

# BALEAP AGM 2012



## EAP Assessment in the UK



Diane Schmitt

# Three main types



- Pre-entry screening assessment
- End of pre-sessional/foundation assessment
- In-sessional screening assessment

# Pre-entry screening



- UKBA controlled
- Linked to CEFR
- Secure English Language Test (SELT)  
authorized list

| English language Test                    | Awarded by     | Level | Minimum Grade Required  | Test validity | Documents required with application | Contact details   |
|--|----------------|-------|---|---------------|-------------------------------------|---|
|  |                | C2    | Reading – 90<br>Listening – 90<br>Speaking – 6<br>Writing – 6                                 |               |                                     |   |
| IELTS (Academic and General Training)    | Cambridge ESOL | B1    | Listening – 4.0<br>Speaking – 4.0<br>Reading – 4.0<br>Writing – 4.0                           | 2 years       | Test Report Form                    | Website: <a href="http://www.ielts.org">www.ielts.org</a><br><br>List of test centres:<br><a href="http://www.ielts.org/test_centre_search/search_results.aspx">www.ielts.org/test_centre_search/search_results.aspx</a>  |
|  |                | B2    | Listening – 5.5<br>Speaking – 5.5<br>Reading – 5.5<br>Writing – 5.5                           |               |                                     | General Enquiries<br>British Council<br>Bridgewater House<br>58 Whitworth Street<br>Manchester, M1 6BB<br>United Kingdom<br>Tel: +44 161 957 7755<br>Fax: +44 161 957 7762<br>Email: <a href="mailto:ielts@britishcouncil.org">ielts@britishcouncil.org</a><br>Website : <a href="http://www.britishcouncil.org">www.britishcouncil.org</a> |
|  |                | C1    | Listening – 7.0<br>Speaking – 7.0<br>Reading – 7.0<br>Writing – 7.0                           |               |                                     |   |
|  |                | C2    | Listening – 8.5<br>Speaking – 8.5<br>Reading – 8.5<br>Writing – 8.5                           |               |                                     | General Enquiries<br>IDP Education Australia<br>Level 8, 535 Bourke Street<br>Melbourne VIC 3000<br>Australia<br>Tel: +61 3 9612 4400<br>Fax: +61 3 9614 0578<br>Email: <a href="mailto:info@idp.com">info@idp.com</a><br>Website: <a href="http://www.idp.com">www.idp.com</a>   |
| City & Guilds International ESOL Diploma | City & Guilds  | A1    | Preliminary<br><br>Listening 13 / 25<br>Speaking 6 / 12<br>Reading 11 / 20<br>Writing 17 / 34 | Indefinite    | Certificate and results sheet       | Customer Relations<br>City & Guilds<br>1 Giltspur Street<br>London<br><br>EC1A 9DD<br>Tel: 0207 294 2885  |
|  |                | A2    | Access  |               |                                     |   |

# The BALEAP Guidelines on English Language Tests for University: Issues, Arguments and Ways Forward

Bruce Howell, Philip Nathan,  
Diane Schmitt, Chris Sinclair,  
Jenifer Spencer and John Wrigglesworth

# BALEAP Guidelines

## IELTS –The International English Language Testing System Test Digest

The IELTS test is developed and administered by The British Council, IDP Australia and Cambridge ESOL, and is the most frequently submitted English language test for entry to higher education in the UK and Australia". There are two IELTS tests, the Academic and the General Training test, only the academic test is intended to be suitable as a measure of English proficiency for entry to Further and Higher Education academic programmes.

### Academic Test Characteristics

|   |
|---|
| <b>Skills tested:</b><br><b>Exam length:</b> Approximately 3 hours <b>Mode:</b> Paper-based and audio listening (R/L/W2hrs 45 minutes-speaking administered separately)   |
| <b>Reading</b><br><b>Time:</b> 60 minutes. Three passages: 2000 – 2700 words in total. Narrative, descriptive or discursive texts are taken from books, journals, magazines and newspapers. Around 40 test items carrying one mark each, including multiple choice, short-answer questions, identifying information, writer's views/daims, matching information, headings, features, or sentence endings; completion of sentences, notes/diagrams and table summary completion.   |
| <b>Listening:</b><br><b>Time:</b> 30 minutes plus 10 minutes transfer time. <b>Mode:</b> Audio<br>Four sections: The first two texts, a conversation and a monologue, involve everyday social contexts. The other two texts involve educational or training contexts. The final text is a monologue on an academic subject. The recordings are heard once only. There are around 40 test items, with the answers in order of listening. Tasks comprise a similar mix to those for reading.  |
| <b>Writing:</b><br><b>Time:</b> 60 minutes<br><b>Task 1:</b> Time: 20 minutes<br>Candidates are asked to describe visual information (Graph/diagram) at least 150 words. This may involve some comparison or identification of trends. However candidates are not expected to speculate on possible causes or significance of the data.<br><b>Task 2:</b> Time: 40 minutes.<br>Essay (at least 250 words) In response to a prompt in the form of an issue or problem or statement of a stance. Student answers are non-specialist and based on personal opinion and experience. This task assesses the candidate's ability to present, organise and support their ideas in the form of a supported argument and assesses language accuracy and range. |
| <b>Speaking:</b><br><b>Time:</b> 11 – 14 minutes<br><b>Format:</b> Three parts; Oral interview between candidate and examiner: Long turn on a topic from a prompt card - 1 minute preparation, 1-2 minutes extended speaking. Candidate and   |

**Scores:** A global score between 1 and 9 is awarded, with scores also recorded as a profile, on the same scale, for each module of the test. Scores are reported in full and half bands, e.g. IELTS 6.0 or 6.5. Scores are available within two weeks of the candidate taking the test and are seen as valid for no longer than two years. There are no restrictions on the number of times a candidate can retake the test.

**Scores & scoring procedures** Reliability scores for reading and listening (the objectively marked modules) are produced annually. Reliability for the writing and speaking are ensured through explicit criteria, benchmarking and examiner evaluation training. Research on the IELTS is available under the Research tab on the IELTS website.

**Test security** Procedures to ensure candidate identity including photographing candidates. Online verification of results available (TRF).

**Availability & accessibility** 6,000 centres worldwide. Offered four times per month in 250 countries. Fees are collected in local currency and are set locally.

**Test preparation and test practice resources:** Practice papers for students and sample lessons for teachers can be downloaded from the website. Also a catalogue of official published materials including Handbooks for teachers, Official IELTS Practice Materials, Past Paper Pads and research information. There are also a wide variety of commercially produced IELTS preparation books.

**Contact details:** [www.ielts.org](http://www.ielts.org)

### Evaluation & Comment


Although IELTS is the most widely recognized and used and test for direct entry to UK Higher Education, care must be taken in using the test appropriately. The test is seen as most discriminating between Bands 5 and 7, thus, it is best used for discriminating between students who are ready for pre-sessional entry courses and those who may be ready for direct entry. The relationship between IELTS and the CEFR is not entirely clear. The test providers point out that "As IELTS preceded the CEFR, IELTS band scores have never aligned exactly with the CEFR transition points". On these grounds, they currently suggest that institutions should set a requirement of Band 7 rather than Band 6.5, if they require a high degree of confidence that the applicant is at CL. Further information about IELTS and the CEFR is available at [http://www.ielts.org/researchers/common\\_european\\_framework.aspx](http://www.ielts.org/researchers/common_european_framework.aspx)

Although they cite Hawkey and Barker<sup>2</sup> and internal research notes, they point out any correspondences suggested are also based on experience and that research is incomplete. The global test score should be read along with the score for each skill with an eye for differences in the component scores (a jagged profile). A range of reports are available on validity, reliability and impact these are available at <http://www.ielts.org/researchers/research.aspx>

Some concerns which have been raised about the test format may be the

# Pre-entry screening



- Direct entry to a degree programme
  - Entry via a pathway programme
    - Pre-sessional English
    - Foundation programme
    - General English
- 

# Non-SELT English language assessment options

- successful completion of university's own English language programme (EFL or EAP)
- university's own test
- non-SELT test which university deems to be at CEFR B2


(All must show that students are B2 in reading, writing, speaking and listening)



# Tier 4 Student Visa for English language study

- ❑ Evidence of English language proficiency at B1 level in all four skills using a Secure English Language Test (SELT)
- ❑ Course of study must be B2 level
- ❑ No more than one month gap between completion of language course and commencement of degree study

# Proliferation of in-house tests



**Swansea University**  
Prifysgol Abertawe

Students - Staff - Español - 中文 - العربية

GO

THE UNIVERSITY RESEARCH UNDERGRADUATE POSTGRADUATE INTERNATIONAL ALUMNI BUSINESS

SWELT

### SWELT

#### International students

- + Courses
- + Entry requirements
- + Apply for a course
- + ISAS International Student Advisory Service
- English Language Training Services
  - Academic Year Programmes
    - + English for University Studies
  - + Pre masters courses
  - SWELT
    - + Content of the SWELT
- + Pre-sessional programmes

### The Swansea English Language Test

The **SWELT** is the official English language test for international students wishing to study at Swansea University. The test is designed, administered and marked by English Language Training Services staff.

#### Format of the SWELT

The SWELT consists of the following papers:

- READING : 1 hour
- WRITING : 1 hour
- GRAMMAR AND ACADEMIC VOCABULARY : 40 Minutes
- LISTENING: 30-40 minutes

#### Where to take the SWELT

All four components are normally taken at a single session, on the same day.

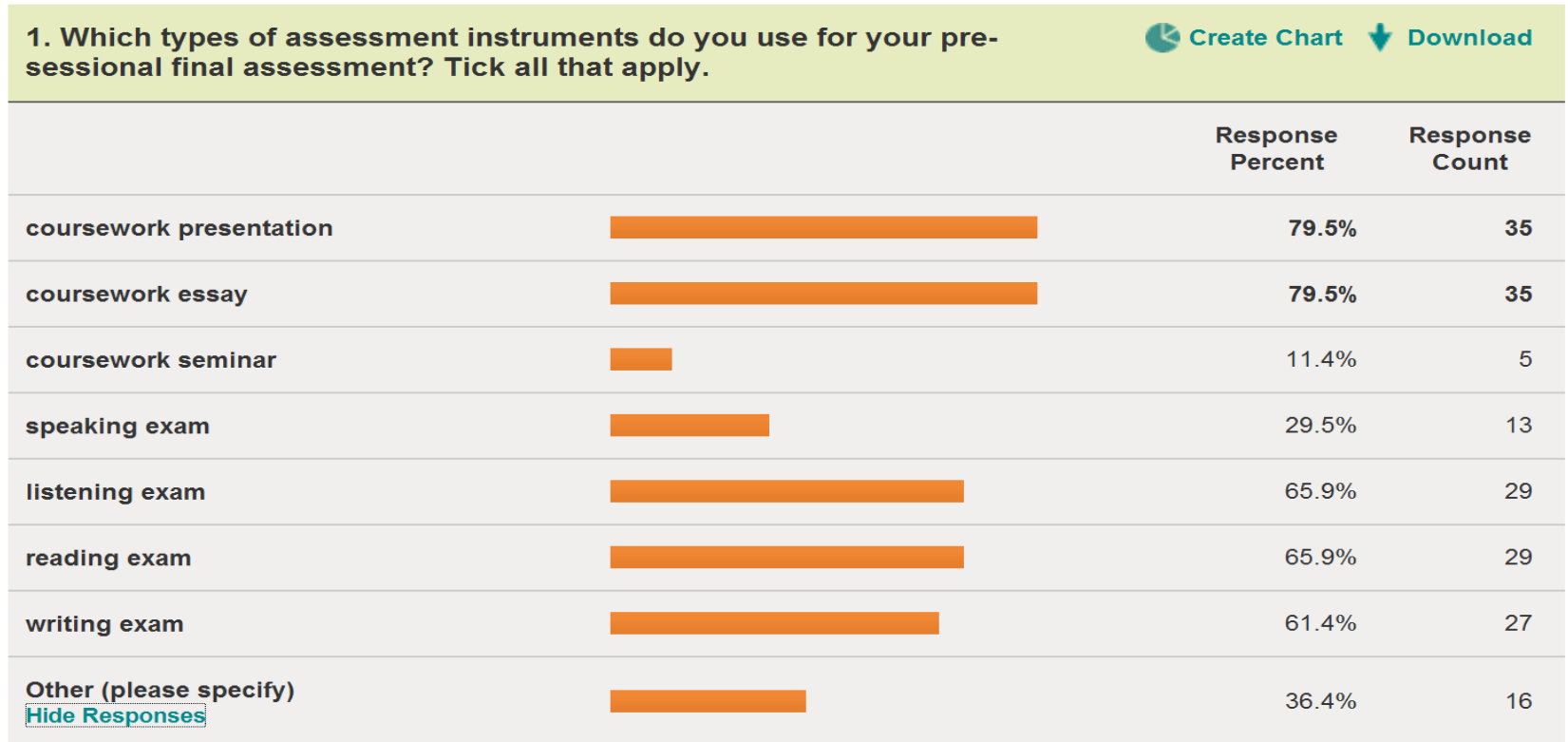
Each component is scored in a banding system equivalent to the IELTS banding, and an overall band is obtained by averaging performance across the four components.

The SWELT may be taken at Swansea University, but at present it is mainly intended for students from China who are contemplating study at Swansea and wish to have their level of English assessed in order to finalise their admission in advance of their journey to the UK.

For this purpose, ELTS organises administrations of the SWELT in various cities in China. These sessions are

**Read more about the SWELT**  
Click for details

# 44 BALEAP members responded to a survey on pre-sessional assessment



# End of pre-sessional assessment

- Combined continuous assessment
- Reading into writing exam
- Short tasks (summary, writing up lecture notes, writing a section of an essay)
- Portfolio of work
- Vocabulary/vocabulary notebook
- Reflective journal
- Open book exam
- Password exam
- TEEP
- English Proficiency Test Battery
- IELTS

# In-session screening assessment

- ☐ None
- ☐ Password
- ☐ In-house assessment – often grammar/vocabulary

## 5.6 ASSESSMENT

- 5.6.1 Assessment content and procedures will be linked to the academic needs of the students and to their future studies.
- 5.6.2 Students will be informed in advance of assessment procedures to be used on the Course.
- 5.6.3 Students will receive timely and useful feedback on their progress and on their strengths and weaknesses.
- 5.6.4 On intensive courses of more than one month, formal assessment of students' progress will be carried out at regular intervals with feedback given and records kept.
- 5.6.5 Students will be encouraged to monitor and take responsibility for their own progress.
- 5.6.6 Exit assessment procedures and reports will be comprehensible and useful to both the student and the recipient subject-specialist department.
- 5.6.7 All student placement and assessment procedures will be related to explicit criteria and measures will be taken to ensure standardisation, fairness and consistency in these procedures across teachers and tasks.
- 5.6.8 Information on well-established external examinations in English for Academic Purposes will be available for students who wish to take such an examination. Students requiring external certification of general English Language Proficiency will receive advice regarding availability of such tests.

## DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

### ASSESSMENT

- *Information on entrance requirements for course(s) to be accredited.*
- *Information given to students on placement procedures and assessment procedures (including any testing).*
- *Account of procedures for record keeping, reporting to sponsors, departments, etc. and sample documents.*
- *Sample of test reports or certificates that are given to students.*
- *Account of procedures for ensuring fairness and equivalency of assessment procedures.*
- *Information regarding any external examinations for which students are entered.*



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- Information on entrance requirements for courses to be accredited.
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- Information on procedures for record keeping, reporting to sponsors, departments, etc. and sample documents.
- Sample of test reports or certificates that are given to students.
- Account of procedures for ensuring fairness and equivalency of assessment procedures.
- Information regarding any external examinations for which students are entered.

**Need to give more attention to the validity of our in-house assessment.**

# Purpose of Language Proficiency Exams

## e.g. IELTS General Descriptors

|          |                       |  |
|----------|-----------------------|--|
| <b>9</b> | <b>Expert user</b>    | Has fully operational command of the language: appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding.   |
| <b>8</b> | <b>Very good user</b> | Has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriacies. Misunderstandings may occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex detailed argumentation well. |
| <b>7</b> | <b>Good user</b>      | Has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning.  |
| <b>6</b> | <b>Competent user</b> | Has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.               |
| <b>5</b> | <b>Modest user</b>    | Has partial command of the language, coping with overall meaning in most situations, though is likely to make many mistakes. Should be able to handle basic communication in own field.                              |



# A general description of writing proficiency

|    | OVERALL WRITTEN PRODUCTION   |
|----|--|
| C2 | <i>Can write clear, smoothly flowing, complex texts in an appropriate and effective style and a logical structure which helps the reader to find significant points.</i>   |
| C1 | <i>Can write clear, well-structured texts of complex subjects, underlining the relevant salient issues, expanding and supporting points of view at some length with subsidiary points, reasons and relevant examples, and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.</i> |
| B2 | <i>Can write clear, detailed texts on a variety of subjects related to his/her field of interest, synthesising and evaluating information and arguments from a number of sources.</i>  |
| B1 | <i>Can write straightforward connected texts on a range of familiar subjects within his field of interest, by linking a series of shorter discrete elements into a linear sequence.</i>  |
| A2 | <i>Can write a series of simple phrases and sentences linked with simple connectors like 'and', 'but' and 'because'.</i>   |
| A1 | <i>Can write simple isolated phrases and sentences.</i>  |

# A general description of writing proficiency

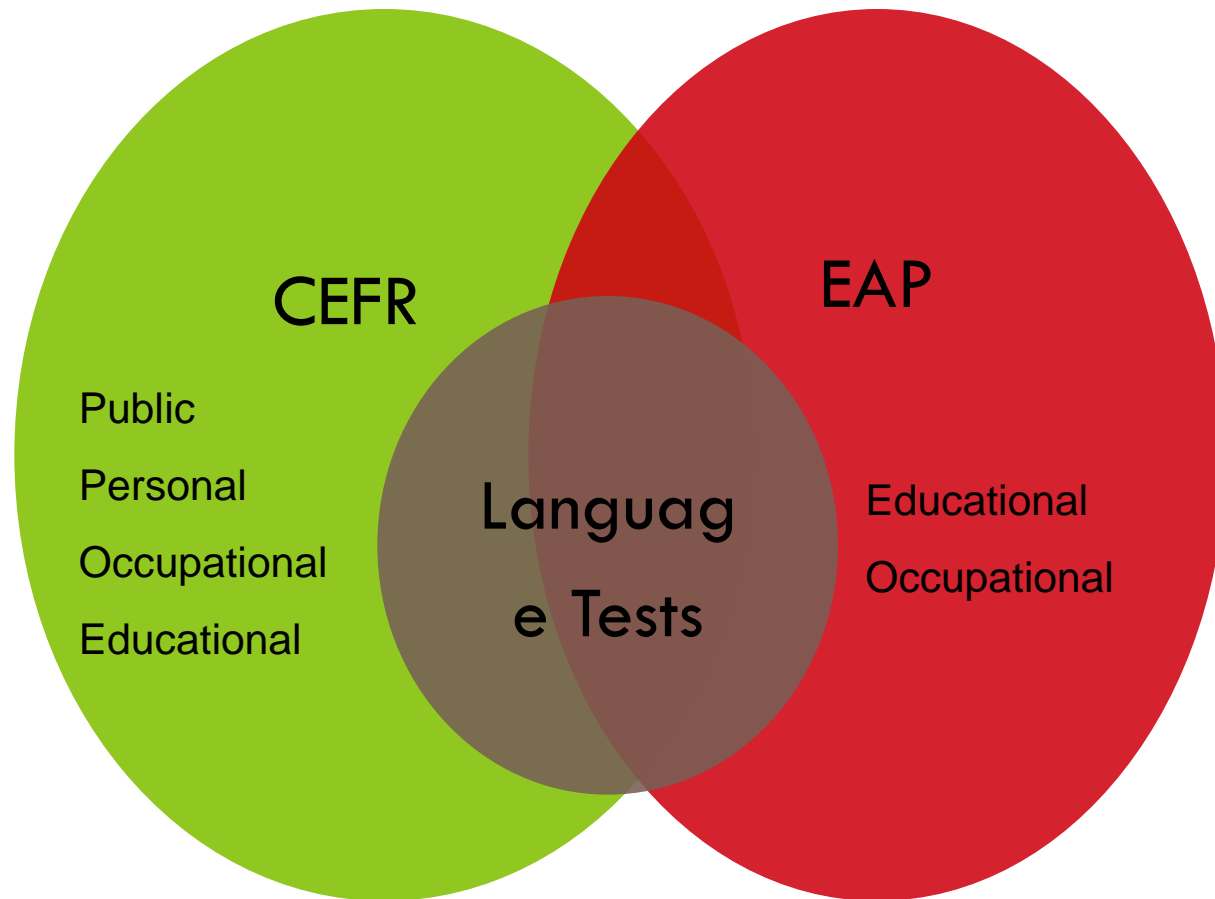
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# Purposes of Assessed Student Writing in University

- Provide opportunities to develop knowledge, understanding and expertise
- Display knowledge, understanding and expertise
- To explain or argue a point
- To demonstrate the ability to explain or argue a point in writing
- To earn a grade or gain credits towards a degree
- To develop skills to communicate with multiple audiences – academic and professional

Nesi and Gardner, 2012

# How do language tests relate to EAP and the CEFR?



# A comparison of written assessment tasks

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Language  
Tests

Personal Argumentative Essay

Diagram Description

Integrative Task – Reading/Listening/Writing

EAP

# Academic Writing Tasks: Genre Families found in the BAWE (Nesi and Gardner, 2012)

1. Case Study
2. Critique
3. Design Specification
4. Empathy Writing
5. Essay
6. Exercise
7. Explanation
8. Literature Survey
9. Methodology Recount
10. Narrative Recount
11. Problem Question
12. Proposal
13. Research Report

# A comparison of written assessment tasks

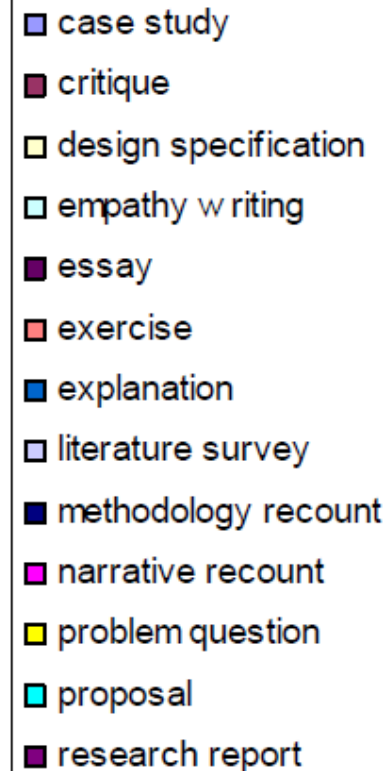
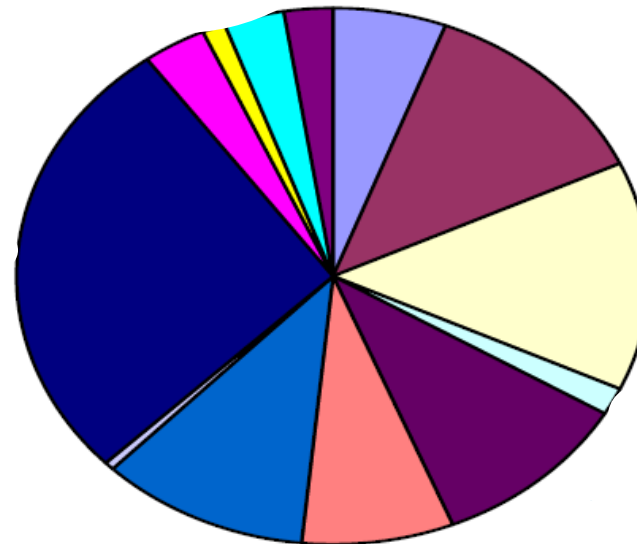


Personal Argumentative Essay

Diagram Description

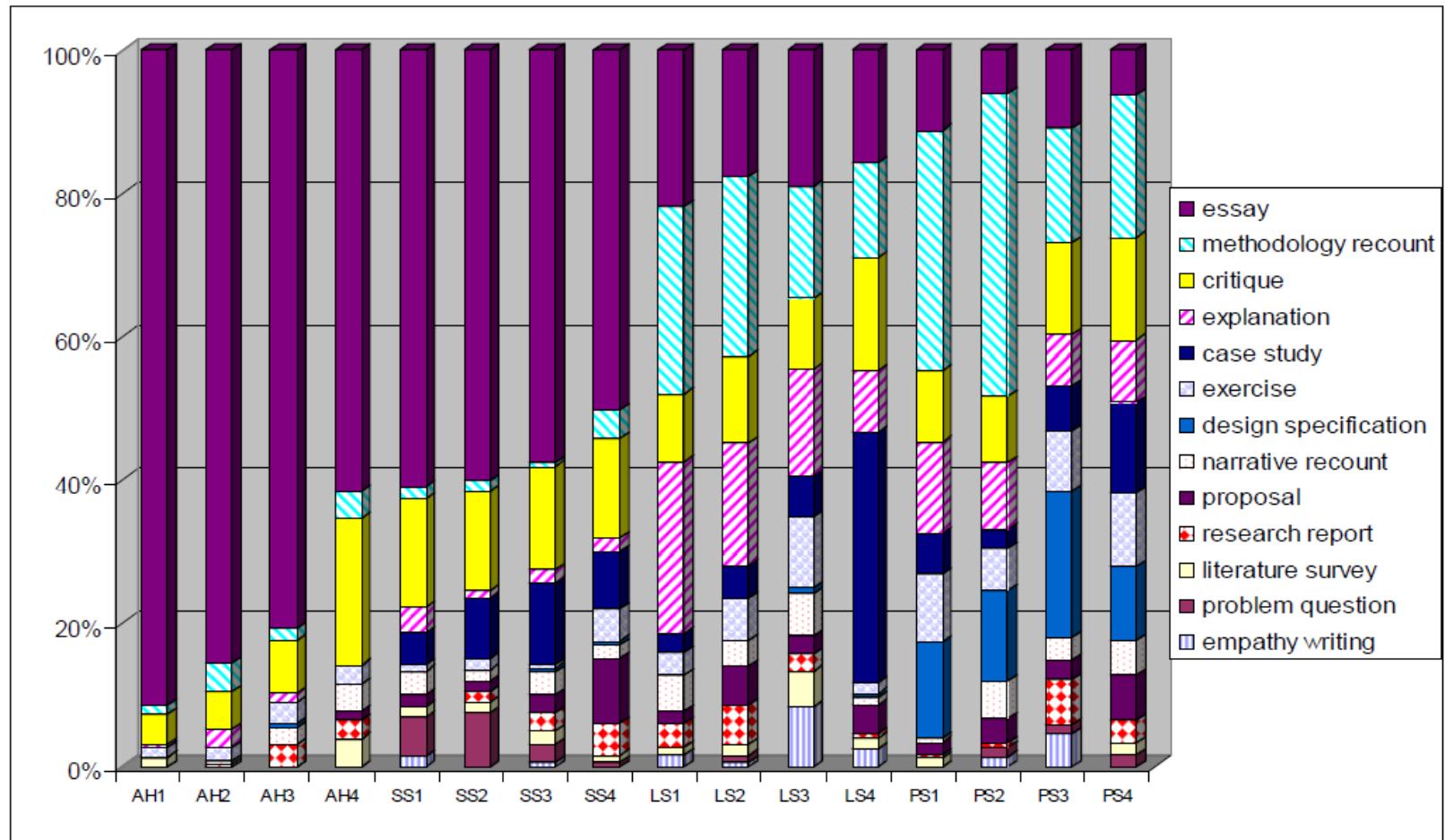
Integrative Task –

Reading/Listening/Writing



**Physical Sciences**

# Writing tasks set at UK universities by disciplinary group and level



(Gardner, 2010)



# Pre-sessional English Programme

## Course description

Academic English can seem very different from the English which you learned at school. The EAP Preessional courses make you familiar with the special features of academic English so that you are ready to study via the English language in your intended University department. The English for International Students Unit (EISU) was one of the first academic English centres in the UK; as a consequence we have a tremendous amount of experience in academic English research, teaching, and learning.

The courses will focus on the language and learning skills which you will need so that you can:

- read and understand academic texts
- listen to and understand lectures and academic debates
- speak and write so that you can express what you mean, as well as express your opinion about what other people mean
- develop accuracy in grammar and pronunciation so people understand you
- use familiar and unfamiliar vocabulary to speak and write about new things

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**We aim to do more  
than language exams.**

- express your opinion about what other people mean
- develop accuracy in grammar and pronunciation so people understand you
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We will help you with more  
Teaching and Assessing  
language exams.

- express your opinion about what other people mean
- develop accuracy in grammar and pronunciation so people understand you
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# Pre-sessional English Programme

## Course description

Academic English can seem very different from the English which

Achievement instead of  
screening or proficiency  
assessment.

Test language exams.

- express your opinion about what other people mean
- develop accuracy in grammar and pronunciation so people understand you
- use familiar and unfamiliar vocabulary to speak and write about new things

# Pre-sessional English Programme

## Course description

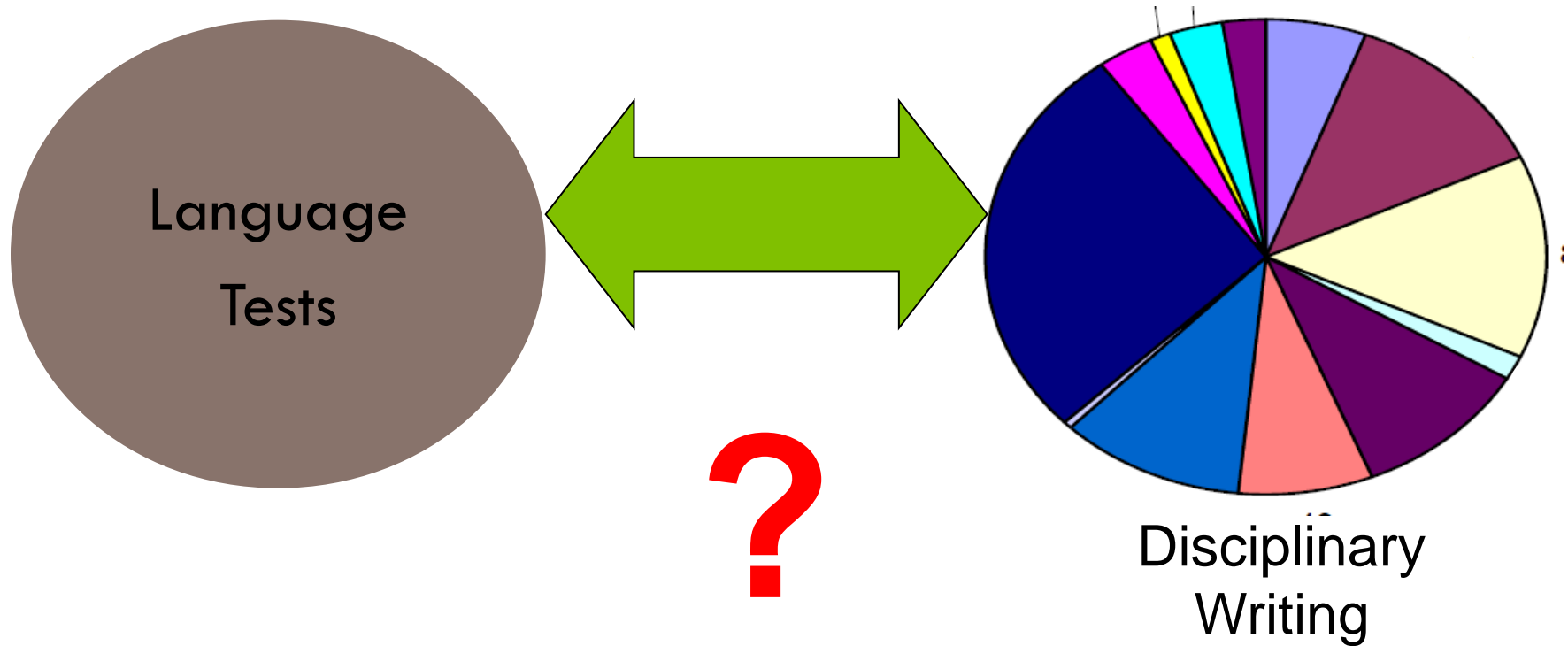
Academic English can seem very different from the English which

Achievement instead of  
All in as little as 4-6 weeks  
assessment.

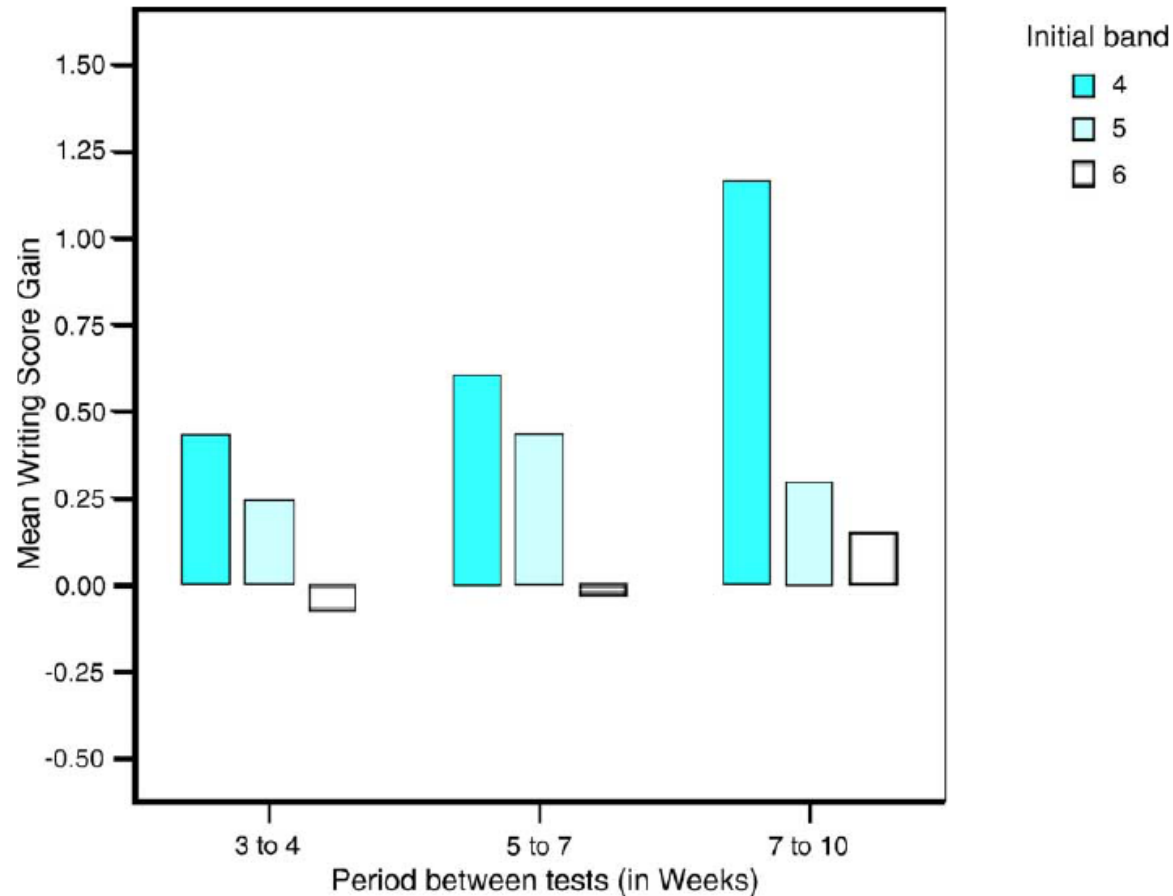
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# High-Stakes Writing Assessment at the Classroom or Programme Level



# Impact of EAP study on language proficiency writing exam scores



(Green, 2005)

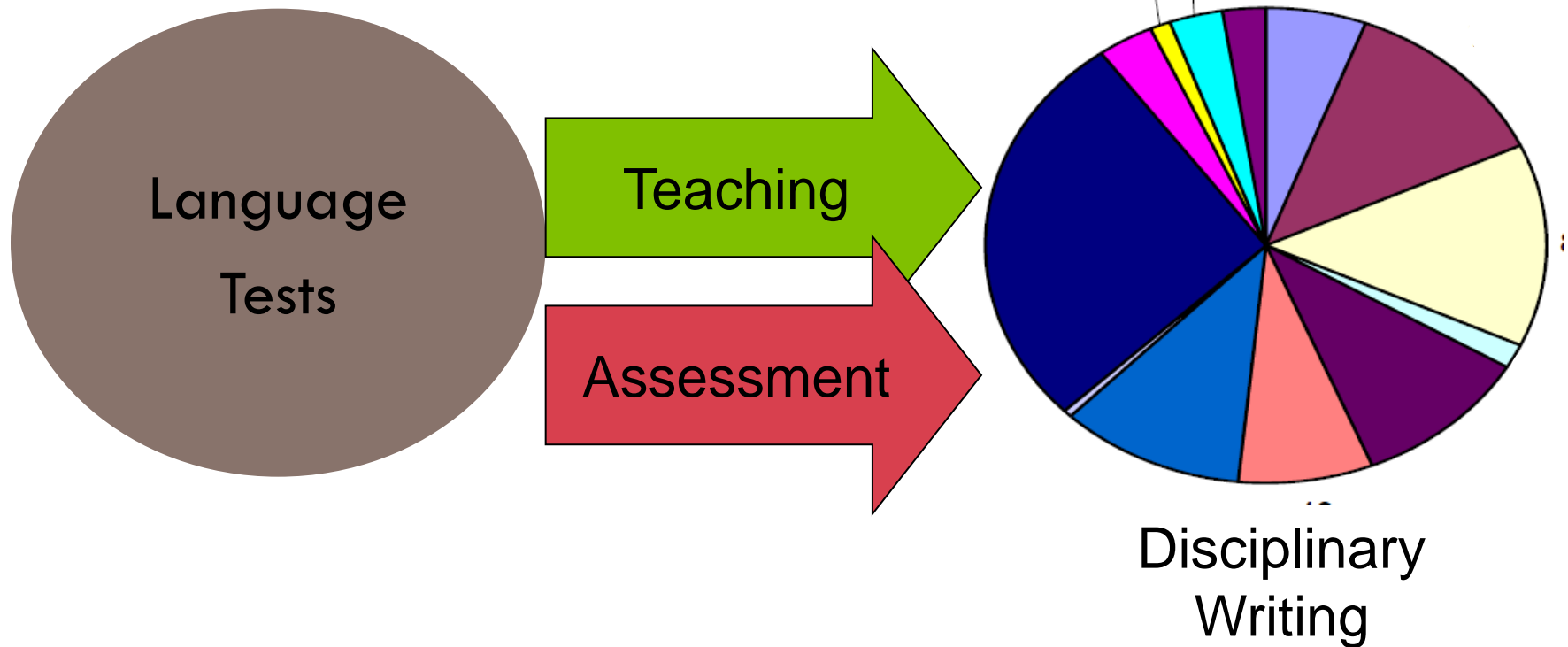
Fig. 3. Mean score gains on IELTS Writing component for learners on EAP courses.

# Impact of EAP study on language proficiency writing exam scores

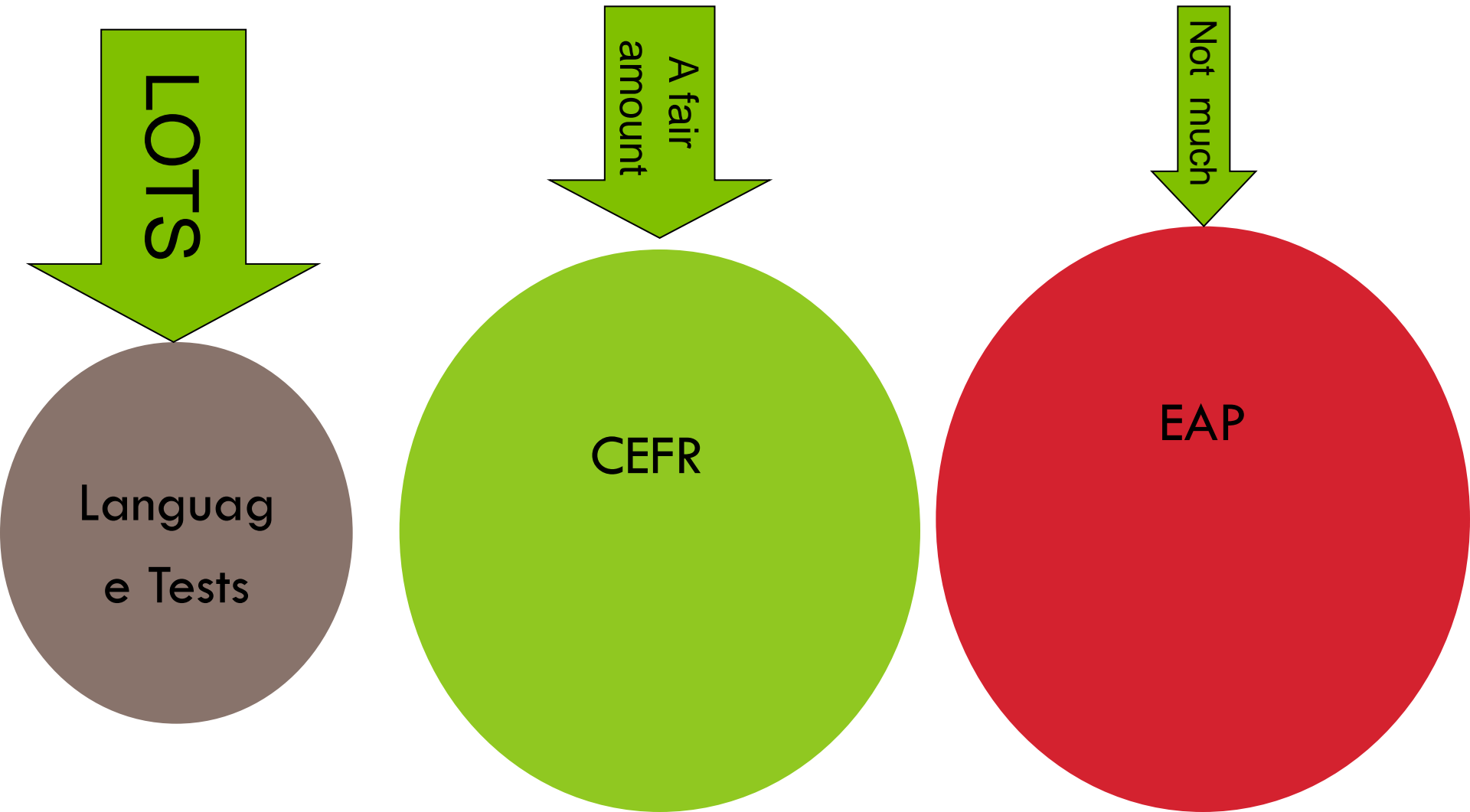
- Green (2005) points out that:
  - IELTS “is not designed to be sensitive to relatively short-term gains in ability or to the contents of particular courses of instruction.” (p. 58)
  - Equating “course outcomes with levels of score gains may raise the expectation that the function of pre-sessionals is to deliver score gains on proficiency tests.” (p. 59)
  - EAP courses are more likely to develop “locally based competencies”



# Classroom-based High-Stakes Tests



# Focus of Writing Assessment Research & Training

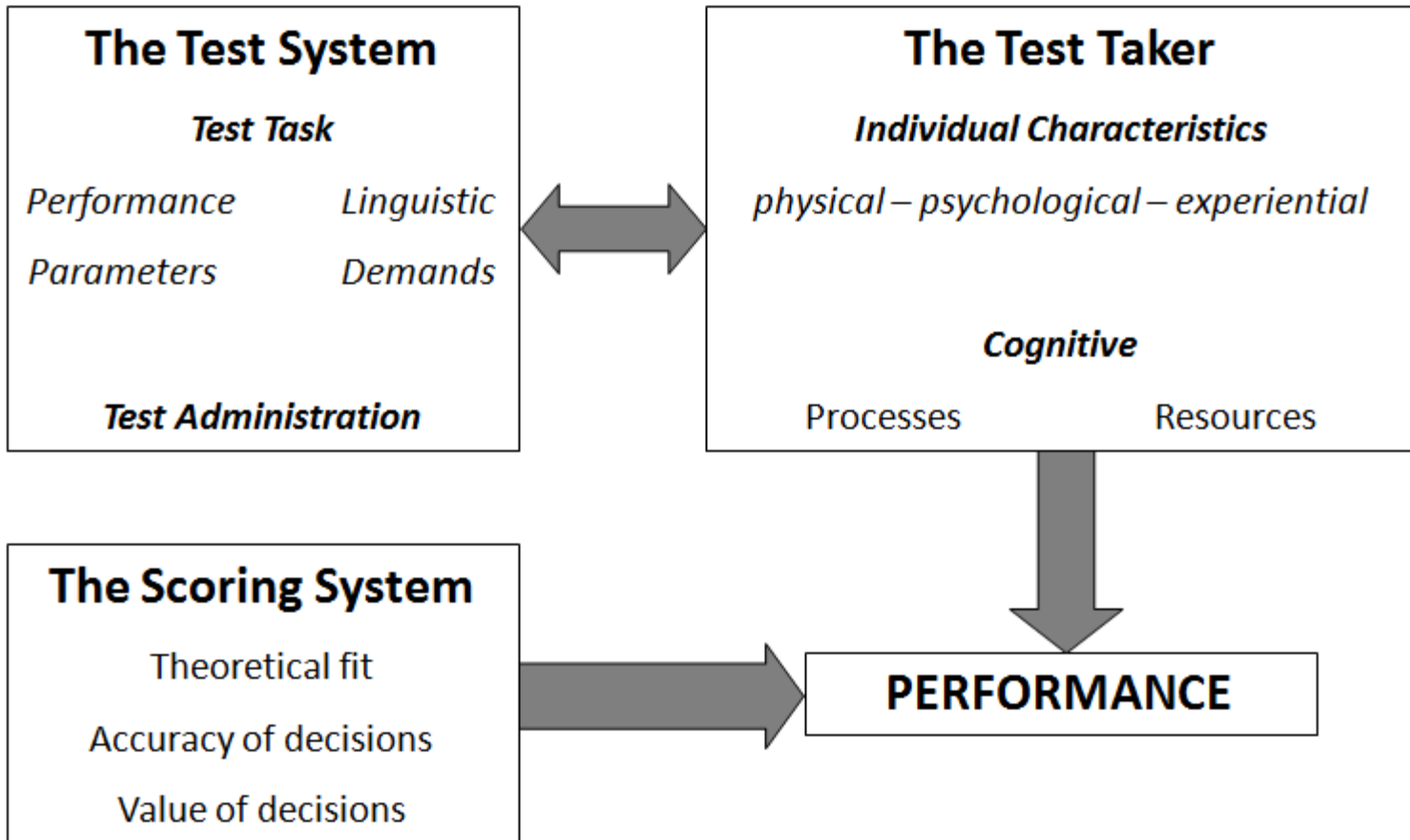


# Localisation

- “In almost all circumstances, local tests are more likely to allow us to make valid assumptions about test-takers.”
- Opportunities for test developers to focus on specific domains and contexts and to offer tests that more closely fit local requirements
- Threats to test quality and claims relating to test level

O’Sullivan (2011:265 & 270)

# Socio-cognitive Framework for Test Validation (Weir, 2005)



# A story to illustrate...

- ❑ 120 students (home and international) are enrolled on a course titled “Exploring Research in Business”
- ❑ This is a second-year course which prepares students to write their third (and final) year dissertation
- ❑ The students are required to write a 2500 word (roughly 10 pages) research proposal
  - abstract, introduction, literature review, methodology, research design, challenges and limitations
- ❑ ¼ of the students fail outright

# The story explained

- ❑ The failing students got stuck in the literature review.
- ❑ Instead of reviewing literature in their area with the aim of identifying a gap in the research...
- ❑ the students wrote a standard essay describing what they had read.
- ❑ The students were also able to write essays about qualitative and quantitative research and their philosophical rationale, but...
- ❑ they did not make links between their literature reviews and their research design.

# The story explained

- ❑ The failing students got stuck in the literature review.
- ❑ Instead of reviewing literature in their area with the aim of identifying a gap in the research...
- ❑ they were not able to describe their research problem and objectives. **Lack of genre awareness**
- ❑ The students were also able to write essays about qualitative and quantitative research and their philosophical rationale, but...
- ❑ they did not make links between their literature reviews and their research design.

## One more story...

- ❑ A cohort of 19 students studying for a Master's Degree in Human Resource Management
- ❑ External accrediting body requires that core modules are assessed by exams
- ❑ Two of these are based on case studies
- ❑ 13 students fail the first exam
- ❑ 11 students fail all three exams
- ❑ The students only read the case studies and did not read other texts from the reading list.



## One more story...

- A cohort of 19 students studying for a Master's Degree in Human Resource Management
- External accrediting body requires that core modules are assessed by written exam
- Two of these modules are assessed by case studies
- 13 students failed the first exam
- 10 students failed all three exams
- The students only read the case studies and did not read other texts from the reading list.

You have got to read widely to write well.  
(Deane in Tribble, 2010)

# Writing Assessment Leakage?

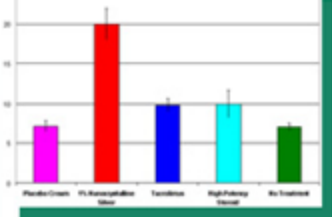
- Teaching and assessment in school and in ESL tends to use a limited range of genres.
- Timed writing in language classes often requires students to provide a personal response to a prompt or to respond to a single text.
- Large scale language testing gives superficial consideration to the topic (Weigle, 2002)

# Characteristics of learner production in academic writing (Paquot, 2010)

- A limited lexical repertoire
- Lack of register awareness
- Lack of awareness of lexico-grammatical and phraseological specificities
- Semantic misuse of connectors and labels
- The extensive use of chains of connective devices
- A marked preference for placing connectors in sentence-initial position (Paquot, 2010)

# Disjuncture between IELTS argumentative essays and assessed academic writing

- IELTS writing:
  - gives too much attention to the subjectivity of the argument; this is at odds with the objective, non-personal writing of assessed academic writing
  - exhibits an excess of authorial authority in the absence of persuasive supporting evidence – this is likely to weaken rather than strengthen an argument
  - draws too much attention to the writer rather than the argument
  - overuses hearsay
  - overly direct – not much hedging



## Who's afraid of the data question?

The first writing task in the IELTS examination is usually a data description. However, this differs significantly from data commentary in science and engineering degrees. Some English teachers are unfamiliar with data commentary and find it daunting to teach. In this talk I will present key features of data commentary at university and suggest tasks for teaching it effectively.

Olwyn Alexander

# What's different between the two types of writing task?

- There is an overall structure to reporting data from tables and graphs at university.
- Locate the results: *The graph shows the different modes of transport used to travel to and from work.*
- Report the main findings: *Whereas walking to work was the most common form of transport in 1960, by 2000 most people travelled to work by car.*
- Account for the findings: *It is likely that by 2000 many companies had relocated to out of town business parks which were too far to reach on foot.*
- Repeat for each finding: *The use of bicycles to travel to work fell dramatically between 1960 and 2000, probably because of the increased number of cars on the road.*

# What's different between the two types of writing task?

- There is an overall structure to reporting data from tables and graphs at university.
- Locate the results: *The transport*

IELTS writing can thus be distinguished from university-level writing:

- IELTS requires the first two moves [locate the results and state the results] and not the final move [comment on the results]
- data commentaries at university require all three moves

# Context validity (Weir, 2005)

- Context validity takes account not just of the linguistic content of an assessment task, but also the social and cultural contexts in which the task is performed.
  - purpose
  - setting
  - time available
  - text length  
(input/output)
  - content knowledge
  - linguistic demands
  - writer/reader  
relationship
  - marking criteria



# Is this a bridge too far?

- Provide opportunities to develop knowledge, understanding and expertise
- Display knowledge, understanding and expertise
  - Writing needs to be part of a wider cycle of reading
  - This part of the cycle needs to be included in the assessment



# Is this a bridge too far?

- To explain or argue a point
- To demonstrate the ability to explain or argue a point in writing
  - There are disciplinary differences in how this is done
  - Can we assess genre awareness?



# Is this a bridge too far?

- To develop skills to communicate with multiple audiences – academic and professional
  - ▣ Can we go beyond assessing different rhetorical types and focus more on purpose and function



# Communities of Assessment Creators

- TEA SIG
  - ALTE Testing Workshops
  - EALTA Pre-conference Events and Workshops
  - ILTA Workshops
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- High stakes is happening in classrooms – we need to work together more to support EAP practitioners developing greater assessment literacy and practical skills.



Thank you for your attention.

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