CHOOSING THE RIGHT WORD

Identifying informal words: the following lists provide contrasting examples of *informal* English (usually spoken) and *formal* English (used in academic writing). Depending on the context, the words on the right *may* be preferable to the words on the left for academic writing. Refer to a good English dictionary to check for meaning if you're not sure which word to use.

Part of speech	Informal vocabulary	Formal (more academic) vocabulary
1. Nouns	thing	factor, issue, aspect, item
	place	location, site
	buyer	purchaser
	parts	elements, components
	answer	response, solution
2. Phrases	good thing	benefit, advantage
	good enough	adequate
	lots of / a lot of	many, numerous
	to do with	regarding
3. Adjectives	good	positive, useful, valuable, advantageous
	bad	negative, disadvantageous
	big	large, major
	little	small, minor
4. Adverbs	around	approximately
5. Verbs	get	obtain
	has got, have got	have
	give	provide, donate
	watch	observe
	stay	remain
	keep	preserve
	show	demonstrate, indicate
	need	require
	guess	estimate
	happen	occur
	answer	respond

Part of speech	Informal vocabulary	Formal (more academic) vocabulary
6. **Phrasal verbs** *(verbs + prepositions or adverbs)*	• Phrasal verbs are common in spoken and informal English, but are rarely used in academic writing. There is usually a more formal, academic verb which is used instead. Below is a list of the more frequently used phrasal verbs and their more formal equivalents.	
	bring along	bring
	start again	resume, recommence
	go up	rise, increase
	go down	fall, decrease
	find out	determine, discern, discover
	pick up	collect
	put in	insert
	fill out (a form)	complete
	take away	remove
	come back, go back	return (somewhere)
	give back, take back	return (something)
	throw away	discard
	take apart	dismantle
	think about	consider
	keep up	maintain
	come over	visit
	put up with	tolerate
	help out	assist
	set up	establish
	get rid of	eliminate
	look into	investigate
	bring up	raise
	meet with	encounter
	cut down	reduce
	move up and down	fluctuate
	put off	delay
	put out (a fire, cigarette)	extinguish
	talk over	discuss
	bump into (an old friend)	meet (by chance)

Useful links:

- Subject-verb agreement: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/599/1/
- Verb tenses and verb forms: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/718/1/