

Rationale for EALTA Special Interest Group *Assessing Writing*

Research in the field of writing is of growing concern as writing is regarded as one of the key qualifications to participate in public life. Current issues cover a range of topics, such as teaching, development and assessment of writing competences in L1 as well as L2, possible definitions of writing constructs, practical questions of task development, the construction of rating scales, validation of writing tests, or political and ethical questions of assessing writing. While there has been a long-standing research tradition in the field of writing, we are still far from having explored all necessary aspects in depth. There is, for example, demand for investigating into the mutual relationship between the development of writing skills in L1 and L2; assessment issues like rater behaviour and feasible rater training, the nature and construction of adequate rating scales, and psychometric models to analyse and report assessment outcomes are to be further explored. A growing interest lies within the challenge of linking writing tasks and student performances to the CEF-levels; while many claims for such existing links have been put forward, there remains the question of how to underpin these claims from a qualitative as well as a quantitative side.

This group addresses teachers, academic researchers and practitioners who are involved or interested in teaching or assessing writing across different learner groups, assessment contexts and institutions. Both, writing in L1 and L2, are included, as comparison and transfer studies between the development in L1 and L2 are a highly informative source of information and insight. The group also hopes to offer a transcultural view on different assessment approaches across Europe and beyond.

This SIG provides a forum for presenting and discussing issues relevant to teaching and assessing writing. Apart from participating in discussions via the email list, an annual meeting is organised which could take the form of a symposium or a workshop addressing current issues emerging from within the group; the meeting could be held either in conjunction with the annual EALTA conferences or at the moderator's university. Further activities include exchange visits of researchers or co-operative research projects amongst group members to enhance the exchange of expertise across Europe.

The moderator for the group is EALTA member Claudia Harsch, who is currently working as Assistant Professor for Language Assessment at the Centre for Applied Linguistics at the University of Warwick, UK. She has worked as researcher and practitioner in the field of testing with a special focus on the assessment of writing since the beginning of the century. Besides working in government-funded test development and evaluation projects in Germany, she has taught at university and given numerous in-service teacher training seminars targeting the development of assessment literacy amongst teachers. Her research interests are in areas around language assessment, with a focus on assessing productive skills and exploring possibilities of assessing intercultural competences.