

# A Study on Whether We Should Encourage the Frequent Use of Advanced Vocabulary in Second Language Writing

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## Abstract

This paper explores the use of advanced vocabulary in writing, questioning the widely held belief that using more complex words improves writing quality. It argues that clarity and accuracy should take precedence over complexity. While advanced vocabulary can enhance expression in certain contexts, excessive use can hinder communication and make writing difficult to follow. The paper emphasizes the importance of balancing simple and advanced vocabulary, considering the context, purpose, and audience of the writing. Ultimately, effective writing depends on the clarity and accuracy of word choice rather than the complexity of the vocabulary.

## Keywords

Advanced vocabulary, writing quality, clarity, accuracy.

## 1. Introduction

In many English language teaching and learning contexts, particularly in primary and middle schools, there is a widely held belief that using more advanced vocabulary in writing results in higher quality and higher scores. Many middle school teachers encourage their students to replace simple words with more "sophisticated" ones, assuming that this will help them improve their scores. Online resources frequently promote learning materials like "100 advanced words to replace simple ones." However, experts and experienced writers question whether this emphasis on advanced vocabulary truly enhances writing. This paper investigates whether encouraging the use of advanced words in writing is beneficial and how to choose vocabulary appropriately in writing.

## 2. Literature Review

The debate over the use of advanced vocabulary in writing has gained significant attention. Some scholars argue that advanced vocabulary can improve writing quality, while others believe that overuse of complex words may reduce clarity and lead to confusion.

In defining "advanced" vocabulary, many students and teachers consider longer, rarer, or more complex words as advanced words. For instance, words like "cogitation" are often viewed as more advanced than "thinking" simply due to their rarity. However, Johnson (2018) suggests that advanced vocabulary refers to words that have greater precision in communication, not just rarity or length<sup>[6]</sup>. While "cogitation" may be more precise than "thinking," it is not always necessary or appropriate. Advanced vocabulary, particularly in academic contexts, refers to terms that help express complex ideas clearly and precisely (Harris, 2019)<sup>[4]</sup>.

Schmitt (2000) argues that vocabulary acquisition should be gradual, with learners mastering high-frequency words before moving on to more complex ones<sup>[9]</sup>. Nation (2001) also supports this approach, noting that a solid foundation of basic vocabulary is essential for understanding more specialized terms<sup>[8]</sup>. Misuse of complex words can create ambiguity, especially for learners, and hinder clear communication (Williams & Brown, 2020)<sup>[10]</sup>.

On the other hand, Biber et al. (1998) highlight the importance of advanced vocabulary in formal academic writing, where precise terms are often necessary to convey specialized knowledge<sup>[1]</sup>. However, both Biber<sup>[1]</sup> et al. and Hyland (2009)<sup>[5]</sup> emphasize that advanced vocabulary should be used strategically to maintain clarity and readability.

In contrast, Laufer (1997)<sup>[7]</sup> and Williams and Brown (2020)<sup>[10]</sup> warn that overuse of advanced vocabulary can alienate readers and reduce the effectiveness of writing. Excessive focus on complexity can also distract readers from the core message of the writing (Gernsbacher & Kaschak, 2003)<sup>[3]</sup>. Carter and McCarthy (2006) argue that advanced vocabulary, when overused in creative or informal writing, can make the writing sound forced and unnatural<sup>[2]</sup>.

In conclusion, existing research suggests that while advanced vocabulary has its significance, its use should always be balanced with clarity, context, and the purpose of the writing.

### 3. Choose Vocabulary Correctly for Effective Writing

Effective writing depends largely on the appropriate selection of vocabulary. Writers should prioritize accuracy over complexity, consider the context in which the writing is produced, and be aware of vocabulary diversity, so as to enhance the overall quality of writing.

#### 3.1. Accuracy Over Complexity

A core principle in writing is that accuracy should always take precedence over complexity. For instance, in academic writing, using an advanced term incorrectly can confuse readers and undermine the clarity of the argument. For example, using "metamorphosis" instead of "change" might seem sophisticated, but if misused, it could lead to confusion about the writer's intent.

Misuse of complex vocabulary can detract from the message. On one occasion, a middle school student wrote, "The decision was a critical cogitation," when what they meant was "thought" or "consideration." The term "cogitation" here did not enhance the meaning but instead made the sentence harder to understand. This example demonstrates that choosing a complex word unnecessarily can undermine the message and confuse the reader. Therefore, clarity should be the main priority, especially in contexts where understanding is crucial.

#### 3.2. Contextual Considerations

The context of the writing heavily influences the choice of vocabulary. In formal academic writing, advanced vocabulary is often necessary. For example, terms like "biodiversity" or "photosynthesis" are specific and precise, and they are essential for discussing certain scientific concepts. In contrast, using such terms in casual writing may sound unnatural and overly technical.

Consider the following two examples:

1. "The government enacted a policy to reduce carbon emissions." (Formal, precise)
2. "The government made a move to lower pollution." (Informal, clear)

Both sentences convey the same idea, but the second sentence is simpler and more natural for a general audience. This demonstrates that while advanced vocabulary may be appropriate in academic or technical contexts, simpler language often works better in informal or general writing.

#### 3.3. Vocabulary Diversity

Vocabulary diversity is also crucial for maintaining reader engagement and avoiding repetition. A writer who uses the same words repeatedly risks boring the reader and making the writing monotonous. For example, instead of always writing "good," a writer can use alternatives like "excellent," "outstanding," or "wonderful" to convey subtlety. However, diversity should not

come at the cost of clarity. If the synonyms used are not perfectly appropriate for the context, they could confuse the reader or diminish the message.

For instance, in a narrative, the writer might describe a character as "a very nice person." Over time, this could become repetitive. A better choice could be "compassionate," "generous," or "kind-hearted." However, each term must align with the character's true traits to avoid misrepresentation.

### 3.4. The Balance Between Simplicity and Complexity

While advanced vocabulary can enhance writing, overuse can make the text sound forced, difficult to follow, or pretentious. A good writer understands the importance of using both simple and advanced words in a balanced way. For example, a scientific paper may require precise technical terms, but the introduction and conclusion can often benefit from simpler, more accessible language to ensure broader readability.

In a personal narrative, a writer might use simple language to create an intimate, relatable tone, while integrating a few advanced terms to demonstrate knowledge or depth. This balance ensures the writing remains engaging and clear without sacrificing sophistication. In contrast, an essay that relies too heavily on complex terms might alienate readers or confuse them, as seen in the example below:

1. "The process of photosynthesis enables plants to produce food from sunlight, water, and carbon dioxide." (Clear and straightforward)
2. "The phenomenon of photosynthesis permits flora to synthesize nourishment from solar energy, H<sub>2</sub>O, and carbon dioxide." (Excessively complex and difficult for the average reader)

The second example is unnecessarily complicated, showing how overuse of advanced vocabulary can hinder communication.

## 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, while advanced vocabulary can enhance the quality of writing, it is not a guarantee of success. The most important considerations when choosing vocabulary should always be accuracy, clarity, and appropriateness for the context. Writers should prioritize precise, clear language over complexity, ensuring that the vocabulary used contributes to the reader's understanding rather than hindering it. The key to effective writing is not using the most advanced words possible, but choosing the right words for the right context. Advanced vocabulary has its value, but it should be used judiciously and always with the goal of improving communication. Future research could explore how vocabulary use in writing affects reader comprehension and how learners can be taught to balance clarity and complexity in their vocabulary choices.

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