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 Weppler
• Workshops & Blog
• Tutoring & Consultation Services
• Courses: TA, Pronunciation, Writing, Presentations
• Web: http://cslc.nd.edu/eap
• 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 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/