

The Big Word Myth

“大词”的迷思

Why reaching for advanced vocabulary lowers your score — and what actually raises it.

为什么堆砌高级词汇会拉低你的分数——以及什么才能真正提分

A student sent me an essay last month with the word *ubiquitous* in it three times. She was proud of it.

上个月有个学生给我发来一篇作文，里面用了三次 *ubiquitous*。她很得意。

I had to tell her it was one of the reasons her Lexical Resource was stuck at 6. Two of the three uses were wrong — not wrong in meaning, wrong in collocation and register. She had spent months building a list of impressive words, and the list was holding her back.

我不得不告诉她，这正是她的词汇分卡在 6 分的原因之一。三处用法里有两处是错的——不是意思错，而是搭配和语体错。她花了好几个月整理一份“漂亮词”清单，而这份清单正在拖住她。

This one is easier to settle than most IELTS arguments, because the answer is printed in a public document that anybody can read. The band descriptors are published by the IELTS Partners. ^{[1] [2] [3]} I am going to walk you through what they actually say.

这个问题比大多数雅思争论都容易讲清楚，因为答案就写在一份任何人都可以查阅的公开文件里。评分标准（band descriptors）由雅思主办方公开发布。^{[1] [2] [3]} 下面我带你看看它到底写了什么。

The short version 简短版本

The criterion is called Lexical Resource, and it rewards precision, appropriacy and collocation — not rarity. A rare word used slightly wrongly is not scored as ambition. It is scored as an error. In fact, reaching for less common vocabulary and getting it slightly wrong is very close to the published description of Band 6. ^[1]

这项标准叫“词汇资源”，它奖励的是准确度、得体程度和搭配——而不是罕见程度。一个罕见词用得略有偏差，不会被当作“有野心”，而会被当作错误。事实上，“尝试使用较不常见的词汇但略有不准”，几乎就是官方对 6 分的描述。^[1]

PART ONE • 第一部分

What is true: range genuinely counts

真实的一半：词汇广度确实计分

I am not going to tell you vocabulary does not matter. It matters enormously. A candidate who can only say *good, bad, big, a lot of* is capped, and no amount of clever structure will lift them. The descriptors do reward a wider resource as you move up the bands. ^{[1] [3]}

我不会告诉你词汇不重要。它非常重要。一个只会说 *good, bad, big, a lot of* 的考生是有天花板的，再巧妙的结构也拉不住。随着分数往上走，评分标准确实会奖励更宽的词汇资源。^{[1] [3]}

And research backs this up. Studies of learner corpora have shown that phraseological richness — how well a writer handles word combinations — predicts overall text quality as judged by professional raters. ^{[5] [6]} So vocabulary work is not wasted. The question is which vocabulary work.

研究也支持这一点。学习者语料库的研究表明，“短语丰富度”——也就是作者处理词语组合的能力——能够预测专业评分人对文本整体质量的判断。^{[5] [6]} 所以背词并不白费。问题在于：你背的是什么。

What the top bands actually say 高分档到底在说什么

Read the top of the Lexical Resource column and one word keeps appearing. It is not *rare*. It is not *advanced*. It is **precise**. Band 8 and Band 9 are described in terms of conveying precise meaning with flexibility. Rarity appears only as something to be handled *skilfully* — which is a condition, not a reward. [1] [3]

把“词汇资源”那一列的顶端读一遍，你会发现一个词反复出现。不是“罕见”，也不是“高级”，而是**准确**。8分和9分的描述，围绕的是“灵活地传达准确含义”。罕见词只在一个前提下出现：需要被“熟练地”使用——那是条件，不是奖励。[1] [3]

What moves up the bands

随分档上升的是

Control: accuracy, collocation, register, flexibility

控制力：准确度、搭配、语体、灵活度

What does not

不随分档上升的是

Rarity of the individual words you choose

你所选单词本身的罕见程度

The Band 6 pattern

6分的典型特征

Less common words attempted, but slightly inaccurate

尝试不常见词汇，但略有不准

The Band 8 pattern

8分的典型特征

Wide resource used flexibly for precise meaning

词汇宽广且运用灵活，传达准确

The sentence that should stop you 一句该让你停下来的话

Here is the part almost nobody reads carefully. The published Band 6 description of Lexical Resource covers a candidate who reaches for less common vocabulary and does not quite land it. [1] Read that again.

下面这部分，几乎没有人认真读过。官方对6分“词汇资源”的描述，所包含的正是这样一个考生：他伸手去拿不常见的词，却没完全拿稳。[1] 请再读一遍。

That is the big-word strategy, described by the people who write the test, and filed under Band 6. Not Band 7. Not Band 8. The strategy you were sold as a way to reach Band 7 is the published description of the band you are trying to leave.

那就是“堆大词”策略本身——由命题方亲自描述，并归入6分。不是7分，也不是8分。那个被当作“上7分的方法”卖给你的策略，正是你想离开的那个分档的官方定义。

Band 6

6分

Reaches for less common words, some inaccuracy

伸手去拿不常见词，存在不准确

Band 7

7分

Uses them with some awareness of style and collocation

使用时已有语体与搭配意识

Band 8

8分

Handles them skilfully; inaccuracies are occasional

运用熟练，不准确仅偶尔出现

The variable is not the word. It is your control of the word. The same item can sit at Band 6 or Band 8 depending entirely on whether you placed it correctly. This is why swapping *common* for *ubiquitous* is not a score strategy. It is a coin toss.

变量不是这个词，而是你对这个词的控制力。同一个词，可能落在6分，也可能落在8分，完全取决于你是否把它放对了位置。所以把 *common* 换成 *ubiquitous*，不是提分策略，而是抛硬币。

What the research adds 研究补充了什么

Corpus work on learner writing found something that should change how you study. Comparing intermediate and advanced non-native writers, the difference was not that advanced writers chose rarer single words. It was that they handled *word combinations* differently: intermediate writers overused ordinary high-frequency pairings and underused the strongly associated combinations that mark fluent academic English. [5]

针对学习者写作的语料库研究，发现了一个应该改变你学习方式的事实。对比中级与高级非母语写作者，差别不在于高级者选了更罕见的单词，而在于他们处理词语组合的方式不同：中级写作者过度使用普通的高频搭配，而少用那些构成地道学术英语的强关联组合。[5]

Later work went further and argued that single-word measures are simply not enough to assess writing quality — formulaic competence has to be measured too. [7] In plain terms: the examiner is not counting your rare words. The thing that separates a 6 from an 8 lives in the spaces *between* your words.

后续研究更进一步提出：单词层面的指标根本不足以评估写作质量，必须同时衡量“固定表达能力”。[7]说白了：考官不是在你用了几个罕见词。把6分和8分区分开来的东西，就住在你词与词之间的空隙里。

So the honest version of the true half 因此，真实的那一半，诚实的说法是

Vocabulary breadth matters. Vocabulary *control* matters more, and it is what the bands are actually built around: accuracy, collocation, register and flexibility. [4] [3] [5] [7]

词汇广度重要。但词汇控制力更重要，而且它才是分档真正围绕的东西：准确度、搭配、语体与灵活度。[4] [3] [5] [7]

PART TWO • 第二部分

What is false: that rarity is the same as range 虚假的一半：把“罕见”当成了“广度”

The myth survives because it feels obvious. Harder words look like better English. And a word list is easy to sell, easy to buy, and easy to feel productive with. Learning collocations is slower and far less satisfying.

这个迷思之所以长期存在，是因为它看起来很合理。难词看上去就像是更好的英语。而一份词汇表好卖、好买，也容易让人产生“我在进步”的感觉。学搭配则慢得多，也没那么有成就感。

But the criterion is not measuring how difficult your words are. It is measuring whether you put the right word in the right place. Those are different skills, and only one of them is on the scale. [1] [2] [3]

但这项标准衡量的不是你的词有多难，而是你有没有把对的词放在对的位置。这是两种不同的能力，而量表上只有其中一种。[1] [2] [3]

I want to be fair to the people selling these lists. A collocation dictionary or a good academic vocabulary book is a genuinely useful thing to own, and the Academic Word List is free and worth working through. [4] The problem is not the words. It is the promise attached to them — that difficulty alone buys you a band.

我想对卖这些词表的人说句公道话。一本搭配词典、一本好的学术词汇书，都是真正值得拥有的东西；而学术词表（AWL）是免费的，也值得认真过一遍。[4]问题不在词，而在于附在词上的那个承诺——好像难度本身就能买来一个分档。

Three ways a big word costs you marks

“大词”扮分的三种方式

- **Wrong collocation.** *Make a threat* instead of *pose a threat*. *Take a conclusion* instead of *draw a conclusion*. The individual words are correct; the pairing is not. This is the single most common lexical error I mark.

搭配错。 make a threat 而非 pose a threat; take a conclusion 而非 draw a conclusion。单词都对，搭配错了。这是我批改时看到最多的词汇错误。

- **Wrong register.** An idiom dropped into an academic essay, or a formal legal term dropped into a Part 1 answer about your hometown. The word is real. It is wearing the wrong clothes.

语体错。 把一个俚语塞进学术作文，或把一个正式法律术语塞进介绍家乡的 Part 1 回答。词是真词，只是穿错了衣服。

- **Wrong precision.** Choosing a word that is *near* your meaning rather than *on* it. *Ubiquitous* does not mean *common*; it means present everywhere at once. Get that wrong and you have not shown range — you have shown that you do not know what the word means.

准确度错。 选了一个“接近”你意思的词，而不是“正中”你意思的词。Ubiquitous 不等于 common，它指“无处不在”。用错了，你没有展示广度，只展示了你不知道这个词是什么意思。

PART THREE • 第三部分

The swap that actually works

真正有效的替换

So what should you be swapping, if not *common* for *ubiquitous*?

那么如果不是把 common 换成 ubiquitous，你到底应该换什么？

Swap vague for specific, and swap loose pairings for strong ones. That is what the descriptors mean by precision and collocation, and it is what the research found separating intermediate writers from advanced ones. ^[1] ^[5] Here is what it looks like in practice.

把笼统换成具体，把松散的搭配换成强搭配。这就是评分标准所说的准确与搭配，也正是研究中区分中级与高级写作者的那个差异。 ^[1] ^[5] 具体长这样。

Instead of 不要写	Write this — specific, correctly paired 请写这个——具体、搭配正确
a very big problem	a pressing concern / a serious shortfall
the government must do something	the government should introduce stricter regulation
this causes bad effects	this has adverse consequences for public health
many people think	there is a widespread belief that
technology is developing fast	technological change is accelerating

Look at what changed. Not one of those upgrades is a rare word. *Pressing*, *stricter*, *adverse*, *widespread*, *accelerating* — every one of them is ordinary vocabulary. What changed is that each one is *exact*, and each one is sitting in a pairing that native academic writing actually uses.

看看变了什么。这些升级里没有一个是罕见词。Pressing、stricter、adverse、widespread、accelerating——全部都是普通词汇。变的是：每一个都精确，而且每一个都处在地道学术写作真正使用的搭配中。

This is also why the Academic Word List is worth your time while a “band 9 word list” is not. ^[4] The AWL is a list of words that actually recur in academic text, so learning them in context teaches you their normal company. A list assembled for impressiveness teaches you nothing about where the words belong.

这也是为什么学术词表（AWL）值得你花时间，而“9分词汇表”不值得。^[4] AWL里的词是真正在学术文本中反复出现的，在语境中学它们，你就学到了它们平常和谁作伴。而为了“显得厉害”而拼凑的词表，什么也教不了你。

“A common word used exactly beats a rare word used nearly. Every single time.”

“一个用得精准的普通词，胜过一个用得差不多的罕见词。每一次都是如此。”

PART FOUR • 第四部分

What Lexical Resource is actually measuring “词汇资源”真正测量的是什么

Four things, drawn from the published criteria. ^{[1] [2] [3]}

四件事，均出自公开的评分标准。^{[1] [2] [3]}

1. **Precision.** Does your word land exactly on your meaning, or somewhere near it? This is the word that dominates the top of the scale.

准确度。 你的词是正中你的意思，还是只在附近？这是量表顶端出现最多的一个词。

2. **Collocation.** Do your words keep the company that English actually keeps? This is where Chinese-speaking candidates lose the most marks, because L1 pairings rarely map across.

搭配。 你的词有没有和英语里真正与之搭配的词在一起？这是中文考生失分最多的地方，因为母语的搭配很少能直接搬过去。

3. **Register and style.** Does the vocabulary fit the task and the audience? Formal essay, spoken conversation, letter to a friend — all different.

语体与风格。 词汇是否符合题型和对象？正式论文、口语对话、写给朋友的信——完全不同。

4. **Flexibility.** Can you say the same thing more than one way when you need to? This is paraphrase, and it is the skill that carries across into Reading and Listening too.

灵活度。 需要时，你能不能用不同方式说同一件事？这就是同义改写，也是能直接迁移到阅读和听力的能力。

Notice what is absent: the difficulty of the words you chose.

请注意没有出现的一项：你所选单词的难度。

PART FIVE • 第五部分

What I tell my own students to do 我给自己学生的建议

- **Learn the pairing, never the word alone.** Do not write down *threat*. Write down *pose a threat to*. The unit of study is the combination, because that is what is being assessed. ^{[5] [7]}

学搭配，永远不要只学单词。 不要只记 *threat*，要记 *pose a threat to*。学习的单位是组合，因为被评估的就是组合。^{[5] [7]}

- **Cap yourself at one risk per paragraph.** If you want to try a less common item, try one, and make it the one you are most sure of. Four risky words in a paragraph is four chances to be marked down.

每段只允许自己冒一次险。 如果你想用一个不常见的词，就用一个，并且选你最有把握的那个。一段里塞四个没把握的词，就是四个扣分机会。

- **Delete before you decorate.** Cut *very, really, a lot of, so much* first. Removing vagueness raises precision faster than adding difficulty does, and it carries no risk at all.
先删，再装。先把 *very, really, a lot of, so much* 删掉。去揉含糊比增加难度更快提升准确度，而且零风险。
- **Read your own sentence out loud and ask: would a specialist write this?** Not *does it sound clever*. Whether it sounds like the field it belongs to.
把自己的句子念出来，问一句：专业人士会这么写吗？不是问“听起来厉害吗”，而是问“听起来像这个领域的语言吗”。
- **Build from the Academic Word List, in sentences.** 570 word families, free, and every one of them recurs in real academic text. Copy out a whole sentence for each, not a translation. ^[4]
从学术词表（AWL）入手，以句子为单位。570 个词族，免费，且每一个都在真实学术文本中反复出现。每个词诗下一整句，而不是一个中文释义。 ^[4]
- **Keep an error log of your own collocation mistakes.** Yours will repeat, because they come from Chinese pairings that do not transfer. Twenty logged and fixed is worth more than two hundred new words.
给自己的搭配错误建一份错题本。你的错会反复出现，因为它们来自无法直接迁移的中文搭配。记下并改对二十个，比新背两百个词更有价值。

PART SIX • 第六部分

Test your own writing tonight

今晚就可以检测你的作文

Take your last essay and run these five checks.

拿出你最近一篇作文，做这五项检查。

- **Circle every word you would not use in speech.** For each one, ask whether you could defend its collocation. If not, it is a liability, not an asset.
圈出每一个你口语中不会用的词。逐个问自己：它的搭配我说得清吗？如果不行，它是风险，不是资产。
- **Count your *verys* and *a lot ofs*.** Every one is a place where a precise word was available and you did not reach for it.
数一数你的 *very* 和 *a lot of*。每一个都意味着：那里本有一个精确的词，而你没去拿。
- **Check your verb-noun pairs against a corpus or collocation dictionary.** Verb-noun is where Chinese-speaking candidates go wrong most often.
把你的“动词 + 名词”搭配拿去语料库或搭配词典里核一遍。动名搭配是中文考生出错频率最高的地方。
- **Read one paragraph aloud to somebody who does not do IELTS.** If they wince at a word, the examiner will mark it.
把一段念给一个不考雅思的人听。如果他在某个词上皱了下眉，考官就会扣那个词。
- **Then ask the honest question.** Did you use that word because it was the right word, or because it was the impressive one? You already know the answer.
然后问一个诚实的问题。你用那个词，是因为它对，还是因为它显得厉害？你心里已经有答案了。

IN SUMMARY • 小结

Where I stand

我的立场

Vocabulary range counts. The bands do reward a wider resource, and building one is real work worth doing. ^[1] ^[3]

词汇广度确实计分。分档确实会奖励更宽的词汇资源，而积累词汇是真正值得做的功夫。 ^[1] ^[3]

But rarity is not range, and difficulty is not a score. Reaching for a less common word and missing is close to the published description of Band 6 — the band you are trying to leave. ^[1]

但“罕见”不等于“广度”，“难度”也不等于分数。伸手去拿一个不常见的词却没拿稳，几乎就是官方对6分的描述——也正是你想离开的那个分档。 ^[1]

Precision is the lever. A common word used exactly, in a pairing English actually uses, outscores a rare word used nearly. Work on control, not on difficulty. ^[5] ^[7]

真正的杠杆是准确度。一个用得精准、且处于英语真实搭配中的普通词，分数高于一个用得差不多的罕见词。练控制力，不是练难度。 ^[5] ^[7]

REFERENCES • 参考文献

Sources, numbered

出处 (按编号)

Every numbered marker points to an entry below. The band descriptors are published free by the IELTS Partners — go and read the Lexical Resource column yourself. It is the single most useful hour in your preparation.

文中每一个编号都对应下列条目。评分标准由雅思主办方免费公开——请你自己去把“词汇资源”那一列读一遍。那是备考中最值得花的一个小时。

Official assessment criteria — published by the IELTS Partners

官方评分标准 (由雅思主办方发布)

- [1] IELTS Writing Task 2 band descriptors (public version). Available from ielts.org
- [2] IELTS Writing Task 1 band descriptors (public version). Available from ielts.org
- [3] IELTS Speaking band descriptors (public version). Available from ielts.org

Peer-reviewed research

同行评审研究

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