

# Designing an EAP Syllabus: English Language Support for Further and Higher Education

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## 1. Aims.

Many foreign students studying for degrees, BTEC or HND qualifications at British institutions of further or higher education experience problems. Some of these problems will be general to all students, but many will be particular to those students who are non-native speakers of English. The object of a course in English for Academic Purposes is to help overseas students overcome some of the linguistic difficulties involved in studying in English.

## 2. Background to the course.

In the last few years there have been a number of changes in attitudes towards language and language learning. Some of the most significant of these changes have been brought about by sociolinguists trying to define what is meant by communicative competence. Chomsky's (1965) concept of 'linguistic competence', our tacit knowledge of formal structures, has been criticised as being too narrow, and it is now accepted that any theory of language must also take into account our knowledge of the social factors that condition our selection and use of these structures. Thus, Chomsky's notion has to be developed into a broader notion of 'communicative competence', which takes into account the relationship between language and the particular situation in which it is appropriate (Campbell & Wales, 1970; Hymes, 1972).

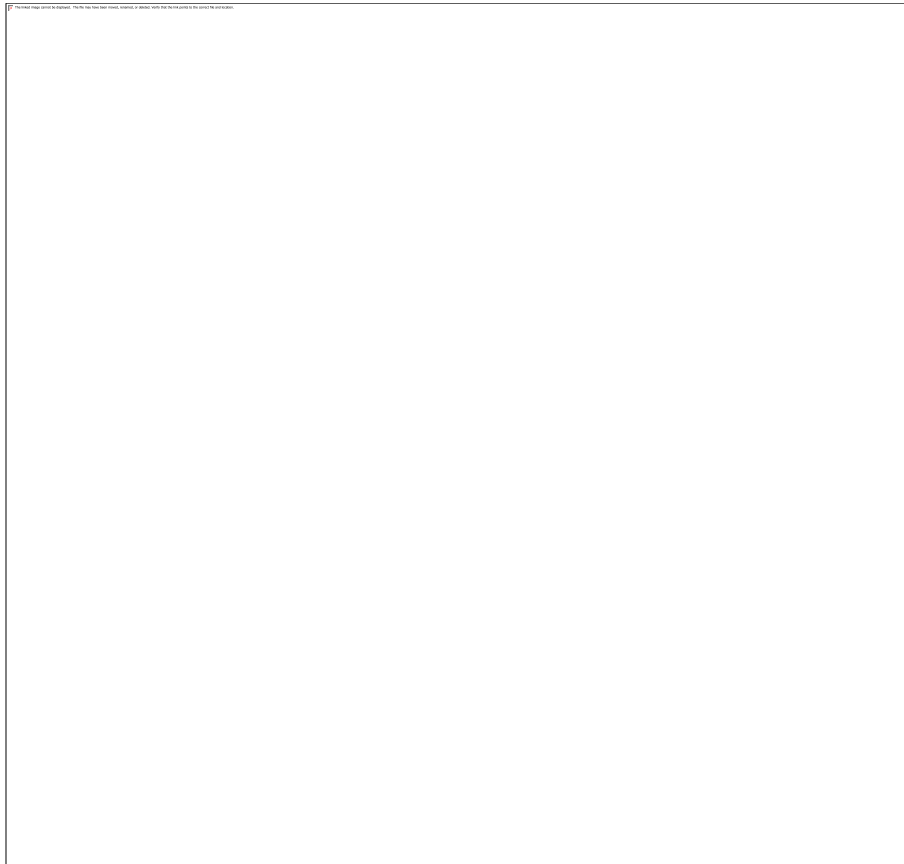
This change in emphasis, from the formal rules of the language to what it is that makes language appropriate in a given situation, has given rise to an interest in languages for particular purposes, and in a closer examination of the precise objectives of the language learner. At the same time, based on the work of the Council of Europe, there has been a move away from grammatical, and situational syllabuses towards those based on a more functional or notional approach (Wilkins, 1976; Van Ek, 1975). This kind of approach takes the communicative factors of language into account from the beginning, without losing sight of grammatical and situational factors. Taking this present state of thinking about language into account, with the belief that more attention should be paid to the purpose for which the language is being studied, then, it is important, in designing any syllabus, to investigate the purposes for which the students use English.

## 3. The approach.

The basic approach to syllabus design that is taken here is an ESP (English for Specific Purposes) approach, which means, broadly, an approach in which the teaching content is matched to the requirements of the learners.

Bell (1981, p. 36) offers a first approximation to language teaching syllabus design as shown in Figure 1.

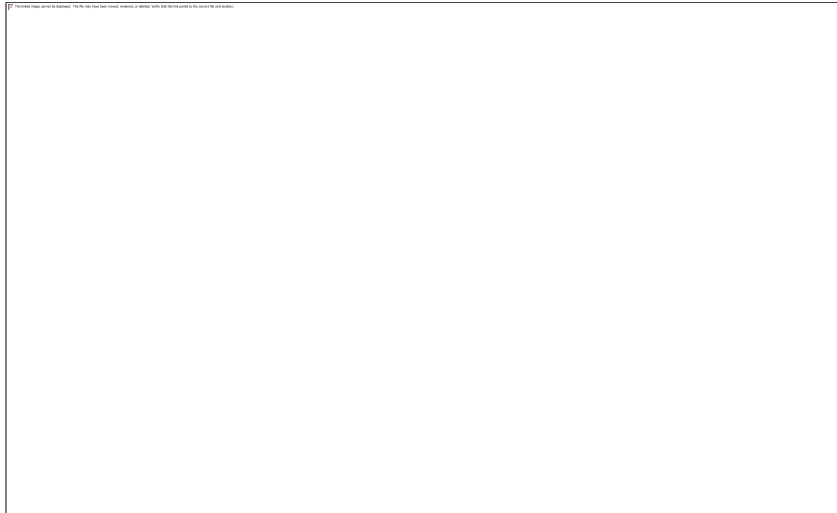
**Figure 1. Language teaching syllabus design**



The left branch is concerned with the external requirements expected of the student. The right branch is related to the student's present competence and the bottom branch is to do with educational philosophy. The main emphasis in the present situation is on the left branch: analyze needs, analyze skills, design syllabus.

The most useful model for analysing linguistic needs is Munby's *Communicative Syllabus Design* (1978). A simplified view of the relevant part of the model is shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. The Munby model.**



The heart of the model is the Communicative Needs Processor (C. N. P.). Information about the learner, the participant, is fed into the C. N. P. which consists of a number of categories. After these categories have been worked through, we finish up with a profile of needs - a description of what the learner will be expected to do with the language at the end of the course.

The following are the relevant categories (Munby, 1978, pp. 154-167):

0. Participant - the learners.

1. Purposive Domain - this category establishes the type of ESP, for what purpose.

e.g. educational: social science, communications studies, law at HE level.

2. Setting - the time and place.

e.g. English University - lecture rooms, tutorials, seminars, library, laboratories, art rooms, examinations.

3. Interaction - the roles in which the participants will find themselves in terms of status, age group, social relationships etc.

e.g. role: student  
relationships: student-student, student-lecturer/tutor/technician

4. Instrumentality

a. medium of communication.

e.g. spoken - receptive and productive

written - receptive and productive.

b. channel of communication.

e.g. face to face, print

5. Dialect - the dialects the student will have to understand and produce.

e.g. standard British accents and dialects.

6. Target level - level of linguistic proficiency, different skills may be different.

e.g. ELTS 7 for Law, JMB grade 3 etc.

7. Communicative event - what the learner will have to do with English.

e.g. attend lectures, take part in seminars, etc

8. Communicative key - the manner in which communication needs to be carried out.

e.g. formal/informal plus range of attitudes.

9. Profile - what the student needs to be able to do.

If we now apply this to our specific situation and look at the communicative event category in more detail, for social science students in higher education we find the following:

### **Settings**

1. Lectures
2. Seminars
3. Tutorials
4. Group projects
5. Practical sessions (Art/Science)
6. Private study
7. Examinations

### **Instrumentality**

1. Spoken - productive (speaking)
2. Spoken - receptive (listening)

3. Written - productive (writing)
4. Written - receptive (reading)

### **Communicative events**

The activities in which the students would use English in each of the above settings are shown in Figure 3.

### **Figure 3. Communicative events.**



In more detail:

#### **1. Lectures.**

- a Listening: (i) listening for general understanding and specific points to remember.
- b Speaking: (i) asking for clarification.
- c Reading: (i) reading handouts and board/OHP.

d Writing: (i) taking notes that can be re-constituted.

## 2. Participating in seminars.

a Listening: (i) listening for general understanding and specific points to remember.

b Speaking: (i) asking for clarification  
(ii) oral presentation from notes/without notes  
(iii) discussion

c Reading: (i) reading handouts and board/OHP.

d Writing: (i) taking notes that can be re-constituted.

## 3. Participating in tutorials.

a Listening: (i) listening for general understanding and specific points to remember.

b Speaking: (i) asking for clarification.  
(ii) discussion of topics from previous lectures or related topics.

c Reading: (i) reading handouts and board/OHP.

d Writing: (i) taking notes that can be re-constituted.

## 4. Group Projects

a Listening: (i) listening for general understanding and specific points to remember.  
(ii) listening to and following instructions.  
(iii) listening to explanations of problems.

b Speaking: (i) asking for clarification.  
(ii) making suggestions.  
(iii) oral presentations of work.  
(iv) discussion.

c Reading: (i) reading handouts and board/OHP.  
(ii) following instructions.

d Writing: (i) taking notes that can be re-constituted.  
(ii) writing reports.  
(iii) writing instructions

## 5. Practical sessions.

a Listening: (i) listening for general understanding and specific points to remember  
(ii) listening to and following instructions.  
(iii) listening to explanations of problems.

b Speaking: (i) asking for clarification.  
(ii) making suggestions.  
(iii) discussion.

- c Reading: (i) reading handouts and board/OHP.  
(ii) following instructions.
- d Writing: (i) taking notes that can be re-constituted.  
(ii) writing reports.  
(iii) writing in support of work.

6. Private study: studying reference materials (textbooks, manuals, articles, handouts etc.) in library or at home.

- a Listening: n/a
- b Speaking: n/a
- c Reading: (i) reading intensively.  
(ii) reading for main information - skimming.  
(iii) reading for specific assignment oriented information - scanning.  
(iv) reading to discover and assess writer's position.  
(v) library skills.
- d Writing: (i) note taking.  
(ii) selecting and organising information for reports and essays.  
(iii) describing theories, practices and trends.  
(iv) writing evaluative reports/essays on theories, practices and procedures.

6. Examinations.

- a Listening: (i) listening to instructions.
- b Speaking: (i) asking for clarification.
- c Reading: (i) reading and understanding examination questions.
- d Writing: (i) writing relevant and correct answers.

## 4. The course.

It would therefore seem useful to suggest that in such an EAP course there should be four main sections to the course from which material will be selected depending on student needs and interests. The syllabus defines what we expect the students to be able to do at the end of the course and will therefore provide specifications for the final examination. The four main sections would be:

- 1 Academic writing
- 2 Academic listening
- 3 Academic reading
- 4 Seminar skills

See appendix for details of the the form such a syllabus could take.

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## Appendix

### The course

1. Academic Writing
2. Academic Reading
3. Seminar Skills
4. Academic Listening



## **Academic Writing Course**

The aim of this course is to enable non-native speakers of English to produce coherent and appropriate formal academic writing.

### **1 Research and using the library**

#### 1.1 Finding relevant information

1.1.1 Using catalogues

1.1.2 Using books and periodicals

1.1.3 Using bibliographies and indexes

#### 1.2 Using sources

1.2.1 Making notes and writing up notes

1.2.2 Paraphrasing

1.2.3 Summarising

1.2.4 Quoting directly

1.2.5 Referring to sources

1.2.6 Writing a references list

### **2 Writing descriptions of places, objects etc.**

2.1 Describing location and direction

2.2 Writing definitions

2.3 Classifying / categorising

2.4 Comparing and contrasting: similarities and differences

2.5 Reporting and narrating

### **3 Describing processes and developments**

3.1 Expressing purpose, means and method

3.2 Expressing degrees of certainty

3.3 Expressing reasons and explanations / cause and effect

3.4 Describing developments and changes

3.5 Describing a sequence of events / time relations

3.6 Writing instructions

#### **4 Developing an argument**

4.1 Presenting arguments, ideas and opinions

4.2 Expressing certainty and doubt

4.3 Supporting an argument: illustrating and exemplifying ideas

4.4 Refuting arguments, ideas and opinions

4.5 Offering evaluative comments on opinions and arguments

4.6 Drawing conclusions

#### **5 Writing an essay**

5.1 Essay organisation: presentation and layout

5.2 Spelling and punctuation

5.3 Including graphs, charts and tables

5.4 Writing paragraphs

5.5 Writing introductions and conclusions

5.6 Academic writing style

5.7 Revising the essay - proofreading

#### **6 Answering exam questions**

6.1 Understanding the question

6.2 Planning the answer

6.3 The exam answer

6.4 Evaluating the answer

## **Academic Reading Course**

The aim of this course is to assist the non-native speaker of English studying in the medium of English at tertiary level to comprehend more fully material of the kind that he or she may be required to read and thus to receive more benefit from the course.

### **1 Understanding meaning**

- 1.1 Deducing the meaning of unfamiliar words and word groups
- 1.2 Understanding relations within the sentence / complex sentences
- 1.3 Understanding explicitly stated information
- 1.4 Recognising implications: information not explicitly stated
- 1.5 Understanding conceptual meaning, e.g. comparison, purpose, cause, effect

### **2 Understanding relationships in the text**

- 2.1 Understanding the communicative value of sentences
- 2.2 Understanding relations between the parts of a text through lexical cohesion devices
- 2.3 Understanding relations between parts of a text through grammatical cohesion devices
- 2.4 Understanding relations between parts of a text by recognising indicators in discourse
- 2.5 Understanding punctuation
- 2.6 Understanding text by going outside it

### **3 Understanding important points**

- 3.1 Distinguishing the main ideas from supporting detail
- 3.2 Recognising unsupported claims and claims supported by evidence: fact from opinion
- 3.3 Extracting salient points to summarise
- 3.4 Selective extraction of relevant points
- 3.5 Following an argument
- 3.6 Reading critically / evaluating the text

## **4 Reading efficiently**

- 4.1 Surveying the textbook/manual
- 4.2 Surveying a chapter/article using first sentences of paragraphs
- 4.3 Surveying a chapter/article using first and last paragraphs
- 4.4 Skimming to get gist / general impression
- 4.5 Scanning to locate specifically required information
- 4.6 Reading quickly

## **5 Reading skills**

- 5.1 Understanding graphs, tables etc.
- 5.2 Reference and library skills
- 5.3 Reading the assignment: using source materials
- 5.4 Note taking
- 5.5 Reading notices and instructions

## **Seminar Skills Course**

The aim of this course is to help the students to be more aware of what is involved in seminar activity and to supply them with some of the interactional language that is used there.

### **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 The purpose of seminars
- 1.2 Making notes to speak from
- 1.3 Using notes to speak from
- 1.4 Pronunciation - voice

### **2 Making a presentation**

- 2.1 The structure of presentations
- 2.2 Introducing the topic
- 2.3 Making a statement of intention
- 2.4 Giving the information in detail
  - 2.4.1 Sequencing
  - 2.4.2 Describing graphs and figures
  - 2.4.3 Describing similarities and differences
  - 2.4.4 Comparing and contrasting
  - 2.4.5 Illustrating a point - giving examples and referring to research
  - 2.4.6 Amplification of a point
  - 2.4.7 Explaining a point
  - 2.4.8 Emphasising a point
- 2.5 Checking that people are following
- 2.6 Summarising and concluding
- 2.7 Inviting others to contribute

### **3 Controlling the discussion**

- 3.1 Chairing the discussion
- 3.2 Changing the subject - moving on
- 3.3 Speeding up things
- 3.4 Directing the discussion
- 3.5 Drawing attention to a breakdown in communication
- 3.6 Coming to a conclusion

#### **4 Participating in the discussion**

- 4.1 Interrupting politely
- 4.2 Asking questions - asking for more information/clarification
- 4.3 Stating a point of view - supporting your view
- 4.4 Agreeing and disagreeing - challenging and commenting
- 4.5 Making suggestions
- 4.6 Checking - making sure that you have understood
- 4.7 Holding the floor - preventing interruptions

#### **5 Listening and note taking**

- 5.1 Recognising important points
- 5.2 Distinguishing fact from opinion
- 5.3 Recognising indicators in discourse
- 5.4 Extracting salient points to summarise
- 5.5 Note taking

## **Academic Listening Course**

The objective of this course is to enable a non-native speaker of English to follow a lecture, discussion or demonstration in English at degree level and write adequate notes on this.

### **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 Introduction to note-taking skills
- 1.2 The purpose of note-taking
- 1.3 How to take notes
- 1.4 Introduction to branching notes
- 1.5 Abbreviations and symbols

### **2 Understanding meaning**

- 2.1 Recognising spoken sentences
- 2.2 Understanding relations within the sentence / complex sentences
- 2.3 Understanding intonation, voice emphasis etc.
- 2.4 Importance markers
- 2.5 Deducing the meaning of unfamiliar words and word groups
- 2.6 Understanding explicitly stated information
- 2.7 Recognising implications: information not explicitly stated
- 2.8 Understanding conceptual meaning, e.g. comparison, purpose, cause, effect
- 2.9 Recognising the speaker's attitude

### **3 Understanding relationships in the lecture/discussion/demonstration**

- 3.1 Understanding the communicative value of sentences
- 3.2 Understanding relations between the parts of a lecture through lexical cohesion devices
- 3.3 Understanding relations between parts of a lecture through grammatical cohesion devices
- 3.4 Understanding relations between parts of a lecture by recognising indicators in discourse

3.5 Understanding the lecture by going outside it

#### **4 Evaluating the importance of information**

4.1 Recognising the sections of a talk

4.2 Recognising repeated or reformulated information

4.3 Distinguishing the main ideas from supporting material

4.4 Recognising unsupported claims and claims supported by evidence: fact from opinion

4.5 Following an argument

4.6 Listening critically / evaluating the text

#### **5 Listening skills**

5.1 Skimming: listening to obtain gist

5.2 Scanning: listening to obtain specific information

5.3 Ignoring irrelevant information

5.4 Selective extraction of relevant points

5.5 Extracting salient points to summarise text

5.6 Following instructions



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