

Grammar Tip #6: How to make students' academic writing more precise**MULTIWORD VERBS ACTIVITY (Intermediate to advanced)**

As our students begin to tackle more academic writing tasks, their language needs to become more precise. One area where we can support this transition is by increasing our students' awareness of verb choice. As we know, English grammar has multiword and single-word verbs. In conversation and informal writing, multiword verbs (e.g., *find out*, *look at*) are very common. However, single-word verbs are often preferred in academic writing because their meaning is more precise. Here's an activity that will help your students build their vocabulary resources to improve their academic writing.

Common multiword verbs with single-word verb alternatives

back up	→	support
find out	→	discover
go back	→	return
look at	→	observe
look into	→	explore
	→	investigate
point out	→	show
	→	demonstrate
put off	→	delay
put up with	→	tolerate
start off	→	begin
talk about	→	discuss

MATERIALS: Use the list of multiword verbs provided and/or collect multiword verbs from your students' writing. Print out your list of verb pairs. You will need one list per student or student pair for the activity. Cut up the lists so that each verb is on a separate piece of paper – for example, one piece has *back up*, another has *support*, and so on. Put each cut-up list of the verbs in a separate envelope.

STEP 1: Have your students work individually or in pairs. Give each student or pair an envelope with the verbs.

STEP 2: Instruct your students to match the multiword verbs with the correct single-word verbs.

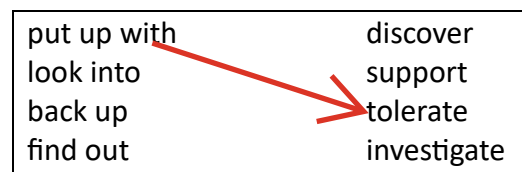
STEP 3: Once students have finished matching the verb pairs, ask them to compare their results with other students.

STEP 4: Have students look at examples of their own writing. Ask them to highlight all instances of multiword verbs and then replace them with more precise single-word verbs.

VARIATION 1:

Write some multiword verbs on the board or create a matching activity like the one below. Have students work individually or in pairs and race to complete the activity.

Note: This variation works well as an introductory or review activity.



VARIATION 2:

Give your students sentences or short pieces of writing that use multiword verbs. Ask students / pairs to find and replace the multiword verbs with more precise single-word verbs.

Example sentences:

- The scientist looked into the chemical properties of the new material.
- After summer break, students are eager to go back to classes.
- This review talks about the pros and cons of electric vehicles.
- The author backed up her claims with many sources from scientific journals.