

Review of Milada Walková (2024). *Teaching Academic Writing for EAP: Language Foundations for Practitioners*. Bloomsbury Academic. 211 pp. ISBN 9781350287716 (Paperback)

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I declare no conflict of interest.

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In April 2021, I transitioned from teaching General and Exam English in a variety of contexts to teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) at City University of Hong Kong. Having aspired to teach in a university setting for some time, I had sought out the teaching assignments in my previous roles that I saw as being the most closely related to EAP. I embarked upon this transition, then, having acquired experience teaching on a range of IELTS preparation courses and courses that focused on writing proficiency, and while I hoped that this experience would provide firm ground on which to pivot towards my new path, I knew that I was going to have to take additional steps to equip myself to meet the demands of my new context.

Once in my role, I found that, in my attempts to enhance my ability to meet the needs and expectations of my new students across the range of English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) courses that I had been assigned, I was fast becoming something of a student myself during the evenings, reading much of the original research cited in the course materials prepared by my colleagues. And, while I had initially regarded this reading as simply part of the groundwork that I would have to do in order equip myself with the knowledge that would allow me to perform my teaching duties confidently, I must confess that I found the additional reading I was doing to be such a confidence booster that I was reluctant to stop. It was a great pleasure, therefore, to read through Milada Walková's recent book *Teaching Academic Writing for EAP: Language Foundations for Practitioners*, where the importance of EAP practitioners consulting the relevant academic research so that their practice may properly be described as "research-informed" is something of a through-thread. An EAP practitioner herself (at the University of Leeds, UK), Walková demonstrates some of her own considerable activities in engaging with original research across this seven-chapter book, whose aim is to provide an overview of the available research into concepts relevant to academic writing and to demonstrate how this research can inform teaching practice.

In the Introduction chapter, Walková (following Ding and Bruce, 2017) explains that, to the extent that EAP is closely informed by academic research, it can rightfully be regarded as an academic discipline. That said, and as she soon concedes, good research-informed practice is quite often not achieved in EAP, with practitioners sometimes acquiring the underlying knowledge that informs their practice from suboptimal sources (such as teaching materials found on EAP websites). Owing to such materials often being developed in a space that is multiple degrees of separation from relevant scholarly research, these types of materials, Walková cautions, are liable to rely on preconceptions (or “myths”) about academic writing that have been repudiated in the relevant literature. Instead, practitioners should either be looking to obtain ‘first-hand access’ to the relevant academic theories and research or a type of ‘second-hand access’ that keeps the original work in view – the type of access that might be offered by conference presentations that illustrate how original research can be applied in a practical setting, for instance, or by Walková’s book itself.

Chapter 2 begins with an accessible overview of theories of epistemology and language use, followed by brief discussions of writing and language pedagogy, and approaches to EAP. Readers are either introduced to or reminded of, for instance, Bloom’s revised-taxonomy of cognitive skills, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP), the process-genre approach to writing instruction, and the critical-pragmatic approach to EAP. The discussions of the respective theories and approaches are thorough enough to be understood by readers who have not yet encountered them, yet brief enough to maintain a lively pace. With so many different concepts presented so succinctly, I would suggest that this chapter might be particularly useful as a starting point for practitioners who are tasked with designing a course and who wish to decide on the underlying theoretical principles, supported in the literature, that will help direct the design process. Should the reader find that they wish to read about a concept in more detail, references are consistently made to the books and articles in which these concepts were originally described.

Chapter 3, on the subject of genre, starts by emphasizing that, rather than being rigidly prescriptive, genres should be understood as sets of conventions – identifiable patterns of moves and associated language items that can be adapted to suit the writer's purpose. The chapter also includes an insightful discussion of how EAP practitioners might negotiate the challenges (which, as the author concedes, cannot be eliminated entirely) presented by the “genre paradox”, a term used to describe the frequent mismatch between the expert academic genres that students read (e.g. textbooks, journal articles) and those in which they are expected to write (e.g. essays). The second part of the chapter is given over to discussions of selected (common) academic genres, and includes detailed tables of typical moves and language items for each genre discussed. The tables synthesize analysis from multiple sources, and practitioners might be tempted to include this chapter as a reference in their course materials so as to provide students with convenient access to these tables and the readily implementable information contained therein.

In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, Walková delves into detail with regard to the language of academic texts, the mechanics with which they are constructed and the configurations into which they are organized. Not forgetting that an important part of the aim of the book was to provide practical applications for teaching, her expositions of textual features are accompanied by a number of teaching activities, demonstrated clearly using sample texts and accompanied by commentary. The discussion in Chapter 4, ‘Language and Content’, also extends to the development of criticality (such as the ability to evaluate and critique sources), an important part of helping to facilitate students’ participation in the academic world. Chapter 5, which focuses on structure, contains a discussion on topic sentences and some of the alternative classifications provided in the literature for sentences with organizing functions. Newer EAP practitioners might find this discussion especially insightful as it represents one of the areas in which popular notions about academic writing are revealed to be largely unsubstantiated in the literature. In this case, the unsubstantiated notions relate to the prevalence of topic sentences, at least

as they appear in expert genres of academic writing. Chapter 6, which reminds us that academic writing is a social act, pays due attention to how academic writing crafts representations of the writer, reader, and the wider community, and how consideration of these representations will inevitably impact a number of choices that the academic writer has to make. The extensive discussion in this chapter covers substantial ground, including voice, stance, evaluation, and citation.

The concluding chapter covers the matter of formative feedback. Although literature on formative feedback in EAP specifically is currently somewhat lacking, which is something that the Walková would like to see addressed, the chapter discusses the more extensive literatures from Higher Education and TESOL and the extent to which they can be seen as relevant to EAP. Points of divergence are duly noted – the strong preoccupation with language accuracy in the TESOL feedback literature, for example, is viewed as somewhat misplaced in EAP, where the issue of whether the intended content is communicated clearly is a much more pressing concern than technical linguistic accuracy. This discussion of feedback research is then followed with a number of principled recommendations for the provision of feedback both at the level of the individual practitioner marking assignments and at the level of curriculum design. That said, the chapter is also grounded in the realities of our institutional contexts, and it is acknowledged that aspirations towards delivering high quality feedback are often frustrated by practical and institutional constraints, including, for example, teacher-to-student ratios.

All in all, the book provides a thorough, accessible overview of the decades of research on which the practice of teaching academic writing has been built. Absent from the book is any substantive consideration of the implications of Generative AI on EAP practice, but I do not believe that this should be viewed in any way as a drawback. One of the ways in which the book benefits from not including a discussion of AI is that it does not have to make compromises with regard to the measured authority and meticulousness with which the text is delivered (and which would have been difficult to extend to a discussion of developments that are so new and fast-moving). However, there is also a second benefit

that I find even more compelling. As I write this in June 2025 and shortly following this year's AHKLC Symposium, which was conducted under the central theme of 'Repositioning Language Education in the Age of AI', it appears as though a key cost of devoting so much attention to responding to new technological developments might be that it draws some practitioners away from engagement with the research conducted in areas that have a longer-established relevance to academic writing. Those who stand to lose most in this current landscape are perhaps newer practitioners, who, without exposure to the right sort of material, might not come to fully appreciate how their practice can still derive so much benefit from engagement with the body of research on which good EAP practice has been built.

Reading this book has benefited my practice in a number of ways. Firstly, it has provided some ideas for new teaching activities. For instance, since reading this book, I have started to draw upon elements of Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP) to assist in my teaching of sentence-to-sentence progression. An example of this was in a recent lesson I taught whose focus was the Introduction section of IMRD reports. In this lesson, I saw that students were experiencing issues taking the reader closer to particular areas of study that they had chosen for their research assignments, with some of the paragraphs they had drafted appearing to almost go round in circles. I edited some of the drafts in front of the class in order to show how the texts could assume a much clearer sense of direction when the order of information in each sentence was governed by an understanding of "known" information and "new" information. I then took the students through the relevant teaching activity in Chapter 5 of Walková's book. The students appeared highly engaged – I had the sense that this was something that they had never been explicitly taught before, and, by the end of the class, most students were able to draft Introduction sections that progressed much more efficiently towards their specific areas of study.

This book has helped me be more descriptive and less prescriptive when discussing academic writing, and I am more likely to advise students regarding the various impacts of certain choices rather than to prohibit one choice in favour of another. In response to Chapter 6 in particular, I've also started

to foreground the target reader in these discussions, highlighting students' roles as participants in the wider academic community. I think that this has the potential to make the practice of academic writing seem more "real", and students appear to find this motivating.

Lastly, the book helps underscore the difference between the EAP practitioner, who develops an understanding of academic writing based on the relevant scholarly literature, and other tutors of academic writing. As Walková makes clear from the outset, and as becomes more and more evident as the book progress, those who fail to engage with the relevant literature are likely to find that their teaching is compromised by misconceptions and oversimplifications. I concede that some simplification is often important, but, in many cases, students will need to move beyond the practice of producing the five-paragraph argumentative essays that most academic writing tutors would be comfortable teaching and towards writing that participates in a much more complex and evolving social practice. Now well-established in my role as an EAP practitioner, it is important that I able to help them do this in an authoritative, research-informed way, and I believe that this is where *Teaching Academic Writing for EAP* makes an important contribution.

References

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