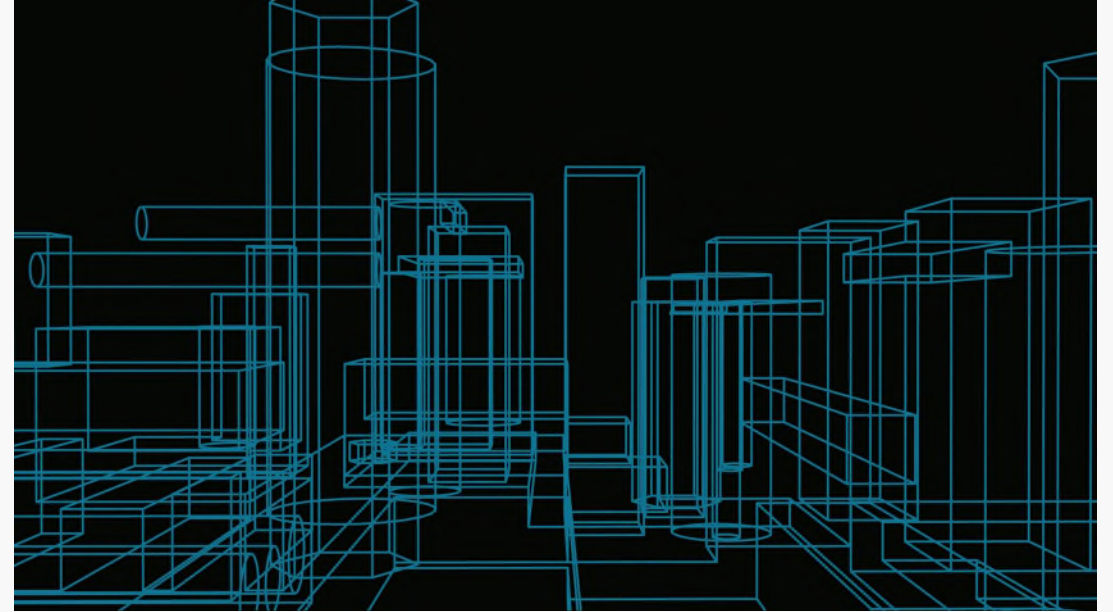


Deconstructing the concept of essay creation.

*Can it be delivered in an oral
mode?*



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***Before I start,
let's quietly reflect ...***

- Are we good at spontaneous academic/formal speaking?
- Can we 'hold the floor' when we are unexpectedly 'given the floor'?
- Do we always need to write our speech down before delivering it? Do we always need to rehearse formal monologues before delivering them? Do we always need visual aids?
- Can we trust ourselves to finish a line of sophisticated thought without memorising it in advance?

Aim:

- ❖ to discuss 'oral essay' as a concept under construction
- ❖ to discuss the results of a PhD pilot study
(supervisors: prof. Lesley Gourlay & prof. Alison Clark-Wilson)

Outline:

- Is the essay really dead?
- Conceptualising 'oral essay'
- Motivators for the research project
- Pilot study design
- Pilot study preliminary results
- Quotes from interviews
- What's next?

Is the essay really dead...

- **Articles in academic journals**

Richard Andrews, 'The End of the Essay', 2003

Tom Gyenes and Judith Wilks, 'Is the Essay Dead?', 2014

Brandon Konoval, 'Is the Essay Dead?', 2022

- **Current media hype and metaphors of death**

'The college essay is dead' ([Marche, 2022](#))

'The essay is dead, but it's not yet buried' ([Zaretsky, 2023](#))

'Did ChatGPT kill the student essay?' ([Skorburg & White, 2023](#))

'If AI kills the essay, I will be a pallbearer at the funeral' ([Bugeja, 2023](#))

... or is it still 'alive and well'?

(Andrews, 2003)?

Conceptualising oral essay

‘Part of its [essay] longevity is a result of its flexibility, its ability to adapt to different functions’.
(Andrews, 2003, p.126)

Can an essay adapt to a different mode of delivery?

‘Oral essay’ - a ‘spontaneous’ structured oral monologue without visual aids or prepared manuscripts (where students are ‘given the floor’ to orally construct a critical academic argument combining personal stance and experts’ ideas)

- ✓ Performance aspect removed (no standing, no microphone required, body language irrelevant)
Focus on articulating ideas, building on the views of others and constructing an academic narrative
- ✓ Aimed at all students, regardless of linguistic background (home and international students)
- ? Assessment? Assessment of learning, for learning or as learning? Skill-development task?
Exercise in academic literacy? Assignment? Scaffolding tool? ‘A means by which learning could take place’ (Tsang, 2020)? Communication genre? Speech event?
- ? Marking criteria? Assessment rubrics? Rating scales? Learning outcomes? Desirable goals?

Conceptualising oral essay

Mercer, Warwick & Ahmed's Oracy Skills Framework (2017)

Gordon Joughin's dimensions of oral assessment (1998)

Ursula Wingate's essay framework (2012)

Ervin Goffman's ideas about 'fresh talk' (1981)

Peter Elbow (ed.) Landmark Essays on Speech and Writing (2015)

Motivators for the 'oral essay' project

- ✓ My professional experience and the concepts of 'ownership' and 'detachment'

'I own the words I speak more than I own the words that I write'.

(student's sentiment recorded by Joughin, 2008, p.107)

'Omnia mea mecum porto' ('All that is mine I carry with me')

- ✓ The appeal to develop students' oracy skills and put oracy in HE on research agenda

(Heron, 2019; Heron et al, 2021; Mercer et al, 2017; Wilkinson, 1965)

'Skewed by deprivation and privilege' (Dockrell, 2019)

'Cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1986) that can improve employability and enable social mobility?

'Oracy as competence' and 'oracy for learning' (Heron et al, 2022)

Tool for thinking, meaning making, constructing knowledge and enhancing learning? (Mah, 2016; Vygotsky, 1986)

- ✓ The need to continue diversifying assessment for an increasingly diverse student cohort

(O'Neill and Padden, 2021)

- ✓ The introduction of sophisticated AI writing tools *(Rudolph et al, 2023)*

AI vs HI? What makes us human? [Raising the standards on being human.](#)

Pilot study

- **Part of the on-going Design-Based Research PhD project**
(*interventionist, collaborative, iterative* — McKenney & Reeves, 2018; Bakker, 2018)
- **Exploratory stage**
(to illuminate potential features of an oral essay & to listen to students' voices)
 - R.Q.1. How is the task of 'oral essay' interpreted by students?
 - R.Q.2. What are students' attitudes towards an essay task when it is implemented in an oral format?
 - R.Q.3. How do students characterise their performance of an oral essay task?
 - R.Q.4. Which features of the written essay are exhibited in the oral essay?
- **Sample:** non-probability small convenience sample, n=7, international, Master's
- **Ethics:** voluntary participation, outside classroom time, minimised power imbalance
- **'Oral essay' task:** read a small number of quotes (experts' ideas), then synthesize and incorporate them into your own oral argument on a given topic
- **Mixed methods (pragmatism paradigm):** observation of oral essay production, semi-structured interview, background questionnaire, self-rating scale

[illegible]

OK...umm...good afternoon and now...err... I would like to talk about different types of...err... teaching methods. Err...Now...err.. in my opinion ...err.. flipped classroom **methods method** is the best way...err..to teach and learn. Err...I...err...seems to me that...err..we don't as to as teachers...err..and students...err...we don't need to...err..read...err..what we could read...err..from books. And...err.. **the** to discuss...err.. what we just read...err..it's a better way to learn. And...err.. it also...err.. reinforced our current law knowledge. Err...and it is also beneficial...err..about...err.. study discipline. Err...so...err..I would like to...err..explain...err.. my ideas about this...err..teaching method. Err...firstly ..err..as a student and...err..former teacher...err..I can say that students don't need to hear...err..what they could read from books. Err...I think reading...err.. is a better way...err..than listening **to learning something (pause) to learn something**. Err...flipped flipped method allows to discuss...err..what they have learned...err..in class and this reinforce what they have learned. Err...(unintelligible) they won't forget...err..most of what they have learned. That's why...err.. it seems to me that it is the best learning methods. Err...and...**in in** addition to this...err..it is also beneficial in terms of study discipline...err..which is a very important attribute for...err..students teachers and researchers. Err...and...as...err..Ansori and Nafi said...err.. autonomous learning and classroom interaction is...err..an important...err..study skills and...err.. this flipped method...err..is convenient...err..for autonomous learning and classroom interaction. Err...however...err..in contrary of Chuang Weng and Cheng's ideas...err..I don't think that...err..these...err.. learning methods depend on motivation of the students because it is actually...err..the same for every other learning methods. So it is not a disadvantage for this...err..type of learning methods and...err..I also don't agree with...err..Singh et al's ideas about language barrier. Err...that's true...err..**it's it's it might be** a problem for the students who don't have enough English level but the on the other hand all of the students must have a good enough English level to attend classes so it is not an important problem I think. And...umm...**as I said as I mentioned before**...err..Singh argued that...err..this type of method...err..is...err..beneficial for (untintelligible) and time management. So...err..in conclusion...err..I can say that...err..this flipped method...err..is the best learning | method because...err..in this way...err..we can remember most of...err..what we learn in the classes. And it is also...err..beneficial for our study discipline, which is very important for us. Err...that's why...err..these...err..type of...err..method should be apply...err..on classes. It's all I have to say. Thank you for your listening.

Ok, good afternoon, and now I would like to talk about different types of teaching methods. Now, in my opinion, flipped classroom method is the best way to teach and learn. Seems to me that we, as teachers and students, don't need to read what we could read from books. And to discuss what we just read, it's a better way to learn. And it also reinforced our current law knowledge. And it is also beneficial about study discipline. So I would like to explain my ideas about this teaching method. Firstly, as a student and former teacher, I can say that students don't need to hear what they could read from books. I think reading is a better way than listening to learn something. Flipped method allows to discuss what they have learned in class and this reinforce what they have learned. (*unintelligible*) they won't forget most of what they have learned. That's why it seems to me that it is the best learning methods. And in addition to this, it is also beneficial in terms of study discipline, which is a very important attribute for students, teachers and researchers. And as Ansori and Nafi said, autonomous learning and classroom interaction is an important study skills and this flipped method is convenient for autonomous learning and classroom interaction. However, in contrary of Chuang, Weng and Cheng's ideas, I don't think that these learning methods depend on motivation of the students, because it is actually the same for every other learning methods. So, it is not a disadvantage for this type of learning methods, and I also don't agree with Singh et al's ideas about language barrier. That's true; it might be a problem for the students who don't have enough English level, but, on the other hand, all of the students must have a good enough English level to attend classes so it is not an important problem, I think. And, as I mentioned before, Singh argued that this type of method is beneficial for (*untintelligible*) and time management. So, in conclusion, I can say that this flipped method is the best learning method because in this way we can remember most of what we learn in the classes. And it is also beneficial for our study discipline, which is very important for us. That's why these type of method should be apply on classes. It's all I have to say. Thank you for your listening. **(407 words)**

(without speech disfluencies, but with additional punctuation)

Green – features normally present in written essays

structural elements (introduction, main body, conclusion) – but students were directly instructed to include them
linking words (e.g. firstly, in addition to this, however, on the other hand, in conclusion)

incorporating references (e.g. ‘as Ansori and Nafi said’, ‘Singh argued that’) – the student did not mention years though

thesis statement – position and outline (in introduction)

paragraphing is not obvious/not clear

Red – features normally absent in written essays:

contracted forms (e.g. that’s, it’s, don’t)

pronouns ‘I’, ‘me’

starting sentences/new ideas with ‘And’

boosting (e.g. ‘is the best way’)

Ok, good afternoon, and now I would like to talk about different types of teaching methods. Now, in my opinion, flipped classroom method is the best way to teach and learn. Seems to me that we, as teachers and students, don’t need to read what we could read from books. And to discuss what we just read, it’s a better way to learn. And it also reinforced our current law knowledge. And it is also beneficial about study discipline. So I would like to explain my ideas about this teaching method. (Introduction)

Firstly, as a student and former teacher, I can say that students don’t need to hear what they could read from books. I think reading is a better way than listening to learn something.

Flipped method allows to discuss what they have learned in class and this reinforce what they have learned. (unintelligible) they won’t forget most of what they have learned. That’s why it seems to me that it is the best learning methods.

And in addition to this, it is also beneficial in terms of study discipline, which is a very important attribute for students, teachers and researchers. And as Ansori and Nafi said, autonomous learning and classroom interaction is an important study skills, and this flipped method is convenient for autonomous learning and classroom interaction.

However, in contrary of Chuang, Weng and Cheng’s ideas, I don’t think that these learning methods depend on motivation of the students, because it is actually the same for every other learning methods. So it is not a disadvantage for this type of learning methods, and I also don’t agree with Singh et al’s ideas about language barrier. That’s true; it might be a problem for the students who don’t have enough English level, but, on the other hand, all of the students must have a good enough English level to attend classes so it is not an important problem, I think. And, as I mentioned before, Singh argued that this type of method is beneficial for (unintelligible) and time management. (Main body: not very clear how to paragraph)

So, in conclusion, I can say that this flipped method is the best learning method because in this way we can remember most of what we learn in the classes. And it is also beneficial for our study discipline, which is very important for us. That’s why these type of method should be apply on classes. It’s all I have to say. Thank you for your listening. (Conclusion)

Agreed and disagreed with ‘experts’. No plagiarism – summarized their ideas.

Preliminary findings

- **Content analysis of researcher's observation notes + students' written notes:**

- ✓ A range of task interpretations and strategies were adopted to successfully produce an oral argument.

- **Genre analysis (oral essay transcripts)**

- ✓ Despite the expected speech disfluencies (*filled pause, repetition, repair, false start*), the transcripts of oral narratives showed recognizable genre features of an essay, suggesting its potential to act as a measure of students' critical argumentation skills.

- **Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of interview transcripts**

- ✓ Students (*unprompted*) framed the purpose of 'oral essay' from both perspectives: *oracy as competence* and *oracy for learning*
- ✓ While acknowledging the struggles and challenges of the task, students expressed interest in developing skills of spontaneous oral argumentation within their disciplinary context.

Students' thoughts as reflection of academic theories

✓ Interacting relationship between speech and writing (Halliday, 2008; Elbow, 2015):

It's like I can ride a bicycle or take a taxi. It's the same. Both are vehicles to transport something.

(participant 3)

✓ Memorisation as a useful learning tool (Booker, 2007; Goffman, 1981):

Researcher: *How can the oral essay task be designed to facilitate spontaneity and prevent memorization?*

Participant 1: *We cannot speak fluently if we don't memorize some important knowledge.*

Participant 2: *If I have good memory, I will use it. If I can remember all of this, I definitely will remember it, but I can't.*

✓ The ideas of ownership and detachment (Joughin, 2008):

*When you need to write a 2000-word essay, you need a lot of information, and some of the information you just.. even don't know what the meaning is, but you still put that in the essay. You just wanna make your words, make enough words.. yeah. So, I feel this way is a better way to learn information. It's not that much and it's very appropriate and you can learn...and then it becomes your information. **It becomes yours**, yeah, but the [written] essay - no. **(participant 7)***

What's next?

No claims to generalisability  Potential transferability
(& ecological validity)

Authentic (real-life) settings, situated learning environments

- different university disciplines (Arts & Humanities, STEM, Social Sciences)
- subject lecturers as co-designers

Multiple iterations: design-test-reflect-redesign

Focus of the future empirical investigation:

NOT on impact or effectiveness (yet!)

BUT on appeal, relevance, consistency, practicality,
local viability & broader institutionalisation



Thank you for 'giving me the floor'

Disclaimer:

My speech was not spontaneous 😊

Questions?
Comments?
Suggestions?

‘Oral essay’ task – pilot design

- Handouts (oral essay task + self-rating scale)

What is your initial reaction to the task?

Would you be able to do it?

Would you take notes? What would your notes look like?

Would you write the whole essay down first?

How long would you take to prepare?

How long do you think you would speak for?

Would you memorise some parts of your speech?

Would you be ‘scared’ to do it spontaneously (as Goffman’s ‘fresh talk’)?

Practice makes perfect?

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Appendix (useful documents/slides for Q&A)

The right to deconstruct ...

‘Alternative assessment certainly fits with the theme of deconstructing EAP. However, given the nature of EAP is to support students in their studies, it is unclear how preparing students for an assessment format that they will not encounter in their studies will benefit them.’ (reviewer’s comment)



Photo by Paolo Candelo on Unsplash

- ‘If EAP is considered a field, and not a ‘peripheral support service’ (Ding and Bruce, 2017, p.3) or other often deprecating terms, then it is a legitimate academic discipline in which research and publication are component parts, integrated with teaching.’ (Davis, 2019, p.2)
- Can EAP practitioners be equal participants in HE assessment research?



The underlying 'spirit' of the enquiry

Critical friend: 'If it's never been done before, maybe it cannot be done...'

Me: 'Maybe it cannot. But why don't we try?'

O'Neil (2012, p.134): 'Fail early, fail often and report it'.

In 'oral essay', students would draw upon some of these skills, but not all.

Cambridge Oracy Skills Framework (Mercer et al, 2017, p.54)

PHYSICAL

1. Voice
2. Body language

- 1 a) fluency and pace of speech; b) tonal variation; c) clarity of pronunciation; d) voice projection
- 2 a) gesture and posture; b) facial expression and eye contact

LINGUISTIC

3. Vocabulary
4. Language variety
5. Structure
6. Rhetorical techniques

- 3 appropriate vocabulary choice
- 4 a) register; b) grammar
- 5 structure and organisation of talk
- 6 rhetorical techniques, such as metaphor, humour, irony and mimicry

COGNITIVE

7. Content
8. Clarifying and summarising
9. Self-regulation
10. Reasoning
11. Audience awareness

- 7 a) choice of content to convey meaning and intention; b) building on the views of others
- 8 a) seeking information and clarification through questions; b) summarising
- 9 a) maintaining focus on task; b) time management
- 10 a) giving reasons to support views; b) critically examining ideas and views expressed
- 11 taking account of level of understanding of the audience

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL

12. Working with others
13. Listening and responding
14. Confidence in speaking

- 12 a) guiding or managing the interactions; b) turn-taking
- 13 listening actively and responding appropriately
- 14 a) self-assurance; b) liveliness and flair

'Oral essay' can be positioned within the proposed dimensions.

Joughin's dimensions of oral assessment (1998, p.368)

Table 1.

TABLE 1. Dimensions of oral assessment

Dimension	Range
1. Primary content type	Knowledge & understanding; applied problem solving ability; interpersonal competence; personal qualities.
2. Interaction	Presentation vs Dialogue
3. Authenticity	Contextualised vs Decontextualised
4. Structure	Closed structure vs Open structure
5. Examiners	Self-assessment; peer assessment; authority-based assessment
6. Orality	Purely oral vs Orality as secondary

Each dimension covers a range of practices. For four of these dimensions ('interaction', 'authenticity', 'structure' and 'orality'), the range has the quality of a continuum. The dimensions of 'primary content type' and 'examiner', however, are not continua but rather consist of more-or-less discrete categories.

The framework can be adapted for the 'oral essay'.

Essay writing framework (Wingate, 2012, p.153)

U. Wingate / Journal of English for Academic Purposes 11 (2012) 145–154

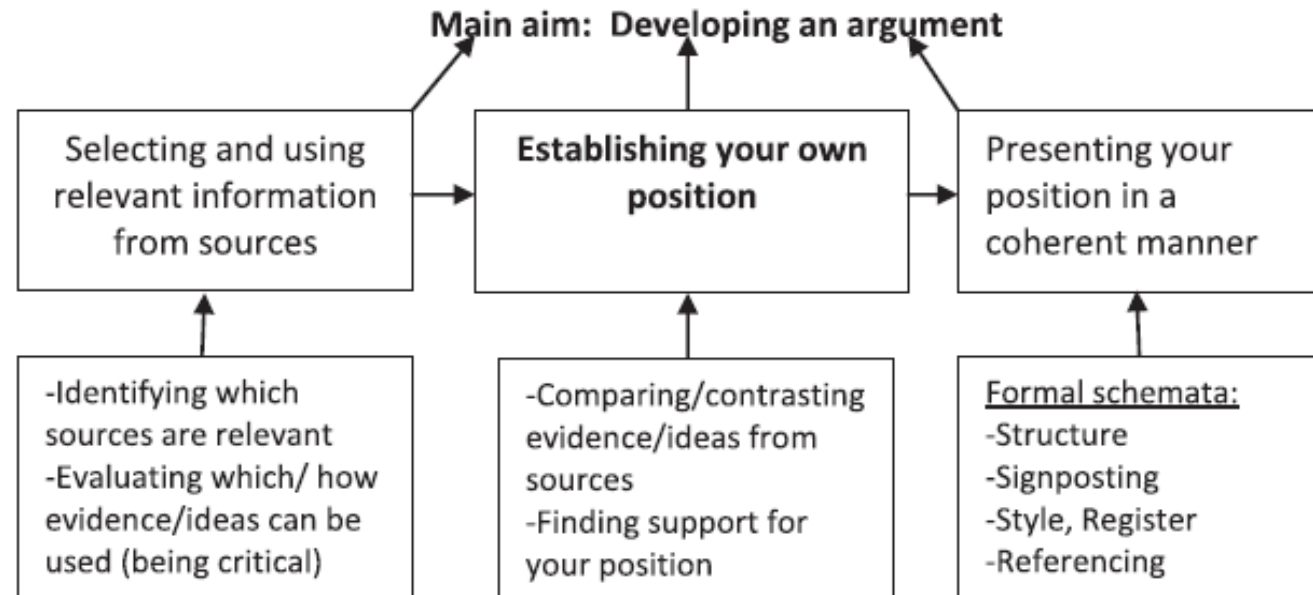


Fig. 1. Essay writing framework.