

What is Word Frequency in Academic Discourse?

Worksheet

Word frequency in academic discourse measures how often words appear in scholarly texts. High-frequency words are essential for comprehension; low-frequency words are specialised or topic-specific.

Questions

1. What does word frequency measure?
 - A) How long a word is
 - B) How often a word appears in a text or corpus
 - C) How difficult a word is
 - D) How new a word is
2. Which is a high-frequency word in English?
 - A) Phenomenological
 - B) Ossification
 - C) The
 - D) Obfuscation
3. Why should ESL learners prioritize high-frequency words?
 - A) They are easier to pronounce
 - B) They appear in most texts and ensure comprehension
 - C) They sound more academic
 - D) They have only one meaning
4. An academic word appears 0.5 times per 1,000 words. What type is it?
 - A) High-frequency
 - B) Medium-frequency
 - C) Low-frequency / specialised
 - D) Not a word in English
5. In academic texts, how many times does 'the' typically appear per 1,000 words?
6. Compare frequency: 'analyze' vs 'phenomenological'.
7. Why should ESL learners focus on high-frequency academic words?
8. Define: What is word frequency?
9. Define: Why study word frequency in academic texts?
10. Define: What are high-frequency words?

Answer Key

1. B) How often a word appears in a text or corpus — Word frequency measures the number of times a word appears in a text or corpus.
2. C) The — 'The' is the most frequent word in English, appearing in most texts.
3. B) They appear in most texts and ensure comprehension — High-frequency words appear in most texts and cover a large portion of written English.
4. C) Low-frequency / specialised — 0.5 per 1,000 is low frequency — a specialised or field-specific term.
5. Answer: 'the' is the most frequent word, appearing ~70-90 times per 1,000 words. This high frequency reflects its essential role in English grammar. Learners should master high-frequency words first for comprehension.
6. 'Analyze' is moderately frequent (~2-5 per 1,000 words) across many texts. 'Phenomenological' is low-frequency (~0.1 per 1,000 words) and field-specific. Frequency reveals which words are essential vs specialised.
7. High-frequency words appear in most texts → essential for comprehension. Low-frequency words are often field-specific → learn by need. Mastering 2,000 most-frequent words covers ~80% of academic texts.
8. Word frequency measures how often a word appears in a text or corpus (body of texts).
9. To identify which vocabulary is most important to master and to focus learning on high-impact words.
10. Words appearing very often in texts (e.g., 'the', 'is', 'and'); often function words or common verbs.

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