

Academic Assistance and Tutoring Centers

Aggie Grammar Guide: Appendix: Academic Idioms & Phrases

This Appendix contains several academic idioms and phrases that can help you improve your writing. There is no practice or answer key because these idioms need to be memorized, and there are no rules to practice.

Idioms are fixed expressions, which means the words within them can't be altered. They are comprised of words that together have a different meaning than each word individually. Idioms can help connect ideas and make writing sound more fluent.

Below is a list of commonly used academic idioms and phrases (found in UC Davis student writing and research journals) that students often have difficulty forming and using correctly. An idiom is academic if it is used by professional authors on government websites, in newspapers, or in academic journals, so published writing is another good place to look for academic idioms and phrases.

To use other academic idioms and phrases not found in the list below, consult a dictionary to see a definition and how to use them correctly.

Each entry includes:

- The part of speech (for example noun, verb, adjective).
- The most common definition.
- At least one collocation, which is how the idiom/phrase functions in a sentence. The terms in brackets are grammatical terms or common words that surround the idiom/phrase, indicating that you should insert the appropriate grammatical structure and/or wording into your sentence. Since grammar terms are in their base form, make sure you conjugate correctly.
- At least one example sentence using the idiom/phrase.

as well as (conjunction)

Definition: To add one thing to another. Since this is a synonym for “and,” you might choose “as well as” for emphasis or to avoid using “and” multiple times in a sentence.

Collocation: [all parts of speech] **as well as** [all parts of speech]. Both sides should be parallel in form.

- Example: Nina is an amateur in wall climbing **as well as** rock climbing.
- Example: Nina is excited **as well as** ready to go wall climbing tomorrow.

as...as (adverb)

Definition: To say that two things are equal to each other in some way or to show an equal comparison between two things. This indicates a type of analogy.

Collocation: **as** [adjective] **as** [noun]

- Example: Organic Chemistry is **as** difficult **as** getting to Mars.

base on (verb)

Definition: To use one idea or concept as a foundation to develop another idea.

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Collocation: As a main verb in a sentence. As an active verb, it takes the form [noun] **base** [noun] **on** [clause or phrase]. As a passive verb, it takes the form [noun] [be] **based on** [clause or phrase].

- Example (Active): The College Board **bases** the college ranking system **on** whether institutions meet the categories' standards.
- Example (Passive): The college ranking system **is based on** whether institutions meet the categories' standards.
- Example (Passive): The college ranking system **is based on** the categories' standards.

Collocation: As a verb either occurring after the noun or in an introductory phrase/clause before the subject of an independent sentence.

- Example: The College Board ranks colleges **based on** whether institutions meet the categories' standards.
- Example: **Based on** the categories' standards, the College Board ranks colleges.

because of (adverb)

Definition: To show the reason why an action has happened. This is distinct from “because,” which is a conjunction and precedes an entire clause.

Collocation: **Because of** [noun], [independent clause]

- Example: **Because of** stereotypes, unjust behavior is constantly affecting minorities and low-income communities.

Collocation: [independent clause] **because of** [noun]

- Example: Last year, I chose to apply to four UCs **because of** their prestige, without considering other factors.

collaborate with/on (verb)

Definition: To work with someone to achieve a goal. **Collaborate with** focuses on the “someone” while **collaborate on** focuses on the goal.

Collocation: As the main verb of a clause

- Example: The great and smart people who **collaborated on** the development of photography probably could not predict that years later the camera would be an incidental function for the phone.
- Example: I **collaborated with** great and smart people to develop photography.

compare to/with(verb)

Definition: To show how two or more things are similar or different.

Collocation: When indicating similarity, as the main verb in a clause: [noun] **compare** [noun] **with/to** [noun].

- Example: I **compared** the U.S. educational system **to/with** Canada's and found they are basically the same.

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Collocation: When indicating difference, the -ed form is usually used without “not”, and the base form is usually used with a form of “not.”

- Example: Personally, I prefer a country with a different educational system **compared to/with** the system I am currently in.
- Example: The educational system I’m currently in cannot **compare to/with** the United Kingdom’s system.

Collocation: As part of an introductory phrase before the main sentence, the –ed form is always used.

- Example: **Compared with/to** the paper letter and telegraph, the Internet is the fastest and easiest choice.

composed of (verb, always passive)

Definition: To show that something is made up of more than one part. Synonym for “consist of.”

Collocation: As the main verb of a clause. This is a passive form that does not have an active equivalent.

- Example: All of these atoms are **composed of** matter.

consist of (verb)

Definition: To show that something is made up of more than one part. Synonym for "composed of."

Collocation: As the main verb of a clause. This is an active form that does not have a passive equivalent.

- Example: This study **consisted of** 40 families.

discriminate against (verb)

Definition: To treat a particular individual or group differently, always in a negative way.

Collocation: As the main verb of a clause, either passive or active.

- Example: I was **discriminated against** for being Hispanic and playing tennis, competing against students that are all Caucasian.
- Example: I was **discriminated against** because I am Hispanic, play tennis, and compete against students that were all Caucasian.
- Example: The judges **discriminated against** me for being Hispanic.

effect on (noun)

Definition: To indicate that something/someone is changed by something/someone else in some way. Synonym for “impact on.” Note that **effect on** is neutral and vague and should be qualified in some way to indicate what the effect is.

Collocation: [verb] a(n) **effect on** [noun] (Note, a common way to qualify this is to use the structure: [verb] a(n) [adjective] **effect on** [noun], but the [adjective] is not required grammatically.

- Example: Having a sense of not belonging can have a negative **effect on** a student’s overall academic performance.

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impact on (noun)

Definition: To show that something is changed. Synonym for “effect on.” Note that **impact on** is neutral and vague and should be qualified in some way to indicate what the impact is.

Collocation: [verb] a(n) **impact on** [noun]. (Note, a common way to qualify this is to use the structure: [verb] a(n) [adjective] **impact on** [noun], but the [adjective] is not required grammatically.)

- Example: The U.S. News' college ranking system is one that has a significant **impact on** our decision to attend UC Davis.

lack of (noun)

Definition: To not have enough of something. Note that this functions differently than “lack” as a verb.

Collocation: a/the **lack of** [noun]

- Example: The **lack of** income coming into a family can prevent children from attending college or change their perspectives about their own future.

majority/minority of (noun)

Definition: To show the most/fewest members of a group.

Collocation: a/the **majority/minority of** [noun]

- Example: In Japan, the **majority of** people earn their salary by writing their blogs.
- Example: A **minority of** students do not understand their chemistry professor.

not only...but also (conjunction)

Definition: To show that two things are connected.

Collocation: Many things can occur around this phrase. When “not only” does not occur at the start of your clause, each part that occurs after “not only” and “but also” should be parallel so you compare two grammatically similar parts of speech.

- Example: A sense of belonging matters **not only in** education **but (also) for** life in general.
- Example: Second, the system is heterogeneous because it **not only compares** schools within the same fields, it **also compares** a big, low-tuition, economically diverse public school with a small, high-tuition, elite private school.

Collocation: When “not only” occurs at the start of the clause, use a helping verb between “not only” and the main subject.

- Example: **Not only do** race, gender, class, and sexuality affect a student’s academic success **but (also)** their sense of belonging plays a big role.

on the one hand/on the other hand (idiomatic phrase)

Definition: To compare two oppositely related things.

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Collocation: Used as an introductory phrase either before the independent clause, in two separate and parallel sentences or to link independent clauses along with a semicolon. Note that “on the one hand” can be implied, rather than directly mentioned.

- Example: **On the one hand**, I love meeting new people around the world. **On the other hand**, I cannot stand checking in luggage at the airport. (Note the period separates these into two complete sentences.)
- Example: **On the one hand**, I love meeting new people around the world; **on the other hand**, I cannot stand checking in luggage at the airport. (Note the semicolon joins these independent clauses together into one complete sentence.)
- Example: I love meeting new people around the world. **On the other hand**, I cannot stand checking in luggage at the airport.

Collocation: As an interjection separated by commas within a sentence.

- Example: I love meeting new people around the world. My sister, **on the other hand**, is a completely different story.

point of view (noun)

Definition: To indicate someone’s single idea or perspective.

Collocation: As a noun, used to indicate an idea that belongs to a noun. The idea can take many grammatical forms: [optional possessive noun] **point of view** [about, on, -OR- of][noun phrase] -OR- **point of view** that [independent clause]

- Example: I agree with the author’s **point of view** about chemicals damaging many ecosystems around us.
- Example: I agree with the author’s **point of view** that chemicals have seriously damaged many ecosystems around us. (Note that while you can also say “the point of view of the author,” this is disfavored because it is repetitive and not concise.)

Collocation: As a noun in a clause. Note that an adjective often precedes “point of view” to qualify it.

- Example: In conclusion, the bicycle is an instrument that can help us view the world from a different **point of view**.

Collocation: As a noun, used to indicate the perspective an author takes in his/her/their writing, typically as in [first, second, or third] person **point of view**.

- Example: The authors write in first person **point of view** to emphasize that they were the ones who came up with this theory and tested it.

raise by (verb)

Definition: To care for children while they're growing up.

Collocation: Used as a passive verb in a clause.

- Example: The researchers studied how lambs were **raised by** ewes to examine bonding behaviors.