

# **Authenticity & Need in the design of EAP Reading Tests**

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# The key to Authenticity ...

*...is the (TLU) '**T**arget **L**anguage **U**se'* (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:*

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

# Test content & format (2)

...

## Part 3: tasks completion (2 hours)

- q *You have 2 hours to finalise and submit your answers*

# (self ) Evaluation (1) ...

- q Tension between ‘authenticity’ & ‘practicality’
- q Problem of ensuring standardisation of marking
- q Issue of creating an accurate set of descriptors & appropriate mark scheme
- q Need to avoid ‘collusion’ between candidates
- q Managing a whole day administration of large candidature
- q 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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# What do YOU think?

