The New Academic Word List Test (NAWLT)

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The NAWLT is a diagnostic test of written receptive knowledge of the New Academic Word List (NAWL) (Browne, Culligan & Phillips, 2014a). The NAWL is comprised of 963 words[1] that appear frequently in academic discourse and that are not part of the New General Service List (Browne, Culligan & Phillips, 2014b). The NAWLT is comprised of 40 items, 20 from each of two frequency-determined bands of the NAWL. This sampling rate is approximately equal to that of the New General Service List Test (NGSLT) by the same authors. Sampling from bands of around 500 words is useful for two reasons. First, it allows for more precise feedback than sampling from 1000-word bands, which has been the norm in recent years. Second, it was felt that approximately 500 words is a reasonable learning goal for a semester of study, especially considering that some of those words will already be known to learners.

Both the NAWLT and the NGSLT have been designed to the same specifications as the Vocabulary Size Test (VST) (Nation & Beglar, 2007). Each item provides the target word followed by a short sentence containing this word in a natural yet non-defining context. Four answer choices are given, with one being a paraphrase of the target word. In the case of target words with more than one sense, the item was written based on the most frequent meaning as determined by the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) (http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/). When considered appropriate, we also consulted the academic sub-corpus of the COCA to help in these determinations. The three distractors for each item define words that are the same part of speech and of a similar frequency as the target word. As far as possible, items were written with simplified grammatical structures and with high frequency vocabulary. Other than the target words themselves, the test is comprised entirely of words from the NGSL.

Currently in its pilot phase, the NAWLT has demonstrated good technical quality, with no discernible problems with either dimensionality or item fit under the Rasch model. The test reliability of .75 (Cronbach's alpha) is somewhat lower than that of the NGSLT, reflecting the fact that it has fewer items.

Interpretation and Use

Because the test is designed to aid in setting learning goals and making principled plans of vocabulary study, we suggest that except in the case of highly proficient learners, the NAWLT initially be used together with the NGSLT to establish a profile of both high frequency and academic vocabulary. For learners with sizeable gaps in knowledge in any of the five tested levels of the NGSL, it would be better to first target those words for learning, as they are more common and therefore more useful in increasing the percentage of words a learner knows when encountering a written text. One approach is to use a threshold score of around 80 to 85% to determine mastery of each level, and then to identify the first gap in knowledge based on this threshold. Once learning goals are established, there is a range of useful study materials for both the NGSL and NAWL located under "Tools and Textbooks" on the NGSL website (http://www.newgeneralservicelist.org/vocabulary-links/).

Further Development

Additional, parallel versions of the NAWLT are being developed to enable repeated testing for ongoing feedback to students in longer programs of study. We tentatively plan to complete one by the summer of 2015 and another by early 2016. We also intend to develop Japanese-English bilingual versions of the tests in order to eliminate the risk of unknown words or grammatical structures in the test items influencing test scores. For the continued development and refinement of the NGSL and NAWL tests, we would be most grateful to anyone who is willing to share anonymous test results with us. Kindly contact either of us at the email addresses listed above.

References

Browne, C., Culligan, B. & Phillips, J. (2014a). A new academic word list: the most important words for understanding academic text. Available at: http://www.newacademicwordlist.org.

Browne, C., Culligan, B. & Phillips, J. (2014b). A new general service list: the most important words for second language learners of English (version 1.01). Available at: http://www.newgeneralservicelist.org.

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[1] Strictly speaking, the NAWL and NGSL are comprised of *modified lemmas*, in which the headword and its inflected forms are considered part of the same group. In the case of different parts of speech which have the same form, such as *cure* (n) and *cure* (v), the inflected forms of both words are considered part of the group, hence the term modified lemmas.

Test of Written Receptive Knowledge of the New Academic Word List

Level 1

1 **unify**: They are **unified**.
a. full of life
b. certain
c. working together
d. easy to believe

2 **workshop**: How was the **workshop**?
a. meeting to talk about a topic
b. important and dangerous journey
c. person you play or fight against
d. first performance

3 **substrate**: This is the **substrate**.
a. farm under water
b. way to show two amounts are equal
c. bottom layer
d. bad feeling between two people

4 **immune**: They are **immune**.
a. not strong
b. not affected by something
c. not religious
d. not explained or understood

5 **diagram**: Can you see the **diagram**?
a. shape like a ball
b. living thing
c. drawing that explains something
d. group of people from the same place

6 **diameter**: Check the **diameter**.
a. plan for when things will happen
b. distance across a circle
c. place to put your things
d. piece of writing

7 **maternal**: She is feeling **maternal**.
a. like a strong leader
b. like a mother
c. full of energy
d. very tired

8 **amplitude**: **Amplitude** is important here.
a. size
b. development
c. returning the money
d. official connection to a group

9 **nonlinear**: I think it is **nonlinear**.
a. not possible to pass through
b. not certain
c. not related in a simple way
d. not attached

10 **morphological**: The problem was **morphological**.
a. related to the form
b. everywhere in the world
c. lasting a long time
d. not reported

11 **adverse**: The effect was **adverse**.
a. bad or negative
b. told to other people
c. only at certain times of the year
d. just in some cases

12 **interval**: There were some **intervals**.
a. pictures with meanings
b. people to work machines
c. things to block people
d. times between events

13 **controversy**: There was a big **controversy**.
a. test to find a result
b. argument with many people
c. event to show something is special
d. event with many teams

14 **minimize**: Try to **minimize** it.
a. send it by TV or radio
b. make it colder
c. make it as small as possible
d. add something to make it better

15 **contradiction**: That is a **contradiction**.
a. difference in two statements
b. place you are going to
c. thing that stops you working
d. small part of a bigger thing

16 **authority**: She has **authority**.
a. beauty
b. power
c. education
d. good health

17 **transformation**: The **transformation** will begin.
a. basic system
b. order of things
c. change
d. story

18 **migration**: There is a lot of **migration**.
a. movement to other places
b. things stopping other people working
c. attention in newspapers or television
d. support for other people

19 **dominant**: They are very **dominant**.
a. powerful
b. far from other people
c. worried
d. different from others

20 **pi**: Please use **pi** for this.
a. the money for marriage
b. a special number
c. a way to understand a problem
d. help or advice

Level 2

21 **vitamins**: There are a lot of **vitamins**.
a. new things that people have made
b. places where things meet
c. things that are good for the body
d. people who want to change the world

22 **infectious**: It is **infectious**.
a. causing a lot of pressure
b. easy to understand
c. possible
d. able to spread to other people

23 **clay**: This is **clay**.
a. earth we use to make things
b. something to use in bed
c. a bad feeling
d. a ball shape

24 **lump**: That is a big **lump**.
a. thing you can eat
b. place to wash
c. piece of something
d. list of names

25 **stance**: That is an interesting **stance**.
a. guess
b. new part
c. skill
d. opinion

26 **industrialize**: This place is not **industrialized**.
a. having factories or businesses
b. higher than places around it
c. able to grow food
d. popular with people

27 **fabric**: I really like that **fabric**.
a. material for making clothes
b. hard outside part
c. clear difference
d. building design

28 **elastic**: They are very **elastic**.
a. good at something
b. easy to guess
c. basic
d. able to stretch

29 **breakdown**: He did not know about the **breakdown**.
a. counting of the people
b. information that became public
c. failure
d. cause

30 **replication**: We did a **replication**.
a. song that tells a story
b. copy of the original one
c. practice before the start of something
d. small change to make something better

31 **exponential**: The growth is **exponential**.
a. happening with no control
b. possible to achieve
c. not expected
d. increasing very quickly

32 **crude**: The plan was very **crude**.
a. good thinking
b. simple and basic
c. easy to pay for
d. surprising

33 **conduction**: This slows **conduction**.
a. how things break into pieces
b. how a liquid is released
c. how something changes shape
d. how heat or electricity move through a material

34 **denominator**: This is the common **denominator**.
a. feeling that you have been treated badly
b. thing everyone or everything has
c. thing that causes disease
d. feeling that a situation is too easy

35 **biodiversity**: We should think about **biodiversity**.
a. the variety of living things in a place
b. bringing water so that plants can grow
c. a system that is equal for everyone
d. controlling how other people live

36 **enforcement**: **Enforcement** here was good.
a. making people follow rules
b. the number of people who liked something
c. the way things stayed the same
d. the way things were arranged

37 **actively**: They did it **actively**.
a. completely and carefully
b. with passion and energy
c. without waiting
d. quietly and gently

38 **coherent**: This is not very **coherent**.
a. difficulty to do
b. helpful
c. warm and friendly
d. clear and easy to understand

39 **stadium**: Here is the **stadium**.
a. place to watch sports events
b. thing being carried by a boat or plane
c. book about someone's life
d. path going under the ground

40 **descriptor**: These are good **descriptors**.
a. lists of new ideas
b. things for holding liquids
c. things to do in your free time
d. words used to explain something

NAWL test – Answer key

Item	Answer
1	c
2	a
3	c
4	b
5	c
6	b
7	b
8	a
9	c
10	a
11	a
12	d
13	b
14	c
15	a
16	b
17	c
18	a
19	a
20	b
21	c
22	d
23	a
24	c
25	d
26	a
27	a
28	d
29	c
30	b
31	d
32	b
33	d
34	b
35	a
36	a
37	b
38	d
39	a
40	d