

Competency Framework for Teachers of English for Academic Purposes



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Introduction

The teaching of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has expanded with the increasing use of English for study, teaching and research in further and higher education institutions worldwide. In recognition of a gap which exists in EAP-specific teacher qualifications, BALEAP has established a description of the core competencies of a professional EAP practitioner, in order to provide teachers new to the field, and those responsible for training them, with clear goals and understanding of the role of an EAP teacher. Competency is here understood as 'the technical skills and professional capabilities that a teacher needs to bring to a position in order to fulfill its functions completely' (Aitken, 1998). The development of the competencies framework was informed by the findings of a 3-stage survey of EAP practitioners between April 2005 and January 2006. In addition, the competency framework was presented for discussion at the BALEAP conference in Durham in April 2007. The competencies, thus, reflect best practice as viewed by experienced practitioners.

The competencies are primarily intended to provide guidance for the professional development of less experienced teachers. They are based on the assumption that a teacher already has post-experience training in the teaching of English and experience of studying at postgraduate level (see Appendix for example qualifications and experience in the UK). The framework specifies core competencies at masters level, where practitioners are expected to demonstrate a systematic understanding of the main theoretical areas of a discipline and critical awareness of current issues and problems. They should be able to exercise independent initiative to make complex decisions, plan tasks or deal with problems in the absence of complete or consistent information. They should show a commitment to continue to develop professionally.¹

It is envisaged that the competency framework could be used as one or more of the following:

- An agreed description of good practice
- A reference document acting as a basis for:
 - supporting the professional development of EAP teachers within institutions
 - self-monitoring of professional development for freelance teachers
 - accreditation of individual teacher portfolios as evidence of professional achievement
 - EAP teacher recruitment and selection
 - course design for teacher training in EAP
 - course accreditation for teacher training in EAP
- A means of raising the profile of the profession within institutions and the further and higher education sector

¹ More detailed specification of masters level is available online at the QAA Framework for higher education qualifications in England and Wales (2001) <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/EWNI/default.asp> retrieved 20.01.08 and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications framework <http://www.scfq.org.uk/downloads.asp> retrieved 20.01.08.

Overall competency statement

An EAP teacher will be able to facilitate students' acquisition of the language, skills and strategies required for studying in a further or higher education context and to support students' understanding of approaches to interpreting and responding to the requirements of academic tasks and their related processes.

Summary of competency statements

Academic practice	an EAP teacher will –
Academic contexts	have a reasonable knowledge of the organizational, educational and communicative policies, practices, values and conventions of universities.
Disciplinary differences	be able to recognize and explore disciplinary differences and how they influence the way knowledge is expanded and communicated.
Academic discourse	have a high level of systemic language knowledge including knowledge of discourse analysis.
Personal learning, development and autonomy	recognize the importance of applying to his or her own practice the standards expected of students and other academic staff.
EAP students	an EAP teacher will understand –
Student needs	the requirements of the target context that students wish to enter as well as the needs of students in relation to their prior learning experiences and how these might influence their current educational expectations.
Student critical thinking	the role of critical thinking in academic contexts and will employ tasks, processes and interactions that require students to demonstrate critical thinking skills.
Student autonomy	the importance of student autonomy in academic contexts and will employ tasks, processes and interactions that require students to work effectively in groups or independently as appropriate.
Curriculum development	an EAP teacher will understand –
Syllabus and programme development	the main types of language syllabus and will be able to transform a syllabus into a programme that addresses students' needs in the academic context within which the EAP course is located.
Text processing and text production	approaches to text classification and discourse analysis and will be able to organize courses, units and tasks around whole texts or text segments in ways that develop students' processing and production of spoken and written texts.
Programme implementation	an EAP teacher will be –
Teaching practices	familiar with the methods, practices and techniques of communicative language teaching and be able to locate these within an academic context and relate them to teaching the language and skills required by academic tasks and processes.
Assessment practices	able to assess academic language and skills tasks using formative and summative assessment.

Competencies relating to academic practice

1. Academic Contexts

An EAP teacher will have a reasonable knowledge of the organizational, educational and communicative policies, practices, values and conventions of universities.

Knowledge & understanding of –	Ability to –	Possible indicators –
norms and conventions of universities in relation to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • course structure • teaching and learning • staff/student communication • assessment 	work with materials and tasks from different subject areas and engage with the ideas they present	relate EAP course objectives, content and skills to the contexts and requirements of university courses
modes of knowledge communication and publication including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • print media • electronic media • oral genres (e.g., lectures, seminars, conference presentations) 	help students find their way into the writing and speaking practices of their disciplines and institutions	require outcome tasks to be presented in print, oral and electronic modes in line with the cultural practices of the university
university policies relating to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ethical practices • respect for intellectual property • disciplinary procedures • student support 	help students to understand university policies and procedures and the reasons behind them	use appropriate citation and referencing in learning activities and prepared assessed tasks

2. Disciplinary Differences

An EAP teacher will be able to recognize and explore disciplinary differences and how they influence the way knowledge is expanded and communicated.

Knowledge & understanding of –	Ability to –	Possible indicators –
discourse communities and how membership and full participation is achieved	work with subject specialists and take account of their different perspectives with regard to knowledge communication	provide students with frameworks to investigate disciplinary differences and values, particularly in relation to the communication of knowledge
audience within discourse communities	raise students' awareness of discourse features of texts in their disciplines	guide students to investigate the genres and expert practitioners of their specific discourse communities
the importance of evidence-based reasoning in knowledge creation	train students to investigate the practices of their disciplines (e.g., the use and citation of sources as evidence)	

3. Academic Discourse

An EAP teacher will have a high level of systemic language knowledge including knowledge of discourse analysis.

Knowledge & understanding of –	Ability to –	Possible indicators –
discourse features and sub-technical vocabulary which would allow teachers to read and make sense of texts without being subject specialists: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • grammar and syntax at the level of phrase, clause and sentence • discourse features beyond the sentence • cohesion and coherence • semantics and pragmatics • approaches to text classification, e.g., theories of genre and text type 	apply theories of text and discourse analysis to course organization, materials selection and development, and assessment	analyse examples of academic genres in terms of the features of systemic language knowledge listed show the teaching of features of systemic language knowledge as having value when part of a functioning whole provide analytical feedback, across the range of features of systemic language knowledge, which promotes accuracy in students' spoken and written outputs

4. Personal Learning, Development and Autonomy

An EAP teacher will recognize the importance of applying to his or her own practice the standards expected of students and other academic staff.

Knowledge & understanding of –	Ability to –	Possible indicators –
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the importance of continuing professional development • appropriate professional terminology • current issues in teaching and researching EAP • the role of ambiguity in academic enquiry • the importance of critical reflection on own practice 	take appropriate decisions based on own knowledge and understanding write and speak clearly, coherently and appropriately engage with academic research and literature to inform own practice and communicate these ideas to colleagues	relate personal approach to teaching to a specific EAP teaching context review an article/book/teaching journal or provide evidence of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • action research • conference presentation • published paper

Competencies relating to EAP students

5. Student Needs

An EAP teacher will understand the requirements of the target context that students wish to enter as well as the needs of students in relation to their prior learning experiences and how these might influence their current educational expectations.

Knowledge & understanding of –	Ability to –	Possible indicators –
<p>the prior learning, expectations and values that students are likely to bring from their original learning cultures</p> <p>the specific language knowledge and skills, educational values and roles necessary for participation in the target learning culture</p> <p>the different content and focus required at pre-sessional, undergraduate in-sessional and postgraduate in-sessional levels</p>	<p>undertake a principled and systematic analysis of the gap between students' competence and what they need for academic study</p>	<p>show effective communication with students from a range of cultural backgrounds</p> <p>provide pathways into the target learning culture which lead to understanding of its values, processes and tasks</p> <p>show the use of a range of teaching methods and teacher roles in response to different types of learner needs</p> <p>show the use of tasks and materials that incorporate a variety of learner roles and learning styles</p>

6. Student Critical Thinking

An EAP teacher will understand the role of critical thinking in academic contexts and will employ tasks, processes and interactions that require students to demonstrate critical thinking skills.

Knowledge & understanding of –	Ability to –	Possible indicators –
<p>how critical thinking underpins academic practice</p> <p>the elements of critical thinking</p> <p>critical approaches to knowledge to enable its evaluation and expansion</p>	<p>make links between critical thinking and study competence explicit for students</p> <p>provide opportunities and stimulus for critical thinking in sequences of learning activities</p>	<p>show students' development incrementally across time through syllabus/tasks/lesson plans/materials</p> <p>demonstrate that syllabus/ materials/ assessment contain knowledge transforming tasks and activities</p> <p>show how students review and evaluate their own learning aims/materials/ activities/ assessment in terms of usefulness for future study</p>

7. Student Autonomy

An EAP teacher will understand the importance of student autonomy in academic contexts and will employ tasks, processes and interactions that require students to work effectively in groups or independently as appropriate.

Knowledge & understanding of –	Ability to –	Possible indicators –
<p>the principles of student autonomy</p> <p>the use of new technologies to support autonomous learning</p> <p>how to support student autonomy through group activities and individual tutoring</p>	<p>make the link between autonomy and academic study explicit to students</p> <p>stage the sequence of learning activities from guided to facilitated to autonomous</p> <p>foster student autonomy through group activities as well as one-to-one tutorials</p>	<p>demonstrate the promotion of student choice/ active engagement/ reflection/ students taking responsibility in syllabus/tasks/lesson plans/ materials</p> <p>require students to plan, draft and present larger summative tasks</p> <p>require students to show how they took responsibility for achieving group tasks</p>

Competencies relating to curriculum development

8. Syllabus and Programme Development

An EAP teacher will understand the main types of language syllabus and will be able to transform a syllabus into a programme that addresses students' needs in the academic context within which the EAP course is located.

Knowledge & understanding of –	Ability to –	Possible indicators –
<p>a range of EAP syllabus types</p> <p>the need in a syllabus for progression and recycling and transfer of knowledge and skills to other learning contexts</p> <p>constraints and their impact on syllabus design</p>	<p>identify aims and objectives of an EAP syllabus to address the gap between students' competence and what they need for academic study</p> <p>integrate course objectives, language and skills content and assessment</p> <p>select, adapt or create materials from appropriate sources and develop appropriate tasks</p>	<p>demonstrate the relationship between student needs and the implementation of a syllabus in a programme</p> <p>articulate course objectives in ways that show how they will be assessed</p> <p>justify the selection of material</p>

9. Text processing and text production

An EAP teacher will understand approaches to text classification and discourse analysis and will be able to organize courses, units and tasks around whole texts or text segments in ways that develop students' processing and production of spoken and written texts.

Knowledge & understanding of –	Ability to –	Possible indicators –
<p>approaches to text classification and analysis such as those used in genre research, including the functional and rhetorical features of texts</p> <p>disciplinary differences evident in academic genres</p> <p>text processing skills and strategies</p> <p>text production skills and strategies</p>	<p>identify and analyse academic genres and the functional and rhetorical features of academic texts and train students to do the same</p> <p>incorporate explicit analysis of spoken and written texts into sequences of teaching and learning activities</p> <p>stage and scaffold the teaching of reading and listening for study purposes</p> <p>use a text-based approach for teaching writing and speaking skills</p>	<p>design a programme that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses whole texts or text segments • integrates text processing and text production • uses cycles of analysis and synthesis of processes, skills and tasks

Competencies relating to programme implementation

10. Teaching Practices

An EAP teacher will be familiar with the methods, practices and techniques of communicative language teaching and be able to locate these within an academic context and relate them to teaching the language and skills required by academic tasks and processes.

Knowledge & understanding of –	Ability to –	Possible indicators –
<p>the key differences between the content and processes required for teaching and learning in an EAP class compared with a general ELT class</p> <p>a developed repertoire of teaching techniques and the rationale for their appropriate use</p>	<p>plan and deliver a programme of lessons based on a syllabus</p> <p>distinguish between teaching subject content, procedural knowledge (e.g., how to go about doing a task) and language knowledge</p> <p>integrate teaching of academic language and academic study skills in lessons</p> <p>integrate study skills into other skills teaching</p> <p>integrate IT into delivery, to enhance IT skills and reflect academic practices</p> <p>respond flexibly and exploit unplanned learning opportunities effectively</p>	<p>justify lesson plans on the basis of students' needs and syllabus. Evaluate a core textbook for a particular context</p> <p>adapt or create materials and explain the rationale behind these</p> <p>reflect on and respond to observation or student feedback on teaching</p> <p>comment on a revised lesson plan</p>

11. Assessment Practices

An EAP teacher will be able to assess academic language and skills tasks using formative and summative assessment.

Knowledge & understanding of –	Ability to –	Possible indicators –
<p>different modes of EAP assessment</p> <p>the link between assessment and teaching and learning in EAP</p> <p>the purpose and structure of international proficiency tests e.g., IELTS and TOEFL</p>	<p>integrate course objectives, language and skills content with assessment</p> <p>select appropriate modes of assessment and design or evaluate assessment tools for language and skills for EAP listening, speaking, reading and writing, including integrated skills</p> <p>apply marking criteria consistently and to agreed standards</p> <p>give appropriate feedback on oral and written student performance</p> <p>use assessment outcomes to inform teaching and learning</p>	<p>In a specific context justify examples of assessment instruments in a specific EAP context</p> <p>evaluate an assessment tool comment on the application of marking criteria to assessment instruments</p> <p>comment critically on the mode and appropriacy of feedback given on student work</p> <p>justify changes to a lesson plan or programme of work</p>

Glossary of key terms

Academic discourse —

relates to the common understandings, norms, conventions, language, vocabulary, rituals etc for communication within the discourse community or 'community of practice'. (Johns, 1994)

Autonomy —

is both independence and interdependence (Little, 1991; 1994 cited in Blin, 2004). Independence entails taking responsibility for one's own learning, setting objectives, and making informed pedagogical decisions based on some form of self-evaluation. The development of learner autonomy can be seen not only as the development of 'individual' autonomy but also as the development of a social, and even political autonomy through which a group of learners will collectively take responsibility for and control their learning. (Blin, 2004).

Competency —

is here understood as 'the technical skills and professional capabilities that a teacher needs to bring to a position in order to fulfill its functions completely' (Aitken,1998).

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Appendix 1:

Examples of appropriate qualifications and experience for the UK context

- Undergraduate degree
- Postgraduate degree
- Relevant subject focus in undergraduate or postgraduate degree
- ELT/TESOL/Applied Linguistics focus in undergraduate or postgraduate degree
- Cambridge ESOL of Trinity Diploma in English Language Teaching (or equivalent)
- Postgraduate Certificate in Education

- ELT teaching experience
- Experience of educational sectors outside ELT
- Experience of teaching at university level
- Experience of teaching students from other cultures
- Experience of teaching abroad
- Experience of other academic cultures
- Experience of doing research
- Experience of learning another language

Appendix 2:

This competency framework has been compiled by a BALEAP working party whose members included Olwyn Alexander, Douglas Bell, Sandra Cardew, Julie King, Anne Pallant, Mary Scott, Desmond Thomas, Magdalen Ward Goodbody.

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