



Warm-up

- Where do you work?
- What type of course(s) do you teach on?
- Do you consider yourself to teach ESAP, EGAP or somewhere in the middle?



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Specificity in EAP Writing: how far should we go?

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- Literature review
- Questionnaire – results and implications
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- Tentative conclusions/recommendations



Specificity

- *Are there skills and features of language that are transferable across disciplines?*
- *Should we focus on the texts, skills and forms needed by learners in distinct disciplines?*



Distinction between EGAP & ESAP (Blue, 1988a)

EGAP (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Spack, 1988)	ESAP (Halliday et al. , 1964; Hyland, 2002)	Middle ground? (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Skills, language forms and study activities thought to be common to all disciplines.- Generic academic practices (e.g. note-taking, summarising, using dictionaries, giving presentations, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Teaching of skills and language which are related to the demands of a particular discipline or department.-Generally involves some cooperation with subject departments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Core academic skills first.-More specific work later.



Arguments for a general view (Spack, 1988)

EAP writing courses should follow a common core.

- Skills and language are the same across a range of disciplines.
- Low proficiency learners need a core of basic English first.
- Language teachers lack the expertise and confidence to teach subject conventions.
- Students will learn best from teachers who have a solid grounding in the subject matter.

“...we should leave the teaching of writing in the disciplines to the teachers of those disciplines.” (Spack, 1988: 30)



Arguments for specificity (Hyland, 2002)

The teaching of specific skills and rhetoric cannot be divorced from the teaching of a subject itself.

- Subject teachers lack the interest and expertise to teach literacy skills.
- What are these generic skills and forms?
- Students acquire features as needed.
- Target skills and activities are important.
- Academic genres are forms of social action.
- Academic genres only take on meaning when they are situated in context.



Arguments for specificity continued...

- The structure of common formats (e.g. 'lab report' or 'dissertation') can differ completely across disciplines.
- The presentation of arguments, methods of reader engagement, etc reflect preferred disciplinary practices.
- Students communicate effectively only by using [a discipline's] particular conventions.

“Effective language teaching involves taking specificity seriously”
(Hyland, 2002: 117)

Structure of 'lab reports' in natural sciences and engineering (Braine, 1995)

Botany	Aerospace	Chemical	Mechanical	Petroleum	Electrical
Introduction	Abstract	Abstract	Objective & summary	Introduction	Abstract
Materials & methods	Introduction Theory	Introduction Theory	Facilities & instrumentation	Apparatus Procedures	Introduction Theory
Results	Apparatus & procedure	Apparatus & procedure	Experimental procedures	Hazards	Solution
Discussion	Results	Results	Results	Results	Results
References	Conclusions	Recommendations	Discussion Conclusions	Conclusions	Conclusions

Lexis and collocation

Hyland and Tse (2007) Is there an ‘Academic Vocabulary’?

- ‘*consist*’ means ‘*stay the same*’ in the Social Sciences and ‘*composed of*’ in the Sciences.
- ‘*volume*’ means ‘*book*’ in Applied Linguistics and ‘*quantity*’ in Biology.
- ‘*abstract*’ means ‘*remove*’ in Engineering and ‘*theoretical*’ in Social Sciences.

Recommendation

Use of subject-specific corpora as opposed to lists such as the AWL.



Evans and Morrison (2010)

- Interview-based longitudinal study (28 undergraduates at HK University)
- Questionnaire survey (3, 009 1st year students)
- Writing (academic style, cohesion, grammar) found to be the most problematic skill, plus a lack of rich vocabulary

“The survey results have clear implications for EAP practitioners”
(Evans and Morrison, 2010: 395)



However...

“EAP courses based exclusively on survey findings of this kind may overlook what seems to be the central challenge confronting freshmen namely the need to understand and appropriate the discourse practices of the disciplinary community they have chosen to enter”

(Evans and Morrison, 2010: 395)



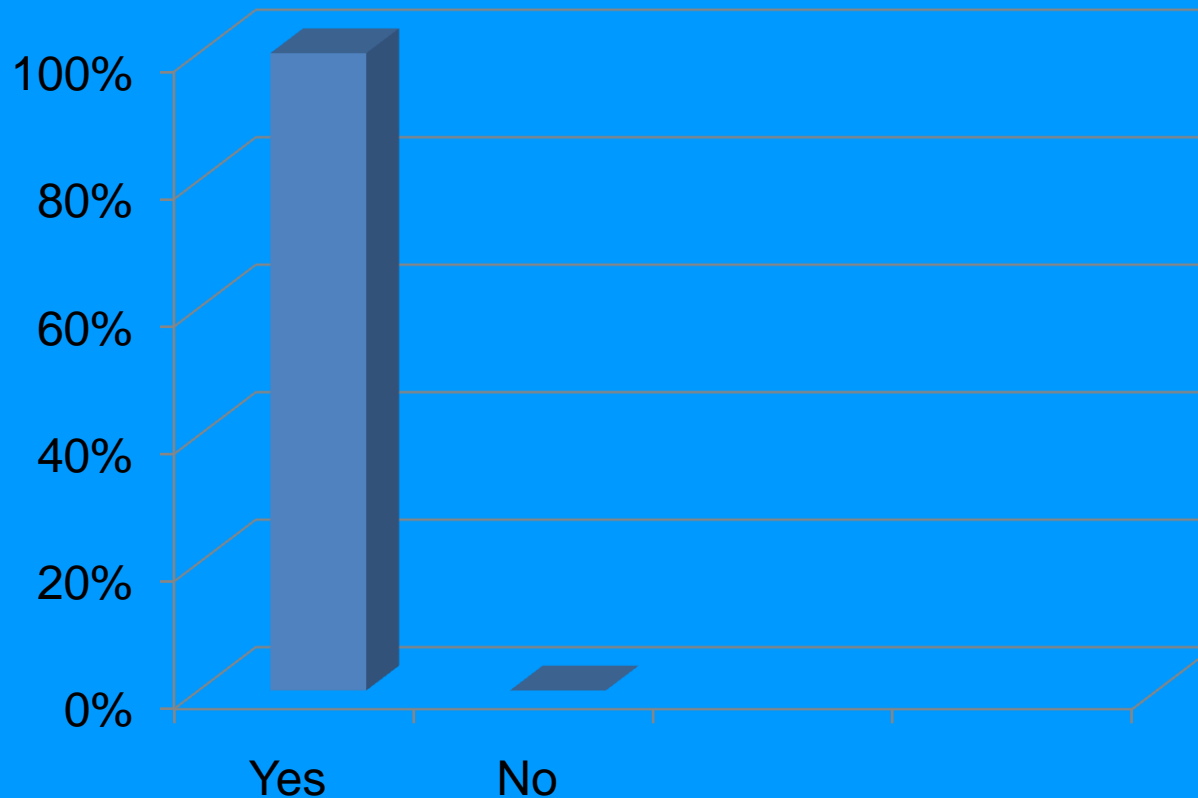
Questionnaire

- Usefulness of EAP writing instruction.
- 20 post-EAP course students.
- Open and closed questions.



Results

Did the classes help to improve your academic writing?





Did the classes help to improve your academic writing?

“It help me a lot about my academic writing ability such as how to write a paragraph, how to write in academic style and how to avoid plagiarism and so on. It focus on dissertation writing and 200-300 word essay writing. There seems no specific lesson on 2000-3000 word essay writing which we usually do in our MA class.”

(Ke Wang, MA Applied Linguistics with TESOL)



Did the classes prepare you for written work you had to produce during your post-graduate studies?

“Generally, yes However, in some parts of academic writing it still confused me. For example, when I tried to write my interim report, I used quotation to mark some great ideas from other people, which the teacher in ELTC told me is a really great way to use another people’s opinion. However, my supervisor told me it is not allowed in academic writing. Actually, he told me I should never use quotation in my academic writing. “

(Hongxi Liu, MSc Electronic and Electrical Engineering)



How could the classes have been improved/more useful, particularly in terms of improving your academic writing?

“Some student achieve a good mark in IELTS...but when they try to write an academic paper, they don't know how to write it or write it as a teenage student. The language teaching needs to be more close the actual usage.”

(Junchao Lu, MSc Management)



But...

- We may not have a choice.
- Institutional constraints may require a general academic writing course to be offered.
- Students may want a general academic writing course (e.g. not yet decided on future specialism).



Discussion

- Do you think there are generic skills and language forms/functions that are transferable across different fields?
- Do you think learning is more effective if it is based on the specific conventions and skills used in the student's target discipline?
- Do you believe there is a 'common core'? Brainstorm as many common features of academic writing you can think of.
- Do you incorporate the AWL into your teaching? Is it useful?
- **How far should we go?**



Recommendations

- More empirical evidence needed.
- Closer liaison with departments.
- Collaboration with subject specialists (team-teaching?).
- Discipline-specific grouping of students?
- Greater emphasis on the actual needs of students.

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