

Authenticity & Need in the design of EAP Reading Tests

John Slaght, University of Reading

The key to Authenticity ...



...is the (TLU) 'Target Language Use' (Bachman, 1990:300)

... is the 'correspondence between language test characteristics and features of target language use' (Bachman & Palmer, 1996:23)

However, tests are by their very nature 'artificial contexts for language use' (Spence-Brown, 2001:463-481)

Reading for academic purposes requires a **task-based** approach where conveying **meaning** through **real world** challenges is **primary**

The task-based approach ...



... is conceptually near authenticity (Weiderman & Van der Slik, 2005)

... entails reading into writing – academic literacy

... can be coupled with 'traditional' testing

... may encourage students to read widely & actively

... should have good **pedagogical washback**

Addressing study Needs (1) ...



... grappling with heavy reading loads

... reading expeditiously:

'conscious use of strategies to sample a text in the most efficient fashion in line with a particular purpose'

(Urquhart & Weir, 1998:131)

Addressing study needs (2) ...



... understanding & sticking to reading purpose

... distinguishing the important from the less important

... reading critically & thinking critically 'reading the lines, reading between the lines, reading beyond the lines' (Li Du, 2010)

Addressing study needs(3)...



... judiciously filtering the information glut

... making decisions about information fit for purpose texts should have 'sufficient salient features to simulate academic content, style & convention (Leukowicz,1997)

... noting & annotating for operationalizing the end task

... selecting purposefully

The Open-Book Test ...



... is a hybrid (combining aspects of TEEP with Controlled Coursework model)

... includes reading into writing (like TEEP)

... encourages use of sources to 'inform' the writing

... is envisaged as a 5-hour (full day) assessment measure

The Open-Book Test is intended as...



... a compromise between traditional testing formats & a coursework/portfolio approach

... an assessment of academic literacy

... a test of purposeful reading, critical reading & thinking, reading into writing, time management & study skills

Academic literacy is ...



the use of genre as a form of 'how tests are written & interpreted and part as the individual's cognitive processing involved in reading and writing'

(Geisler, 1994)

'the complex set of skills (not necessarily only those relating to the mastery of reading & writing) which are increasingly argued to be vital underpinnings or cultural knowledge required for success in academic communities...'

(Hyland & Hamp-Lyons 2002:4)

Test content & format:



Part 1: focus (15 mins)

Read and make note of any ideas about the following question

How can the academic reading needs of international students be most authentically tested?

Part 2: Preparation (2 hours 45 mins)

Make appropriate use of Texts A-F in order to complete the following tasks which will be assessed by an academic panel:

- Highlight /annotate relevant parts of the texts (10%)
- Rank the 6 texts in order of relevance (10%)
- Complete a set of slides relevant to the focus task (20%)
- Write a critical review (150 words) of one of the texts (20%)
- Answer (350 words) the focus question (30%) + bibliography (10%)

Test content & format (2)



. . .

Part 3: tasks completion (2 hours)

You have 2 hours to finalise and submit your answers

(self) Evaluation (1) ...



- Tension between 'authenticity' & 'practicality'
- Problem of ensuring standardisation of marking
- Issue of creating an accurate set of descriptors & appropriate mark scheme
- Need to avoid 'collusion' between candidates
- Managing a whole day administration of large candidature
- Lower order skills are neglected

(self) Evaluation (2)...



'controlled coursework' successful in secondary education

use of texts in 'high stakes' tests differ from the use intended by writers of academic texts – the OBT goes some way to addressing this

motivation to approach texts in a way more closely resembling actual study practice on degree level courses

Encouraging critical reading & thinking, efficient time management, dealing with lengthy texts, synthesizing skills, appropriate referencing

In the final analysis ...



... in the context of EAP reading **authenticity** and **need** should be perhaps the very essence of any pre- sessional programme of study and the assessment measures that are part of it

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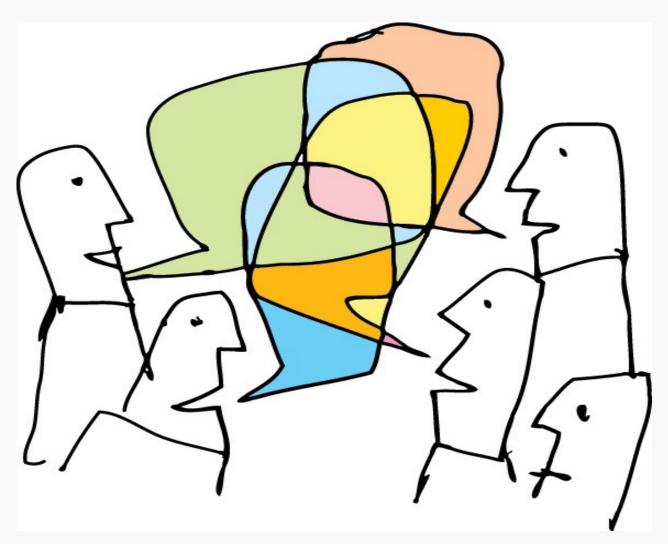
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What do YOU think?





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