

# Authentic Product vs Authentic Process: a new approach to assessing the academic essay on a pre-sessional EAP course

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# Guiding Principles?

**‘The assessments should be valid by being directly related to the genres students have studied; this also implies relevance, usefulness and a basis in real academic practices.’**

**Hyland (2006, p. 302)**

**‘(EAP assessment) needs to simulate authentic academic study and assessment tasks, and require students to use language in ways that reflect these authentic tasks.’**

**Alexander, Argent and Spencer (2008, p.308)**

**‘The first ... expectation subsumed within validity is that assessment should as a minimum do no harm to instruction or to learning.’ (Hamp-Lyons, 1989)**

# Evolution of our Assessment Strategy

2009	2011		2013	
Essay	Essay	50%	Essay	20%
Individual presentation	Group Presentation	20%	Group Presentation	20%
	Listening exam	15%	Listening exam	20%
	Reading exam	15%	Reading exam	20%
			Writing exam	20%

# A new approach to the coursework essay

## **We wanted an approach which would**

- reflect our belief in ‘integrated academic literacy’
- assess the writing process as well as the end product
- encourage student engagement at an early stage
- lead to positive washback on teaching
- be rooted in real academic practice

# The coursework essay writing process

- Reading and engaging with texts and lectures
  - Drafting a plan
  - Feedback on draft plan
  - Final plan (assessed 15%)
  - Writing first draft
  - Peer review and feedback on first draft
  - First draft feedback viva (assessed 15%)
  - Additional research
  - Second draft
  - Formative use of TurnItIn
  - Final draft submission (assessed 70%)
  - Feedback on final draft
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# Assessing essay plans

## Kiernan, Lawrence and Sankey (2007)

- Can the use of a preliminary essay plan (PEP) facilitate students' engagement and mastery of academic literacies they need if they are to succeed on a core first year communication course?
- PEP summatively assessed (weighted at 10%)
- Looked at grades of 1500 students before and after introduction of PEP.
- Marks improved from mean 63.9% to 71.4%
- Students commented that the PEP improved planning, time management (starting early), engagement, academic skills and **confidence**
- Non-threatening (low weighting), reduced anxiety and provided early gauge of progress

# Assessment Criteria for Essay Plan

	<b>Argument</b>	<b>Essay Structure</b>	<b>Indication of sources to be used</b>
<b>A</b>	A clearly expressed statement of argument which completely addresses the title prompt.	<p>The overall structure of the essay is clearly shown in the plan. The sequencing of the sections is logical and reflects the statement of argument.</p> <p>Each section has a clearly expressed and defined topic which connects logically to the argument. Each section has at least 2 relevant supporting points. The reader is well informed about the way the argument will be developed.</p>	Each section has a clear indication of which parts of the provided source texts will be used to support points made (i.e. author, page/paragraph number).

# Assessing vivas

Franks and Hanscomb (2012)

- Structured interviews with MA students in Glasgow who had been assessed by means of a 10-minute summatively assessed feedback viva (weighted at 10%)
- Students valued being forced to reflect deeply and felt that talking about their work improved their understanding
- They also valued the individual attention
- It made them think about ways of improving their essay
- It helped them become more confident about their work

# Assessment Criteria for First Draft Viva

	<b>Engagement with and understanding of their own essay and the argument(s) put forward</b>	<b>Understanding of the feedback provided on the plan and the draft</b>	<b>Ability to explain how they intend to address feedback</b>
<b>A</b>	The student demonstrates very good engagement with the essay and is able to clearly outline and justify the stance taken. Specific questions on essay content are well answered.	The student demonstrates that he/she has read, understood and reflected on the plan and first draft feedback. Specific strengths and weaknesses of the draft are clearly identified and well expressed. Disagreement with aspects of the feedback may be appropriately expressed but this may not be well justified.	The student explains clearly how specific weaknesses identified in the feedback will be addressed. The strategies suggested are appropriate and realistic.

# Assessment Criteria for Final Draft

- Argument and Organisation
- Language, style and presentation
- Use of sources and referencing

# Possible advantages of this approach

- Real evidence of improved student engagement with process, topic and texts
  - More effective and thoughtful planning
  - More reflection and careful consideration of feedback
  - Better understanding of academic conventions
  - bad academic practice could be ‘nipped in the bud’
  - Greater confidence to use own words
  - Skills and language transferable to other assessments
  - Encourages cooperation – discourages collusion
  - Not all about the end product – focus on the process
  - Positive washback on teaching – more focus on giving responsibility to students than supporting them
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# Some questions

- Are we assessing process in the right way?
- Is it too scaffolded to mean anything?
- Is it practical?
- Is it reliable?
- Is it authentic?
- Is the process/product weighting correct?
- Why bother?

# However .....

‘The third group (those who are interested in assessment innovations and are keen to emphasise authentic testing) may have the best intentions at heart, but, without a rigorous design specification, test construction cycle and validation procedure in place, can actually end up doing more harm than good ..’ .

Pearson (2013)

# References

- Alexander, O., Argent, S. and Spencer, J. (2008). *EAP Essentials: A teacher's guide to principles and practice*. Reading: Garnet.
- Franks, B. and Hanscomb, S. (2012) Learning through reflective dialogue: assessing the effectiveness of feedback vivas. HEA. Available at: <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/journals/discourse-journal>
- Hyland, K. (2006). *English for Academic Purposes: an Advanced Resource Book*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Kiernan, E., Lawrence, J. and Sankey, M. (2006) *Preliminary Essay Plans: assisting students to engage academic literacy in a first year communication course*. In: Proceedings of the 9<sup>th</sup> Pacific Rim in HE Conference. Queensland University of Technology. Brisbane, Australia.

Please contact me if you would like to know more or have suggestions.

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