

# 1.1: Welcome to Academia! An introduction to the concept of academic discourse communities

## Teacher's notes

### Background

This activity is a teacher-led discussion. The activity can be used at any level from lower intermediate upwards, but is particularly useful at the beginning of an EAP course for establishing the context of study.

### Aims

- to introduce the concepts associated with academic discourse communities and academic purposes

### Material

The teacher's visual *Welcome to Academia!* has headings under which details are noted during class discussion.

There is a suggested key.

### Procedure

- 1 Ask the class if they know which country they are in (this can result in a lively discussion in Scotland, because students sometimes report that they are in England). Then suggest that they are preparing to enter another country, Academia. Elicit what this word means, relating it to EAP, and point out the significance of the *-ia* ending. Ask students to name other countries ending in *ia*. This is also a good way of getting students to respond in class from the start of the course, as they are comfortable volunteering information they are sure about.
- 2 Elicit what elements make a country, e.g., language, laws, etc. Present a list of elements, using the teacher's visual *Welcome to Academia!*, and elicit examples from the class under each heading. Students discuss the elements at this stage.
- 3 Students often add some extra items, and it is interesting to find out if the students or teacher can think of how this is represented in Academia. For example, the heading Currency in the list was originally suggested by a group of students doing this task. It required hard thinking to come up with the answer – qualifications and publications.
- 4 The items which generate the most discussion are usually Laws and Media of communication. This is a way into the idea of referenced and supported statements of knowledge, and the seriousness with which this is taken in Academia. It also highlights the difference between the Media, such as TV and newspapers and online channels, which academics use to communicate with the rest of the community and the media they use to communicate with other academics in their field.

### Follow-up

- Any activity which explores an aspect of academic discourse communities in more detail, e.g., one in which academic texts are distinguished from newspaper articles through differences in the linguistic style and other features.
- A writing task which explicitly simulates research-based writing, e.g., one in which students agree to gather data about the class for a short report. This shifts the students' focus away from the state of their English and on to what to write, as they have to select information and decide on the appropriate content and structure of their report.

**Teacher's visual**

**Welcome to Academia!**

**Language**

**People**

**Provinces**

**Laws**

**Media of communication**

**Currency**

## Teacher's visual

### KEY

Welcome to Academia!

### Language

Academic English: academic vocabulary  
 objective, impersonal tone  
 gives information and ideas  
 clear, logical structure

### People

The academic community or academics: professional researchers and writers, professors, lecturers, research students, undergraduates and postgraduates

### Provinces

Fields of study: engineering, medicine, linguistics, accounting, IT, economics ...

### Laws

How data is collected  
 What cheating and plagiarism mean  
 How academics should relate to each other  
 How facts are established and theories disproved  
 What types of claims can be made

### Media of communication

Academic journals, conferences and reports, learned societies, seminars, lectures, theses and dissertations, books

### Currency

Academic qualifications and publications

## 1.2: Rich Aunty: an introduction to writer's stance

### Teacher's notes

#### Background

This set of tasks uses an accessible, non-academic context to introduce the concept of taking a stance, and the evaluative and persuasive language associated with this. It also encourages critical thinking in a familiar context. Students discover the language used by two writers to give their texts persuasive force. They then complete a vocabulary record and test themselves. The texts are accessible even to lower intermediate students. The activity is particularly useful at the beginning of work on argument and persuasion.

#### Aims

- to identify writer's stance
- to identify persuasive language for showing stance
- to make an organized record of persuasive language
- to learn and test recall of persuasive language

#### Material

- Key: Letters 1 and 2 with key language highlighted
- Tasksheet 1: Letter 1 with questions
- Tasksheet 2: Letter 2 with questions
- Tasksheet 3: Letters 1 and 2 with key language gapped, for students to self-test
- Tasksheet 4: Vocabulary tasksheet

#### Procedure

- 1 Elicit how students finance their studies and what problems there can be. Discuss the dangers of gambling and check/pre-teach vocabulary (e.g., syndicate, racehorse). Is gambling allowed/restricted in your country? In the UK, gambling is basically permitted only for adults over 18 years.

**Cultural awareness note:** Handle the topic with care – the tone of the content is suitably anti-gambling, and should be acceptable in non-gambling cultures. The situation does, however, reflect a real danger for a small number of students in the UK.

- 2 Explain that the lesson will introduce some new vocabulary. To present the difference between an optimist (The glass is half full) and a pessimist (The glass is half empty), draw a half-full glass, and ask the class to describe it, to identify the optimists and pessimists amongst them. There are equivalent expressions in many cultures. The point is that the same fact can be described with different language, to create different impressions in the reader. Showing a writer's attitude in this way is known as showing *stance*.

**Cultural awareness note:** Avoid the word *opinion* because stance is more appropriate for academic writing.\*

\* See Chapter 8: *Critical thinking* for a fuller discussion of this issue.

- 3 Ask students to read Letter 1 quickly (e.g., allow no more than 30 seconds) to find answers to the Letter 1 questions.
- 4 Ask students to read Letter 2 quickly (30 seconds) to answer the Letter 2 questions.
- 5 Ask students to read Billy's letter again carefully and highlight:
  - a the language he uses to make his mistake look less serious than it really is
  - b the language he uses to make his solution seem more attractive than it really is
- 6 Ask students to read the aunt's letter carefully and highlight the language she uses to show her stance.
- 7 Use the highlighted language to explain and complete the tasksheet vocabulary with the students.
- 8 When they think they know how the persuasive vocabulary is used, students can test themselves, using the gapped texts.

## KEY

- Letter 1:
- 1 The writer's purpose is to persuade the reader to lend him money.
  - 2 He is optimistic.
  - 3 Reader's predicted response? No correct answer; explore the possibilities.
- Letter 2:
- 1 The writer's purpose is to justify not lending money and to give advice.
  - 2 She is pessimistic.

See the photocopiable key for highlighted vocabulary for the gapped text tasksheet.

Vocabulary tasksheet suggestions:

Maximizers	Minimizers	v/n/adj choice showing stance**
[Letter 1]		
<i>extremely</i>	<i>a little</i> <i>a few</i> <i>only</i>	<i>unlucky</i> (+ve/neut.) [c.f. <i>unwise</i> (-ve)] <i>opportunity</i> (+ve) [c.f. <i>chance</i> (neut.), <i>risk</i> (-ve)] <i>invest</i> (+ve) [c.f. <i>spend</i> (neut.), <i>waste</i> (-ve)]
relatively (enhances following adjective: small)		
[Letter 2]		
<i>quite a (written)</i> <i>totally</i>  <i>highly</i> <i>very</i> <i>much</i>		<i>shock</i> (-ve) [c.f. <i>surprise</i> (neut.)] <i>unwise</i> (-ve) <i>waste</i> (-ve) [c.f. <i>spend</i> (neut.)]
relatively (enhances following adjective: large)		
<i>even/even if</i> expressions used to indicate something surprising or extreme: <i>Even Mr Bean passed his driving test.</i> (surprising) <i>People have been injured and even killed on this stretch of road.</i> (extreme)		

\*\*There are other lexical sets worth exploring with students; another common one in EAP is *enjoy – experience – suffer* (also *endure*).

## Follow-up

- Students can use the language to compose a note/email to a tutor asking for an extension to the time in which to write an essay (this could be a group task).
- Find further examples to analyze, e.g., in advertisements, political texts, personal recommendations, or personal statements on university application forms. Students rewrite extracts to make them more neutral, and pass them on to others who have to make them more persuasive again.
- At a later stage in the course, students need to work with authentic academic texts. They can identify the writer's stance in an argument text through the persuasive language used, then look at the text organization to see where the stance is taken in relation to the moves of an argument. Classroom materials 8.3, *What does the writer think?* is an example of this. Postgraduate students can also do similar activities using abstracts, where the writer's stance is often shown, as in the abstract *Particle Filters* in Chapter 6 Reading and Chapter 5 Vocabulary.

## KEY

### Highlighting for gapped text

#### Letter 1

Dear Aunty May,

I am writing to ask you to lend me **a little** money to help me with **a few** financial problems. I was **extremely unlucky** last week and lost my savings while playing cards with some friends.

However, I have an **opportunity** to **invest** money in a syndicate which is buying a racehorse. I need **only** \$1000, which I know is a **relatively** small amount to you. I will be able to repay you when the horse wins races.

Your affectionate nephew,

Billy

#### Letter 2

Dear Billy,

Your letter was **quite a shock**. Your assumption about my financial position is **totally** wrong; **even** \$100 would be a **relatively** large sum of money to me. **Even** if I could afford \$1000, I would not let you **waste** it on a racehorse. You are a **highly** educated boy but you have been **very unwise**. I can't lend you any money and in future I suggest that you are **much** more careful with your savings.

Your affectionate,

Aunty May

## Tasksheet 1: Letter 1

## Questions

- 1 What is the writer's purpose?
- 2 Does he take an optimistic or pessimistic stance?
- 3 What do you predict his aunt's stance will be when she replies?

## Letter 1

Dear Aunty May,

I am writing to ask you to lend me a little money to help me with a few financial problems. I was extremely unlucky last week and lost my savings while playing cards with some friends.

However, I have an opportunity to invest money in a syndicate which is buying a racehorse. I need only \$1000, which I know is a relatively small amount to you. I will be able to repay you when the horse wins races.

Your affectionate nephew,

Billy

(85 words)

[illegible]



## Tasksheet 2: Letter 2

## Questions

- 1 What is his aunt's purpose?
- 2 Does she take an optimistic or a pessimistic stance with respect to his proposed solution?

## Letter 2

Dear Billy,

Your letter was quite a shock. Your assumption about my financial position is totally wrong; even \$100 would be a relatively large sum of money to me. Even if I could afford \$1000, I would not let you waste it on a racehorse. You are a highly educated boy but you have been very unwise. I can't lend you any money and in future I suggest that you are much more careful with your savings.

Your affectionate,

Aunty May

(81 words)

[illegible]

## Tasksheet 3: Gapped texts

### Letter 1

Dear Aunty May,

I am writing to ask you to lend me \_\_\_\_\_ money to help me with \_\_\_\_\_ financial problems. I was \_\_\_\_\_ unlucky last week and lost my savings while playing cards with some friends.

However, I have an \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ money in a syndicate which is buying a racehorse. I need \_\_\_\_\_ \$1000, which I know is a \_\_\_\_\_ small amount to you. I will be able to repay you when the horse wins races.

Your affectionate nephew,

Billy

### Letter 2

Dear Billy,

Your letter was quite a \_\_\_\_\_. Your assumption about my financial position is \_\_\_\_\_ wrong; \_\_\_\_\_ \$100 would be a \_\_\_\_\_ large sum of money to me. \_\_\_\_\_ if I could afford \$1000, I would not let you \_\_\_\_\_ it on a racehorse. You are a \_\_\_\_\_ educated boy but you have been \_\_\_\_\_. I can't lend you any money and in future I suggest that you are \_\_\_\_\_ more careful with your savings.

Your affectionate,

Aunty May

## Tasksheet 4: Vocabulary

Writers/speakers show stance by

- using emphasizers which either maximize (The cup is half full) or minimize (The cup is half empty)
- choosing words and phrases which evaluate (either positively or negatively)
- using *even* to emphasize a point

Text	Maximizers	Minimizers	v/n/adj choice showing stance
Billy (Letter 1)			
Aunt (Letter 2)			

# 1.3: Chocolate in the classroom: a fun way to introduce concepts relating to plagiarism\*

## Teacher's notes

### Background

In this activity, groups of students invent academic research findings, and write them up briefly for imaginary academic books and journals. The teacher openly plagiarizes from these to write a report. The class as a whole then guides the teacher through the process of correctly referencing and paraphrasing, or summarizing the ideas, as appropriate. The exercise is designed for students who are beginning to write academic texts and need to incorporate ideas from other sources. It is important that the topic is accessible, but the treatment is not too serious. Process, not content, is the learning objective. In fact, the content is the fun part, and the activity works best if the class is used to the occasional joke or trick in the classroom.

### Aims

- to introduce the purpose and process of incorporating the ideas of others into student texts

### Material

A means of recording and displaying students' texts

### Procedure

- 1 Introduce the topic of the lesson, effective classroom study, and elicit ideas from students about what helps them to study. Tell students that you have found that eating chocolate enhances memory. Describe orally some fantasy research and findings, then present this material as a pre-prepared abstract with a fantasy journal or book reference, for example, Argent, S. (2007) *Eat your way to a degree*. Edinburgh: Garner Press.
- 2 Set up groups of three or four, including one scribe and one spokesperson. Invite students to invent a similar set of findings, and write them up in the same format. You need to encourage students to be inventive/provocative (e.g., sleeping in class produces better exam results). Students should also make up a spurious book title or journal, with the spokesperson or another member of the group as named author. You will need to help them to set this reference out appropriately. Some students need more support and stimulation than others, but some in the class will be surprisingly inventive!
- 3 Ask spokespersons to present their texts in turn. Help the rest of the class to edit them for clarity, and to correct referencing and accuracy errors. Allow the content and ideas, however crazy, to stand.
- 4 Collect the abstracts, thanking students, and saying how helpful these will be for the report you hope to publish in an important academic journal. Write the report on the board, with the help of the class, referring to the abstracts. Deliberately copy word-for-word and do not reference (leave plenty of space for editing this text).
- 5 If there has been no reaction to this blatant plagiarism, draw out the fact that their ideas have been stolen. Elicit/show how to reference, using a simple form of referencing such as Harvard, and change the text accordingly. Elicit/shape the reworking of the ideas into your own words to eliminate the copying.

\*I am indebted to Andrew Stechmann of Macquarie University for the idea on which this activity is based.

- 6 The resulting text can be typed as a short, correctly referenced model text – perhaps including the source extract so that students have a complete record of the process.

## **Follow-up**

Students will need lots more work on incorporating the ideas of others in their own writing (see the chapters on writing and reading). Keep pointing out references in reading texts, and reminding students of the issues as necessary, in feedback on their own writing.

A variation can be used with more confident writers. Divide the class into two groups to prepare an abstract of research supporting either claim A or rival claim B. Examples might be whether reward or punishment is the best way to make students stay awake in class, or whether students learn better from group work or working alone. Students have to decide how to show their stance, develop counter arguments, and use more evaluative language than in the simpler activity.