



## Common Multi-word Constructions in Academic English Writing

Writers consistently use certain multi-word constructions. When used accurately, these allow texts to take on an idiomatic structure. To help writers better understand how to make their writing more proficient, we look to Liu (2012), a multi-corpus study that identifies the multi-word constructions most commonly used in in both American and British academic English writing across multiple disciplines.

A note of caution—the goal isn't to memorize these constructions; rather, by becoming more familiar with common constructions, writers can learn how others use such phrasing and can apply that to their own writing. It can be useful simply to skim the list and get a feel for these.

### Key Abbreviations

To understand the constructions more accurately, note the following abbreviations:

**Noun (N):** a person, place, or thing

**Noun Phrase (NP):** has a noun or indefinite pronoun (e.g., everyone, anyone, everything, anything) as its head; a noun phrase can be replaced with a single pronoun without losing grammatical accuracy (e.g., the seven-year-old child → she; two broken windows → they; a trusting few → they)

**Verb Phrase (VP):** consists of a verb and its complements but not the subject (e.g., wrote the paper; submitted it for a grade; ran quickly across the field)

**Determiner (det):**

- articles (a, an, the)
- demonstratives (e.g., this, that, these, those)
- quantifiers, including numbers (e.g., much, more, less, fewer, some, enough, one, five)
- difference words (e.g., other, another)
- distributives (e.g., all, both, neither, either, every, each)
- pronouns and possessive determiners (e.g., my, your, his, her, its, our, their)
- pre-determiners (e.g., such, what, rather)

## Band 1

### (Occur 100 or more times per million words)

We've ordered these alphabetically to make the list easier to search. To see these ordered in terms of usage (i.e., most commonly used to less commonly used), see Liu (2012).

(as) (a) part of (det + N)	in order to VP
(at/by) the end of (det + N)	in terms of (det + N)
(be) associated with (det + N)	in/by contrast
(be) based on (det + N)	look at (det + N)
(be) designed to VP/for	many of (det + N)
(be) due to (det + N)	NP argue that
(be) found in (det + N)/to VP	NP assume that (det + N + VP)
(be) involved in (det + N)	NP believe that
(be) related to (det + N)	NP claim that (det + N + VP)
(be) seen as (det + N)	NP find (mostly in the past tense) that
(be) used to (VP)/in/as	NP indicate that
(in) a variety of	NP say that
(in) the case of (det + N)	NP show that
(in) the development of (det + N)	NP suggest that
(modal V) lead to (det + N)	occur in (det + N)
(of) some of (det + N)	of course
(the way/ways) in which (det + N)+VP	on the other hand
(to) deal with (det + N)	one of (det + N)
a/the (large/small) number of	out of (det + N)
access to (det/N)	participate in (det + N)
according to (det + N)	point out
apply/be applied to/for	refer/(be) referred to (as) (det + N)
as a result (of det + N)	result in (det + N)
as to wh-clause/NP	so that + clause
as well	such as (det + N)
as well as (det + N)	take place
be (more) likely to VP	tend to VP
be/to be able to VP	that is (=i.e.)
come from (det + N)	the effect(s) of (det + N)
consist of (det + N)	the fact that (det + N + VP)
contribute to (det + N)	the importance of (det + N)
depend on (det + N)	the nature of (det + N)
each of (det + N)	the use of (det + N)
focus on (det + N)	the/(possessive) ability to VP
for example	the/adjective amount of
for instance	there be det + N
in + the name of a country/state/region	there be no NP
in addition (to)	X percent of (det + N)
in fact	

## Band 2

### (Occur 50-99 times per million words)

We've ordered these alphabetically to make the list easier to search. To see these ordered in terms of usage (i.e., most commonly used to less commonly used), see Liu (2012).

(a/the)/(wide) range of	his or her
(as) a matter of	if there be NP
(at) the beginning of (det + N)	in general
(at) the level of (det + N)	in other words
(at) the time of (det + N)	in practice
(be) different from	in response to
(be) included in (det + N)	in this article/chapter
(be) known as (det + N)	in this/that case
(be) obtained from/by	in turn
(be) regarded as (det + N)	it is clear that
(be) required to VP/for	it is possible to VP/that
(be) similar to (that/those/ det + N)	make up/be made up of
(for) the purpose of (det + N)	NP imply that
(in) the absence of (det + N)	NP is one of (det + N)
(in) the context of (det + N)	NP know that
(in) the form of (det/N)	NP mean that
(in) the process of	NP report (mostly past tense) that
(in) the work of (det + N)	NP state that
(to) the question of (det + N)	NP think that
a series of	on the basis of (det + N)
a set of	regardless of (det + N)
a/the function of (det + N)	respond to (det + N)
a/the study of (det + N)	reveal that
a/this/the kind of	set out
account for [det + N]	set up
add to (det + N)	so far
allow for (det + N)	the concept of
amount to NP	the existence of (det + N)
an attempt to/attempt (V) to VP	the extent to which
as a whole	the history of (det + N)
as if + clause	the idea of
as/so far as (clause/NP)	the need to VP
at all	the presence of
at the same time	the problem of
attempt (verb) to	the relationship between (det + N)
be going to VP	the rest of (det + N)
belong to (det + N)	the results of (det + N)
call for	the role of (det + N)
carry out (by)	the value of (det + N)
derive/be derived from (det + N)	this/the type of
ensure/to ensure that	to do so
give rise to NP	with respect to (det + N)
go on (to)	

## Band 3

### (Occur 20-49 times per million words)

We've ordered these alphabetically to make the list easier to search. To see these ordered in terms of usage (i.e., most commonly used to less commonly used), see Liu (2012).

(adjective) implications for	in the course of (det + N)
(be) affected by (det + N)	in time
(be) aimed at	it is difficult to VP
(be) attached to (det + N)	it is important to VP
(be) attributed to	it is impossible/not possible to
(be) defined as	it is likely that
(be) discussed in (det + N)	it is necessary to
(be) exposed to	it seems/appears that
(be) made in (det + N)	let us/me + infinitive
(in) the face of	look for
(NP)	make use of
a lot of	NP agree that
a period of	NP demonstrate that
a/the consequence of (det + N)	on the part of
after all	see table X
an/the analysis of	take on
as for	take up
as long as	take/be taken into account
as/so long as	talk about (det/N)
at the beginning of	the area of
benefit from (det + N)	the center of (det + N)
build up	the difference between (det + N)
cope with	the distribution of
differ from	the issue of (det + N)
divide/be divided into	the needs of (det + N)
emerge from	the position of (det + N)
find out	the same as
for the first time	the size of (det + N)
in detail	the structure of (det + N)
in favor of	this/the sort of
in light of	to date
in place	turn out
in public	turn to NP (typically a topic/issue)
in relation to	with regard to (det + N)

## Reference

Liu, D. (2012). The most frequently-used multi-word constructions in academic written English: A multi-corpus study. *English for Specific Purposes*, 31(1), 25-35.

