



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION
FOR LANGUAGE TESTING
AND ASSESSMENT



University of
Bedfordshire

The Impact of Academic Writing Tests

Dr Anthony Green

Centre for Research in English Language Learning and Assessment

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Assessing Academic Writing

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CRELLA

Centre for English Language Learning and Assessment

Writing Processes



Cognitive dimension

– The knowledge factor

- multiple competencies (Bachman and Palmer 1996)

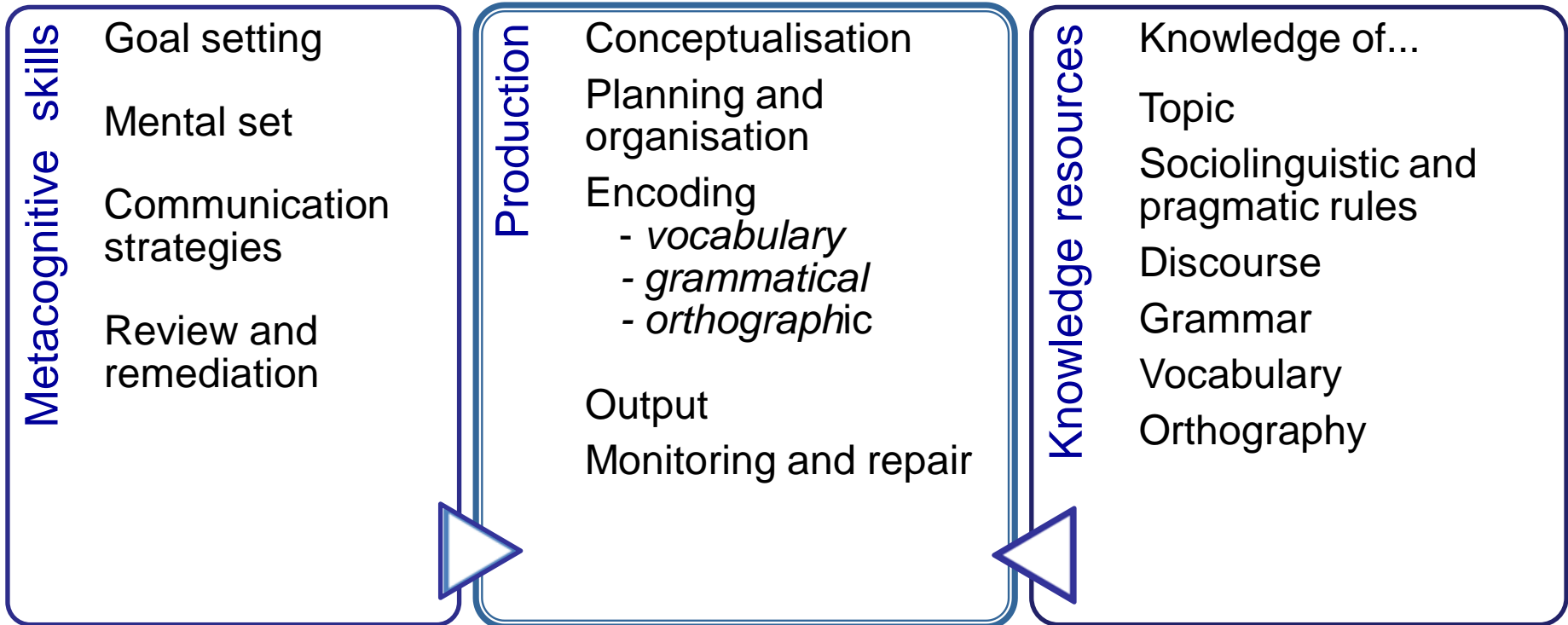
– Processing factor

- established procedures enable fluent performance with online planning reduced to acceptable amounts and timing

– Metacognition

- preparation, remediation, revision

What is Writing?



Green 2013 A simplified model of language production (after Chenoweth and Hayes 2003)

What is *Academic Writing*?

The features that distinguish writing (process or product) as being academic

Academic Writing

What is *academic* writing?



- ***main form of assessment of student learning*** in universities
- usually based on ***external sources of data***
- involves use of ***evidence*** to ***indicate*** or ***test*** a ***conclusion***
- may involve ***induction, abstraction, deduction*** and ***generalisation from given knowledge to new situations***

(Biggs and Collis 1982)

Academic Writing



Academic writing at a university involves...

- self-directed critical inquiry [i.e. *reading*]
- using writing to think through genuine problems and issues
- writing to an imagined community of peers with a personal rhetorical purpose

...and these distinguish academic writing from more limited comprehension and response.

(Flower 1999, p.251)

Academic Writing

What is *academic* writing?



Academic writing involves expectations of...

- clarity and explicitness
- propositional precision
- technical vocabulary use
- formal register (objective style)
- text length
- comprehensibility and coherence
- textual organization
- conciseness
- referencing and integration of sources

Academic Writing

What is *academic* writing?



Successful (positively evaluated) academic writing in non-timed settings typically involves recursive **processes** of...

- ***drafting***
- ***editing***
- ***reformulation***

Best results involve multiple drafting

Academic Writing

Why assess *academic* writing?



Topic understanding is built and assessed through the ***process*** of academic writing

Data selection, reorganisation, analysis, synthesis and ***evaluation*** are both ***writing processes*** and ***learning processes*** (writing to learn)

Writing helps us both to **achieve understanding** and to **communicate our understanding** of a subject

Task design

How Should We Assess Academic Writing?



A common-sense answer ...

'The best way to test people's writing ability is to get them to write'

(Hughes, 2003 p.83)

But *impromptu* writing about personal experiences and opinions is not generally what students do:

reading-to-write

What is Performance Testing?



1. Sample of **written** or spoken language
2. **Simulates behaviour in the real world**
 - ⤴ Not like paper-and-pencil 'objective' tests
3. Observed and evaluated **by agreed judging process**

Performance Testing



Performance tests are characterised by relationship of test task to world beyond the test:

Ideally tasks are...

- ✓ **direct** and
- ✓ **authentic**
 - **situationally** authentic
 - **interactionally** authentic

But test can never fully represent reality

Performance Testing



McNamara (1996) – continuum of performance testing

- Strong – *focus on successful task completion*
- ← Weak – *focus on language used*

Writing Tasks

TLU tasks and assessment tasks



Nature of input

- Spoken/ visual/ written
- Controlled/ impromptu
- Length/ complexity/
number of speakers
- Topic
- Planning time

Nature of (expected) response

- Length
- Interaction
- Text type
- Functions
- Linguistic features
- Purpose

Relationship between input and response

- Reactivity: degree of reciprocity/ interaction involved
- Scope: amount and range of input to be processed in order to respond
- Directness: extent to which response can be made using information in input by or whether test taker must also rely on contextual information/ real world knowledge.

Bachman & Palmer (2010)

Rating scales

Academic Writing

How is *academic* writing assessed?



Successful academic writing is based on common understanding between student and assessor of...

- ***terminology***
- ***assumptions***
- ***issues***
- ***modes of argument***
- ***legitimate evidence***

(National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education 1997)

Understandings of legitimacy of objects & methods of inquiry may not generalise across disciplines.

Dublin descriptors for first cycle (bachelors degree)



Students

- have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that, whilst supported by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study;
- can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and have competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study;
- have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgements that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues;
- can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences;
- have developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy.

Academic Writing

How is *academic* writing assessed?

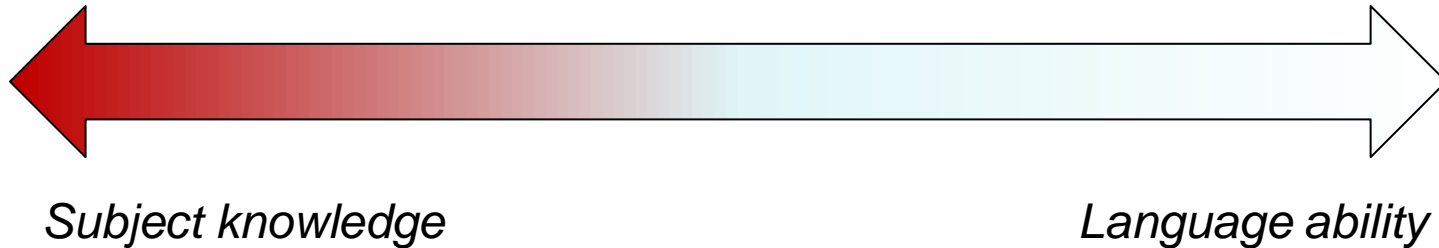


Judgments applied to academic writing principally concern

- ***topic knowledge***
- ***topic understanding***
- ***relevance to task set***
- ***coherence***
- ***observation of conventions***

Criteria for Judging Academic Writing: indigenous or linguistic?

- Content understanding
- Criticality of judgement
- Rhetorical organisation
- Linguistic adequacy



Training Raters



- Understanding criteria for assessment
- Agreement with other raters
- Consistency of performance

Rating Scale Criteria



- Holistic:
 - Global Achievement (Cambridge ESOL, Main Suite examinations)
- Analytic:
 - Task fulfilment, Accuracy and range
 - *(Trinity Integrated Skills in English)*
 - Content, Organisation and cohesion, Range, Accuracy, Appropriacy of register and format
 - *(Cambridge ESOL, Main Suite examinations)*

Holistic Rating Scales



- **Positive features**
 - Practicality: fast
 - Rating holistically may be more naturalistic
- **Disadvantages**
 - No useful diagnostic information: single score
 - Not always easy to interpret: raters not required to use same criteria to arrive at score

Analytic Rating Scales



- **Positive features**

- Can provide diagnostic information if scores reported separately
- Potentially clear, explicit and detailed
- Usually more reliable (multiple scores)
- Useful in training raters to focus on our construct
- Potentially useful in guiding learners

- **Disadvantages**

- Time-consuming
- May overburden raters

Rating Scale Criteria

(CEFR Appendix 1)



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Methods

- *Intuitive*
- *Qualitative*
- *Quantitative*

Qualities

- ✓ Positiveness
- ✓ Definiteness
- ✓ Clarity
- ✓ Brevity
- ✓ Independence

Impact of scoring procedures



How might the choice of global/ holistic rating scale affect teaching and learning?

How else might scoring systems impact on the classroom?

How could you help teachers to use rating scales to support learning?