

# How to Improve Your Academic English

## Getting the most out of an English-speaking environment

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Welcome

- 329 DeBartolo Hall
- Web: <http://cslc.nd.edu/>

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Program

- EAP Fellows: Justus Ghormley & Amanda Wepler
- Workshops & Blog
- Tutoring & Consultation Services
- Courses: TA, Pronunciation, Writing, Presentations
- Web: <http://cslc.nd.edu/eap>
- [http://graduateschool.nd.edu/professional\\_development/pdcalendar/](http://graduateschool.nd.edu/professional_development/pdcalendar/)

### **The Learning Process**

#### **Pair Work:**

- Describe a skill or aptitude you developed over time. (ex: musical instrument)
- What was the key to mastery?
- What advice would you give to a novice?

Practicing consistently in meaningful blocks of time each day is better than practicing for several hours just once a week.

### **World Englishes**

How many different types of English can you think of?

- British English
- American English
- Australian English
- Caribbean English
- Hong Kong English
- Philippine English
- Singapore English
- South African English
- Indian English
- Hip-hop English
- ...?

### **What is Academic English?**

- Talk about the last time you had to explain a complex topic or idea. Assume the person you are talking to has no prior knowledge or background in the topic

- How is the language we use in conversation different than the language used to explain or teach something complex?
- **Write down 3-5 features of Academic English.**
  - Share them with your partner

### **Features of Academic English**

- Rich in detail and description
- Combines and links sentences: paragraph length discourse
- Narrates and describes using major time frames
- Handles challenges presented by complications
- Paraphrases
- Gives multiple examples
- Can be understood by people unaccustomed to dealing with non-native speakers

### **Language Skills for Mastery**

- Writing, Reading, Speaking, Listening, Vocabulary, Grammar

### **Improving Writing by Reading**

“All text represents content, which is what we want to get out of the text, but it also has a structure or organization.”

*Joanna Williams, professor of psychology and education, Columbia University*

### **Improving Writing by Reading**

- **Read for content first, read again for form & structure**
- Take notes on commonly used structures: descriptive, cause-effect, compare and contrast, etc.
- Look for key vocabulary and transition words/phrases
- Identify what you do not understand or what is confusing
- How does the author connect the central ideas to secondary topics?
- Keep a reading response journal

### **Building Vocabulary**

When do you know a new word or phrase has been added to your vocabulary?

- Know what it means (Definition)
- Know how to say it (Pronunciation)
- Know how to spell it (Spelling)
- Know when and when not to use it

(Context & Grammar)

- **You can use the word/phrase with confidence**

Vocabulary Notebooks:

- Pay attention to what you hear and read
- Note words and phrases you want to use
- **Write them down in an organized place**
- Look up the definition and usage
- Track how often you use a word or phrase
- Choose **NO MORE** than 4-5 to practice each week

- If you can use it five or more times in a single week, move on to a new word/phrase

### Spoken Language

- How much time do you spend actually *speaking* English every week?
  - **Not** listening to a lecture or other students
  - **Not** getting explanations in your own language about how the language works
  - **Not** watching TV/Movies or listening to the radio
- How much time do you spend in focused speaking practice?

Focused Speaking Practice:

- **Record Yourself**
  - Talk about academic topics as if you were talking to an expert.
- **Listen immediately and again 24 hours**
  - What do you notice about your own speech?
  - Which sounds do you have difficulty hearing?
  - Where do you pause or hesitate?
  - What vocabulary are you using
- **Favor frequency vs. length**
  - You will improve more quickly if you record yourself 10 minutes per day than if you try to do 2 hours once a week
- Take what you need from each and every communication encounter
- Continuously review your progress

### Second Language Acquisition

"We believe that what the learner does to learn a foreign language is far more important than what the teacher teaches."

*The ABCs of Languages and Linguistics: A Basic Introduction to Language Science" by Curtis Hayes, Jacob Ornstein & William Gage*

- What does this quote say to you about building language skills?
- With a partner: Come up with your own statement about language learning

### Setting Goals

Survey:

- What do you hope to accomplish regarding your academic English?
- Why do you want to improve?
- What is clear & effective communication?
- What is your present level? What is your target?
- How much time can you realistically spend practicing your academic English?

Best Practices:

- Take into consideration the your personal time commitments and abilities.
- Identify objectives to achieve your goals
  - *how* you plan to achieve your goals

- Monitor your progress and refine your goals, objectives, strategies and plans as needed.
- The more you put into your language the more you will get out of it.

Make a plan for working on your Academic English:

- Set realistic goals
- Learn about the features of academic English
- Record and listen to yourself
- Read for more than just content
- Build self-monitoring skills
- Use your new vocabulary in your daily life
- Gain confidence and comfort
- Looking for advice

*Read the following situation with a partner and discuss possible solutions for Sam.*

- Sam is preparing to give a presentation at an academic conference at the end of the semester. Currently he does the following:
  - He reads various articles on the topic of the presentation for 1-2 hours a week.
  - He writes notes on the topic for 30 minutes once a week.
  - For the remaining hours of the week, he is focused on other things.
  - He usually works individually in the lab, at the library or at home.
  - Sam only talks to his professors and colleagues about a other topics: what is going on in the lab, what classes to take, etc.

*Read the following situation with your partner and discuss possible solutions for Mae.*

- Mae is trying to improve her spoken English. Currently she does the following:
  - She goes to EAP workshops occasionally and has never made an appointment with an EAP tutor.
  - She usually works individually in her lab, at the library or at home.
  - Although she watches English language TV she speaks very little.
  - She only occasionally speaks with her professors outside of class.
  - Most of Mae's friends are from her native country, so when she socializes with friends she usually speaks her native language.

### **Resources on Campus**

- International Student and Scholar Affairs (ISSA)
  - <http://issa.nd.edu/>
- University Writing Center
  - <http://writingcenter.nd.edu>
- English for Academic Purposes
  - <http://cslc.nd.edu/eap/>