

# Integrating reading and writing skills for EAP

**Kat Robb** suggests ways of improving students' academic literacy.

The nucleus of EAP has predominantly been to improve learner reading and writing skills to support them in their university studies, whether they pursue undergraduate or postgraduate pathways. Developing academic writing skills, and comprehending the plethora of academic literature available, is something which takes time and tenacity regardless of whether English is a first, second or other language. Higher education learners are required to critically analyse literature, draw their own conclusions and produce their own ideas, which without a shadow of a doubt is much easier said than done. Even in the case that our learners do read often in English or their own language, and are confident when writing, this cannot be reflected into the academic context.

Academic reading and writing compliment each other, in that reading constitutes the foundation for the creation of student literature reviews, research papers, thesis, policy reports and coursework essays. Without the previous knowledge in the subject area, and models to learn the language, referencing norms and layout, learners are unable to meet the academic conventions required by faculty. Despite the increasing recent changes to include more presentations into many subject areas, the essence of university education continues to be the development of literacy skills: reading for research, and writing to produce one's own responses to the question under discussion.

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During my experience as an EAP teacher, I have found that the least preferred of all lessons are hands-down reading and writing, so I will share some ideas here that I use to harbour the strengthening of academic literacy, and that have helped learners develop.

## **Guess the article content from the title**

This is literally as the name says, learners predict the content of the article they are going to read, from the title alone, thereby enabling cognitive preparation for the topic. I would then encourage learners to write their own abstracts, which helps them focus on the main

ideas they would expect to read within the paper. These can be shared among learners and discussed open class. The teacher can then project the original abstract from the article on the board for learners to compare their versions and identify any similarities in the content. This is a good opportunity to tackle target language from the abstract that will scaffold learner comprehension when reading the full article. An extension to this activity is to repeat the same process as above, for the section headings. Each group of learners could be given a different heading and the task of bullet pointing the main content points of the section. Once this is completed they can again compare with the original paper. It is advisable to use shorter papers (4–6 pages) with this activity. I find this scaffolding process fosters learner interest in the article, and provides them with the confidence to make educated guesses about the content of articles they find, and helps them determine whether they think they are relevant for their own writing.

## **Critical awareness**

Select sections of academic articles that provide the author's stance on the given topic; this can be a paragraph or longer. The objective is for learners to identify where the author's point of view is given in the text, and which language is used to do this. Project the titles of the articles on the board for learners to match with the sections of text, and feedback open class to check. Using the language previously identified, learners write a short paragraph about two or three of the topics to give their own angle on the topic.

## Topic sentences and thesis statements

I have often found that learners find writing topic sentences and thesis statements extremely challenging. It may be that in their first language they would say the same thing in not so many or more words, or simply they are unable to identify what a topic sentence is. To hone skills for the writing of both, I give learners jumbled paragraphs containing thesis statements and topic sentences on a handout, equal numbers of both work well. In open class, an example of each is analysed to determine the main topic (thesis statement) and the paragraph topic (topic sentence); the amount of scaffolding will depend on how quickly learners grasp the concept. The idea is that the same process is repeated in groups, and once this is done, that learners write a thesis statement for the topic sentence paragraph and vice versa!

The thesis statement below should be rewritten as a short paragraph, with a topic sentence at the beginning. Often the last sentence of the paragraph introduces the new theme for the next paragraph, so you can decide if this is something you choose to add as an additional activity. It is important that learners understand that thesis statements make a claim that will be discussed throughout the paper, and that topic sentences set the tone for the paragraph and relate back to the thesis statement.

### Example:

#### Thesis statement

'It has been demonstrated that dependence on technology has caused students to lose the ability to think independently. This dependence has caused a greater prevalence of mood disorders, memory loss and loneliness.'

#### Topic sentence

There are many reasons why the dependence on technology has a negative effect on humans, especially students ...

#### Reading

Academic reading differs from the texts candidates find in English language proficiency tests and realia

because while there is no doubt they are authentic, they are also personal reports of conceptual or practical research where theories are argued, and specific areas within a subject are contested or examined. So while our learners may be 'good readers' in English and/or their own language, and are able to employ the sub skills of reading for gist or skimming a text, few will hold the necessary skills to interpret an academic text adeptly. Others may feel they are unable to critically analyse an academic article, or identify the angle of argument that is being presented by the author. For this reason, I find text deconstruction activities imperative in order to help develop critical awareness and criticality. Approaching reading in this way enables learners to develop their interpretation skills, which in turn can be used as a reading into writing checklist, by employing the framework. Below is a framework that I devised and use in its entirety as a way of guiding learners to consider different aspects of the text to better comprehend it. It is possible to pick out specific features depending on the focus of the lesson.

**Example:** Identify/distinguish the main arguments from peripheral arguments

Learners read the article and try to identify the arguments given throughout. This can first be scaffolded by pre-teaching language that expresses giving angles, points of view and arguments so that learners are able to identify the points in the text where these are given. Once these points have been highlighted, group discussions can be held to decide if the information contributes to the main argument or is peripheral.

#### Text deconstruction framework

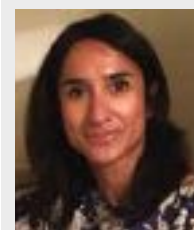
- Pre-reading: What do you already know about the topic?
- Consider the 'usefulness of a text' before reading in-depth: skim read / read the conclusion first & the abstract
- Who is the target audience of the text?
- Does this have an impact on the register?

- Consider the authority of a text: author, source, date, publisher
- Identify main arguments
- Identify/distinguish the main arguments from peripheral arguments
- Identify fact and opinion
- Consider if claims are supported by evidence
- Critical/Interactive Reading: Do I agree/disagree with claims? Why?
- Future predictions/implications

The aim of the activities presented in this article is to support learners in their awareness of the composition of academic texts so they are able to identify specific features, and improve their ability to produce their own discourse as a result. The activities are intended for use in generic EAP classes, or discipline specific; the teacher can select the texts and subject areas to use accordingly. To finish each lesson, it is a good idea to ask learners to write a question they have, a concern or something they are pleased about with their progress. This helps the teacher plan for the next lesson, ensures learning aims are being met and promotes learner self-reflection.

Some useful websites I source articles from are:

<http://eric.ed.gov/>  
[www.academicenglishuk.com/teachers](http://www.academicenglishuk.com/teachers)



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