



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION  
FOR LANGUAGE TESTING  
AND ASSESSMENT

# Testing and Assessment for Academic Purposes Special Interest Group Meeting

Friday, October 14

**Hosted by Sabancı University, Istanbul at:**

**The Karaköy Communication Centre (2<sup>nd</sup> Floor)  
Bankalar Caddesi 2, Karaköy, 34420 Istanbul**

**Event Organiser:** Peter Holt (0539 398 9546)

There is no fee for the event.

## Programme

**10.00 – 10.30 Peter Holt, Sabancı University, School of Languages, Istanbul**

Introduction to EALTA  
Testing and assessment for academic purposes in Europe: A brief overview

**10.30 – 11.00 Diane Schmitt, Nottingham Trent University, UK.**

Testing and assessment for academic purposes in the UK: A brief overview

**11.00-11.20 Coffee Break**

**11.20 – 12.15 Nükte Durhan, Middle East Technical University, Northern Cyprus Campus,  
School of Foreign Languages, Kalkanlı, Güzelyurt, KKTC Mersin 10. Turkey**

**Presentation: The use of synthesis tasks in the assessment of academic writing**

In assessing academic writing, it is important to include “reading-into-writing” tasks as a means to improve validity and authenticity. EAP courses include instruction on synthesizing reading and writing, and writing from source material is an important feature of academic writing across disciplines. There is enough evidence in the literature for considering discourse synthesis processes as part of the academic writing construct. Surveys comparing EAP and IELTS-focused courses identified some skills deficits experienced by students in IELTS preparation courses including EAP areas such as the integration of source material, subject-specific knowledge and vocabulary, coping with the length of university assignments, and not having enough practice in the writing process. Some researchers advocate the restoration of the previously existing link between the Reading and

Writing test modules in IELTS. In the light of this information, this paper proposes that the reading into writing assessment tasks (used at METU freshmen EAP courses) consisting of the production of a synthesis or an argumentative paragraph by combining information from two to three different excerpts on a specific topic are justifiable assessment tasks. However, although these tasks have the strengths of trying to simulate the discourse synthesis sub-processes of organizing, selecting and connecting, and including citation skills, they do not really reflect some of the important characteristics of EAP writing. Some of their main drawbacks are not involving real selection and organization of large amounts of source material on the part of the student, and not reflecting the distinctive features of longer essays - the most common university genre - by focusing on producing a paragraph.

**12.15 - 1.15 Lunch**

**1.15 – 2.10 Diane Schmitt, University of Nottingham, UK.**

**Presentation: When might good teaching practice become a testing problem?**

This presentation will explore the relationship between teaching and testing where coursework essays are used as a method of high stakes assessment. It is not uncommon for students moving into English-medium tertiary level education to have had very limited experience of writing in English. Pre-sessional students regularly report that the longest piece of writing they have ever completed in English is the writing section of either the IELTS or TOEFL exam. Thus, it is easy to see why a large proportion of teaching time on pre-sessional and foundation courses is given over to teaching students to write longer, source-based academic essays.

A difficulty arises, however, when assessment of these same essays is used to make high stakes decisions about students' academic writing ability. Actions which are considered good practice in teaching – lots of support, multiple drafts and extensive feedback – introduce a number of confounding variables for assessors required to make high stakes judgements on which important inferences about students' abilities will be made. When offered the choice between assessing students' abilities in academic writing with an exam taken under test conditions or with the much messier classroom/homework essay, are EAP assessors caught between a rock and a hard place?

**2.10 – 3.05 Stella Smyth, University of Leicester, UK.**

**Presentation: Assessing the assessment: creative writing as a means of assessing students' literary, linguistic and communicative competence in a university module on *Shakespeare's Plays***

This talk is based on a 10 credit undergraduate module in Shakespearean studies for international students at the University of Leicester. First, I outline how I incorporated creative writing alongside more traditional academic assignments. My presentation will then show how these two forms of written assessments complemented each other. Moreover, it will illustrate how both of these formative assessments created a potentially transferable synergy between teaching and testing.

There is already a model in Shakespeare's own practice for the use of creative writing – based on his plays. Referring to the module's syllabus and then to samples of the students' assessed work on it, I demonstrate that certain aspects of the creative writing process are both teachable and testable.

Finally, the talk raises three questions which it seeks to answer, as well as opening them up for further responses from the audience: 1. How can we assess L2 students' response to literary texts in a broader, more enlightened range of written genres than just the traditional academic essay?

2. How does the experience of producing creative writing on Shakespeare equip learners with relevant skills for the workplace or their future career choices? 3. How did the creative writing tasks on this particular module achieve both 'face' and 'content' validity with the learners, academic colleagues and the course assessors?

### **3.05 – 3.25 Coffee Break**

**3.25 – 4.20 Glyn Jones, Senior Researcher, Language Testing, Pearson.**

#### **Presentation: Investigating the difficulty of integrated skill test items for Academic Purposes**

Integrated skill items – test items which assess more than one language skill – may be expected to lend a degree of authenticity to assessments of academic language ability inasmuch as academic skills largely involve *processing* information: reading in order to prepare for a spoken presentation, for example, or writing notes while listening to a lecture.

In a study of a listening-only item type in the Pearson Test of English Academic (PTE Academic) Brunfaut and Revesz (2011) found that aspects of discourse structure such as lexical cohesion were better predictors of test takers' performance than were physical features, such as speed of delivery. It may be that, for these test takers, the challenge in listening as an academic skill consists in processing prepositional content more than in decoding the acoustic signal.

This presentation will report on progress of a study aimed at extending this line of enquiry to an integrated item type, the "Summarize Spoken Text" item in which the test taker writes a brief summary of an authentic recorded text, usually an extract from a lecture. The presenter will endeavour to show how physical and structural aspects of the texts impinge on the quality of test takers' written responses.

**4.20 – 5.15 Tara Erdener and Michael O'Neill, Doğuş University, Istanbul**

#### **Presentation: Assessing Students Critical Thinking Skills in Productive Language Tasks**

Doğuş University Department of Foreign Languages has begun a new initiative aimed at addressing the teaching and assessment of critical thinking skills in students' productive language tasks. This session is designed to allow participants to reflect on the role of critical thinking tools and skills in the construction of syllabi and assessment and also to share some of the systems we have implemented and the results of them so far.

#### **5.15 – 6.00 Discussion**

Participants who are not presenting are invited to submit questions related to their own testing or assessment context which they would like to share with the group. Alternatively, they may have further questions for the presenters. The session is intended to provide an opportunity for participants to exchange ideas about issues of common interest. Where possible, questions will be circulated to the group before the session..

### **7.00 Dinner on the Galata Bridge**

Restaurant to be announced. There will be a fixed menu of around 55 Turkish lira, or an *A La Carte* menu.