Beyond the Five-Paragraph Essay in EAP Writing

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Today’s Session

A practical presentation, with teaching ideas for the EAP writing class

Slides available from: jennifermacdonald.ca
The 5-paragraph essay

- Formulaic “McEssay”
- Intro--3 body paragraphs--Conclusion
- Based on personal opinion/experience (vs. external sources/texts)
- Different from an argumentative essay
Why move past the 5-p essay in EAP?

- A genre that only exists in writing courses (ESL/EAP or L1)
- Corpus data suggest other genres more common in academic study (Gardner and Nesi, 2012)
- Academic courses require students to demonstrate knowledge of a source text much more frequently than ESL/EAP courses so (Leki and Carson, 1997)

- Can facilitate a (continued) uncritical approach to text: one-size-fits-all “zombie writing” (formulaic writing; canned responses; limited development of topics, etc.)
What to do?

- Raise genre awareness: the “rhetorical flexibility necessary for adapting…to ever evolving contexts” (Johns, 2008).
- How?
  - Teach concept of genre and get students to think about it before and during writing
  - Provide resources on genre to be accessed independently
  - Assign (for reading and writing) a variety of texts of the types students are more likely to encounter in their academic careers
Genre - a simplified definition

- Different text types, or genres, for different contexts
- Exemplars of a genre show similarity of purpose, audience, structure, style and content (Swales, 1990)
Teaching genre - the footwear metaphor

- Various genres/types of footwear: high heels, soccer/football cleats, winter snow boots, sandals.
- **Purpose.** Each has its purpose: to make it wearer look good, to provide traction and allow for speed, to keep feet warm and dry, to keep the feet cool
- **Expectation of a community.** If you don’t wear what’s expected in that context, it can seem inappropriate.
- **Shared style/structure.** Each genre of footwear shares structural and style characteristics: (a pronounced heel, laces and spikes, rubber and lugged sole, open-toed construction), without each pair being exactly the same.
Other Challenges

- **Adapting to your context.** Can’t have full authenticity of purpose, audience, structure, style and content of texts in an EAP context with a mixed class. Aim for as many of these features as possible.
- **Work arounds for research.** Can’t always draw on the authentic, discipline-specific research that certain genres would draw upon in their academic context. Have to get creative.
- **Finding resources.** Many textbooks don’t approach text in this way. Compile your own samples, decide what to focus on.
- **Independent resources.** Great Resource: British Council - Writing with a Purpose (http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/writing-purpose/writing-purpose)
Eight Academic Genres to Try in the EAP Classroom

- Explanation
- Definition
- Methodology Recount
- Literature Survey
- Case Study
- Proposal
- Abstract
- Professional biography
Explanation: “A descriptive account, written to demonstrate understanding of the object of study and the ability to describe and explain systematically how it functions.” (Gardner, 2011)

* Can be a paragraph (topic sentences and paragraph-level skills can be introduced)
* What to describe? Anything! Draw on web, Youtube, Wikipedia, textbooks, students’ prior knowledge
Definition/extended definition as found in dictionaries, specialist dictionaries, encyclopedias or even (gasp!) Wikipedia

- The structures used in this genre is of particular interest: defining, impersonality, objectivity
- From Wikipedia’s submission guidelines:

  6 Rule 6. Cite, cite, cite
  7 Rule 7. Avoid shameless self-promotion
  8 Rule 8. Share your expertise, but don't argue from authority
  9 Rule 9. Write neutrally and with due weight
Methodology Recount: “A description of procedures undertaken by the writer, possibly including Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion sections, written to develop familiarity with disciplinary procedures and methods, and additionally to record experimental findings.” (Gardner, 2011)

- This is the genre of the lab report.
- Students could find a demonstration of a scientific experiment on Youtube/carry out a simple science or social science experiment and write it up.
- Lots of examples of first-year lab reports online for exemplars
Literature Survey: “A summary including varying degrees of critical evaluation, written to demonstrate familiarity with literature relevant to the focus of study.” (Gardner, 2011)

- Present a collection of texts at a level and source appropriate to the class.
- Does even have to be full texts: could be headlines or summaries or abstracts.
Case Study: “A description of an exemplar or particular case with recommendations or suggestions for future action, typically written to gain an understanding of professional practice (e.g. in business, medicine, or engineering) (Gardner, 2011)”.

- This can be tricky in a mixed class without shared background knowledge
- All students can approach the same case/exemplar, but describe it and recommend further action from the point of view of their own discipline, e.g. focus on the Alberta Oil Industry from an economic, environmental or technological point of view
- Can also do a linguistic case study of a piece of learner writing; students will have to draw on linguistic metalanguage to describe and recommend action
Proposal: “A text including an expression of purpose, a detailed plan, and persuasive argumentation, written to demonstrate the ability to make a case for future action” (Gardner, 2011).

- Similar approach to case study can be taken
Paltridge (1996) analyzes the moves in an abstract. Interesting model to read.

- Easy to compile a “micro-corpus” of abstracts from a certain field, and have students analyze them for various features: moves, use of passive, use of personal pronouns, use of different collocations
- An abstract can be written based on a student’s own research, an existing research paper, or accounts of research from easier-to-read publications like Scientific American
Academic/professional bio; Twitter/LinkedIn bio

- Gather samples from conference programs, the bottom of research articles, social media
- Analyze for content, vocabulary, grammatical structures
- Students can write bios for themselves, or for famous people, historical figures, etc.
References


Thanks!

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