

English for academic study: Extended writing and research skills

By *Judy Maxwell*

Created 09/20/2011 - 11:45

Book Review by Jack Bowers, Academic Skills and Learning Centre, ANU:

Published in conjunction with the University of Reading, *Extended Writing and Research Skills* has been a popular generalist course book for proficient NESB students about to embark on tertiary studies. While many British course materials suffer from assuming that English is only spoken north of Land's End, *Extended Writing and Research Skills* employs international contexts to develop universal themes. Its focus enables it to unpack several important writing skills: developing ideas, structuring an argument, what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it. There are also some useful exercises aimed at developing oral skills presentations; anyone who has sat through what passes for oral presentations will understand that most students need to develop their competencies in this area.

As a course book, however, *Extended Writing and Research Skills* is limited and old-fashioned. Its limitations are clear and well understood: the authors have focussed on the skill of writing, and to that end it is a good book. Unfortunately, this focus falsely separates writing and reading to the detriment of both. Good writing and good reading go together because the synthesis required in critical reading – the close analysis of textual material – is precisely the same process which is key to the development of an argument. It is by deciphering the point of view of the written, spoken, televisual material under scrutiny, and appreciating the devices used in the construction of that point of view, that successful students bring to their writing. By moving away from the assumptions inherent in language learning, EAP practitioners could focus more on the “hidden curriculum” of tertiary studies: absorbing information; developing and testing ideas; focussing deeply on the responses of others and seeking to understand the assumptions behind them; articulating one's own response in the light of newly developed knowledge; acknowledging the ideas of others; developing objectivity and theoretical sophistication.

My other concern is the apparent (and rather quaint) assumption that students do most of their assignment research via books. Search engines, databases, e-journals, podcasts and blogs have proliferated in the last decade. One of the requirements of a course book is to familiarise students with research techniques and platforms. In my experience, the skills for deciphering on-line material are much the same as for older media – notwithstanding a lot more chaff for the same amount of wheat – but it is essential that students gain familiarity with on-line materials beyond computer games and Facebook. Nowadays course books should consider an on-line element as an indispensable part of the format, while remaining practical, grounded, realistic and skills-based.

Publication Source Information **Author/s:** McCormack, Joan
Slaght, John

Year of publication: 2005

Place of publication; Publisher: Reading: Garnet

Title of Journal, Edited book or Conference and Page numbers: *Journal of Academic Language and Learning*, Vol. 2, No. 1; pp. B1-B2

ISSN/ISBN: 978-1-85964-980-0

URL or DOI: <http://journal.aall.org.au/index.php/jall/article/view/59/49>

Contact details **Contactable:** off

Source URL: <http://aall.org.au/aallpublication/english-academic-study-extended-writing-and-research-skills>