay structure, if necessary in light of performance on the essay in Block 1 (above) • Discussion of key vocabulary in Chapter 3 (equivalence, similarity), Chapter 4 (difference, inequality), and Chapter 5 (changes, increases, decreases) • Metaphor/idiom discussion for each chapter • Discussion of additional vocabulary for one or more chapters (optional) <p>Writing-Process Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer editing on first draft of similarities-differences essay • Teacher feedback on first draft of similarities-differences essay • Grade final draft of similarities-differences essay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercises in <i>BAV</i> as appropriate for homework or in class • Other exercises as the teacher sees fit (composed by the teacher) • Quiz(zes) about <i>BAV</i> Chapter 3 • Quiz(zes) about <i>BAV</i> Chapter 4 • Quiz(zes) about <i>BAV</i> Chapter 5 <p><u>Essay:</u></p> <p>One of the writing projects at the end of <i>BAV</i> Chapter 3 (p. 65), Chapter 4 (p. 91), or Chapter 5 (p. 120), or an essay assigned by the teacher</p>

Block 3***Causes, Effects, Correlations, and Favorable or Unfavorable Factors***

Time	Content	Some Activities
Weeks 9–14 (18–24 instructional hours; additional time may be planned for a final exam, if necessary)	<p>BAV Chapters 6, 7, 8, and 9</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some reminders about essay structure, if necessary, in light of performance on Block 2 essay • Discussion of the differences between causation and correlation • Discussion about multiple causes and effects • Discussion about conditions and factors that promote or hinder a process • Discussion about key vocabulary in Chapter 6 (links, correlations), Chapter 7 (cause and effect), Chapter 8 (permitting, making easier), and Chapter 9 (stopping, preventing) • Metaphor/idiom discussion for each chapter. • Discussion of additional vocabulary for one or more chapters (optional) <p>Writing-Process Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer editing on first draft of cause-effect/correlation/factors essay • Teacher feedback on first draft of cause-effect/correlation/factors essay • Grade on final draft of cause-effect/correlation/factors essay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercises in <i>BAV</i> as appropriate for homework or in class • Other exercises as the teacher sees fit (composed by the teacher) • Quiz(zes) about <i>BAV</i> Chapter 6 • Quiz(zes) about <i>BAV</i> Chapter 7 • Quiz(zes) about <i>BAV</i> Chapter 8 • Quiz(zes) about <i>BAV</i> Chapter 9 <p><u>Essay:</u></p> <p>A cause-effect essay, a correlation essay, or an essay discussing favorable/unfavorable factors. Students are expected not to confuse causal relationships with coincidental relationships. The logical standard for the students should be set quite high.</p> <p>Assignment: One of the writing projects in <i>BAV</i> Chapter 6 (p. 143), Chapter 7 (p. 165), Chapter 8 (p. 187), or Chapter 9 (p. 214), or an alternative essay assigned by the teacher</p>