

Basics

Keywords are the parts of a sentence or a paragraph that contain the most important information. They are usually nouns and verbs; they are not usually prepositions, articles or auxiliary verbs (although there are exceptions – see the Key features section). Adverbs and adjectives can also be keywords, depending on the context and the type of writing.

The academic context

When we are reading as part of our studies, it is important to be able to find the information we need quickly. Identifying keywords helps us to do this. It helps us to follow a text and understand it quickly. It also helps us to find relevant information quickly, so it saves us research time. In academic situations, we often have to read a lot, and this skill helps us to find relevant information fast.

Remember that there are often keywords in *questions*. These help you look for the answers when you read. Sometimes the keyword you are looking for will be a synonym of the word in the question.

Key features

Keywords are usually the following:

- names
- places
- years or dates
- numbers
- nouns
- verbs

Chapter titles and section headings usually contain keywords. In addition, any words which begin with a capital letter, are in italics (*like this*) or are in bold (**like this**) are probably keywords. Don't forget that, while keywords are usually nouns and verbs, any word can be a keyword. Look at the highlighted examples:

The results were **not** as we expected.
Apply heat from **above** the liquid.
The office is **in** the town centre.
Put the mask on **before** entering the room.
We thought the law had changed. **However**, we were wrong.

Challenges / difficulties

The biggest challenge is knowing which words are keywords. At first, it can seem like all (or most) of the words are important. It is also often easy to miss keywords.

How can I develop this skill?

Focus on identifying the important words and phrases in texts, and circle, underline or highlight them. If you have identified ten words per line, it's probably too many. If you have no words in a paragraph, it's possible that you have missed them.

Learning outcome

When you learn to identify keywords, you will quickly understand the main point of a text. This means that you can:

- make a quick decision about whether the text is useful to your studies
- more easily learn or take notes on the information you need

Theory to practice

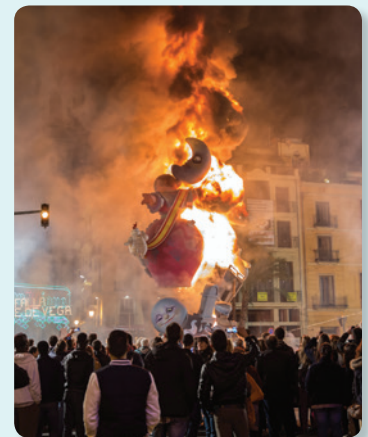
 Read the text, and highlight, circle or underline the keywords. Then discuss your answers with a partner.

The *Falles* festival

Valencia, Spain – 15–19 March

Fireworks are a big part of the festival. There are displays at midnight every night. Each display fills the sky with spectacular colours and lights and lasts 20 minutes. The biggest display, the *Nit de Foc*, is on the night of the 18th. Every day at 2 p.m., crowds of people come to Valencia's main square for a display of powerful firecrackers and fireworks. This noisy event is called the *Mascleta*, and you can hear the firecrackers many kilometres away.

The final event of the festival is the *Crema*, the burning of the *falles*. At around midnight on the last day, the sculptures are set on fire, one by one. For Valencians, the burning of the *falles* symbolizes the end of the winter.



Ways to get more practice

Test yourself by trying to recreate a piece of text using only the keywords. Copy the keywords, cover the text, and then try to write down what the text says using only your notes.