Chapter 3: Course design

This chapter will examine:

- the role of EAP courses in an academic curriculum
- the importance of course design for the EAP teacher in the classroom
- how principles of course design are implemented coherently

You will have the opportunity to:

- relate key aspects of EAP course design to your own situation
- apply principles of EAP course design when selecting and adapting materials
- relate methods of delivery to processes of learning

Designing courses is generally the remit of more senior or more experienced EAP teachers, but even those with years of teaching experience find the task challenging, as these questions[1] show.

- *I've been asked to write an EAP syllabus. Where do I start?*
- *How can I prepare a single EAP course to meet the needs of a wide range of disciplines?*
- *What kind of EAP course is suitable for low-level learners?*
- *I have no time to write special EAP materials – can I adapt our general English materials?*
- *Our students are failing because their English assessments are so different from the English syllabus we are supposed to use. What can we do?*

In addition to those who write a course, everyone in an EAP team has to be aware of its underlying principles in order to deliver it effectively, i.e., to achieve its aims.

The overall aim of an EAP course is to help students towards membership of their chosen academic community. This requires EAP course designers to gain a broad understanding of the conventions, expectations and practices of the target academic communities as well as the expectations of EAP students, as outlined in Chapter 1: *The context of EAP*. It also requires them to become familiar with the style and conventions of texts that students are likely to meet and the language they need to produce in their studies, as shown in Chapter 2: *Text analysis*. Based on this understanding, course designers can then identify the needs that the course will meet. This chapter outlines the key principles for designing and delivering EAP courses to meet these needs.

The role of the syllabus

EAP courses vary tremendously in terms of length and timing, specific aims, content, context and students. They can be as brief as two or three weeks before the start of an academic degree programme (a pre-sessional EAP course) or as long as two years, e.g., as part of a broad programme of study prior to degree level (a foundation programme). In-sessional EAP courses run concurrently with an undergraduate or postgraduate course and may be credit-bearing or simply offer support with academic writing and speaking. EAP classes can be aimed at a specific subject discipline (narrow-angled EAP or ESAP, English for specific academic purposes) or a wide range of target disciplines (wide-angled EAP or EGAP, English for general academic purposes).[2] In many countries, students are only required to read academic texts in English (EAP/FL, EAP in a foreign language context).[3] In other contexts, EAP students have a particular need for writing or speaking. Course design is a process which attempts to meet such identified needs within the constraints of the course.

Before discussing the principles underlying the design of different EAP courses, it is important to clarify the key components in an educational programme. Figure 1 shows the structure of a typical UK undergraduate foundation programme, designed to prepare students for university study. The curriculum is the whole educational programme in which students are engaged. In addition to EAP, students in this example are preparing for their future studies by following a course in IT related to the purpose of their degree. Subject-specific courses broadly linked to different degree programmes are also offered at an introductory level, e.g., an introduction to the UK business context or an introduction to social science research methods.

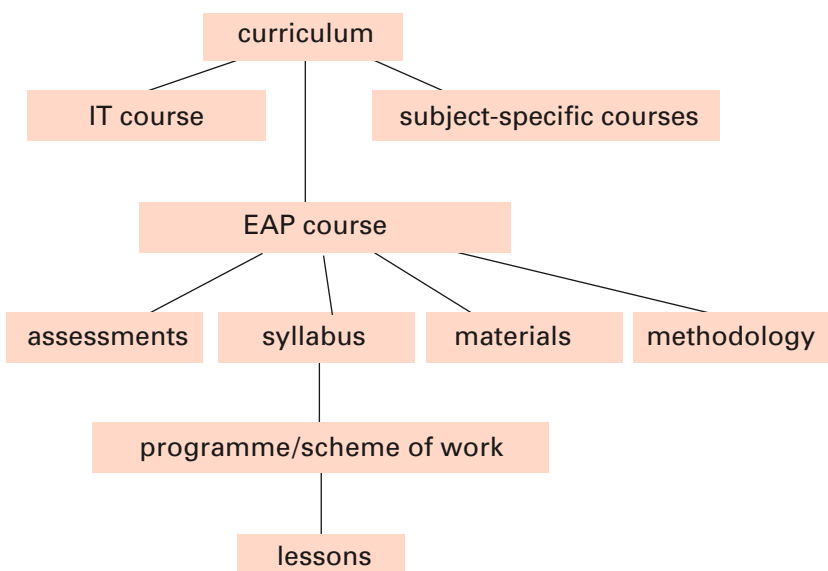


Figure 1: ***A typical UK undergraduate foundation programme***

At the heart of a well-designed course is the syllabus. It is a description of what students need to learn and is usually formulated in terms of general goals or aims that the course hopes to achieve and smaller more specific learning objectives or outcomes, which outline what students should be able to understand and do by the end of a course.[4] These goals and objectives determine the choice of materials and methodology and also the types of assessment. As explained in Chapter 10: *Assessment*, the syllabus works best when the learning outcomes it specifies are closely aligned to the assessments of the course and when the materials and methodology clearly lead to the assessments.

As the discipline of EAP has developed, course designers have recognized the importance of a systematic account of what is to be learned. 'A syllabus publicly declares what the teacher regards as important to the students and so reflects a philosophy of teaching, including beliefs about language and learning.'[5] In most courses, teachers are given a syllabus to which students also have access and which links materials and tasks with individual lesson aims.

Task 1

List the reasons why it is necessary for a teacher and students to have a public description of this kind, i.e., a syllabus.

A syllabus is an account of what it is necessary to cover to achieve the aims of the course. From the syllabus, the programme or scheme of work is derived. This enables both teachers and students to see what they have covered and what they are going to cover. For teachers, the syllabus is the source for planning their teaching week and their daily lessons. It enables them to justify lesson content to students. For students, it provides a framework for them from which to make a coherent record of what they learn, providing a sense of achievement and progress. It is the basis on which to evaluate their learning and the teaching they receive. Without knowledge of the syllabus, it is difficult for students to develop autonomy and critical skills.[6]

For course directors, the syllabus is a document on which to base timetabling, the organization of resources, and guidance for a teacher taking a class for an absent colleague. The syllabus is used to induct and train new members of staff and is the means by which many teachers have learned the basics of EAP.[7] In addition, a syllabus is a prerequisite for systematic reflection, evaluation and review of learning and teaching, which is an essential process for ongoing professional development and for the continuing evolution of the syllabus itself.

A syllabus provides a basis for the accountability of the teaching department to the larger institution or to government education departments or validating

bodies such as BALEAP[8] and the British Council. It shows the principles on which teaching and learning are based and how these align with other courses within a wider curriculum.

Designing a syllabus

Having established the importance of an EAP syllabus and where it fits in a curriculum, it is necessary to consider how to create one – where to start, what to include and how to organize it. Figure 2 outlines the process that will be described in this section.

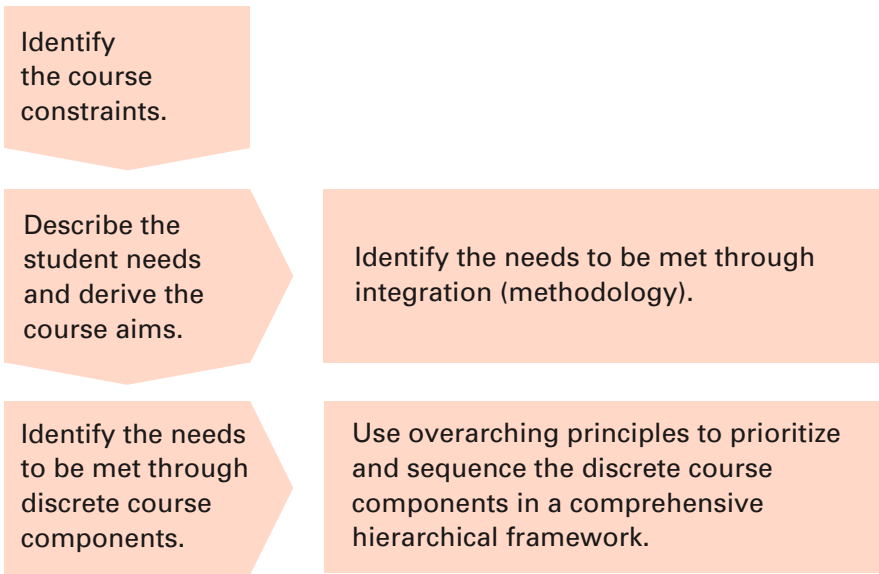


Figure 2: ***The process of designing a syllabus***

Identifying constraints and needs

A well-established and necessary emphasis on learner-centred approaches has led most of the literature to indicate that course design starts with needs analysis.[9] Although needs analysis is an essential step in determining course aims, objectives and content, it is not necessarily the most useful place to start designing a course. The first step is to consider the constraints of the teaching context. In practice, most experienced teachers find they have to adapt or supplement materials because of the teaching situation. Courses only work well when their design takes into account the constraints under which they will be delivered. Courses that are produced in-house for a specific target student group often build in this kind of flexibility. A course written without attention

to these constraints, however carefully constructed in terms of student needs and theories of language and learning, will run into problems.

Constraints

Task 2

Think about your current teaching situation.

- What are some of the constraints you face?
- How do these constraints affect what you are able to teach?

Perhaps the most common constraint is time. Clearly, students would be expected to learn less in four weeks than in twenty weeks. Other constraints have to do with student numbers, institutional practices, availability of resources, teachers' experience and expertise, and learners' experience. The process of setting out these constraints is sometimes called a *means analysis*.[10]

Time is likely to be the constraint that has the most significant impact on course design. Either the course has too few contact hours to allow sufficient development of the students' learning or EAP components have to slot into times that are convenient for the institution rather than convenient for EAP students and teachers. Another significant constraint is class composition. EAP teachers report that dealing with mixed level or mixed discipline groups is one of their greatest difficulties[11] but student numbers rarely allow classes to be made up of learners heading towards the same academic discipline.

Although the benefits of subject-specific input into EAP courses have been well argued,[12] a course for a mixed-discipline group has to have aims that are more generic, i.e., more concerned with procedural knowledge and transferable skills and strategies.[13] The need to work with a wide range of subject-specific texts provides opportunities for collaborative outcomes to tasks and a sharing of expertise. This is enhanced if students bring in texts from their own disciplines. Even an apparently homogeneous group might have a need for a broad-based EAP course with generic aims because the employment opportunities beyond the university are not subject specific and employers, as stakeholders in the course, demand flexibility and a broad range of abilities.[14] In fact, course designers for homogeneous groups have to be very careful that they do not constrain the syllabus by a needs analysis which is too subject-focused.[15] The course designer, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, who was worried about meeting the needs of a wide range of disciplines, can be reassured that there are benefits to a broad-based course. She can also use an understanding of graduate attributes to bring scholarship into the classroom.[16]

Constraints relating to the institution within which an EAP course is delivered include lack of understanding of the language needs of either the students or the

receiving subject departments. Decision makers in the institution may feel that a general English course is sufficient, especially if it is a cheaper option than employing specialist EAP teachers. On the other hand, institutional practice in some countries sees technical vocabulary as a priority and postgraduates and junior teachers from an academic department teach, by translation into English, the technical vocabulary of their discipline to undergraduates. It is sometimes very difficult to change such views.

A particularly worrying belief in some UK institutions, and one with which students and teachers sometimes too readily collude, is that students require a diet of general English to bring them to a vaguely specified proficiency level before they are ready to digest EAP. The result of this is an invisible ceiling through which students cannot pass. This is particularly demotivating for postgraduates who are already experts in their fields and who may have studied English for a number of years. These students respond very negatively to de-contextualized remedial grammar practice or an EFL course book designed for non-academic purposes.

Even when an effective EAP course has been designed and implemented, it is fragile if it depends on collaboration with or support from a single sympathetic decision maker in the institution. If this person moves to another post, the whole project has to be 'sold' to a new, probably very busy, senior post holder.[17] All institutional constraints on EAP teaching and learning need to be critically examined, particularly where they perpetuate a low-status role for the discipline of EAP, and many need to be challenged.

Constraints can relate to the teachers themselves, their experience, knowledge and preferred teaching style. Some teachers may be unwilling to adopt an EAP approach[18] and less confident teachers can feel pressure from learners to change aspects of the course, particularly if the course design encourages students to evaluate teaching and learning. For example, learners might complain that a course is not sufficiently exam focused. Even when such changes might be counter to perceived pedagogic principles, teachers sometimes comply simply to keep students happy.[19] Allowing students the freedom to express their needs requires considerable confidence on the part of teachers, and such confidence only comes with experience in a supportive teaching environment.

In course design, there is always a balance to be struck between what is needed and what is practically possible and sometimes constraints have benefits. For example, a time-constrained course can encourage course designers to promote more learner responsibility. Inevitably, degree subject courses often take priority over EAP and this also may focus course design more effectively to prioritize student needs. One answer to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter, *Where do I start?*, is to identify the course constraints, decide which should be challenged and which are acceptable and then begin to analyze student needs.

Needs

An EAP syllabus is essentially an organized description which answers the question: *What does a student need from an EAP course in order to study academic subjects through the medium of English?*

Task 3

List as many of these needs as you can for a class of EAP students that you know.

The commentary that follows should help you to begin to organize your ideas as a basis for a syllabus. Your list might include descriptions of things students need to know and things they need to be able to do, including language skills and skills for university study. This chaos of competing elements has to be sorted into a coherent, hierarchical or layered description, with unit headings and goals. An EAP syllabus somehow has to organize and describe the most important knowledge and skills that a given set of students need: from how to form the noun for the verb *produce*, to the best organization for a research report; from how to recognize critical stance to how to ask questions in a seminar. Furthermore, because the course will be limited by practical constraints such as the time and resources available, the course designer must prioritize these needs and may have to abandon some of them. Drawing up a syllabus is a complex process based on analyzing constraints, institution requirements and student needs, followed by prioritizing, sequencing and integrating what has to be learned. At each step in the process, there are many possible choices and the resulting syllabus will not only be unique to you and your students but will also be constantly evolving. It is important to recognize that a syllabus is never perfect but always a work-in-progress. However, there are important principles which can help to organize the chaos into an effective syllabus.

The organizing principles for syllabus design

When creating a syllabus, the designer derives the course goals or aims from the description of the needs to be met – what is to be learned. At this point, it is useful to think of two kinds of need. There are some needs that are best met through input that is integrated into all aspects of teaching and learning, i.e., through the methodology of the course. There are other needs that drive the choice of units for the course. These have to be identified, prioritized and sequenced in a principled way to form the syllabus framework. Both types of need have to be made explicit in the course aims.

The principle of integration

Some key abilities are best developed through integral features of activities, tasks and texts throughout the course, rather than as separate lessons.[20] In fact, all the graduate attributes introduced in Chapter 1 need to be integrated in this way. For example, any course preparing for academic study must help students to develop autonomy and the ability to engage critically with all aspects of learning. Coupled with this is the principle of experiential learning,[21] in which students learn from what they do and experience as well as from what they are told and shown. For example, EAP courses can simulate as far as possible the practices of academic departments in the design and implementation of assessments. Student autonomy, critical thinking and experiencing authentic academic practices are important aims in an EAP course, which are met largely through the teaching and learning approach: the methodology. This is described in the second part of this chapter and in the chapters that follow.

Overarching principles

Whatever form the description of student needs eventually takes, there are important overarching features that an EAP syllabus must have. Firstly, it must be developmental, showing how progress is made towards the main goals and the specific learning outcomes over the duration of the course. Progress can be delivered, for example, through increasingly long and conceptually complex texts or tasks, through increasingly challenging rhetorical functions, and through increasing student autonomy. A syllabus without clear development of student abilities is fundamentally flawed.

Secondly, to enable students to review and consolidate their learning, there has to be considerable recycling in the syllabus. Some recycling will be planned into the course through revision sessions and through the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. Some recycling arises naturally but predictably through built-in progression, for example, the rhetorical function of problem and solution recycles cause and effect (to analyze the problem) and comparison and contrast (to evaluate solutions). Some genres also share similar features which can be recycled, e.g., a research proposal and a report may have similar introductions, both containing a short literature review. A great deal of learning recycles in a less predictable way. For example, in feedback on student writing, a teacher may point out that a student has used a collocation that was first noticed in a reading text in an earlier unit. It is important to identify and exploit these opportunities and to relate them explicitly to the syllabus.

Finally, what is learned must be transferable. Materials and activities provided to meet any given syllabus goal or learning outcome are themselves limited in scope and relevance. However, the learning resulting from them needs to

extend beyond the duration of the course to contexts which are sometimes unknown or unspecifiable. This implies recycling, of course, but also requires that students are made aware of the generic nature of what they learn and are able to identify for themselves opportunities for effective transfer of learning – an important component of student autonomy. The three overarching principles of an EAP syllabus are:

- progression towards the overall course goals
- built-in, explicit recycling
- transferability across a range of contexts and disciplines

These three principles enable the course designer to build a framework for the syllabus.

Choosing where to start: building the framework

Having considered the course constraints and the principle of integration, and with the three overarching principles in mind, the course designer has to build a syllabus framework from the needs in the list from Task 3. The way designers describe needs has historically led to a confusing array of different syllabus types,[22] making it difficult for a course designer to know where to start. Syllabuses for language learning have evolved considerably over the past half-century, benefiting from new knowledge about language, its role in society and how it is learned and, in the case of EAP, a developing awareness of what is required for academic study. Because EAP syllabuses are closely related to student needs in academic disciplines, they are necessarily eclectic. This eclecticism has to be guided by a sound understanding of the underlying basis for the analysis of language and skills that gives rise to each particular description of student needs.

Task 4

The left-hand column in the table below shows a variety of ways of describing students' needs.

- For each description of needs, choose the underlying basis for the analysis from the right-hand column.
- Which kinds of analysis can most effectively provide the overarching principles of progression, recycling and transferability?

Description: Students need to	**Analysis:** based on
produce a literature review/give a presentation	sentence grammar
use the present perfect/use modals	vocabulary
skim and scan/proofread	
work in a group to solve a problem in a case study/work with another student to research an answer to a question	rhetorical functions
	genres and texts
use linking words such as *however*/ understand affixes	discourse grammar
use cohesive devices/present and organize information in a paragraph	content and topics
describe a sequence of events/explain a cause and effect relationship/ express uncertainty	academic study skills
have an understanding of the education system they will be studying in/have background knowledge of their target academic area	typical tasks in higher education programmes

Sentence grammar

Grammar items such as the present perfect and modals have long been the starting point for building the framework of general English syllabuses. These items are also important in academic English. However, sentence grammar is not a good basis on which to build the syllabus framework. Analysis at the sentence level presents both teacher and learner with potentially the whole of English grammar as the syllabus – an impossibly enormous task. In addition, a focus on grammar at the sentence level ignores the specific applications that grammar items such as the present perfect and modals have in academic discourse. For example, the present perfect is important in the narrative of a literature review (an academic genre) and for indicating sequence in a description of process (a rhetorical function). Modals in academic texts are used primarily to indicate degree of certainty or possibility but their use to express permission and ability is less frequent. Sentence level grammar items become recyclable

and transferable in EAP once they are associated with genres and rhetorical functions. Language analysis in EAP must look beyond the sentence level to rhetorical functions and genres to provide a framework within which grammar items that are important in academic discourse, e.g., noun phrases, can be selected and prioritized.

Although governments everywhere are trying to move school English syllabuses away from formal, sentence-based grammar to a more communicative approach,[23] most international students will have experienced grammar analyzed at the sentence level and this is likely to form a strong part of their expectations of an EAP course. These expectations can only be countered by demonstrating the value of alternative approaches.

Vocabulary

EAP students need to learn vocabulary appropriate to academic contexts as well as the most frequent words in general use, but, as in the case of sentence grammar, vocabulary is not a good starting point for setting up a syllabus framework. Key vocabulary items are best learned not in isolation but in their contexts[24] and, as in the case of grammar, context is supplied by academic genres and rhetorical functions. For example, students need to be able to use correctly a wide variety of linking words, to understand how affixes affect meaning and to learn those collocations that are most frequent in academic texts. The word *however* is frequent in texts which compare and contrast (rhetorical function); prefixes are important in expressing ideas such as negativity (*un-*, *im-*), quality (*-able, -proof*) and scale (*micro-*). There is clear transferability to different academic disciplines of collocations such as *key factor, major issue* and *implement policies*, and many of these, like grammatical items, are contextualized and recycled through rhetorical functions and genres.

Rhetorical functions

Rhetorical functions, such as describing a sequence of events or explaining a cause and effect relationship, provide a linguistic analysis that is related to a text's communicative purpose rather than its form and so they are a good place to start designing a syllabus. Functions can be used, together with concepts found routinely in academic language, e.g., time, scale, negativity, probability, to provide a syllabus with progression, recycling and transferable language. This type of analysis was the organizing principle of many EAP course books in the 1980s and early 1990s[25] and has considerable advantages. It combines communicative purpose with meaning-based grammar and vocabulary. Functions can generate patterns of language and organization which students can learn and which are highly transferable, e.g., all academic subjects require the description of a sequence of events and explanation of cause and effect

relationships. A writing syllabus, for example, based on rhetorical functions, can be strongly developmental, progressing from paragraph level descriptions and definitions to multi-functional persuasive texts in which functions covered earlier in the syllabus are recycled.[26]

A functional analysis is not the only starting point for deciding the main syllabus units but it is particularly useful in some situations, e.g., for students with lower levels of English. Although rhetorical functions should always form an essential strand of a syllabus, they do not provide all the linguistic skills and understanding needed for students to perform competently at university so they need to be supplemented by analysis of other aspects of academic communication.

Genres and texts

Needs can be described according to the genres, or communicative events, both written and spoken, which give rise to the texts that a learner will have to understand and produce.[27] Examples are research proposals, literature reviews, emails to lecturers and seminar presentations. Genres can provide a particularly good starting point for drawing up a syllabus when assessments also relate to genres, e.g., where students are assessed on a literature review or a presentation. In this case, the assessments and the syllabus are closely aligned. Focus on genres brings to the fore the social nature of texts and, although genres differ enormously in language and form from one discipline to another,[28] they can be studied in such a way as to make learning transferable. By understanding how to analyze genres, identifying how purpose and audience inform the choice of content and organization, students can learn to use genres to achieve the kinds of communicative purposes for specific audiences that will be required in their degree studies.

However, academic genres specify audience and purpose rather than language, and exposure to even a wide range of genres does not directly and systematically develop language ability.[29] A syllabus based only on analysis at the level of academic genres may not provide students with enough exposure to transferable academic language, e.g., the language used to classify or to link causes and effects. In addition, authentic academic texts may be difficult to read and need considerable scaffolding. Both these difficulties can be addressed through an analysis of the rhetorical functions and discourse grammar which operate at paragraph level and support the organizational moves within the genre.

Discourse grammar

Grammatical analysis which operates at the level of the paragraph, discourse grammar, is described in Chapter 2. It equips learners to present and organize information logically and cohesively in a paragraph or longer text and to understand such texts. It is intrinsically recyclable and transferable. This is a neglected level of analysis and one which teachers sometimes find difficult to penetrate. On its own, it is not sufficiently developmental to be the basis of a syllabus. However, when combined with an understanding of rhetorical functions and genres, an awareness of discourse grammar can help students to meet audience expectations of the way texts develop, which can shift the focus of their readers away from the accuracy of the sentence level grammar.[29]

Content and topics

An analysis of student needs at the level of content has the benefit of allowing the course designer to choose motivating topics for reading, writing and discussion that are relevant to a range of academic disciplines or are related to students' experience of higher education. Such content can be valuable input into a syllabus, but on its own, cannot provide the overall aims and the unit-by-unit framework for development, recycling and transferability of language. There are also inherent dangers in a topic-focused approach. Topics that are accessible to students from a range of backgrounds can be too general, particularly for students who are intending to study in that field, and, without the appropriate academic genres, topics are no guarantee of academic content or language.[31] One solution to the problem of mixed discipline EAP courses has been to base content on how students learn and what life is like at university. However, there is a limit to how much time students want or need to spend talking and reading about topics such as how to study or student life. Much of this aspect of student needs can be covered first hand and experientially through the principle of integration, i.e., through the teaching approach and how the course is delivered rather than through content. For example, assessments can be designed with rubrics, deadlines and marking criteria more in line with those at university than those usually found on a general English course.[32] The syllabus can include activities such as making contact with subject departments, open day visits and, where possible, sitting in on lectures and tutorials or interviewing staff and students.[33]

When all the students are following the same academic course, an adjunct or sheltered EAP course is possible,[34] in which academic content is delivered automatically through a syllabus framework of appropriate genres and texts.

Academic study skills

Clearly, EAP students will need particular skills to succeed in higher education. A skills analysis is often used in exam preparation courses, which have tended to dominate the EAP course book market. Often, course designers describe student needs in terms of reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. These are further broken down into sub skills, such as searching for specific information in a text and proofreading a written draft. Such skills are clearly important and need to be developed. They are recyclable and transferable and, therefore, have a place in an EAP syllabus. However, a syllabus framework constructed out of skills leads to a course that neglects language input or 'underspecifies the complexities of language issues in the academic context'.[35] Although most skills-based EAP course books have sections covering rhetorical functions, e.g., comparing and contrasting, the linguistic analysis is sometimes weak and incomplete[36] and rarely allows for the integrated development of conceptual and linguistic understanding. There is also a danger that, without a clear underlying language syllabus, transfer of language is poor across the four main skills, especially if they are taught separately. As Hyland comments: 'We have moved away from the idea of EAP as study skills, like a set of technical tools that you could just apply anywhere'.[37]

Typical tasks in higer education programmes

EAP is concerned with two types of task: tasks to promote learning[38] and tasks to replicate performance in the future academic discourse community. The former is not a description of need (the basis of syllabus design) but rather an aspect of methodology. Tasks in higher education programmes require students to be able to interact to achieve specific outcomes, often of the kind required in professional practice. In both undergraduate and postgraduate courses, therefore, tasks are designed to require collaboration and some negotiation of meaning, e.g., problem solving using a case study or researching the answer to a particular question. Clearly, these types of task can make a useful contribution to any EAP course by replicating study genres and academic performance. Tasks to promote learning or to replicate academic performance can contribute units of syllabus design and can be sequenced according to increasing complexity and authenticity.[39] However, it is difficult to use tasks as a starting point for syllabus design because it is not clear what makes one task more difficult than another and, hence, how they might be sequenced developmentally in terms of language. Genres and rhetorical functions provide a better starting point to allow for progression, recycling and transferability in a syllabus.

Task 5

Look at the contents map or contents page of an EAP course book or a course that you use.

- Which type(s) of analysis from the table in Task 4 are being used to organize the syllabus?
- In the same way, identify the types of analysis that underlie the list of needs you produced in Task 3.

Organizing a description of needs into a syllabus

Each type of analysis is likely to be represented in the contents, i.e., the syllabus, of a modern EAP course because each reveals a different kind of need. As Johnson points out, arguments about which type of analysis is the best basis for a syllabus

> … are no more sensible than arguments as to whether the specifications in a construction contract should cover the foundations or the steel framework or the concrete or the glass or the interior design. The obvious answer is that all of these must be covered.[40]

All analyses discussed above are valid in EAP in that each leads to descriptions of real needs, but not all of them can provide a good starting point for organizing a syllabus. Two possibilities emerge strongly: a syllabus framework based on analysis at the level of rhetorical functions or one based on analysis at the level of genres. Both can include all three principles of progression, recycling and transferability of learning. The choice may ultimately be decided by course constraints. However, all the other needs identified for a particular group of students have to find a place within the chosen framework.

The process of syllabus design may be summarized as follows:

- identifying the constraints under which the course will operate
- identifying the needs of the students which can be realistically met within these constraints
- deciding which needs can be met through integration into texts and tasks and which should form discrete components of the syllabus
- prioritizing and sequencing the discrete course components in a comprehensive hierarchical framework which takes into account the overarching principles

The following authentic case study scenarios illustrate the process of balancing needs and constraints to produce very different syllabus solutions.

Task 6

Below are some authentic course design scenarios, described in terms of needs and constraints.

- Choose one that most nearly reflects your teaching situation.
- Suggest an outline syllabus that could meet the needs within the constraints.

Case study A:
Authentic course design scenarios

Scenario 1: *'Low level' students*[41]

Every year a small number of highly educated mature students, but 'false beginners' who had not learned English formally, applied for EAP courses at a further education college. They wished to prepare for English-medium university courses but because of their low scores on placement tests they were placed in lower level general English classes. Here, they typically made rapid progress in listening and speaking but not in their writing. Their writing was too rudimentary to cope with simple lower intermediate EFL texts, let alone academic ones. They felt frustrated and complained about being kept in general English classes when their aim was academic study, often at postgraduate level. However, there were never enough of these students at any one time to justify the cost of a special writing class.

Scenario 2*: Postgraduate students*[42]

A university engineering department asked an EAP team based at the university to provide a credit-bearing EAP course to run alongside such modules as Software Engineering and Digital Signal Processing in one of their internationally based masters courses. The students came with a high level of English but needed to improve as much as possible for future professional as well as academic purposes in a competitive field. The EAP team were already running a credit-bearing, non-specialist, postgraduate academic writing course. There was no time available to write a new course.

Scenario 3: *Foundation undergraduate students*[43]

A UK university set up an international campus in China in order to teach a range of its undergraduate and postgraduate degrees entirely in that country. The common first year of the undergraduate courses included an EAP programme with assessments that had to be passed in order to proceed. The degree programmes onto which the first cohort

of students hoped to progress were International Communications Studies, International Studies and International Business. A major concern, in view of the target degrees, was the limited world knowledge and academic skills that the students may have acquired compared with the corresponding UK students embarking on the same degree programmes. Although the situation is changing rapidly, teaching and learning for most students in China is much more focused on the final high school exams[44] than in the UK, where a broader exploration of controversial issues is the norm of high school life.

Scenario 4. *In-sessional support for undergraduates*[45]

A worryingly high number of international undergraduate students in Management Studies at a UK university were achieving marks below expectations and seemed to be struggling with plagiarism. They reported language as their main problem in performing well and in integrating with other students. The Management Studies Department were willing to co-operate in providing an optional extra EAP support class and in recruiting students for it.

Scenario 1 does not require a complete EAP course or a complete writing course. It reflects a very specific need for a focus on key elements of both. A short, self-study, EAP literacy course was designed. This bridged the gap between the general English and EAP courses by taking the students from elementary to lower intermediate EAP literacy using a self-study pack. The syllabus units were rhetorical functions, starting with knowledge-telling functions such as very simple instructions (how to make a cup of tea), and progressing through eight units to describing increase and decrease (simple commentary on graphical data). The material could be covered in eight to ten weeks, within a single term, and involved mostly homework with occasional tutorials. The course proved highly motivating for mature students, who particularly liked the recognition of their ability to study effectively and autonomously.

The starting point in the design process was to identify rhetorical functions which would provide recycling and rapid development of language through simple, specially written texts. Rhetorical functions are a useful basis for EAP for learners with an initially low level of English because they concentrate learning and teaching effort on development of language in context. The course was demanding in terms of materials development – one estimate for the time taken to write distance learning materials is that each student effort hour takes at least ten hours of tutor writing time[46] – but it solved the problem of restricted class time and was a one-off investment that proved useful for many years. Online delivery of this course would be an obvious next step.

In Scenario 2, initially, the engineering students were included in the existing wide-angled EAP writing course with a range of other postgraduates. The syllabus had been designed around rhetorical functions as the starting point, but was evolving and beginning to include useful genres, such as literature reviews. By encouraging students to bring in their specialist course materials, it was possible to identify generic features of specialist academic texts.[47] Feedback from the engineering students made it clear that they would prefer to study as a specialist group in order to benefit more from this type of input.

In the following year, feedback from the first cohort of students and the engineering tutors prompted the EAP team to develop a narrow-angled ESAP course. Course review documents and interviews with tutors and students provided information on perceived needs. The starting point in the design process was to identify two key genres for the EAP assessment that the students would need to produce later for their engineering coursework and in professional practice. A poster presentation based on a problem in their field and a literature review of a topic of their choice were selected, giving an assessment-aligned syllabus. Without time to write the course in advance, the team adopted the approach of sketching out a rough syllabus and writing the detail as the course proceeded. Teaching and learning focused on what was needed to produce the assessed EAP coursework. Using authentic materials from students and subject tutors helped to minimize materials writing. This approach provided authentic genres combined with the rhetorical functions needed particularly by engineers (for example, describing objects and processes, presenting problems and evaluating solutions). The syllabus unfolded through a research partnership between students and teachers. The teachers provided the linguistic and skills framework whilst the students researched the distinct genres and the rhetorical functions of their field, collaborating in fine-tuning the syllabus to match their needs.

The starting point in the course design process for Scenario 3 was to identify genres and tasks typical of undergraduate courses: timed examination writing, coursework writing and projects, lectures, presentations and seminar discussions. For the course designers, however, it was important that students additionally had background knowledge to reflect the international nature of the target degree courses. They used a sixth-form level textbook[48] for native speakers of English to provide themes for exam questions, coursework assignments and discussion tasks. The necessary language and skills practice was derived from this book and related texts on the same themes. The whole course was delivered in the same way as a first-year undergraduate course would be in the UK. For example, there was an expectation of developing student responsibility for study and the university's policies on submission deadlines and plagiarism were strictly adhered to. In addition to language and study skills, the exams also assessed retrieval of the textbook content which had been taught, thus providing an authentic undergraduate experience.

Scenario 4 led to an initiative intended to support those students identified as having weaker written and spoken English. What follows is a summary based on the published report.[49] Ten hours per week of EAP were provided. Details of the syllabus used are not presented in the source paper, but the starting point in the design process was to identify weaknesses in terms of academic skills, writing style and basic grammar. The initiative proved disappointing because very few students attended and those that did included a significant proportion of the 'worried well',[50] i.e., reasonably able students who were worried about their skills, rather than the intended target, i.e., students who were experiencing real difficulties. Overall gains in terms of assessments were barely significant.

The analysis of what went wrong is a good illustration of how institutional attitudes and practices can undermine the best intentions in syllabus design. Students, particularly those struggling to keep up, had no incentive to take time away from their core studies to attend long hours of an optional extra course. Recruiting for the support course depended on Management Studies lecturers communicating sensitively to students the importance and benefits of attending. However, the benefits were not made clear, and official communications instead focused negatively on the 'problems' of the students. The first writing exercise, intended to help students to self-select onto the course, involved writing about a culturally loaded case study of a UK football manager. The later EAP sessions clashed with Management Studies coursework deadlines.

Many of these issues were subsequently addressed. Some of the key skills were embedded into credit-bearing modules in the degree course; attempts were made to align the learning outcomes of EAP with other degree course modules to improve the relevance of the EAP input; the timings were improved and a more positive approach to identifying and recruiting students was agreed. An important outcome of trying to resolve difficulties such as these is a realization that subject discipline lecturers bear a responsibility for making their lectures, notes, instructions and advice more accessible to all students. In particular, the whole institution benefits by internationalizing the curriculum through using case studies and examples 'from a wide range of countries and cultures'.[51] EAP courses cannot make up for institutional failings but EAP teachers have a responsibility to bring such failings to the attention of the institution. When this is done sensitively and in a spirit of cooperation, everyone benefits, as in the case of scenario 4.

The role of the classroom teacher in syllabus design

Generally, designing whole courses is the remit of more senior or more experienced EAP teachers. However, all teachers need to take a principled approach when evaluating and modifying course materials.

Task 7

Evaluate the syllabus of an EAP course book or course that you are familiar with in terms of the three overarching principles of progression, recycling and transferability. You may need to look further than the contents page.

- How far does the course integrate critical thinking, student autonomy and experience of academic study in the course units?

Most experienced teachers adapt or supplement courses. Although published materials generally go through extensive review, redrafting and piloting, teachers rarely follow them uncritically and usually make adjustments for their own particular students and situation, i.e., their constraints. In making modifications to course materials, teachers are in fact embarking on small-scale course evaluation and design. Modifying any course has implications. The students should experience the syllabus not simply as a series of related activities and objectives but as a fully integrated whole. Most EAP courses take an eclectic approach in which several strands of analysis are combined to provide a syllabus. However, it should be clear to students and teachers how needs and constraints inform the organizing principles.

Task 8

List any reasons you have had for adapting or supplementing the materials, e.g., a course book, you have used to teach a course.

Reasons for modifying materials can relate to the materials and activities themselves, to the needs of the students in the class, to teacher preferences or to the institution to which the course belongs. Materials might appear dull or culturally inappropriate. They can seem inauthentic in content, style or purpose and, especially in the case of listening recordings, in delivery. Texts may not reflect genres that the students need to use. They may seem too difficult for the level of the class or have subject-specific content that challenges the teacher's expertise. Tasks may not have sufficiently clear instructions; they may need more steps to ensure successful completion; they may be insufficiently challenging. Activities can also fail to exploit the possibilities of the materials and miss opportunities to meet key teaching objectives about language, content, student autonomy, or critical thinking. Materials generally may not recycle enough or may not ensure that learning is transferable to new situations. Sometimes, teachers feel that aspects of a course or course book do not suit their style of delivery or the students' learning styles.

Teachers can experience frustration when institutions dictate course content which is based on outdated views of teaching and learning. Increased

internationalization of the discipline of language teaching means that teachers worldwide can share ideas and access professional development courses and online publications to a degree never seen before. Such teachers may want to develop their teaching practice accordingly. However, sometimes the syllabus and assessments are imposed by a higher authority and it can be difficult to challenge and change established practices from within an institution.[52]

Whatever the reason for modification, it is particularly important to avoid a *Pick and Mix* approach in which favourite bits of different course books are combined in an incoherent way. Supplementation or modifications to materials should not be based on intuition but on the principles of good course design outlined in the earlier sections of this chapter. It is important for teachers to understand these principles so that they can evaluate, justify and share confidently any changes they make. The following constructed case study illustrates a common dilemma faced by teachers new to EAP: whether to fall back on a tried and tested lesson or attempt a new and unfamiliar approach prescribed by the course material.

Case study B:
The Jim Twins: Same topic, different approach

Teacher X was teaching EAP for the first time on a busy pre-sessional course with an in-house syllabus and set of materials. The next unit entitled *Research* contained a suggested text, with tasks, about research on the Jim Twins – twins who were separated at birth but met again in later life. The main aim of the unit was for students to learn how academic writers report and evaluate research. Teacher X read the material and did not feel very confident about using it with her intermediate level students. She was very short of time and so she turned to a unit in an EFL course book that she had used before, which covered the same topic of the Jim Twins and which she knew would stimulate a lot of discussion.

Task 9

Read the following extracts from Text X, chosen by Teacher X, and the course material, Text Y.

- Which would you prefer to use with your EAP students?
- Why?

Teacher X used an article about the Jim Twins of approximately 600 words in the EFL course book, *Cutting Edge Intermediate*.[53] Here are the first and last paragraphs.

Text X

It is well-known that twins are closer to each other than most brothers and sisters – after all, they probably spend more time with each other. Parents of twins often notice that they develop special ways of communicating: they invent their own words and can often finish the other's sentences. In exceptional circumstances, this closeness becomes more extreme: they invent a whole language of their own, as in the case of Grace and Virginia Kennedy from Georgia in the USA, who communicated so successfully in their own special language that they did not speak any English at all until after they started school. In Britain there was the famous case of the 'silent twins', June and Jennifer Gibbons, who were perfectly capable of normal speech, but for years refused to talk to anyone but each other …

… But what can be the explanation for these remarkable similarities? Is it all pure coincidence, or is the explanation in some way genetic? Research into the lives of twins is forcing some experts to admit that our personalities may be at least partly due to 'nature'. On the other hand, analysts are also anxious to emphasise that incredible coincidences do happen all the time, not just in the life of twins.

The course materials used an extract about the Jim Twins from a second year undergraduate text on Marketing entitled *Consumption and Identity*.[54] It is approximately 275 words. Here are the first and last paragraphs.

Text Y

Social scientists are especially keen to study monozygotic (identical) twins which have been separated from birth. As such twins are genetically identical, one would expect that any differences in behaviour would be due to the environment. By studying separated twins, scientists can remove the influence of a common upbringing in a family in studying the effects of inheritance and the environment with respect to personality formation …

… … The study of the 'Jim Twins' seems to indicate that inherited characteristics play a key role in determining identity and consumption behaviour. However, one must be cautious in interpreting such findings. For example, just as the fact that both boys were called 'Jim' is not an effect of heredity, so it is not at all unusual for middle-aged men from the USA to drive Chevrolets and drink beer. Fascinating coincidences about their lives do not link in any conclusive way to any contemporary theories about inheritance. In other research, twins have adopted quite

different behaviours, for example one twin in the same study grew up to be a proficient pianist in a non-musical family while her sister who was adopted by a piano teacher did not take to the instrument.

Teacher X chose her text because she thought the extract from the Marketing course was too difficult for intermediate level students as it contained technical vocabulary (e.g., *monozygotic*). Text X was longer and therefore provided more extensive reading practice as well as giving a more detailed account of the research and having many more interesting examples of twins for discussion, illustrated with photographs. This text left the conclusion open, giving more opportunity for a balanced discussion. The course book lesson notes with Text X included some useful verb tense revision, which many of the students needed. In comparison, Text Y seemed rather dry and boring and the lesson notes directed the teacher to spend a lot of time going over the text several times.

Text Y was chosen by the course designer because it was in an introductory textbook written by one of the lecturers in the university's Business School in which some of the students would subsequently study. It seemed to be a key piece of research in the Marketing course. In addition, although it was short, the writer seemed to use a more academic style, defining key terms such as *monozygotic* in the text and presenting a closely argued but succinct justification for his conclusion. There were also more words from the Academic Word List[55] in the shorter text and more academic noun phrases. It seemed to offer many opportunities for language exploitation.

Task 10

Compare the aims and activities of Teacher X's lesson with those recommended in the course materials.

- What were the most important differences in how the texts were used?

Teacher X's lesson notes using text X **Aims**	**Teaching notes for using text Y** **Aims**
Review the present perfect simple (with *for, since* and *ago*) and past simple verbs. Learn the language for describing life experiences. Discuss the life experience of twins.	Identify the writer's stance when discussing research in a textbook. Learn the language for showing stance and evaluating evidence. Review the organization and language for rhetorical functions.
Revision: target verb tenses **Pre-reading** Clarifying the meaning of key vocabulary (e.g., *leave home*) and matching these life events to a time scale. Discussion of personal experience, personal wishes and cultural differences relating to life events. Lead-in: Discussion about how being a twin affects a person's life and personality.	**Pre-reading** Lead-in: discussion about two types of twins and how they differ. Sorting task: separate human features which are genetically determined (e.g., eye colour) and those which are environmentally determined (e.g., first language).[56] Critical thinking: Why might a marketer be interested in these questions?
Reading 1 (search reading) Matching six sentences to specific twins mentioned in the text, e.g., *They had their own special language* = the Kennedy twins. **Reading 2** (careful reading) Comprehension questions about the research, e.g., How do scientists explain the similarities between the sets of twins separated at birth?	**Reading 1** (search reading) Task to identify the writer's stance, i.e., Does the writer believe that consumer behaviour is genetically determined? **Reading 2** (careful reading) What three reasons does the writer give to support this stance? Write these in your own words.

	Language focus What language does the writer use to show his stance? Record the key words in vocabulary notebooks. **Revision** Text organization: Match parts of the text with their rhetorical functions, e.g., defining, comparing and contrasting. Verb tenses: Identify the different tenses and say why they were used.
Follow up Discussion: Which coincidences were most surprising? Is there a genetic influence – what is your opinion? Are the personalities in your family similar or different? Prepare to talk about the life of a famous person.	**Follow up** Critical thinking: What other research questions could twin studies help to answer? Write some suggestions, with reasons why identical twins would be needed.

Teacher X followed the activities set out in the course book. This is a well-established, task-based EFL course book, reflecting the priority given in the EFL classroom to discussion. The article on which the unit is based is interesting and easy to relate to students' experience. The text has clearly been chosen to present language connected to life events. It focuses on the tenses needed for narration and the vocabulary for biographical information. It is ideal for stimulating discussion of personal experiences and personal opinions. The activities exploit the text fully for these purposes.

However, although both classes have covered the same topic, there are two different underlying syllabuses. Lesson X is task based, with some grammar analysis. There is built in recycling but minimal progression or transferability in terms of academic needs. The class Y syllabus is functionally based and uses an authentic genre. Students in class Y have begun to explore how research is described and evaluated by academics. There is recycling of rhetorical functions and associated verb tenses, progression in terms of the introduction of persuasive rhetorical functions and academic transferability through the

opportunity to write a supported argument and to think critically – to go beyond knowledge telling and into knowledge transforming. Although class X had an interesting and enjoyable lesson, the students in class Y would see a clearer rationale for what they were doing. The authentic source and purpose of text Y would give it credibility, and justify the time spent exploiting the text for language.

This case study illustrates the danger inherent in using non-EAP materials. In deviating from an EAP syllabus, however good the material may be, a teacher might not meet the particular needs of the students. This is especially true in the case of general English or EFL materials, which are not targeted at academic study in English. By making this type of modification, the teacher has applied a syllabus that is hidden, less transparent, less principled and less coherent than the original, and one that is not easily accessed by students or teaching colleagues. However, teaching is only effective when the teacher is fully committed to the course and its materials. Teacher X's choice was probably made through a combination of lack of confidence, time and support. This means that the designer of this course has failed to take into account an important constraint: the experience of at least one of the course teachers. It is important for course designers to anticipate teacher-training needs and build into the course a convincing justification for every demand that the syllabus makes of both students and teachers. It is particularly important in EAP not to let teachers feel de-skilled.

Task 11

Look back to your answers to Task 8.

- Were your modifications justified?
- Did you share your rationale for these changes with colleagues or did you feel this was just a matter for you and your class?
- What are the implications of your decision?

A principled eclectic EAP syllabus addresses the specific needs of the students, within the constraints of the course. Teachers need to maintain unbroken the important strands in its design and follow its inherent principles of integration, progression, recycling and transferability. Teachers and course designers are likely to negotiate a syllabus with students, at least to some extent, and will evaluate and adjust the course as it proceeds and student needs change. However, these changes have to be principled and incorporated into the shared description of the course to ensure that it develops appropriately.

Methodology

The previous section dealt with the *what* of EAP, i.e., the way in which students' language needs can be incorporated into a coherent syllabus. This section looks at the *how* of EAP, i.e., the methodology for achieving the aims and objectives of the syllabus. This aspect has tended to receive less attention from EAP writers and researchers.[57] The teacher's role is to support students in identifying and learning the language they need to achieve their rhetorical purposes and to provide scaffolding and feedback for their performance in communicative tasks. Basturkmen[58] summarizes methodologies in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in terms of the relationship between input, i.e., the point at which students are exposed to samples of language use, and output, i.e., the point at which they use the language in productive tasks. Either students are first presented with models of language use which they are then required to produce themselves, or they follow a 'deep-end strategy'[59] in which they struggle to communicate and, in so doing, recognize the gaps in their language and strategic knowledge. An example of the former is a text-based approach,[60] whereas the latter follows a task-based approach.[61] Both these approaches emphasize the collaborative and experiential nature of teaching and learning. These approaches are illustrated in the following case study of a writing lesson.

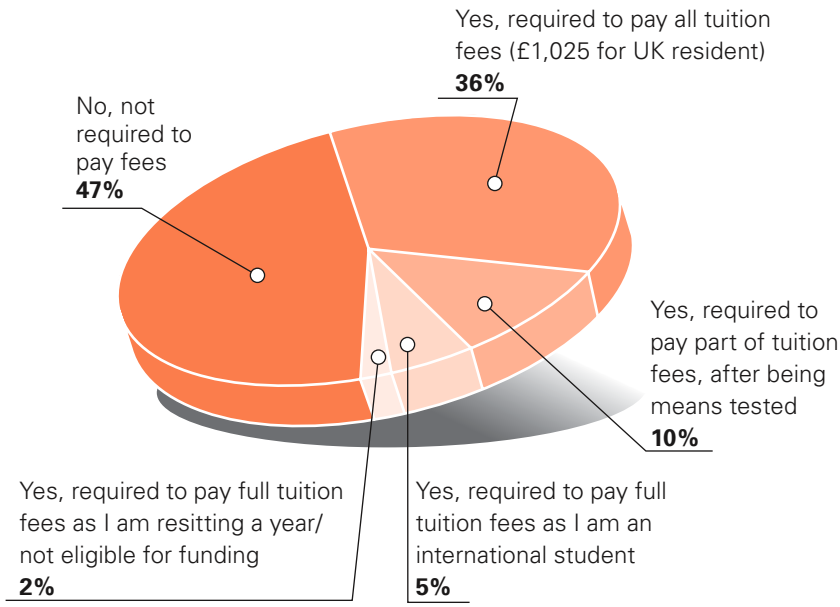
Task 12

- Which parts of the lesson below seem to you to be text-based (i.e., input before output) or task-based (i.e., output before input) or collaborative?
- Where in the lesson does the teacher focus on grammatical form?

Case study C:

Students in an EAP writing class have been working on data commentary, a sub-genre usually contained within a report or research article. In a previous lesson they have been introduced to the concept of data in tables and graphs and how these are used to represent relationships between real world entities or variables. They have analyzed several example texts and are now ready to write a commentary.

Lesson phase 1: The teacher explains that the aim of this lesson is to construct a data commentary which could be used in an information pack for new students who might be interested in reading about changes in higher education in the UK. She shows on a visual display a pie chart showing the proportions of students at university in the UK who have to pay tuition fees.[62]



She asks the students if they are represented on the chart and they locate the segments which show the proportion of overseas students paying full fees or European students paying home fees.

Lesson phase 2: The teacher divides the students into groups of four and asks them to prepare, with their group members, a general statement that describes the main relationship in the pie chart. A scribe in each group prepares their statement for a visual. The teacher notices that students in some groups are discussing what to write but in two of the groups the scribe is writing and the other group members are not contributing. Each group then presents their statement and the class decides which one best represents the data in the chart. The class chooses the following statement:

> *The chart shows students who pay tuition fees and students who do not pay is the same.*

Lesson phase 3: The teacher gives feedback by asking the questions below:

- Are the students really the same?
- Are the numbers exactly the same?
- How can we connect the chart to what it shows?
- How can we make a comparison between two categories in the chart?

Groups discuss the questions and the teacher guides whole class discussion to improve the general statement to the following:

> *The chart shows that the proportion of students who pay tuition fees is about the same as the proportion who do not pay.*

She underlines some of the words as shown and guides the class to identify the sentence patterns in which these collocations typically appear:

shows that + clause identifying the main relationship

first noun phrase + *be* + *about the same as* + second noun phrase

Lesson phase 4: From this general statement produced by the students, the teacher then completes the first part of the commentary herself, writing on the visual and eliciting suggestions from the class as she does so. As she writes, she talks aloud to let the students hear her thinking process. She decides that the commentary needs evidence from the chart to support the general statement. She also expresses surprise that so many students do not have to pay tuition fees (at the time these had just been introduced in England for home and European Union students) and suggests that the commentary needs to explain why many students still do not pay. As she writes and talks, she changes her mind about what language she wants to use and crosses out parts of her text. When she has finished she reads her text aloud and asks the students to comment on anything that does not seem clear. Finally, she guides the class to identify the genre moves in her text. These include:

- the general statement written by the students
- supporting data selected from the chart
- explanations for the main finding

Lesson phase 5: The teacher asks the students to complete the data commentary by writing about the remaining categories in the pie chart, using the same moves as the first part of the commentary. She suggests that they could also do this in their original groups but several students ask to write individually as they want to get feedback on their writing from the teacher rather than from other students.

In the sections which follow, text-based, task-based and collaborative approaches are explained in more detail and then related to the lesson in Case study C.

Text-based learning and teaching: modelling performance

In a text-based approach, examples of genres which the students are likely to need in their studies are used as models for writing or speaking. These genre examples might be 'apprentice exemplars',[63] i.e., produced by students, if these are available. They constitute a more realistic target performance than professional genres such as textbooks or research articles. However, the teacher's writing, produced under time pressure without extensive polishing, is also a good example and it lets students see that even expert writers struggle to produce text. The cycle of learning and teaching activities[64] proceeds as follows: students are first oriented to the genre by discussing its purpose and audience in the context where it is used. Students analyze example texts in the genre to see how they are organized to achieve their purpose for the particular audience that they identified. Students map the organization by identifying the rhetorical moves. The teacher then models the genre and jointly constructs it with the students, using guided writing exercises. This is followed by independent writing on which students receive feedback from peers and the teacher. Finally, students examine other examples of the genre and reflect on the choices other writers made when writing in this genre. It is important to note that a text-based approach is not a template for a single lesson. The learning and teaching cycle might potentially last several weeks if students are working with genres such as documented essays or research reports, which contain sub-genres, e.g., introductions or data commentaries.

In this case study, the students are learning about a sub-genre, data commentary. They have been oriented to the genre in a previous lesson, where they discussed the purpose of data commentary and analyzed the rhetorical moves in several example texts. In the lesson described in this case study, the teacher's aim is to model the genre. She introduces a purpose for writing about this data by asking the students to find whether they are represented in the chart. Their audience will be new students from similar cultural backgrounds to their own who might be interested in reading about changes to fees for higher education in the UK.

The teacher models the sub-genre first by guiding students to write the general statement in groups and then by jointly constructing the moves that follow with the class, thus giving students access to a wider range of possible language choices to realize this sub-genre. She then guides students to analyze the moves and to use the same move structure to write the remainder of the commentary. The teacher's initial feedback, in phase 3 of the lesson, focuses on accurate interpretation of the data, although she does decide to follow this with a quick focus on form for the general statement. The resulting sentence frames are used to scaffold the students' writing in phase 5 of this lesson. In a subsequent lesson, the teacher can focus on organization in her feedback by commenting on whether students have followed the genre moves and selected some data to support a general statement or merely described all the data they can see in the

chart. Peer feedback allows students to decide whether the language they used is appropriate for a student audience.

This teaching and learning cycle can operate at the level of genre, e.g., report, and sub-genre, e.g., data commentary, but also at the level of rhetorical function. For example, students might work on the concept of comparing – which is required for data commentary – by first recognizing that data is often produced in order to compare the behaviour of one variable with another on which it depends. They can then identify comparisons in the general statements from a variety of data commentaries before constructing these statements jointly with the teacher, as in the case study above, and then independently.

Task-based learning and teaching: deep-end performance

In task-based learning, production usually comes before language input. Students are seen primarily as language users rather than language learners.[65] They work on authentic tasks, drawn from the target situation, which require them to use language to achieve the task goal through negotiation of meaning and problem solving. The EAP classroom is an ideal setting for a task-based approach, because it represents a practice situation designed as far as practicable to simulate the public performance situation in the target academic context.[66] Although the classroom settings in which research on task-based learning has been carried out are generally very different from EAP settings,[67] the approach offers a set of principles to inform classroom activities and reflect on their effectiveness. As we saw earlier in this chapter, it can also drive sections of the syllabus.

A task-based approach generally involves pre-task activities to introduce the topic, activate existing knowledge of both language and content, and encourage planning for the task. The task cycle includes doing the task and planning and reporting the outcome to the class. The task can be quite short, as in this example. Students are free to do the task using the language resources available to them and the teacher does not intervene to correct errors. In the post-task phase, students reflect on their performance in the light of feedback from the teacher and their peers or observation of their own recorded performance. At this stage, they can be guided to notice the gap between the language they used and target language forms.[68] However, in keeping with the performance nature of EAP, the feedback should be driven by function rather than grammar, e.g., in the case study: 'How can we make a comparison between two categories in the chart?'

In the case study above, the students are given a task in which they write the general statement that introduces the data commentary. The teacher orients them to the task by asking them to find where they are represented in the data. The task requires collaboration and negotiation to reach a shared understanding of

the data so that the focus is clearly based on meaning not language, although groups must use language to do the task. Groups report their task outcome, i.e., the statement, to the class and the feedback concentrates on task performance, i.e., choosing the statement which best reflects the data, and also on meaning, as the teacher guides students to decide if the statement they have chosen really does represent the data. It is only after focusing on meaning that the teacher focuses on the form of the statement, doing this by questioning whether it achieves its rhetorical purpose.

Focus on grammatical form

EAP students are learning how to do communicative tasks which require them to use language. The main focus is on the successful outcome of the task and not on the language itself, although grammar and vocabulary knowledge is needed to be able to perform the tasks. Therefore, the position of explicit grammar instruction in an EAP syllabus tends to be very different from its position in a traditional grammar syllabus.

General English instruction, even for students at an advanced language level, tends to follow an input before output method: presenting discrete grammar items, practising them in controlled circumstances when accuracy is important, and then allowing freer practice to encourage fluency, all within a single lesson. The grammar items tend to drive lesson planning, so the teacher starts by choosing a grammatical structure, e.g., *second conditional*, and searches for a context where it might be used, e.g., winning the lottery, in order to provide practice drills of the form. Grammar items are named and classified on the basis of form rather than meaning, e.g., *first, second* and *third conditionals*.

Text-based and task-based lessons are driven by meaning-based objectives, e.g., the need to understand and use genre conventions or successfully complete a task. Once this is achieved, a language focus guides students to examine choices that were available to a writer or speaker to achieve the purposes of the genre or the outcome of the task. This focus on form is best driven by functions which allow the performance to be connected to the rhetorical purposes in the text, as illustrated in the case study.

This kind of 'rhetorical consciousness raising',[69] encourages students to view texts as containers of content. When they have understood the content, they can examine the shape of the container, both at the level of social intention – whether the organization achieves the purpose for the specified audience, and at the level of language – whether the ideas are linked logically and coherently. When students come to construct their own texts, they can focus on their own aims and rhetorical purposes, rather than grammatical rules, and choose language to suit.

Collaborative learning and teaching

People learn naturally by cooperating in groups. In families, or special interest groups or in some workplaces, what a person understands and can do is constructed in relation to a community of novice and expert practitioners.[70] Learning arises from the interaction between an individual's current competence and their experience of the world and is mediated by conversations with practitioners in the community. This is effectively an apprenticeship model of learning in which novices have 'legitimate peripheral participation',[71] i.e., the right to share in and learn from the practices of the community. In this view, there is no direct cause and effect link between what is taught and what is learned. Instead, learning is seen as emergent, resulting from conversations between novices and experts or other novices, i.e., students can learn from peers, whose level of understanding is just above their own, or from experts, teachers or more advanced students, who can provide appropriate staging and scaffolding for tasks.[72]

The EAP classroom can become a community of practice for collaborative learning, but it is not enough just to put students in pairs or groups to do tasks as the case study above shows. Two of the groups did not work together effectively on the first writing task and several students decided to write individually at the end of the lesson because they did not think they could receive effective feedback from their peers. In order for a community of practice to develop, and for collaborative learning to be effective, students need to feel committed to achieving tasks they consider to be worthwhile and to take collective responsibility for the outcomes. Tasks should ideally be designed so that it is only possible to do them collaboratively with all group members making a contribution. Even so, students need training in effective group working strategies so they understand their responsibilities and the roles they can play. It takes time for individuals to trust each other, so groups should not be constantly changing. The teacher needs to build a classroom ethos that links shared goals and tasks with supportive feedback. The teacher in this case study is working towards this classroom ethos by encouraging peer feedback which focuses on meaning, e.g., when students choose the best general statement to describe the data, and by modelling collaboration in her joint construction of the data commentary.

An important feature of collaborative learning and teaching is the type and quality of interaction between students and teacher. Laurillard[73] describes the process of learning in an academic context as a collaborative conversation. The term *collaborative* here suggests working together towards a shared goal. Both teacher and student must be able to describe to each other their understanding of a concept and each must become aware of the difference between their descriptions. The teacher then has the responsibility of adapting her description to the level of understanding of the student, who then uses this feedback to attempt to change his

own understanding. The teacher also provides an environment where the student can interact with a real-world task or problem and receive meaningful feedback on his performance so that he can reach a new understanding of the original concept. As the exchange proceeds, the student's developing understanding leads to a new focus for the continuing conversation. Students learning in a group can share the teacher's role of expert in this conversation because each person will have different areas of expertise which they can contribute to the collective understanding of the group.[74]

In the case study, the teacher has provided an environment in which students interact with an authentic task and receive feedback, i.e., interpreting the pie chart. The students describe their understanding of the chart in their general statement. The teacher then responds with questions which challenge their understanding, and the way they have represented it, e.g., with her question about what is actually shown in the chart. She provides an alternative description: *students* or *the proportion of students*. She then guides the class to produce a statement which more accurately describes the data.

Summary of learning and teaching approaches

Many EAP classes will have students going into a range of academic disciplines, and it will not be possible to focus on the disciplinary practices of one specific field. In this case, a general understanding of genres and functions can provide students with tools to analyze the specific texts in their disciplines, once they arrive there, in order to investigate how knowledge is constructed and communicated. Students need to work on tasks similar to those they will meet in the authentic academic context, e.g., writing an essay or participating in a seminar, with the initial focus on meaning and the task goal, followed by a focus on the language used to achieve the task. If possible, students should be given opportunities to research and write or speak about an aspect of their discipline, e.g., to make a concept or problem in their field of study comprehensible to their peers. The role of the teacher is to deconstruct texts through analysis, to model performance or facilitate tasks which require students to use genres or functions to communicate meaning, and to scaffold student learning through collaborative dialogue. Some of these roles can be supported with information and communications technology, as discussed in the next section.

Technology-enhanced learning or E-learning

E-learning is the term used to describe a variety of technology-enhanced learning which is used to support learning and teaching. It is an important part of EAP

teaching, reflecting the fact that communicative language competence in the modern world now also includes the ability to communicate electronically.[75] The term covers a wide range of applications, which include generic word processing or data analysis software to virtual learning environments (VLE) incorporating other media.[76] The terms *blended learning* and *distributed learning* refer to the combination of ICT with other media or face-to-face communication.

The advantages of e-learning for students include increased flexibility to study where, when and how often they want without needing to attend classes according to a fixed timetable. Individual needs can be catered for more easily. Activities and tasks which have specific answers can become interactive, giving students control over when to seek hints to guide problem-solving or reveal answers. The provision of large banks of such activities means students can work on as many or as few tasks as they need to master skills and knowledge. A variety of media – audiovisual, graphical, animation and text – can be integrated to provide a multi-sensory learning experience and increase motivation and involvement.[77] CMC via email or discussion boards has the potential to encourage collaborative learning and to give shy students a voice in discussion. It can also give all students a greater sense of contact with a tutor because an email can be sent to a group but can seem, to each individual, to be addressed to them personally.[78] Teaching can become more efficient as tutors can concentrate on facilitating interaction with software or with other students rather than providing content. They can monitor individual activity better and therefore guide students more effectively.

However, e-learning courses suffer from higher drop-out rates than traditional courses,[79] possibly due to a sense of isolation from tutors and peers. Students are obliged to rely on support from their peers in group discussions and assignments, but it is difficult to establish a sense of community, even in online discussion groups. Students are required to become more autonomous, directing their own learning, but e-learning does not automatically create more autonomous students, and it may be the case that 'learners require a degree of autonomy in advance in order to use new technologies effectively'.[80] Communication is usually written, via email, which is more formal than face-to-face interaction, and the lack of non-verbal cues to support the message can lead to misunderstandings.

E-learning is rapidly becoming embedded in all aspects of university teaching but its potential is not always fully realized because of the gap in experience which can exist between students and lecturers. Students currently at university are likely to be 'digital natives'[81] who have grown up with videogames, mobile phones and the internet. They feel comfortable with multi-tasking or random access reading, e.g., following hypertext links, and often prefer to learn using images or games. However, some university teachers may still be 'digital immigrants'[82] who value text-based resources, prefer reading sequentially on

paper, and find it difficult to integrate ICT into their teaching. One consequence of this for e-learning is that VLEs and other electronic platforms can simply become dumping grounds for traditional lecture handouts and answers to tutorial questions, and are not fully exploited to improve the flexibility and quality of learning. Another more dangerous consequence is that university managers come to view e-learning as a way to teach more students at reduced costs using less well-qualified staff.

The Re-Engineering Assessment Practices (REAP) project, funded by the Scottish Funding Council, showed that e-learning can improve the efficient use of staff time in assessment.[83] In this project, online discussion forums were used successfully with large classes of first-year native speaker undergraduates to enhance the quality of formative assessment and feedback, and help students to understand what is required for university study. However, e-learning does not save staff time or reduce the need for expert involvement. On the contrary, it requires considerable investment of time in learning new skills and approaches, including collaboration with ICT design specialists and moderation of online activities.

E-learning is not a methodology but a means of delivery that can support a variety of methods and approaches.[84] For example, Warschauer contrasted the practices of three writing teachers who were using ICT in their writing courses. One teacher emphasized the mastery of 'formal structures of what she considered the standard academic essay',[85] and gave explicit instructions for writing five paragraphs with five sentences each. A second was concerned 'to immerse students in a writing environment where they could learn as much as possible from their own writing experience'.[86] Her writing topics were personal or related to students' lives in their communities. Only the third, a non-native doctoral student who had experience conducting research, considered that teaching grammar and process writing would not benefit the students but instead they needed 'to realize what graduate life is about [and] how to become more academic in this system'.[87] She encouraged her students to explore and discuss the kinds of writing they were expected to produce at university. Although they had very different views of the best way to teach writing, all three teachers were able to use technology to support their teaching and considered their use of it to be effective.

There is not space to describe the wealth of e-learning technologies or to explain how they can be used. The pace of development in ICT is so rapid that the description would soon be out of date. However, a certain amount of caution is required when making claims about the potential of ICT to deliver better quality learning. It is necessary to be clear about the rationale for using ICT over other modes of delivery, even for distance learning, and to evaluate how it supports learning.

Task 13

Some examples of different types of ICT are listed below.

- Which ones are you familiar with and feel confident using?
- How much input is required from a teacher in setting up or supporting each type?
- How well do you consider that they support the EAP methodologies described above?

- online language practice activities and vocabulary resources
- academic search engines and referencing software
- concordance software – used with purpose-built or web-based corpora[88]
- webpages – providing advice, e.g., about writing, or tools such as anti-plagiarism software
- email and social media – including blogs, wikis and podcasts
- online discussion forums – chat rooms, class forums and academic forums
- presentation software such as Word™ or PowerPoint™
- blogs, wikis and podcasts[89]
- virtual learning environments, including online discussion forums

Some forms of technology-enhanced learning need considerably more time for preparation and development than they require at the point of use. For example, language practice activities require detailed analysis of the types of mistakes that language learners typically make and the kinds of hints that will be helpful when they are interacting with tasks. Teachers also need time to produce these materials themselves or to collaborate with specialist designers. Although the teacher will have to guide students to use these resources independently, and monitor their use at first, this support can be gradually withdrawn. In contrast, online activities, such as discussion forums and web publishing tools, are fairly easy to set up but are often labour-intensive for the teacher in moderating the on-going activity or providing feedback.

Technology-enhanced learning can support the EAP methodologies discussed above to some extent. The internet provides access to an enormous variety of academic texts ranging from prestige genres, such as research papers in online databases, to student projects published in personal webpages. Example texts relating to specific disciplines can be analyzed and used as models or prompts for writing tasks. Texts which contain particular rhetorical functions can be

found by inserting functional search terms into an internet search engine, e.g., *is a factor in* will find texts explaining cause and effect. The internet also acts as a resource for task-based learning, encouraging exploration and research, for example, to find information for a project or advice on citation practices or typical uses and collocations for vocabulary items. The main problem with the internet is the huge variation in the quality of material published online so teachers need to support students in careful choice and evaluation of resources.

Email and discussion forums enable teacher and students to come together online to discuss their understandings, and give and receive feedback in a collaborative conversation. This is the technology that is currently the most useful for EAP teachers and is increasingly used by students in their real lives. It creates a new dynamic between teacher and students because they are participating in a mental space and are not physically together. The teacher is no longer the focus of attention, as in the classroom, or the main source of motivation. Students have to imagine their audience, both teacher and peers, as they write. They can provide support for peers whose level of understanding is just below their own. The teacher becomes a moderator,[90] setting the scope and aims of the discussion and any tasks it is based on, establishing a collaborative environment, defining the code of conduct, providing access to experts, and ensuring that relevant contributions receive an adequate response. This moderating role usually means the teacher is more facilitating than directing and feels less pressure to fill silences, but can wait for students to contribute.[91]

However, simply interacting online does not guarantee that students will be learning skills that are useful for university study, e.g., the language and conventions of a chat room will not be much use for an academic seminar. Students also have to see a clear purpose and evident benefits to make the time required for online communication worthwhile. This means that discussion forums have to be integrated into the syllabus and assessment tasks of the course. The decision to use technology-enhanced learning needs to be based on sound principles which address the needs of students within the constraints of a course.

Conclusion

Course design is a process in which all EAP practitioners are involved, whether designing a comprehensive syllabus or adapting and supplementing materials. The syllabus is generated from descriptions of student needs, and shaped by the constraints of the course context. Needs can be described using a range of levels and types of analysis, but choices of analysis must be principled and transparent. Three important principles in course design, which any EAP syllabus must demonstrate, are progression, recycling, and transferability to other contexts.

No syllabus is ever perfect and the best course designs are always evolving, with the relationships between the elements – assessments, materials, methods and syllabus – under constant review by all the stakeholders in the course. The syllabus is implemented through appropriate methodology in classrooms and through individual study and computer-mediated learning. The role of the teacher is to support students in analyzing texts, to model performance or facilitate tasks which require students to use genres or functions to communicate meaning, and to scaffold student learning through collaborative dialogue.

Further reading

BALEAP Accreditation Scheme Handbook and Resources. https://www.baleap.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/BALEAP-BAS-Handbook-January-2018-v-2.pdf

Bruce, I. (2011). *Theory and concepts of English for Academic Purposes*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Feez, S. (1998). *Text-based syllabus design*. Sydney: NCELTR, Macquarie University.

Hewings, M., & Dudley-Evans, T. (Eds.) (1996). *Evaluation and course design in EAP*. Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall.

Hyland, K. (2006). *English for Academic Purposes: An advanced resource book*. Abingdon: Routledge.