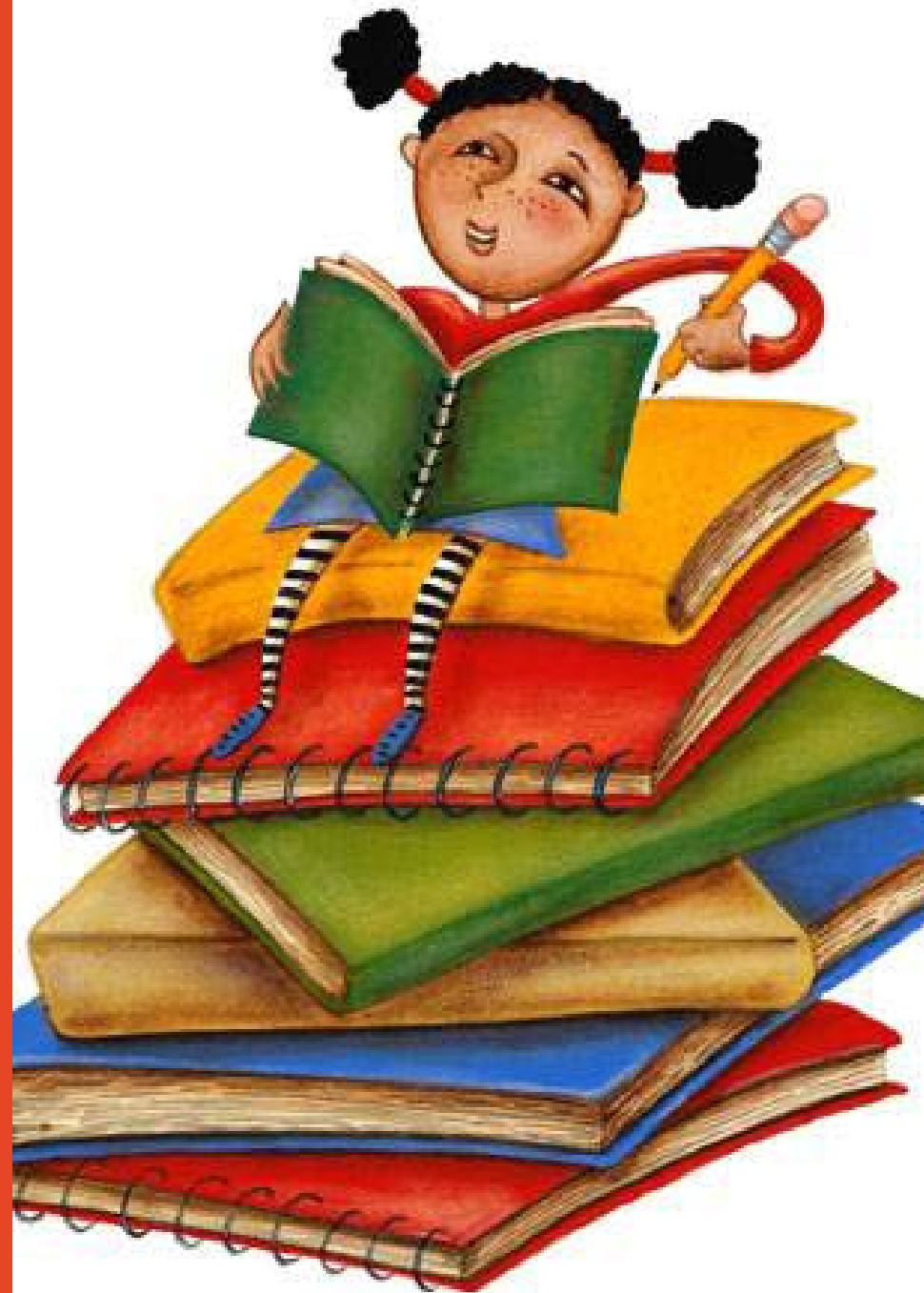# Teaching EAP: Issues and challenges for teachers and course writers

Marcella Robertson

Overview

- Shared issues and challenges

- Panel Q & A

- Best practice instructional approaches

Issues and challenges

**What are your top 2?
Any others?
Share your strategies**

- **Writing**
  - Teaching argumentation
  - Cohesion and coherence
  - Summarising and paraphrasing
  - Moving students from 'knowledge-telling' to 'knowledge-transforming'
  - "What's the point of teaching academic writing when students can't write at sentence level?"
- **Feedback on writing**
  - Making feedback effective
  - Standardisation among teachers
- **Reading**
  - Low levels of comprehension
  - Students understand the words but don't understand the meaning
  - Dealing with long/difficult/discipline-specific texts
- **Critical thinking**
- **Grammar**
  - "The elephant in the room"
- **Vocabulary**
  - Awkward and/or inappropriate use

Panel

Luke Alexander

Walter Slamer

Nick Falkinder

Academic vocabulary

What is this thing we call 'academic vocabulary'?

Is there such a thing as a core set of words and phrases that covers all disciplines? Contested e.g. Durrent (2014); Hyland and Tse (2007).

- University Word List   (Xue & Nation, 1984)
- Academic Word List   (Coxhead, 2000)
- Academic Keywords List   (Pacquot, 2010)
- Academic Formulas List   (Simpson-Vlach & Ellis, 2010)
- Academic Collocations List   (Ackermann & Chen, 2013)
- Academic Vocabulary List   (Gardner & Davies, 2014)

What will our students need at university?

What do they need now?

- Lexis to understand our EAP course materials
- Lexis to do our EAP assessment tasks

Resources

Highlighter for the Academic Word List (AWL)

http://www.eapfoundation.com/vocab/academic/highlighter

NB better than the Nottingham site, produces results by sub-list. Same site also has highlighter and gap-fill makers for the Academic Collocations List and Academic Formulas List.

To create an EAP materials corpus, use AntConc, and easy to use software program freely available from:

http://www.laurenceanthony.net/software.html

(with YouTube tutorials)

Best practice instructional approaches

Reading & Writing Together (R-W)

- University writing depends on effective reading (Wingate, 2015; Grabe & Zhang, 2013).

- Merely having reading and writing abilities is not sufficient to perform reading-to-write tasks (Wingate, 2015).

- Reading-to-write: a unique construct (Grabe, 2009; Hirvella 2004).

- Reading provides a source of authentic, contextualized language and text features that students need for good writing. These features are often "unteachable" otherwise (Ferris, 2009, pp. 40, 112; Coxhead & Byrd, 2007).
    = 'Writerly reading' (Wingate, 2015).

- Intertextuality: "No text is an island" (Widdowson in Johns, p. 35).

Best practice instructional approaches

Reading & Writing Together (R-W)

- Choose one activity/approach and summarise it to your group

- Evaluate each one

- Are there any that you would like to try out in class?

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Best practice instructional approaches

Reading & Writing Together

(R-W)

Best practice instructional approach: Extensive reading

The benefits of extensive reading on the acquisition of vocabulary, sentence patterns and cultural information are well established in the literature (Ferris, 2009, p.91), and can address the problem of students dealing with long texts (Ferris, 2009, p.114).

A good way to incorporate extensive reading into the classroom is through Sustained Silent Reading (SSR). In SSR, the teacher and students stop other activities in order to read silently. This should be done on a regular basis (3 – 5 times per week) and can last 10 – 15 minutes per session.

SSR can be supported through:
- Supplying, or helping students find, appropriate reading materials
- Having some kind of structure and accountability (%age of course grade or extra credit; reading logs; oral/written reports or summaries)

(Grabe & Kaplan, 1996, p.297)

Best practice instructional approach: Controlled summary writing

Summary writing can begin as a controlled or guided activity. For example:
- Provide incomplete summaries for students to complete
- Provide important points as a jumbled series of sentences for students to put in order
- Provide a diagram, flow chart or table with gaps to fill in
- Provide a framework for summarising sources, eg:

  Kwok et al (2003) applied _____
  to solve the problem of _____
  and found that _____

- In groups, students exchange summaries and note differences

- Provide students with a set of key words from a text or paragraph. Students put the words in order of occurrence in the text and discuss how the words are related, thus building up an oral summary of the text. Students then write their summary.

(Alexander et al, 2008; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996)

Best practice instructional approach: Understanding types of evidence

In reading texts, locate and examine all the evidence used by the writer. Then classify the sorts of evidence as:
- empirical fact
- theory
- inference
- opinion

Discussion of the choices should help to raise students' levels of awareness of types of evidence and distinguishing fact from opinion.

(Grabe & Kaplan, 1996, p. 357)

Best practice instructional approach: 'Writerly reading' (1)

In 'writerly reading', the teacher extracts text features for students to notice and apply in their own writing. One text feature that can be focused on is **the grammar and lexicogrammar of academic writing**. Suggestions for doing this are:
- Highlight instances of grammatical features of academic writing:
  - Long complicated noun phrases
  - Limited range of verbs with *be, have seem* often repeated
  - Simple present tense verbs in generalisations and statements of theory
  - Frequent use of the passive
- Highlight the multi-word combinations, collocations, sentence frames which are markers of fluent writing. Follow with controlled writing practice using these language patterns.

(Coxhead & Byrd, 2007)

Best practice instructional approach: Reading efficiently and for a purpose

University reading requires students to read many long texts, but to read selectively according to their purpose. Suggestions for developing efficient and purposeful reading skills and strategies are:

- Students read to answer their own questions, ie, they "go shopping" for information and ideas. Model this through library searches, surveying texts, non-linear reading (eg, reading only the abstract or conclusion).
- Provide students with an authentic reading purpose so that they have clear reading goals beyond simply understanding the content of the text. Take notes that reflect the reader's purpose.
- Integrate reading with authentic writing outcomes such as summarising and note-taking for the reading purpose.

(Alexander et al, 2008)

Best practice instructional approach: Explicit teaching of reading critically

Students should not be expected to know how to read critically; rather, they need to be taught *explicitly* how to do so. One way to help students with critical reading is for the teacher to read a text with students, or to students, and, through a think-aloud process, reveal to students what the text invokes through teacher interpretation. A teacher can read a text and stop every few lines to discuss the various ideas that come to mind: eg, the authority the writer has, who the writer draws on for theoretical authority, the strengths or weaknesses of the argument, the standard alternative views, a text that interlinks with this text in support or opposition, etc. This process of inquiry is useful for students to witness since students seldom 'see' a text directly questioned by an expert reader.

(Grabe & Kaplan, 1996, p. 346)

Best practice instructional approach: 'Writerly reading' (3)

In 'writerly reading', the teacher extracts text features for students to notice and apply in their own writing. One text feature that can be focused on is **cohesion**. A possible procedure for doing this is:

1. Highlight the following cohesive devices in reading texts and guide students to identify the referents in each case:
   - Reference (eg, pronouns, relative pronouns)
   - Substitution (eg, *dark objects* → *lighter* _ones_)
   - Ellipsis (eg, *Vibrios are very common in marine habitats and [very common] on the surface of marine animals*)
   - Conjunctions
   - Summarising nouns (eg, *We travelled by train to Edinburgh. The journey lasted four hours*)
2. Once students are familiar with the range of devices, encourage them to find examples of all devices in all their reading texts.
3. Examine the grammar around the cohesive devices (eg, use of articles, pronouns, conjunctions) whenever possible.
4. Encourage students to use a range of cohesive devices in their writing. Reward and share good use.

(Alexander et al, 2008)

Best practice instructional approach: 'Writerly reading' (2)

In 'writerly reading', the teacher extracts text features for students to notice and apply in their own writing. One text feature that can be focused on is **academic style**. A possible procedure for doing this is:

1. Provide students with a list of academic style features:
   - Specialized vocabulary
   - Formality (eg, absence of contractions; absence of direct questions)
   - Citation conventions
   - Hedging
   - Noun phrases and nominalisation

2. Students look for examples of the features in their reading texts.

(Alexander et al, 2008)

Best practice instructional approach: 'Writerly reading' (4)

In 'writerly reading', the teacher extracts text features for students to notice and apply in their own writing. One text feature that can be focused on is **rhetorical functions** (defining, classifying, comparing, etc). Identifying functions in a text is a way for students to recognise relationships between ideas. Questions you can ask students are:

- What is the writer doing in this sentence/paragraph?
  (eg, Describing? Defining? Comparing? Evaluating?)

- How do you know what the writer is doing? What language does the writer use to describe/define/compare/evaluate/etc?
  (eg present simple to define; vocabulary used to describe a problem)

- What is the relationship between the different functions?
  (eg, describe background to a problem → describe problem → describe cause → describe solution → evaluate solution)

(Alexander et al, 2008)

Best practice instructional approach: Summaries as model texts

Summarising is one of the most common strategies required of academic readers. It is also important to realise that there are various types of summaries. To encourage this understanding, teachers can use model summaries of the following types:
- Linear summaries that follow the organisation of a text
- Summaries that also critique
- One-sentence summaries
- Visual summaries

Analysis of the summaries will be through questions for reflection such as:
- How are the summaries organised?
- What is mentioned first? Second?
- Why do you think the summaries are organised in this manner?
- What do you notice about the language used? What kinds of verbs predominate?
- Is paraphrase used?
- How do you think the writers of the summaries planned their summaries?

(Johns, 1997, p. 138)