

## USING VOCABULARY IN BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS

### Use this sheet to help you:

- Expand vocabulary relevant for your studies in Business and Economics
- Develop strategies for the continued development of your academic vocabulary

### 5 minute self test

Before you read the Helpsheet, spend five minutes considering the following questions:

- How confident am I concerning the vocabulary I need for my studies in business and economics?
- How important is it for me to expand my vocabulary for academic and professional contexts?
- What are some specific strategies that will help me develop my vocabulary?

## Using vocabulary in Business and Economics

As a Business and Economics student, it is important you see yourself as a developing professional in your particular discipline. In order to be such a professional, you need to sound and act like one – a practitioner who can express themselves articulately to peers. Indeed, individual consultations have highlighted that students need to be more precise and accurate in their communication. For example, this means typically avoiding terms like “some”, “recently” and “in the last few years” and instead giving more exact information to help support your ideas.

Such clear and appropriate vocabulary used in your ‘practice’ now (be it your essays, reports, oral presentations and tutorials) and later in the workplace is vital in ensuring your ideas can be understood.

### Finding the vocabulary you need

Don’t just rely on what you already know for the vocabulary you use. Instead, when given an assessment task, for example, carefully consider the discipline-specific vocabulary supplied in the question and assessment criteria. Use any of these terms that might be relevant – if you are not sure of their meanings, ask your tutor or consult a dictionary. Other good vocabulary sources include course and subject outlines (including learning outcomes), set readings, textbooks (especially glossaries) and relevant websites, journals or other sources included on subject LMS pages.

### Some specific business and economics vocabulary

The lists below are a good general starting point for building your business and economics vocabulary.

Nouns:

Nouns (general)			
acquisition	goods	merchandise	restructure
agenda	growth	merger	risk
brand	incentive	niche	segment
commodity	industry	output	services
correction	inventory	projection	stock
deadline	logistics	prospectus	strategy
expansion	manufacturing	report	target

<b>Nouns (related to people)</b>			
agent	competitor	franchisee	representative
associate	creditor	labor force	retailer
board member	director	manager	shareholder
board of directors	employee	partner	speculator
chairperson	employer	president	staff
chief executive officer	entrepreneur	principal	vendor
client	executive	proprietor	wholesaler

N.B. note that capital letters are used when you are referring to a specific position ('Mr John Smith, Chief Executive Officer of X') but if the use is more general, capitalisation is not required ('many company directors are in favor of this change').

<b>Nouns (related to money)</b>			
<b>Generally more neutral usage</b>			
account	interest	outlay	salary
balance	investment	payroll	securities
borrowing	invoice	purchase	speculation
budget	margin	quotation	takeover
capital	market	receipt	transaction
float	offer	refund	valuation
<b>Often used in a positive way</b>			
asset	commission	liquidity	sales
bonus	dividend	profit	turnover
capital	equity	revenue	yield
<b>Often used in a negative way</b>			
bailout	debt	expense	liquidation
bankruptcy	deficit	insolvency	loss
crash	depreciation	liability	overhead

<b>Nouns (related to places or organisations)</b>			
agency	conglomerate	franchise	office
branch	corporation	headquarters	outlet
cartel	division	multinational	point of sale
company	firm	network	shop front

## Verbs:

Rather than using very general verbs such as 'be', 'do' or 'have' try to use more precise verbs where possible – this will make your writing more specific, dynamic and credible. For further illustration look at the two examples below.

**Original:** Managers should **have** good communication skills.

**Revised version with more specific verb:** Managers **should** communicate effectively.

**Original:** The Account Manager said the payment was fine.

**Revised version with more specific verb:** The Account Manager **authorised** the payment.

Here is a list of some more particular verbs:

advertise	develop	invest	recruit
allocate	distribute	invoice	refund
authorise	diversify	maintain	report
calculate	employ	manage	respond
compete	establish	negotiate	run
control	estimate	produce	streamline
delegate	fund	promote	supply
deliver	improve	purchase	target

## Adjectives and adverbs:

Adjectives and adverbs can also help in giving more detail and thus give your readers and listeners a clearer picture. Be especially careful to qualify relatively neutral words like 'effect'.

If you say for example "X had an effect on Y" that is not very useful. It is far better to give an indication of the size of the effect ("X had a significant effect on Y due to..." or "X significantly affected Y due to...") and/or the nature of it ("X had a very beneficial effect on Y because of...") along with supporting evidence. Here are some more examples:

### Adjective (opinion) + adjective (fact) + noun

demonstrative	adjective	adjective	noun
These	innovative	marketing	strategies...

Verb + adverb (opinion)

noun	(specific) Verb	adverb
The President	lead	inclusively.

## Adverb (opinion) + adjective (opinion)

noun	'be' verb	adverb	adjective
Fordism	was	increasingly	influential...

The list below has some useful adjectives. Note that many of these can also be commonly used as adverbs or turned into adverbs (\*).

affordable*	efficient*	offshore	regional*
annual*	financial*	operating	regulatory
commercial*	fiscal	primary*	retail
competitive*	fixed	productive*	secondary
core	holistic*	profitable*	solvent
depreciable*	international*	prosperous*	strategic*
domestic*	logistical*	publicly*	underperforming
economic*	niche	quarterly*	volatile

## Word families

Using different word forms of a particular 'root' word can also give your expression more variety:

Noun	Verb	Adjective	Adverb
product, production	produce	productive	productively
competitor, competition	compete (+ preposition)	competitive	competitively
profit	profit (+ preposition)	profitable	profitably

If you are not sure of the spelling for a particular word form, consult a dictionary like Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary which details various derivatives of a word under the 'Browse List' heading.

## Collocations

Developing a good vocabulary is not just about learning words in isolation. Rather, think about groups of words that often go together in print and/or speech. These combinations, known as collocations, are well known and often used by native speakers. In contrast, other combinations may sound unnatural. Some examples below illustrate this:

Natural expression	Unnatural expression
human resources	people resources
customer or client service	buyer service
sales team	sales squad

Collocations can help your language sound more natural and understandable while also giving you alternative ways to express concepts. They can have a number of different grammatical structures.

## Compound nouns

One of the most common collocations is the compound noun (adjective and noun or noun and noun) where single words join others to make a more specific meaning. Sometimes these may be combined to make just one word as in 'trademark' or 'output' while in other cases they may be two (or even more) as in 'stock market' or 'close economic ties'. In addition, a word like 'buyback' is usually collocated with 'share' ('share buyback'). Once it is clear, you can just use the 'key' word rather than the one that modifies it as in:

The **brand loyalty** of consumers to product X is strong. **This loyalty** has been reflected in last month's strong sales figures.

Below is a table of some examples of common compound nouns in business:

brand loyalty	fixed assets	net profit
cash flow	focus group	niche marketing
close economic ties	joint venture	raw materials
corporate governance	listed company	share trading
distribution channel	market position	supply chain

## Other kinds of collocations

Collocations can also be formed in other combinations including:

- **Adverb + adjective:**

The new sales strategy represents a clear attempt to remain **internationally competitive** in the marketplace.

- **Noun + verb + adverb:**

**Markets reacted strongly** to the profit forecast.

- **Verb + noun:**

The subsidiary **generated substantial profits** from its mining exploration lease.

- **Phrasal verb (verb + preposition):**

The company **was negotiating with** a supplier.

- **More complex noun group (includes a noun with a preposition)**

**Improvements in productivity** have lifted the company's bottom line.

## Learning more collocations

To help learn collocations try to recognise them when you hear (and particularly read) them. When you learn a new word too, write down some collocations for it (i.e. if the word is 'brand' you could also note 'brand identification' and 'brand loyalty'). Apart from noting the word collocations in its particular entry, you could organise them by action, grammatical structure or discipline as in the examples below:

Organising your collocations		
<b>By grammatical structure</b>		
Action (verb + various nouns)	negotiate	an agreement
	negotiate	with staff
Action (various verbs + noun):	break into	the market
	dominate	the market
Structure (adjective + noun):	market	research
	market	share
<b>By discipline (e.g. banking)</b>		
bank account	bank balance	bank branch
bank deposit	bank loan	central bank

Other tips include:

- read as much as possible to understand collocations in context and then use these new collocations if possible in both your written and spoken communication
- Using print and on-line resources such as:
  - a learner's dictionary (i.e. *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* or *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*) to look at example sentences
  - on-line concordances which are huge collections of documents that can show how a word is used in real texts. Thus, if you are unsure what preposition to use (after a verb for example) you can type in the verb and see what prepositions appear with it in the sentences provided in such online references such as *Corpus Eye* and *Lex Tutor*

## Synonyms

Another way to add variety in your writing is to use pronouns such as 'it', 'they', 'this' and 'these'. Ensure however there is no confusion about what you are referring to. For example, the original sentence is somewhat ambiguous in its use of pronouns:

**Original:** The management negotiated directly with staff as a group. They found that it was a difficult process and it took six months to complete. After it was complete, it was found that productivity went up and less staff left the company. It shows that such things are possible and it can work well.

A revised version however includes less repetition and ambiguity, with more specific terms including the use of words that are similar in meaning to the word/s already used (synonyms):

**Revised version:** The management negotiated directly with staff as a group. These dealings with employees were difficult and took six months. The result however was increased productivity and lower staff turnover. Such positive benefits show that management-staff bargaining can be highly advantageous to both parties.

If you right click in Microsoft Word a list of synonyms is provided functioning as a basic thesaurus. A sample of some relevant synonyms is below. Make sure though that the one you use corresponds to the exact meaning of the word you are replacing:

Nouns		
brand/make	cost/expense	overhead/operating cost
cash/currency	customer/client	revenue/return
competitor/rival	employees/workforce	seller/vendor

Verbs		
allocate/assign	forecast/predict	promote/encourage
calculate/determine	observe/detect	replicate/reproduce
employ/appoint	produce/manufacture	suggest/nominate

Adjectives		
comprehensive/wide-ranging	dominant/prevaling	profitable/lucrative
conditional/qualified	financial/monetary	thriving/successful
distinctive/characteristic	fixed/set	unified/integrated

Note too that some words may sound similar or indeed have similar meanings however, it is important you choose exactly the right word for your purpose. That is, ask yourself are you talking about a 'recession' or a 'depression', the 'internet' or 'intranet' or a 'monopoly', or 'duopoly'? If in any doubt, consult a dictionary!

## Antonyms

When you are dealing with terms that have a specific opposite (antonym) be careful because if you choose the wrong option the logic (coherence) of your work will suffer. In fact, often the opposite looks and/or sounds somewhat similar to the original word so be careful with proofreading!

Some common opposites for business contexts include:

Nouns		
buyer/seller	inflation/deflation	outlay/income
employer/employees	lender/borrower	supply/demand
goods/services	mentor/mentee	wholesaler/retailer

Verbs		
buy/sell	diversify/narrow	purchase/rent
display/hide	lend/borrow	rise/fall

Adjectives		
fixed/variable	nominal/actual	retrospective/prospective
gross/net	probable/unlikely	standard/custom
intangible/tangible	public/private	wholesale/retail

Positive/Negative			
<b>Nouns</b>	asset/liability	boom/bust	profit/loss
<b>Adjectives</b>	affordable/prohibitive	current/obsolete	viable/impossible
<b>Verbs</b>	employ/terminate	promote/discourage	satisfy/breach

## Acronyms

In business and economics, like all fields, initials are often used to represent concepts. Some examples are below. If you do use these, generally you need to ensure that you spell them out first, followed by the acronym in brackets. Thereafter, just include the initials but ensure you do not over do it otherwise your writing may becoming overly repetitive and dull to read.

Return on investment (ROI)	Annual general meeting (AGM)
Gross domestic product (GDP)	Price to earnings ratio (P/E)
Profit & loss statement (P&L)	Key performance indicators (KPIs)

## Place ideas in a larger context

Another important consideration in vocabulary is considering the 'wider picture'. This can involve noting that any key nouns you are discussing are an example or member of a larger group. An illustration of this is shown in the following paragraph with the 'general' noun "strategy" being used (along with a qualifying adjective):

Role play can be effective in staff development. It is especially useful for consolidating key principles from the training.

Role play can be an **effective staff development technique. This interactive strategy** is especially useful for consolidating key principles from the training.

Note that the second paragraph is also more cohesive as the second sentence starts with a 'mini summary' of the first.

The table below lists some more of these general nouns:

activity	consequence	issue	purpose
application	context	level	reason
approach	difference	measure	relationship
area	effect	method	result
aspect	element	objective	role
behavior	environment	outcome	situation
category	factor	phenomenon	stage
challenge	feature	policy	standard
characteristic	framework	practice	tendency
circumstance	function	principle	tool
component	goal	process	trend
concept	implication	purpose	variable

## Jargon, cliches and 'weasel words'

As a writer you need to inform, not impress readers or 'pad out' writing (words that don't add anything to your text). Try to convey information and/or argument without using words only known to a very few (jargon) or overused (clichés).

Moreover words and phrases that try to sound specific and meaningful but are really only vague and ambiguous (sometimes known as 'weasel words') are also best avoided. Some examples of such vocabulary in sentences that can make them difficult to understand and/or tedious to read include:

*At the end of the day, while there are two sides to every coin, fulfilling stakeholder outcomes, cultural diversities and synergy savings can help the company in enhancing deep customer engagement. Indeed, moving forward, such change will substantially grow the value pool.*

A 'translation' of the above into a more understandable text is below:

While there are a variety of views on how to improve company performance, three key objectives are important – meeting the all the needs of our customers, using all the diverse talents of our employees and making cost savings where possible. Indeed, such initiatives should substantially improve the organisation's core values.

## Idioms

Business and economics has its own idioms that may at times be hard to understand. The main context and tone of an idiom – especially if its message is positive, negative or neutral – is the most important thing. Idioms are not recommended for written work but may be used occasionally in oral communication such as presentations.

## People

**Bean-counter/ number-cruncher:** a person who works with numbers (i.e. accountant)

*We asked the **bean-counters** to look over the figures in the new budget.*

**Big wig:** a person of importance in an organisation.

*All the **big wigs** are here for the 2010 product launch.*

## Trends

**Bottom out:** reach the lowest or worst point of something

*The share price has **bottomed out** and should soon increase again because of the takeover.*

**Take a nosedive:** marked decrease in value

*The stock price **took a nosedive** when the earnings of the company began to weaken.*

## Actions

**Belt-tightening:** reduction of expenses

*The company had to do some **belt-tightening** to make up for the losses of the offshore investments.*

**Sell like hotcakes/ flying off the shelves/roaring trade:** sell very quickly

*The discontinued products **sold like hotcakes/flew off the shelves** in the post Christmas sales.*

*The company did a **roaring trade** in the post Christmas sales with their discontinued lines.*

## Colours

**in/into the black:** successful or making money

*The new company has been **in the black** for over a year now.*

**in/into the red:** losing money, unprofitable

*The company began to go **into the red** when the oil price rose rapidly.*

## Metaphor, simile and analogy

You may occasionally like to use more abstract ways to convey your ideas – especially similarities. This could be achieved by the use of metaphor, simile or analogy. The use of such devices may be especially useful in an oral presentation when you are presenting complex information to a non-specialist audience. Examples of all these follow:

Metaphor, simile and analogy			
	Meaning	Generic Example	Business Example
<b>Metaphor</b>	A word or phrase that draws a comparison.	A is B (noun or adjective).	<i>Investing in this market <b>is</b> building bridges with clients.</i>
<b>Simile</b>	A metaphor with the addition of either “like” or “as” to make a more explicit comparison.	A is like B. A is as (adjective) as a B.	<i>We were so busy we worked <b>like</b> dogs.  The head accountant has a mind <b>as</b> sharp <b>as</b> a knife.</i>
<b>Analogy</b>	Like a simile or metaphor but more complex. It implies two things are alike in more than one way due to a logical argument.	A is to B as C is to D	<i>The new product <b>was like</b> a shooting star, attracting consumers with its <b>brilliance</b>. However, its popularity <b>faded quickly</b> when a superior rival came on the market.</i>

## Other tips to improve your vocabulary

**Use fewer prepositions.** Some verbs may require a preposition (“go over”) but these can often be replaced by a single, more specific verb (“scrutinise”). If you can do this, your text will be more concise and readable.

**Read as much as you can in your discipline.** In addition to academic journals in your field, make it a habit of reading newspaper business sections in *The Age*, *Herald Sun* and *the Australian* and *the Australian Financial Review*. Magazines such as *Business Review Weekly* and *The Economist* are also useful.

**Compile your own discipline-specific dictionary.** List common key words in your field/s. If you are studying both management and accounting have a dictionary for each. Include not only a definition but also an example sentence, translation (if applicable), the word’s different forms (noun, verb, adjective etc), synonyms and any collocations as required. You might also like to create lists, mind maps and flash cards of such words.

**Become more familiar with frequently used words in academic contexts.** Many words appear frequently in all academic contexts. The Academic Word List (AWL) for example, developed by Victoria University in New Zealand, contains 570 such words.

**Read often and widely.** Wide reading provides you with good models of common features of vocabulary like collocation and sentence patterns.

**Write often.** Writing involves a large amount of thinking and problem solving. Writing often in formats such as a learning journals, blogs or diaries will give you more opportunities to practice using new vocabulary items.

**Use a good online or hard copy learner's dictionary.** Learners' dictionaries give information for each individual word entry including sample sentences, pronunciation, related words and the count status of nouns – this status refers to whether any particular noun is countable (c) or uncountable (u).

## Recommended resources

### Dictionaries

Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary: <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary: <http://www.oxfordadvancedlearnersdictionary.com/>

Economics A - Z (the Economist): <http://www.economist.com/economics-a-to-z>

### Collocations

Corpus Eye: <http://corp.hum.sdu.dk/cqp.en.html>

Lex Tutor: <http://www.lextutor.ca/>

### Synonyms

Thesarus.com: <http://thesaurus.reference.com/>

### Idioms

Idiom Connection (business): <http://www.idiomconnection.com/business.html>

### Academic Word List (AWL)

Wiktionary (AWL entry): [http://simple.wiktionary.org/wiki/Wiktionary:Academic\\_word\\_list](http://simple.wiktionary.org/wiki/Wiktionary:Academic_word_list)

English Vocabulary Exercises for the AWL: <http://www.englishvocabularyexercises.com/AWL/>

### Business and Economics Vocabulary

Melbourne University Library LibGuides (Business and Economics): <http://www.unimelb.libguides.com/cat.php?cid=16132>

ABC Television (Lateline Business): <http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/business/>

BBC World Service (Global Business): <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p002vsyy>