

Google to the Rescue? Tech-Savvy Strategies for Teaching Academic Vocabulary

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The Problem:

- Though learners can provide passable definitions of many words, they cannot use them correctly in speech or writing.

One Solution:

- Search engines such as Google can help learners compare definitions and usage patterns via simple forms of corpus analysis. Learners produce more appropriate sentences for new vocabulary when using these techniques.

Basic errors in university-level ESL learners' vocabulary logs:

1. He had a **hanker** for a better-paying job.
2. Subsequent events vindicated his **guilty** because he shoplifted again at a department store.
3. It's pretty easy for me to think of something that is not **relevance** to the topic.

General Vocabulary Strategies:

- Use English-language dictionaries, not (primarily/exclusively) L1/L2 translators.
- Compare multiple dictionary definitions of the target word.
- Pay attention to the original sentence (context) of the target word when reading.
- Check dictionaries' example sentences with the target word.
- Use additional information from dictionaries, beyond meaning: part of speech, usage notes, etc.
- Use good reading strategies: decide when to look up a word.
- Prioritize high-frequency words and/or words on the Academic Word List (AWL).

Coxhead's Academic Word List (AWL)

- Definitions, pronunciations, translations, and interactive spelling quizzes:

<http://www.esldesk.com/vocabulary/academic>

Academic Word List - 570 words.

Select reference source and click on any word below to view definition, pronunciation, translations or web usage of that word.

Wiktionary
Definition

Spanish I
Translation

Google
Usage



LIST-1

sector available financial process individual specific principle estimate
contract environment export source assessment policy identified create
definition assume theory benefit evidence established authority major
involved percent interpretation consistent income structure legal conce
constitutional analysis distribution function area approach role legislat

Learner Checklist: Six Things to Learn When You Learn a New Word

1. meaning (not just translation)
2. etymology (derivation and/or related words)
3. part of speech (noun, verb, adjective, etc.)
4. usage (regular/irregular, transitive/intransitive/phrasal verb, count/non-count noun, collocations)
5. number of syllables (x) and stressed syllable (y)
→ *write the stress pattern next to/on top of the word to remember how to say it: x-y* (Murphy 2004)
6. pronunciation (consonants and vowels as well as syllables and stress)

Trickier errors in university-level ESL learners' vocabulary logs:

1. The Taiwanese president is trying to **cop out** the promises he had made a few years ago.
2. People who have no confidence in their situations or positions can easily be **snobbery**.
3. Tom always made **reverting** comments that made our meetings go slowly.
4. Their rights have been **confined** and neglected by the government for too long.
5. It is frustrating to watch luckily **vindicated** criminals walk out without serving time in prison.
6. I **conjure** you sincerely to reconsider this business project.

Therefore, even with good strategies, learners still struggle, and teachers need **practical ways to scaffold these strategies in the classroom.**

One possible solution: Corpus Analysis

Typically focused on researchers, teachers, and upper-level language learners:

- Genre-based approaches
- English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approaches
- Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

Michigan Corpus of Upper-Level Student Papers (MICUSP)

- Free, searchable database of academic writing in the disciplines: <http://micusp.elicorpora.info>



| MICUSP project page | Email feedback

include notes & references ?

You are browsing papers in 16 disciplines at 4 levels of 1 paper type with 8 textual features.

▶ STUDENT LEVELS ?

▶ NATIVENESS ?

▶ TEXTUAL FEATURES ?

▼ PAPER TYPES ?

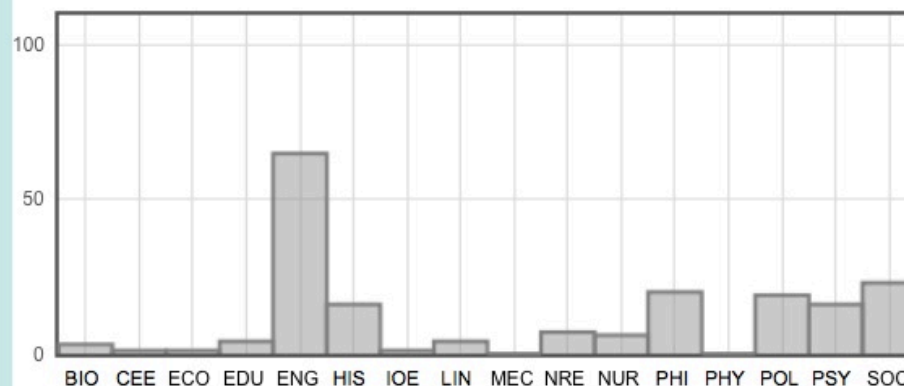
- No Restriction
- Argumentative Essay
- Creative Writing
- Critique/Evaluation
- Proposal
- Report
- Research Paper
- Response Paper

▼ DISCIPLINES ?

- No Restriction

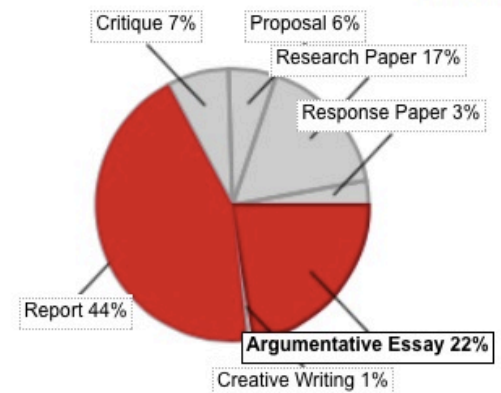
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Showing 1 to 20 of 186 papers

| |

Paper ID ?	Title ?	Discipline ▲ ?	Paper Type
BIO.G0.15.1	Invading the Territory of Invasives: The Dangers of Biotic Disturbance	Biology	Argumentative I

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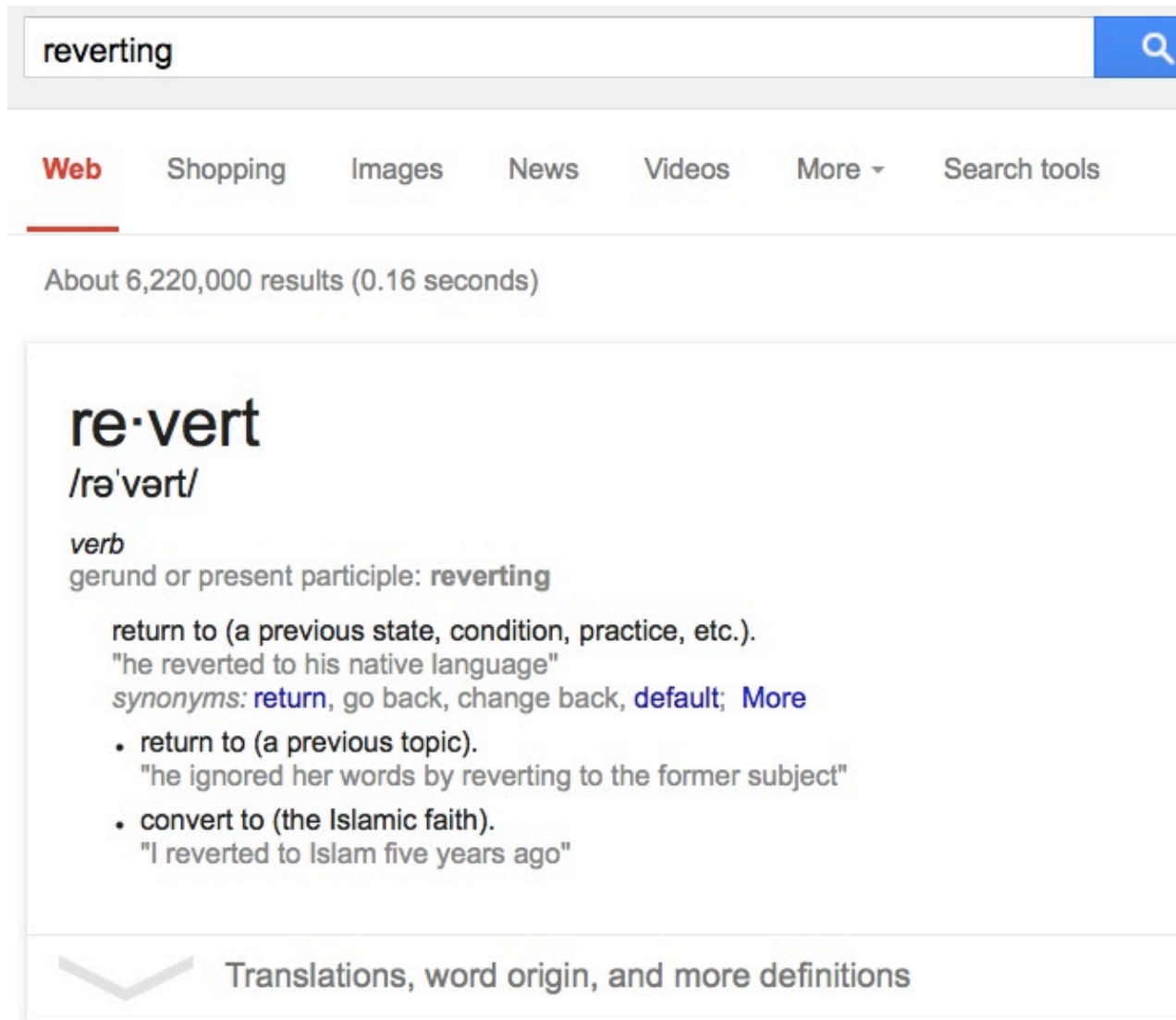
Google™

- Free
- Ubiquitous
- Surprisingly fully-featured



Using Google for Student Corpus Analysis:

- Frequency
- Connotations
- Collocations
- Usage



reverting

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About 6,220,000 results (0.16 seconds)

re·vert
/rə'veɪt/
verb
gerund or present participle: **reverting**

return to (a previous state, condition, practice, etc.).
"he reverted to his native language"
synonyms: [return](#), go back, change back, [default](#); [More](#)

- return to (a previous topic).
"he ignored her words by reverting to the former subject"
- convert to (the Islamic faith).
"I reverted to Islam five years ago"

Translations, word origin, and more definitions

Helping Learners Analyze New Words (example 1)

1. He has **prerogative** to do a lot of things.
2. It's not fair to use the **prerogative** to obtain a better job.
3. Old men should have **prerogative** to enter the park first.
4. It is such a **prerogative** that we can study at this great university.
5. He owns **prerogative**.
6. My friend, who is the son of the vice president, has a lot of **prerogatives**.

define prerogative



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pre·rog·a·tive

/priˈrɒɡətɪv, pəˈrɒɡ-/

noun

1. a right or privilege exclusive to a particular individual or class.
"owning an automobile was still the prerogative of the rich"
synonyms: entitlement, right, privilege, advantage, due, birthright [More](#)

adjective **LAW** **BRIT.**

1. arising from the prerogative of the Crown (usually delegated to the government or the judiciary) and based in common law rather than statutory law.
"the monarch retained the formal prerogative power to appoint the Prime Minister"

A closer look: “He owns **prerogative.**”

“owns prerogative” → 30 results

“owns a prerogative” → 6 results

“owns the prerogative” → 22,900 results

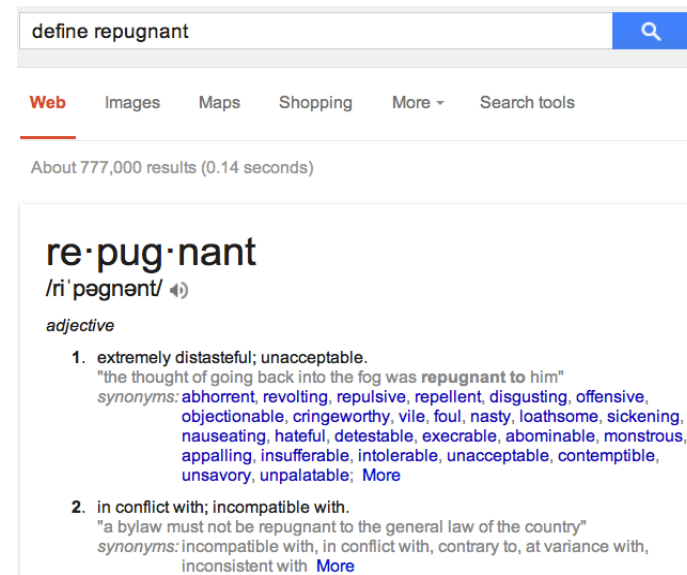
“has prerogative” → 3280 results

“has a prerogative” → 91,000 results

“has the prerogative” → 336,000 results

Helping Learners Analyze New Words (example 2)

1. His annoying sound makes me feel **repugnant**.
2. My mother's food makes me feel **repugnant**.
3. The leftovers made me **repugnant**.
4. She found it **repugnant** when he was asking if she wanted that food.



define repugnant

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About 777,000 results (0.14 seconds)

re·pug·nant
/ri'pəgnənt/

adjective

1. extremely distasteful; unacceptable.
"the thought of going back into the fog was **repugnant** to him"
synonyms: abhorrent, revolting, repulsive, repellent, disgusting, offensive, objectionable, cringeworthy, vile, foul, nasty, loathsome, sickening, nauseating, hateful, detestable, execrable, abominable, monstrous, appalling, insufferable, intolerable, unacceptable, contemptible, unsavory, unpalatable; [More](#)
2. in conflict with; incompatible with.
"a bylaw must not be repugnant to the general law of the country"
synonyms: incompatible with, in conflict with, contrary to, at variance with, inconsistent with [More](#)

A closer look:

“The leftovers made me **repugnant**.”

“me repugnant” → 8590 results

repugnant
in a sentence
→

[Repugnant: In a Sentence - Words in a Sentence](https://www.wordsinsentence.com/repugnant-in-a-sentence/)

[wordsinsentence.com/repugnant-in-a-sentence/](https://www.wordsinsentence.com/repugnant-in-a-sentence/) ▾

Use **Repugnant** in a sentence. The smell was completely repugnant to the pregnant woman. Because of your repugnant behavior, I no longer want to be friends ...

[Definition of “repugnant” | Collins English Dictionary](https://www.collinsdictionary.com/English/Definition/repugnant)

[www.collinsdictionary.com](https://www.collinsdictionary.com/English/Definition/repugnant) ▸ [English Dictionary](#) ▾

Example **Sentences** Including 'repugnant'. He found the notion of popping in on the obsequies altogether repugnant. MacLeod, Charlotte Something in the ...

[How do you use the word repugnant in a sentence](https://www.answers.com/.../Definitions/Example%20Sentences)

[www.answers.com](https://www.answers.com/.../Definitions/Example%20Sentences) ▸ ... ▸ [Definitions](#) ▸ [Example Sentences](#) ▾

Although she was scared about being a teenaged mom, she found abortion to be a very repugnant idea. He considered welfare a repugnant social concept that ...

When (and how) should students implement these techniques?

- For homework—to help with initial stages of vocabulary analysis (flipped classrooms)
- For follow-up homework—to analyze errors in own/classmates' sentences
- In class, in groups—to analyze errors in own/classmates' sentences
- In class, individually during full-group discussion—to quickly access information to troubleshoot a word/concept

Helping Learners Avoid Plagiarism

Teach vocabulary itself:

- "What we call plagiarism [among ESL students in academic writing classes] may more often be a result of lexical limitations, even lexical ignorance and desperation, than cultural differences or outright cheating. [...] [W]hat was missing was appropriate directed vocabulary instruction to allow for proper paraphrasing and summarizing" (Folse 2008, p. 3).

Teach responsible Googling.

- Copy/paste dangers
- Citation specifics:
<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/08/>

Online Plagiarism Quizzes

- Indiana University Bloomington School of Education
https://www.indiana.edu/~istd/plagiarism_test_practice.php
- Clark College Information and Research Instruction Suite
http://www.clark.edu/Library/iris/quiz/plagiarism_quiz_home.php
- University of Southern Mississippi
<http://www.lib.usm.edu/legacy/plag/acceptuse1.php>

References:

- Folse, K.S. (2008). Myth 1: Teaching Vocabulary is not the Writing Teacher's Job." *Writing Myths: Applying Second Language Research to Classroom Teaching*, ed. Joy Reid et al. Ann Arbor: Michigan.
- Murphy, J. M. (2004). Attending to word-stress while learning new vocabulary. *English for Specific Purposes Journal*, 23(1), 67-83.

Thank you!

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