

## Fellow: taking a discourse approach

FP5: You demonstrate awareness of disciplinary differences or discourse features in teaching materials

FP6: You apply theories of text & discourse analysis to materials design.

FT4: You adapt teaching or learning material for specific academic contexts or disciplines.

FT10: You raise awareness of discourse features in your teaching

FT11: You train students to investigate practices of a discipline.

Recent experience of assessing TEAP portfolios has highlighted discourse as an area where applicants can struggle to understand the criteria or provide sufficient evidence of practice. Pages 10 & 11 of the TEAP handbook set out the rationale for taking a discourse approach in EAP teaching and pages 8 & 9 explain the importance of discourse in syllabus design.

Discourse can refer to the context of language use (e.g. specific disciplines) and to instances of language in use (e.g. within spoken or written texts) as Gee (2015) explains:

“Big ‘D’ Discourse” (“Discourse” spelled with a capital “D”) is meant to capture the ways in which people enact and recognize socially and historically significant identities or “kinds of people” through well-integrated combinations of language, actions, interactions, objects, tools, technologies, beliefs, and values. The notion stresses how “discourse” (language in use among people) is always also a “conversation” among different historically formed Discourses (that is, a “conversation” among different socially and historically significant kinds of people or social groups). The notion of “Big ‘D’ Discourse” sets a larger context for the analysis of “discourse” (with a little “d”), that is, the analysis of language in use.<sup>1</sup>

## Feedback from the TEAP assessor

*This submission shows many positive examples of how you have used the TEAP competencies to support your CPD efforts in the subject of EAP. You have proven that you can adapt your teaching materials and approaches in line with the professional knowledge values and further reading into areas such as discourse analysis and academic literacies. Moreover, your critical reflections relating to lesson planning, delivery and approaches to feedback help to develop your understanding of how best to support learners in your context.*

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<sup>1</sup> Gee, James Paul (2015) Discourse, Small D, Big D in *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction*: Wiley, online at <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118611463.wbielsi016>

## Evidence provided by a lesson observation

This candidate for TEAP Fellow was observed teaching a two-hour class on an in-session course (*Grammar for Academic Writing*). The class comprised postgraduate (MSc & PhD) students from disciplines such as engineering, finance, linguistics, education, literature and history. This was the second lesson of four on the topic of sequencing information, exploring ways students can organise their ideas in writing appropriately for a reader. The concepts of them/rheme and given/new<sup>2</sup> were presented in a lecture prior to the lesson and illustrated in simple texts, a text from the teacher's discipline and texts chosen by the students.

## Claim of competence in the Reflective Account of Professional Practice (RAPP)

Referring to evidence in the lesson plan (*italics*), this applicant wrote:

Teaching this course demonstrates my [...] discourse approach to teaching (*stages 3-4 introduced & illustrated the concepts*), as well as adapting materials [...]. I devote class time to noticing discipline-specific texts: students analyse discourse from their fields to transfer practice to assignments in their courses (*stages 8, 9 provided examples for analysis and rewriting*). They collaborate with partners, encouraging interdisciplinary comparison. I demonstrate with an article from my field to explicitly clarify the task (*stage 8 illustrated on PPT slides*). Text analysis and application to students' own writing also promotes autonomous learning and development (*stage 8 analysis and 9 rewriting*).

This claim was supported with evidence from the lesson plan, classroom materials (PPT and handouts) and the observation report. The observer commented:

*This lesson was designed to introduce the concept of theme as an organising principle of sentences within paragraphs. (A) directly addressed the writing needs of students within their disciplines by asking them to search for these patterns of cohesion within discipline-specific texts students had chosen and within their own writing.*

*(A) differentiated discourse knowledge & content knowledge by asking students to work with discipline texts in which the content was already familiar so the focus could be on the discourse/language. She extended the materials to note the connection between themes and paragraph topics and text types, helping students to understand preferred modes of academic communication in their field. The second part of the lesson was conducted as a mini research task to explore these patterns in academic texts.*

*Feedforward: . It is important to recognise that theme/rheme does not always equate to given/new as this is a device writers can use to present controversial ideas as given. The materials could go on to consider the relation between thematic progression and genre. This would be another opportunity for students to explore texts across disciplines.*

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<sup>2</sup> A pedagogical description and explanation of these concepts can be found in Alexander, O., Argent, S. & Spencer, J.A. (2018) *EAP Essentials* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Reading: Garnet Education, pp 71 – 78. Also in <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2019.100769>.

### Evidence provided by the candidate

Study the extract above from the RAPP submitted by this candidate and the comments from the observation report.

Which aspects of the lesson provide evidence that the candidate demonstrates awareness of disciplinary differences in teaching materials and in the lesson?

What theories of text & discourse analysis are being applied to materials design?

How did this teacher raise awareness of discourse features in this lesson?

How did this teacher adapt classroom material for specific academic disciplines?

At what points were students learning how to investigate practices of their disciplines?

What values is the candidate demonstrating in this extract?

### Suggested responses

Which aspects of the lesson provide evidence that the candidate demonstrates awareness of disciplinary differences in teaching materials and in the lesson?

*Both the candidate and the observer comment that the students worked with discipline-specific texts with which they were familiar. The lesson materials had been supplemented and extended to incorporate this aspect. Students compared their analyses with peers from a different discipline in a mini research project, which simulated academic practice.*

What theories of text & discourse analysis are being applied to materials design?

*This candidate's RAPP contained references to Academic Literacies and Genre approaches to Discourse/discourse analysis. The materials were adapted to include discipline-specific texts the students had chosen. The RAPP could have been enhanced with specific reference to Systemic Functional Linguistics, the original source of theme/rheme contrasts.*

How did this teacher raise awareness of discourse features in this lesson?

*The lesson was carefully staged to present concepts within short simple texts before illustrating with a text from the teacher's own discipline and further analysis and comparison of discipline-specific texts. There were opportunities to rewrite texts to make information flow more smoothly and for students to receive feedback on information flow in their writing.*

How did this teacher adapt classroom material for specific academic disciplines?

*Concepts were illustrated with a text from the teacher's own discipline and in texts students had chosen from their disciplines.*

At what points were students learning how to investigate practices of their disciplines?

*In particular the mini project where students analysed and compared texts across disciplines and the feedback on their writing, encouraged students to explore these concepts within their discipline and transfer them to their degree studies.*

What values is the candidate demonstrating in this extract?

*The candidate comments that application to students' disciplines and comparison with peers promotes collaboration (V3) and autonomous learning and development*

*The contextualization within academic disciplines promotes inclusivity (V4), respecting individual learners' expectations and values and encouraging participation in higher education.*

### Notes from the assessor

The assessor made specific recommendations about how the candidate could strengthen their RAPP by more explicitly applying theoretical ideas to materials design.

*Think about how you can adapt the ideas from the readings in your bibliography to suit your specific teaching contexts. For instance, how could you apply some of the ideas from Lea and Street and Wingate more specifically to support the design of materials you are delivering to students and their specific disciplines.*

This blog post ([Demonstrating competence in Discourse/discourse – EAP Essentials \(eap-essentials.com\)](https://eap-essentials.com)) gives an overview of two successful TEAP applications for Associate Fellow and Senior Fellow, which took innovative approaches to demonstrating discourse competence.