

# Getting university students lecture ready

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## Reference data:

Higgins, R., & Wong, R. (2010). Getting university students lecture ready. In A. M. Stoke (Ed.), *JALT2009 Conference Proceedings*. Tokyo: JALT.

Academic English courses are on the increase in Japanese universities. The decision to introduce this type of course is influenced by a range of factors. The instructors' role in this decision-making process is marginal. However, their contribution to the course design is not. This article will discuss an English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) program and its study skills preparation for English content-based lectures. To address the issues outlined above, the article will provide an overview of the teaching context followed by a focused discussion and evaluation of lecture preparation study skills in an EFL context.

日本の大学におけるアカデミック（大学における学問的な）英語コースは増加傾向にある。この様なタイプのコースを導入する為の決議は様々な要因に影響される。この政策決定上における講師の役割はわずかなものであるが、講師陣のコース形成への提案は多大である。この論説ではジェネラル・アカデミック・パーパス（EGAP）とそれに於ける、英語での講義内容での学習方法について論じられている。上記に概略が説明されている論題に取り組むために、この論説は焦点をあてた討論に続いて指導内容の要約と外国語での内容による英語でのEAPの学習方法をの評価を提供する。

**T**HERE HAS been detailed discussion about the globalization of English over recent times (see Graddol, 2006). The global reach of English and its specific areas of focus have an impact on institutional decision-making. This is particularly true in respect of courses being offered in university English language programs throughout Japan where a comprehensive range such as English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Content-Based Instruction (CBI), and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has evolved. With the emergence of these courses comes a necessity to support students in EAP and study skills relevant to their specific fields. It has been suggested that academic discourse is different from general listening events. Academic discourse has a special disciplinary orientation in that it is delivered to an audience in particular ways with underlying rhetorical structures that are different from English used in a more familiar conversational context (MacDonald, Badger, & White, 2000). This article will discuss classroom practice informed by the relevant EAP literature.



## Our context

Six years ago, Ritsumeikan University established the College of Information Science and Engineering (CISE). The program aimed to increase students' English language proficiency and deepen their knowledge of Information Technology (IT) to prepare them for engineering and computer-related careers. In the first few years, the English program focused on ESP. An IT textbook *Infotech* (Esteras, 2002), along with essay writing, discussions, presentations, and individual and collaborative project work, was used to help prepare students for their IT studies. These courses were designed to complement respective CBI lectures (given by computer-science teachers in English) and other English-specific IT assignments required by the CISE.

The curriculum review of the ESP program after it ended suggested a general EAP approach might be more beneficial. The rapid pace of change in IT and technology content can quickly render the information in a textbook obsolete. As students received the content in other programs in the department, the decision was made to use a more general EAP approach. Our starting point for creating a new program was having a general understanding of the field of EAP that would allow us to set out goals and objectives in respect of the new curriculum.

## What is EAP?

EAP is generally defined as teaching English with the aim of facilitating learners' study or research in that language (Jordan, 1997). The academic discourse of EAP has grown over the past 25 years (Hyland & Lyons, 2002). Blue (1988, cited in Jordan, 1997) identified two divisions: English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP). EGAP has a more general study skills focus, including academic listening and note-taking. ESAP is more specifically genre focused. Most English language departments in universi-

ties offer some form of EAP instruction. Japan, certainly at the tertiary level of English education, has adopted more academic English programs (Flowerdew, 1994). This phenomenon raises some interesting questions generally about curriculum decisions, but also for classroom pedagogy, regarding the effectiveness of these kinds of programs for EFL learners, in particular.

## What to include in an EAP skills-based syllabus?

In discussion of various EAP syllabus types, it has been suggested that a skills approach concentrates on more of the traditional language skills (Jordan, 1997). In an EFL environment where students may not have been taught genre specific EAP, this macro language focus can be supplemented by micro skills such as reading or listening strategies. It has been suggested that the main problems associated with taking lectures are decoding, comprehension, and note-taking (James, 1977, cited in Jordan, 1997). In light of this, an EFL context seems to benefit from a general EAP approach that targets these areas within a study skills framework. Within EAP preparation, vocabulary development has at times been considered incidental to reading comprehension (Jordan, 1997). However, it has been suggested by Saville-Troike (1984, cited in Jordan, 1997) that vocabulary knowledge is the single most important area of second language competence regarding academic achievement.

## Vocabulary

Increasing lexical knowledge is one of the central pillars upon which students must build and expand in their continuing efforts to develop their communicative competence in a foreign language. The students' range of passive vocabulary knowledge and their ability to access words quickly have a profound impact on their ability to comprehend academic lectures. "Lexical ignorance" has been found to be one of the major hindrances that

students struggle with when comprehending lectures in English (Kelly, 1991, cited in Flowerdew, 1994). Problems with lexical misunderstanding caused by imperfect perception and understanding of a word's form and meaning have been reported by Rost (1994) as a factor in preventing students from understanding more of lectures and taking more complete notes. In order to better prepare students for academic lectures in English it is vital that EAP instructors pay equal attention to extending the learners' lexical knowledge, listening skills, and note-taking. A vocabulary focus helps with the decoding of what is being said in a lecture. Taking notes and listening comprehension are also macro language skills that are important for content lectures in a second language. This is where the discussion will now turn.

### Note-taking

A part of study skills, note-taking, in particular, is one of the more challenging areas of EAP preparation. What might be considered as appropriate in certain academic settings is not necessarily so in others. Note-taking is a good example of this kind of issue. It has been noted that ethno-cultural as well as language proficiency differences can impact on the strategies of note-takers in EAP classes (Dunkel, 1988). The importance of effective note-taking cannot be overestimated as some studies show that information in lecture notes is twice as likely to be recalled as material not taken down (Aiken, Thomas, & Shennum, 1975). It was felt in our institutional context that the students were taking content-based lectures in English; therefore, study skills training would support lecture preparation more effectively as it develops academic skills including note-taking.

### Academic listening

Listening in an academic university environment involves both collaborative, interactional listening, where a speaker and

listener are engaged in a conversation, and non-collaborative, transactional (one-way) listening. Students engage in collaborative listening in small group discussions, Q & A time at the end of a presentation, modeling of speaking activities with the English instructor, and talking with the teacher. Transactional listening usually occurs in a lecture or a class presentation where the speaker tries to convey to the audience a coherent body of information and details.

According to Hansen and Jansen (1994), listening comprehension involves a series of processes which include "phoneme recognition, morpheme chunking, lexical selection, and creation of a referential meaning for words" (p. 242). James (1977, cited in Jordan, 1997) examined specifically students' listening comprehension in lectures and categorized the main problems that students have with lectures into three broad areas:

- decoding (i.e., recognizing what has been said)
- comprehending (i.e., understanding the main and subsidiary points)
- taking notes (i.e., writing down quickly, briefly, and clearly the important points) (Jordan, 1997, p. 179)

Comprehending an academic lecture usually includes more than just understanding the main spoken input as the students are required to combine the spoken input with other informational sources such as handouts, PowerPoint slides, black/white board displays, slides, and audiovisual materials like videos and segments from the Internet. In order to better follow and comprehend the content of a lecture, students need to be aware that it is crucial to pay attention to the discourse markers of the overall organization (Chaudron & Richards, 1986). In their study, Chaudron and Richards have divided these discourse signals into macro-markers which "are explicit expressions of the planning of the lecture information" (p. 123) and micro-markers which "indicate links between sentences within the lecture, or which function as fillers" (p. 116). Some examples of micro- and macro-markers:

**Micro-markers:**

Well / OK / So / But / Of course / You see / For the moment / Because / Obviously

**Macro-markers:**

To begin with... / I want to discuss the causes of \_\_\_\_\_ / That's enough about \_\_\_\_\_. Let's go on to \_\_\_\_\_. / Let me define that / One of the problems was \_\_\_\_\_ /

(Jordan, 1997; Sarosy & Sherak, 2007)

According to Flowerdew (1994), in the discussion of lecturing styles, there is a general consensus that a conversational style of lecturing is more prevalent. Chaudron and Richards (1986) concluded that a conversational style has more macro-markers, and they and other researchers (Decarrio & Nattinger, 1988, cited in Jordan, 1997) argued for more emphasis to be placed on the teaching of these discourse markers.

**Getting lecture ready**

Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002) recognized EAP takes practitioners “beyond preparing learners for study in English to developing new kinds of literacy: equipping students with the communicative skills to participate in particular academic and cultural contexts” (p. 2). As a result of discussions and the needs analysis for the new EAP curriculum, the teachers felt that certain areas of literacy and communicative skills discussed earlier merited priority. In order to complement the compulsory IT lecture courses outlined, we felt it was necessary to support our students in lecture preparation skills. However, without a strategic team-teaching approach involving collaboration between EAP and content teachers, it is questionable if this is necessarily the best way to progress. The sessions followed what the

instructors felt was logical and pedagogically sound preparation for a lecture, as discussed earlier. The classroom EAP preparation followed a 2-week cycle. These skills sessions had both a macro and micro language skills focus.

**Schematic knowledge**

When students attend a lecture they would normally be expected to have some background knowledge or schemata about the content. It is useful to separate schemata into two categories: content schemata and formal schemata. A schema is a mental construct. Edge (2009) suggested schemata are “ways of organizing our items of knowledge into relevant associations, something like a flexible, organic filing system” (p. 2). Schema activities included visual aids and discussions about the topic areas. By using this approach to introduce the broad area of the content, we are enabling the participants to activate their knowledge about what will be studied and discussed.

**Topic-focused reading**

Content schemata provide a platform to understand the lecture later in the class, but also lead into the reading that introduces concepts, specific vocabulary, and idioms to be recycled throughout the lesson. Each area supports and reinforces knowledge and context. The reading is relatively short and is used to give students a general flavor of the lecture. This reading leads in to more specific vocabulary work.

**Developing learners' academic vocabulary**

The instructors decided to focus more on teaching and recycling vocabulary from the Academic Word List (AWL) developed by Coxhead (2000) in order to more efficiently extend the lexical knowledge needed in an academic context in a short period of

time. Deliberately teaching and using words from the AWL can be a more efficient way to increase vocabulary knowledge and thus gain greater lexical coverage of academic texts in a short period of time. According to Nation (2008), the AWL typically makes up around 8.5% to 10% of words in academic texts and around 4% of newspaper articles. As some newspapers' articles are written in a less rigid academic and easier-to-understand format than textbooks and technical journals, they can make good bridging materials to introduce academic words in context to the learners. Taking the above into account, the instructors have employed the following mixture of language-focused and meaning-focused activities designed to raise their students' lexical knowledge:

- making and using word cards in speaking activities based on AWL words with Japanese definitions, English definitions, and collocated words
- reading newspaper articles selected by the instructors with a higher occurrence of word families from the AWL. Students are asked to underline the AWL words, check their meanings in both L1 and L2, and note the collocations.
- creating collocation grids
- word manipulation exercises such as matching words and their definitions

### Note-taking strategies

The instructors gave participants working examples of prepared notes. Instruction on using shorthand approaches such as abbreviations, symbols, and other time-saving techniques were introduced. This also allowed the instructors to demonstrate their own note-taking styles and enabled students to evaluate different approaches. It is also important in note-taking training to highlight the objectives as well as the process of taking lecture notes. What will the notes be used for later? For example, stu-

dents can use them for reinforcing comprehension of the lecture, or answering a specific question in a test. Therefore, using forms of shorthand, for example abbreviations, should be taught, but it is equally important to make clear the meaning must be understood during the review process; as Chaudron, Loschky, & Cook (1994) suggested, "if essential information is noted it will only be useful if students have a firm control of the meanings of abbreviations" (p. 89). The focus of the classroom study skills preparation then moved on to the academic listening, and listening strategies in particular.

### Lecture listening strategies

Activating schemata, discussed earlier in relation to content, is also relevant to the discourse structures of lectures. Edge (2009) highlights that "formal schemata are arrangements of knowledge based on what we know about how the language is used (p. 2). This is part of a top-down processing approach to the lecture. This allows us to better identify and understand information based on the language used. By highlighting and teaching listening strategies for lectures we can enable students to identify and take notes about key information that is being discussed. The discourse structures of academic listening and lectures in particular are quite specific.

The instructors explicitly highlighted discourse structures in pre-listening activities. Furthermore, students were introduced to some of these lexical markers and were then asked to find them in some short sample lecture transcripts. Having introduced the students to the relevant sets of new lexical markers, the class proceeded to the next step of strategy training for lecture listening where some short audio parts of lectures were played and students wrote down the key information using their knowledge of salient lecture language. This listening activity is very helpful for listening to the language in context. At its conclusion, the short tapescripts for these 1 to 2 minute segments of a practice lecture

were given out. The learners were then instructed to highlight the macro-markers in the lecture introduced in the pre-listening activities and used the tapescript to check their answer to the lecture comprehension questions before final feedback by the teacher. As discussed above in research of macro-organizers it has been suggested that understanding transitional lecture language, for example, does have a greater effect on recall of information (Chaudron & Richards, 1986).

### Lecture simulation

In this segment of the class, short DVD lectures of approximately 10 minutes were used. This brings together all of the content, vocabulary, and language forms that have been studied. It also introduces other salient factors that students will encounter during English lectures in their CISE computer courses. Spoken discourse includes both verbal and non-verbal cues which combine to convey the intended message of the speaker, so it is important that students not only listen to a lecture on a CD, but that they also have the experience of taking a live lecture on video in their EAP classes (Jordan, 1997). In preparing the students to be ready for taking computer science lectures, video segments of lectures with natural speech with all its idiosyncrasies were introduced. By using real-time processing, this really tests the students' ability to respond to what is said in an instant; this is unlike reading, because information cannot be manipulated within the student's own time frame (Rost, 1990). Also, exposure to natural language use which includes pausing, false starts, hesitations, humor, and asides is an important source of exposure to language that is presented in an authentic context. Furthermore, in terms of speech rate, EFL instructors do modify their language in the classroom and this is less likely to be the case in CBI. The simulation lecture offers a bridge between an EAP context and a real-time lecture. Indeed, particularly slow rates of speech may not significantly enhance comprehension (Flowerdew, 1994).

### Evaluation

Learner feedback of our EAP lecture preparation course highlighted a number of issues that require further examination. We felt it was important to obtain students' perceptions of the effectiveness of this EAP approach. During this evaluation it became clear that students did not feel their note-taking had improved. They also highlighted some changes they would like to see in respect of classroom activities involving the textbook. The evaluation and reflection process have also flagged other factors to consider for the future of this course. This is where the discussion will now turn.

### Students' perceptions

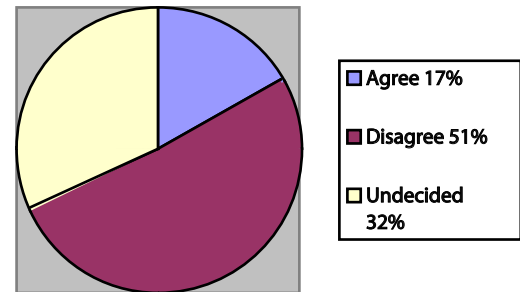
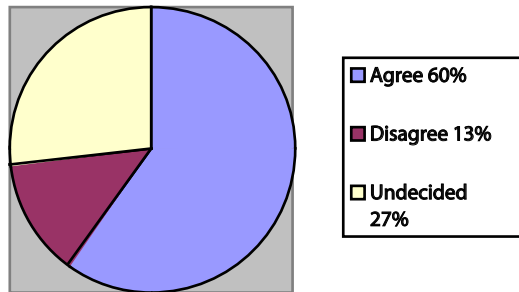


Figure 1. I have learnt how to take better notes when I listen to talks in English.

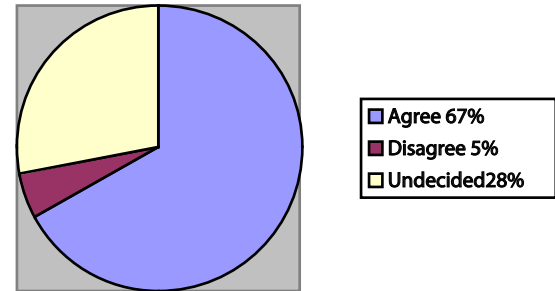
The statistics above indicate there is a level of dissatisfaction with our note-taking training. There could be a number of reasons for this issue. It may be the case that they are not really in a position to evaluate whether their note-taking has improved or not. Almost certainly, their understanding of note-taking

and how to apply this has improved. However, it does raise an important issue. If the students' have this impression about their note-taking, it could have a detrimental affect on their motivation to take notes in their content lectures. This finding has afforded a reflection on note-taking training and is being addressed.



**Figure 2. Learning about lecture language has helped me to follow lectures in English better.**

This suggests a degree of success in the teaching of lecture listening strategies and raising awareness of lecture language. However, there is at present no concrete assessment of the correlation between the EAP approach and the lecture language used in the content lectures. It remains to be seen if some form of collaboration can be developed in the future. As Belcher (2006) recognizes "institutional constraints and an unwillingness of would-be collaborators can be a major hurdle to teaching partnerships" (p. 140).



**Figure 3. I can understand a lecture better when I can see and listen at the same time to the lecturer.**

This would seem to support our decision to include a DVD lecture series. The discussion above about the benefits of exposure to authentic lecture language and interaction, and its delivery through this visual model, seems to outweigh the benefits of an ad-hoc approach to materials design.

### Implications for EAP preparation

As discussed at the outset of this article, academic studies in English are on the increase. What are some implications for English language teachers? In choosing a suitable preparation course in an EFL context, a broad study skills focus seems to balance important lecture learning preparation with core study skills. Looking at this in the more specific context of preparing students for academic lectures in English, it is necessary to use some intermediary bridging materials like short audio lectures, slightly longer audiovisual lectures, and newspaper articles to help students develop both specific academic skills and their lexical knowledge.

Making decisions about materials is a difficult one. In our courses a mixture of materials was used that included some that were commercially sourced. Evaluating course materials is often intuitive and implicit with no particular training given to teachers (Jebani, 2009). In our survey of the students regarding their perceptions of the course, it was found that they considered aspects of the course to be less successful than the course designers had anticipated. It is important when evaluating materials to obtain both teacher and learner feedback.

The evaluation of this EGAP preparation highlighted certain areas for improvement. Using group work to check notes and allowing the groups to negotiate the pace of the input with the teacher are certainly factors to consider (see Nation & Newton, 2009). Collaborative note-checking and promoting learning communities seem to be possible learning strategies to help with these issues (Miller, 2002). In the future there will be an increase in academic English courses in Japan and teachers need to adapt and innovate with the classes they teach.

## Bio data

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