

An Approach to Teaching the Reading Skill for Academic Study

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It is held here that a university pre-session study skills course must strongly reflect the imminence of the academic year if it is to be effective, especially in the closing phase of a skills training course. While students are so diverse in their academic interests, levels of expertise in their field and competence as language users, it might seem that any attempt to ensure effective skills training for all is doomed to failure at the outset. This paper, however, suggests a way in which the difficulty might be overcome in the teaching of the reading skill. The following pages detail certain specifications that underpin the approach and discuss the principles on which the Reading course is based. The approach in operation is then described in the context of two groups of Reading students belonging to the 1993 September cohort of the University of Warwick Pre-session Study Skills Programme. The study concludes with an evaluation of the approach, and puts forward some considerations for any repeated implementation of the course.

INTRODUCTION

The University of Warwick Pre-Sessional programme provides three four-week phases (July, August and September) to develop the study skills of overseas students who intend to pursue university studies in various disciplines. Student numbers rise in September, when students join the course to 'brush up' their English and put study skills into practice in a British context.

At this final stage, any lack of contextualized skills-practice leaves some students, however, still unable to make the connection between the skills training and their real study needs in their respective specialisms, and so unable to apply the skills they were expecting to acquire. And it is perhaps *least* obvious in the reading skill just how training can effectively provide for individual needs. The difficulty for reading tutors and programme developers lies in identifying appropriate texts of interest to students with different disciplinary interests and degrees of expertise in their field, and in providing a meaningful reading brief that accommodates students of varying reading competence. This paper suggests a way in which the dilemma can be resolved.

The approach, detailed later here, is based essentially on four specifications:

1. Each student studies a text of substantial length, strictly on a topic pertaining to own area of specialism.
2. Reading-practice activity images the actual academic contexts of students.

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