Teaching and Assessing Academic Writing for Tourism Studies: An Example of Reflective Practice from the Field

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Abstract

This chapter describes the process of developing an English for tourism studies course at a trilingual university across five academic years. The process involved four phases. During the 2011–2012 academic year, I gained a grounded understanding of the needs of the learners from the standpoint of a *reflective practitioner* (see Farrell, 2007). This initial experience teaching the course served as the basis for a formal needs analysis which informed the writing and implementation of a customized course book during the 2012–13 academic year based on the concepts of English for specific academic purposes (ESAP) and task-based language teaching (TBLT). In response to the observed effectiveness of the course and student reactions, in particular their continued sporadic attendance and reluctance to complete ungraded collaborative writing assignments, I conducted two classroom experiments during the 2014–15 and 2015–16 academic years, respectively, in order to test the effects of two interventions involving the use of extra credit pop quizzes. The extra credit scheme utilized in 2014–15 relied upon multiple choice pop quizzes to incentivize attendance and participation, but resulted in less class time for collaborative writing tasks and less individualized instructor feedback for the students. The modified extra credit scheme in 2015–16 greatly increased the submission of collaborative writing tasks by awarding extra credit for satisfactory completion.

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1. Introduction: Teaching English for Tourism Studies at a Trilingual University

From 2011 to 2016, I was contracted as the instructor of a thirty-hour "specialized English" course for students enrolled in the bachelor's degree program in Tourism, Sport, and Event Management (TSE) at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano in South Tyrol in northern Italy. The University adheres to a trilingual language model, whereby tuition is offered in English, German, and Italian and all students must meet stringent language requirements in order to matriculate and graduate. Roughly 50% of courses in the TSE program are conducted in English, 25% in Italian, and 25% in German. The majority of students speak German and/or Italian as their first language(s), and English is learned as a foreign language (EFL) and serves as both a *lingua franca* (ELF) and a medium of instruction (EMI). Students therefore also require basic academic language skills in order to complete the 50% of their courses and exams which are offered in English. This chapter describes the actions I took to design and continuously enhance the efficacy of the course against this background, with a focus on the materials and methods adopted to teach and assess academic writing skills (see Ennis, 2015, 2018).

The experience as a whole serves as an example of the type of *reflective practice* which I believe should characterize all English language teaching (ELT), but especially English for specific purposes (ESP) and English for academic purposes (EAP), given the growing recognition that decision making in ELT should be *evidence-based* and *data-driven* (Farrell, 2012; Mann & Walsh, 2013; Walsh & Mann, 2015). From the onset, I relied upon both theoretical knowledge and practical experience, I applied mixed methods to collect and analyze various sets of qualitative and quantitative data, and I tested carefully planned interventions under pseudo-experimental conditions. Although my experience was embedded within a specific context, I believe that the approach and the results can be informative to colleagues charged with developing ESAP courses in other settings.

2. Phase 1: Triangulating the Needs of Students of Tourism Studies

When I started teaching the course in the autumn of 2011, there was no established syllabus in place, and I was informed by colleagues and administrative staff that it was my responsibility to decide what and how to teach. I was informed by a colleague who had previously taught the course and the administration staff for the degree program that I would have to administer both a written exam and an oral exam. Based on the syllabus used the previous year and the "study manifest" (i.e., the official description) of the degree program, I could ascertain that the course had previously taught specialized English skills at the B2 level according to the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001), that most students were required to submit B2 certification to matriculate, and that all students would have to certify B2+ in order to graduate. It was logistically impossible to conduct a more complete needs analysis before the semester began.

For the 2011–12 academic year, I therefore decided to teach from a commercially available course book while I familiarized myself with the students and the context, and I planned a formal needs analysis in preparation for 2012–13. Based upon a comprehensive survey of teaching material available on the market, I settled on *Oxford English for Careers: Tourism 3*. Like most books on the market, *Tourism 3* is intended for professionals working in the tourism industry and adopts a functional, communicative approach to teach field-specific lexis and communication skills. Unlike most textbooks, it is intended for managers and therefore contextualizes each chapter to a contemporary theme of tourism management. Although the students—or at least the approximately 25% who regularly attended—enjoyed discussing the themes in English, and undoubtedly learned useful lexis for their field of study, the book was deemed inappropriate, once I formed a grounded understanding of the students and the context (see Ennis, 2011).

The limitations of *Tourism 3* in this context coincided with three emerging observations regarding the needs of my students. First, it became apparent that the majority of the students in the course were already effective and fluent

communicators in English, but struggled with grammatical accuracy and, as adult learners, would require a focus on form. Yet, the textbook failed to systematically review the key grammar of the B2 level, and this often had to be done ad hoc, in response to student inquiries or in the form of corrective feedback. Second, as first-year students, most lacked the academic communication skills required for university study (often also in their L1s), basic academic writing and speaking skills in particular. While the book engaged students with authentic, relevant, current, and intellectually stimulating content, many of the activities were too professional for students more immediately concerned with certifying their language proficiency and passing courses instructed in English. Third, my students were a diverse group of multilinguals who aspired to work in an industry founded upon multilingual and cross-cultural encounters, and thus deserved an intercultural approach to language teaching and learning (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Ennis & Riley, 2017). Unfortunately, like most commercial teaching material, the textbook treated culture only superficially.

Based upon these observations, it became apparent that I would have to produce customized teaching material for this course, as is often prescribed for teaching English for tourism (EfT) (Garcia Laborda, 2011; Ennis, 2011). The first step in this process would be to expand upon my initial observations and conduct a formal needs analysis which triangulated the needs of my students by using multiple sources and methods for sampling (Long, 2005, pp. 28–30). To this end, I adopted a three-pronged approach, including my personal reflections as the instructor, the expectations and requirements of the degree program, and the learner profiles of the students. Specifically, I reviewed the degree program documents and the syllabi of all courses taught in English across the TSE curriculum in order to identify the language skills which would be expected of the students during their studies;[1] I administered a survey to a sample of students from the incoming 2012–13 cohort in order to identify their

1 I also attempted to solicit input from the professors of other courses, but received few responses and found it difficult to meet with colleagues, most of whom, as contract professors, were based in other cities and countries.

backgrounds, interests, and aspirations with regard to both English and tourism, sport, or event management; and, finally, I reflected on the type of course I deemed most appropriate in this context and began systematically reviewing the pertinent academic literature for inspiration.

The university documents and student survey identified the following learner variables and needs:

a. *Diversity*. Twenty-two (56.4%) respondents identified German, fourteen (35.9%) identified Italian, two (5.1%) identified Ladin, and one (2.6%) identified both German and Italian as their L1, while eighteen (46.2%) were from South Tyrol, fourteen (35.9%) were from other provinces in Italy, six (15.4%) were from Germany, and one (2.6%) was from Austria.
b. *Motivation*. A majority (83.8%) expressed a desire to learn English because they "like" the language, 62.2% felt English would help them achieve their career goals, 27% believed English would help them meet their academic goals. No students said they were studying English only because it was a degree requirement.
c. *Compulsory courses*. Students attended subject courses in economics, statistics, management, law, communication, accounting, finance, and information systems, as well as courses on tourism, sport, or event management (e.g., destination management, event planning, sports marketing).
d. *Required skills*. In the TSE program, students were expected to actively follow lectures, read textbooks and secondary literature, write short texts, and, occasionally, give oral presentations.
e. *Majors*. More than half (59.5%) of respondents said they were interested in tourism, 46% were interested in events, 18.9% were interested in sports, and 8.1% were undecided.
f. *Subject interests*. Most (81%) respondents said they were interested in marketing, 76% were interested in management, and 76% were interested in languages. There was relatively little interest in other subjects offered in the program.

g. *Experience abroad*. According to the survey, many students had a desire to study abroad (53%) or complete internships (44%) in an English-dominant country.
h. *After graduation*. Some of the students said they would like to do graduate study (23.5%) or seek employment (31%) in an English-dominant country. (Ennis, 2015, pp. 364–365)

Based on these results and the observations made during the autumn of 2011–12, I resolved to focus on the most immediate needs of my students and design an English for tourism studies course book based on the concept of ESAP and using a TBLT approach.

The initial review of literature in 2012 (which continued through early 2016), produced a plethora of information on teaching ESP and EAP with TBLT approaches and suggested that there was sufficient input on teaching ESAP, as well. But there was a blatant gap in the literature on teaching EfT in general—that is for any current or future professional in the field—and English for tourism studies in particular. I located a vast body of scholarship at the time on travel literature and the translation of tourist texts as well as numerous studies which applied discourse analysis, genre studies, and corpus linguistics to further understanding of how English is used within the tourism sector. All of these sources were very informative in terms of potential content for an EfT course, and several in fact reflected on this application and/or were published in a journal on language teaching and learning. But the limited work available which investigated specific pedagogical practices or phenomena of language acquisition was often only coincidentally situated within a tourism context, and was not informative for teaching students of tourism as much as it was informative for teaching EFL or ESP more broadly. Papers of particular interest to teaching EfT included needs analyses, surveys of textbooks, and suggestions for the incorporation of technology and corpora in the classroom. The few sources which investigated teaching methods, materials selection, and course design focused on teaching English for occupational, professional, or specific business purposes, including all sources which did so within a university context. All works reviewed were insightful, but offered

few practical tips for developing an ESAP course to prepare university students for studying tourism in an EFL and EMI context.

The literature review, as it continued to develop over the five years I taught the course, produced three key findings (see Ennis, 2017a). The first was that there are two distinct branches of ESP inquiry related to tourism: *English of tourism* (EoT), which studies the use of English within the tourism sector, and *English for tourism* (EfT), which studies the teaching and learning of English for students studying tourism as a field of study or professionals working in tourism as an economic activity. The second finding was that, while there was a vibrant EoT discourse in Italy, an academic discourse on teaching EfT, or at least one documented in the literature, had yet to develop in the country in which I was contracted to develop an EfT course. The third finding was that, while there had been significant research on teaching and learning English for current and future professionals in tourism, not to mention numerous textbooks available for purchase, it was clear I would have to design a course on English for tourism studies from scratch.

3. Phase 2: Designing an English for Tourism Studies Course from Scratch

During the 2012–13 academic year, I developed a book for the TSE course based on the immediate needs of my students. The book was conceived as a perpetual work in progress, so that it could be continuously updated and adapted according to the currency of the content, the changing needs of the students, the observed effectiveness of the material, and emerging insights from scholarship on language teaching and learning.

My students' most urgent need, in my opinion, was that all of them would have to complete 50% of their degree in English, yet most lacked the necessary academic writing and speaking skills and field-specific language to do so. The book was, thus, based upon the concept of ESAP (see Dudley-Evans & St. John,

1998, pp. 53–73; Jordan, 2005, pp. 228–270) and, as such, would rely upon "customized learning material to foster the learning of specific language features (grammar and lexis), discourse patterns (cohesion, organization, and coherence), and communicative skills (writing and speaking), as applied to the composition of the specific genre (generic academic texts and formal presentations) common to the TSE Management curriculum" (Ennis, 2017b, p. 153).

Another urgent need of the students, the one of which they were the most acutely aware, was that most of them would have to certify B2+ general English proficiency in order to graduate. Although the aim of the course was by no means to support their efforts to attain a target proficiency level, I decided that it would be appropriate to teach and assess at the B2+ level. By the end of the course, the hope was that my students would be able to provide evidence of a full range of language features and communication skills typical of the B2 level, but with early signs of the discourse management typical of the C1 level. More precisely, I wanted them to use grammar identified as being exemplary of B2 (e.g., Trinity College London, 2009; North, Ortega, & Sheehan, 2010) in order to compose brief written and spoken texts with more purposeful organization and more complex linking devices than was commonly expected of B2 learners of English.

As often prescribed for ESP and EAP, a task-based approach (Ellis, 2003) was adopted with the aim of engaging students with materials and tasks which were authentic and relevant to their chosen field of study. The premise was that if each learning unit simulated the learning of another subject, not only would the experience be more learner-centered and meaningful for the students, but it would also better prepare them for learning higher educational content through EMI. However, as the students struggled more with accuracy than with fluency, I realized they would also require formal instruction, a focus on form, and frequent instructor feedback. I therefore adopted a *weak* TBLT approach, which adhered to the input-interaction-output model of second language acquisition (see Ellis, 1997; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Gass, 2017), so that students would be urged to process input for meaning and form

in an effort to improve both their fluency and their accuracy in reading, writing, and speaking about current issues in tourism studies. The course book would seek to expose the students to a broad range of field-specific language as they performed authentic and relevant tasks, but would focus their attention on practicing and producing specific grammar, lexis, and academic communication skills. This would be achieved by combining top-down and bottom-up processing of language as well as inductive and deductive learning of new language input. I believed that this mixed method would provide a scaffold for the development of autonomous learning strategies which might provide a firm foundation for learning English across the curriculum and as lifelong learners after graduation.

As academic writing and speaking had been identified as a blatant deficit in the skills of my students, I deemed teaching the fundamentals of academic writing to be a central goal of the course and decided to make written production a capstone of each learning unit. (Input on formal academic speaking would be integrated during the 2013–14 academic year.) The weak TBLT approach lent itself to two methods of teaching writing. The first was *reading-for-writing*, which is an integrated-skills approach whereby the input contained in authentic texts is analyzed so that reading can serve as a model for the genre the students are expected to compose themselves. The advantage of reading-for-writing is that it affords students opportunities to scaffold aspects of their own writing upon all forms of authentic input, including the content, the lexis, and grammar, and the discourse features which characterize the genre, and thereby resembles the acquisition of L1 writing skills (Hirvela, 2004). The second concept, which was also necessary due to the high student-to-teacher ratio, was *collaborative writing*, that is, requiring students to complete writing tasks in small groups. Rooted in Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (see Wertsch, 1985) and Long's (1983) interaction hypothesis, there was already compelling evidence at the time that collaborative writing lowers anxiety, increases motivation, promotes the phenomena of scaffolding, metatalk, and languaging, offers more opportunities for peer feedback, and improves task performance (e.g., Saunders, 1989; Johnson & Johnson, 1998; Storch, 2005; Storch, 2011; Mulligan & Garafolo, 2011).

A final principle of course design was based on the fact that my students were multilinguals who studied at a trilingual university and aspired to work in a profession founded upon multilingual and intercultural encounters. It was evident that I could best serve my students by adopting an intercultural approach to language teaching (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Ennis & Riley, 2017). Given the existing constraints of teaching to high academic standards with limited instructional hours and a high student-to-teacher ratio, it was determined that it would not be possible to include separate units or tasks about cultural differences and intercultural encounters. Intercultural competence could only be fostered by fully integrating intercultural learning into language learning tasks designed to develop linguistic and communicative competence. Such integration was attempted by carefully selecting texts which were produced in diverse English-speaking contexts and which confronted students with at least two conflicting points-of-view, and by then urging students to appropriate aspects of the conflicting views during their collaborative writing tasks (Ennis, 2017b).

Following these guiding principles, the course book was designed on a lesson-by-lesson basis and adapted according to the observed effectiveness. The process of designing the course was systematic in that each unit contained two readings, a set of target language features and communication skills, and a series of tasks which required students to engage the readings and the language. The themes, texts, and tasks were selected and adapted based on the survey of syllabi across the TSE curriculum and the expressed academic interests of the students. However, the process of selecting and adapting materials was circular, rather than linear, in that the appropriateness of themes and language informed the selection of texts, while the selected texts confirmed the appropriateness of themes and language.

Themes included current issues in economics, management, law, information systems, event planning, etc. Texts were sourced and adapted from textbooks, academic publications, institutional reports, news media, and websites related to tourism studies, many of which directly from the reading lists of other curricular courses. Tasks were designed to resemble the reading and writing

activities students would engage in other courses, albeit with an explicit focus on the linguistic features. The target language and skills were in part predefined according to the B2+ level of the CEFR, and in part defined by the selected themes and texts.

The final product (Ennis, 2012–2016) consisted of nine learning units, each divided into two parts. Table 1 outlines the thematic focus, target grammar, and communication skills covered in each unit. Each part progressed from tasks which required top-down processing of the thematic content and specialized language contained in the respective text, to tasks which required bottom up processing of specific information and specific linguistic features (see Carrell, Devine, & Eskey, 1988; Chaudron & Richards, 1986). Top-down processing consisted of extensive reading and two collaborative tasks: a pre-reading group or pair discussion that served as an advance organizer and a post-reading discussion, information gap task, or brief collaborative writing task which required students to apply their understanding of the gist and their comprehension of key terms. Bottom-up tasks were initially completed individually, and required both inductive and deductive processing of specific details and specific lexical items and grammatical forms. Inductive tasks were particularly influenced by processing instruction (see Lee & VanPatten, 2003; VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993) requiring learners to draw connections between form and meaning/function and to formulate their own definitions of new lexis, their own explanations of grammar rules, and their own descriptions of the embedded conventions of formal writing by completing brief text, genre, and discourse analyses of excerpts (see Paltridge, 2001; Wennerstrom, 2003; Hyland, 2004). Deductive learning was more explicitly language-focused, and offered explanations of the rules and conventions, followed by language drills and exercises (see Long, 2000). Various forms of instructor feedback were provided at every stage (see Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Table 2 summarizes the structure underlying each half of each unit.

Table 1 – The thematic units

Unit Themes	Target Grammar	Communication Skills
1. Definitions of tourism and current trends in the tourism market	Present simple versus present continuous	Stating facts and describing current trends
2. History of tourism and recent developments in the tourism market	Past simple versus present perfect	Narrating the past and describing recent trends and recent changes
3. Role of leadership in management	Adjectives, adverbs, comparatives, and superlatives	Comparing and contrasting characteristics (traits) and actions (skills)
4. History and future of ICTs in tourism	Past simple versus present perfect for duration; modal verbs for future certainty and uncertainty	Describing past and recent activities and trends; making predictions about the future
5. Role of government in tourism	Zero, first, and second conditionals	Describing the effects of interventions
6. Principles of advertising and advertising laws in Europe	Modal verbs for obligation, necessity, and possibility	Describing rules and regulations and making recommendations
7. Tourism market reports	Present perfect continuous, past continuous, past perfect, and past perfect continuous	Describing and comparing sets of data and describing trends in data
8. Impact of global warming on tourism	Conjunctions and relative clauses	Linking ideas into coherent discourse
9. Social, economic, and environmental impacts of tourism	Adverbial linkers and discourse markers	Linking ideas into coherent discourse

Eight of nine units culminated in a collaborative reading-for-writing task which required the students to consolidate the thematic content, specialized

lexis, target grammar, communication skills, discourse features, and, where possible, opposing points-of-view present in the unit. (Units 2 through 5 contained two capstone tasks, one for each part, whereas units 6 through 9 contained one larger capstone task at the end.) The writing tasks were completed and submitted in groups of three or four students.

Table 2 – Unit structure

Tasks	Task Types	Language Learning Function
Pre-reading	Discussion in small groups or pairs with prompt	Advance organizer: Sharing pre-existing knowledge and opinions on theme in order to activate schemata
Reading	Extensive reading (individually)	Top-down processing of information and language
Vocabulary	Matching words and phrases to definitions; scanning for words or phrases with particular meanings/functions; or defining words and phrases → Comparing responses in small groups or pairs → Solutions and instructor feedback	Understanding the meanings of new words and phrases in context
Reading comprehension	Intensive reading → Information gap, discussion, and/or brief collaborative writing in small groups or pairs → Solutions and instructor feedback	Skimming and/or scanning for gist and main ideas; discussing and expressing opinions about the issues
Inductive grammar	Input processing and language analysis tasks using excerpts from reading → Completion of grammar grids and rules using excerpts from reading → Solutions and instructor feedback	Drawing connections between form and meaning/function of morphemes, syntax, and function words from context; inductive learning of grammar rules

Deductive grammar	Explicit explanation of grammar rules using excerpts from reading → Grammar drills and exercises using excerpts from reading → Solutions and instructor feedback	Deductive learning of grammar rules
Capstone	Collaborative reading-for-writing task using input from readings → Instructor feedback	Scaffolding upon the information, lexis, grammar, discourse features, and conflicting viewpoints contained in readings to compose expository text

Input on academic writing skills followed a similar inductive to deductive learning sequence as that employed for the instruction of vocabulary and grammar. Prior to completing the writing tasks in units 2, 4, and 6, students were asked to work with their groups to formulate a given number of rules or tips for completing the task. They were encouraged to refer to the reading(s) for examples and ideas. The rules and strategies produced by each group were first shared with the class and then compared to rules and tips provided in an appendix, which also contained a model response. Students were instructed to follow these rules and tips and refer to the model response as they completed the writing task in groups. Following this pattern, four rules of writing a complete sentence were introduced in the second unit (pp. 102–103); four rules of writing purposeful paragraphs were introduced in the fourth unit (pp. 104–106); and five tips for writing three-paragraph expository texts (i.e., brief essays and reports) were introduced in the sixth unit (pp. 7–9). Before completing each capstone writing task, students were advised to also review the rules and tips provided in previous units. Table 3 below summarizes how basic academic writing skills were integrated into the course, while Table 2 above depicts how the collaborative reading-for-writing tasks fit into each unit.

Table 3 – The integration of academic writing

Unit	Academic Writing Skills	Capstone Task
2	Four rules for writing complete sentences	Complete sentences about history of tourism and recent market trends
3	Review and practice	Complete sentences about ideal leadership traits and skills of managers
4	Four rules for writing purposeful paragraphs	Purposeful paragraphs about history and future of ICTs in tourism
5	Review and practice	Purposeful paragraph supporting or opposing a tourist tax
6	Five tips for writing three-paragraph expository texts	Brief essay to propose a marketing campaign for a local Christmas market
7	Review and practice	Brief report on the Italian tourism market
8	Review and practice	Brief essay to propose a climate policy for local tourism
9	Review and practice	Brief essay supporting or opposing local investment in tourism

Although Italian higher education caters toward teaching to the test (Ennis, 2018) and leaves little room for continuous assessment, I was trained to view assessment as an integral part of the learning experience. Course assessment was thus based upon the concepts of *testing what you teach* and *testing how you teach* in an attempt to promote positive washback (for a discussion of these concepts in communicative language teaching, see Lee & VanPatten, 2003). Not only were students tested on their ability to recall the grammar, lexis, and communication skills taught during the course, but they were tested on their ability to apply their linguistic competence for a communicative purpose as they completed tasks which resembled those they had completed during the course. In addition to applying the language and communication skills they had developed in the course to similar tasks, they were tested on their ability to engage new texts, new themes, and new language as they did so. In this

sense, they were tested on the autonomous learning strategies they had practiced (i.e., top-down to bottom-up processing, inductive learning, and scaffolding) during the semester as a simulation of learning new language as they engaged new content.

Course assessment consisted of four equally weighted components. The first component was a portfolio of relevant written genre, which was completed and submitted individually during the semester. The central task assigned for the portfolio was a brief report on a tourist attraction, sports team, or event in the student's hometown. The second and third components comprised two parts of a final written exam. Similar in structure to the learning units, the first part of the written exam was a reading, grammar, and vocabulary test in which students read four texts on a common theme and completed a series of reading comprehension, vocabulary, and grammar activities embedded in or based upon the texts. The texts and theme were authentic and relevant to tourism studies, but had not been encountered during the course. The second part of the final exam was a reading-for-writing task for which students composed a three-paragraph essay on an aspect of the theme discussed in the texts. Identical in structure to the collaborative writing tasks completed during the course, students were given a three-question prompt which instructed them to scaffold their composition upon the information and language presented in the texts and balance conflicting perspectives in order to express their own informed opinions (an example of both parts of the written exam can be found on pp. 116–124 of the course book). The fourth component of assessment was an oral exam during which students gave a five-minute oral presentation of the findings of the report and were asked a series of questions by a two-member exam commission. The written and oral productions were assessed according to range and accuracy of lexis and grammar, discourse features, and task completion, with a particular eye to the specialized language and academic writing skills instructed during the course. Table 4 summarizes course assessment.

Table 4 – Summary of course assessment (Ennis, in press)

Components	Items	Constructs
Portfolio	Various written genres	Ability to compose a brief report on a tourist attraction, sports team, or event in student's hometown (and other relevant genre, such as bios or cover letters); Ability to state facts, narrate the past, describe trends and data, make predictions, and give recommendations
Written Exam Part I: Reading, Grammar, and Vocabulary	Six multiple choice, true-or-false, gap fill, and lexical cloze items embedded in or based upon four short texts	Comprehension of four short, authentic and relevant texts on a common theme; knowledge of specialized lexis and grammar covered in course; ability to understand the meaning of new lexis from context
Written Exam Part II: Writing	Essay with a three-question prompt	Reading-for-writing: Ability to synthesize language and content of readings to produce a basic, three-paragraph academic text
Oral Exam	Oral presentation	Five-minute formal presentation of the findings of the portfolio report, followed by brief Q&A; Ability to state facts, narrate the past, describe trends and data, make predictions, and give recommendations

4. Phase 3: Getting University Students to Practice Writing

During the 2012–13 academic year, the new course book seemed effective at meeting the stated learning objectives, in that the majority of students who regularly attended and participated in lessons performed satisfactorily on end-of-course assessment. Unfortunately, despite my attempts to cater to their

needs, most students attended and participated sporadically, and were reluctant to complete and submit ungraded assignments.[2] The average course attendance rate was only 51.9%, 95% CI [47.4%, 56.4%] and student attendance per lesson exhibited a volatile downward trend (see Figure 1). This meant that most of my students were neither practicing nor receiving much corrective feedback on their writing, especially toward the end of the semester. I believed that this was the root cause of many of the disappointing performances on the report assignment and the writing task on the final exam.

In an attempt to improve the situation, I planned two modifications to the course for 2013–14. First, in order to better prepare students for the portfolio and oral exam, the course book was updated with a model presentation and accompanying report (pp. 110–115) which could be analyzed in class, both inductively and deductively, to teach basic oral presentation and report writing skills more explicitly. Second, I amended the assessment policy in order to emphasize the importance of academic writing. In 2012–13, students were required to earn a minimum composite score of 60% on the reading and writing exams in order to proceed to the oral exam and a minimum score of 60% on the oral exam as well as a minimum cumulative score of 60% in order to pass the course. After observing that multiple students had managed to pass the course with failing scores on the reading-for-writing task, I required students in 2013–14 to earn passing scores on all components except the portfolio in order to pass the course, in addition to a passing cumulative grade.

Unbeknownst to me until after the next academic year was in progress, the degree program also lowered the general English proficiency required to enroll for my exam from B2 to B1. This decision was made in response to the misconception on the part of students that the purpose of the course was to

2 The lack of effort on the part of students had not only been observed the previous academic year, but also seems to be paradigmatic of university language courses in Italy (Ennis, 2018), and has been observed among university students of tourism at other institutions in other countries (e.g., Garcia Laborda, 2002).

support them in achieving B2+ proficiency, whereas the stated learning objective in the course syllabus was to foster the development of the academic communication skills necessary for university study, albeit at the B2+ level.

The combination of me raising my expectations of the students in terms of their written production and the institution relaxing the prerequisite to enroll for the exam accentuated the problem, perhaps due to the mixed message received by the students. The average course attendance rate fell slightly to 45.6%, 95% CI [40.8%, 50.4%], $t(176) = 1.87$, $p = 0.032$, $d = 0.28$, while the downward volatile trend in attendance per lesson remained nearly identical (see Figure 1). More importantly, a larger percentage of overconfident but underprepared students were admitted to the first exam session in January/February, and the pass rate fell sharply from 83.6%, 95% CI [w-=71.5%, w+=91.5%] in 2012–13 to 53.9%, 95% CI [w-=42.2%, w+=65.3%], $z(135) = 3.67$, $p < 0.001$ in 2013–14 (Ennis, 2018).

My belief was that the lack of effort on the part of many students was a result of several demotivating factors inherent to the learning context, including limited instructional hours, a high student-to-teacher ratio, and Italian university culture which encourages *teaching to the test* and deemphasizes the role of classroom teaching (see Ennis, 2015, 2018). Reflecting upon the results of the 2012–13 offering of the course shortly after the first exam session, I wrote:

> The situation is exacerbated by the fact that class attendance at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, like most universities in Italy, is optional, resulting in sporadic attendance. Typically, only the weakest and/or most motivated students regularly attend lectures. Professors in Italy often deal with this problem by dividing students into attending and non-attending students and offering attending students the opportunity to complete graded assignments in class. Thus, one solution in this context might be to adapt the assessment procedure to such a model by reducing the homework and incentivizing attendance. Specifically, I am considering assigning extra credit pop quizzes for attending students.... (Ennis, 2015, pp. 374–375)

Thus in 2014–15 the only significant modification to the course was the introduction of extra credit pop quizzes[3] as a form of continuous assessment which offered an extrinsic reward for regular attendance and active participation. Previous research had provided evidence that both extra credit and pop quizzes were effective at increasing student effort in secondary and tertiary education in the United States, but the effectiveness of these practices appeared to have never been empirically studied within the context of language education or in the national context of Italy (for a comprehensive literature review, see Ennis, 2018, pp. 5–7), and there was very limited empirical research on the specific practice of giving extra credit for pop quizzes. Thus the intervention was conceived as a classroom experiment which also aimed to extend previous research findings to these specific contexts (see Ennis, 2018).

As summarized in Ennis (in press):

> The extra credit scheme was designed to incentivize regular attendance and active participation without punishing non-attending students and without causing excessive grade inflation. Ten multiple-choice pop quizzes were administered dur-

3 "Extra credit" and "pop quizzes" are terms employed in North American education. "Extra credit pop quizzes" can be defined as the comparatively rare practice of giving extra credit for pop quizzes. My working definition was as follows: "A pop quiz is merely a specific type of quiz which, although similar in form and function to all quizzes, is administered without giving the students prior notification of the day and time on which it will occur. Students are typically aware that pop quizzes will be a component of course assessment and they are aware of the relative weight of the quizzes in the calculation of their cumulative course grades, but a pop quiz is a 'surprise.' hence the word 'pop.' The conventional wisdom supporting the use of pop quizzes is that where pre-announced quizzes temporarily increase the students' effort to complete a particular assignment or to pay attention and actively participate during a particular lesson, pop quizzes result in a sustained increase in effort because the students never know when a quiz will occur or which course content the quiz will assess. Students are therefore encouraged to attend and participate in lessons, and practice and review at home more regularly…. Extra credit is a term that refers to optional coursework which students may complete in order to improve their cumulative grade. Such work can either be assigned on an ad hoc basis in order to give students the opportunity to compensate for unsubmitted, incomplete, or insufficient work, or, more typically, it can be integrated into a course syllabus and assessment procedure as a motivational tool" (Ennis, 2018, p. 6).

> ing lessons in order to test the students' recall of the field-specific vocabulary, grammar, and academic communication strategies that had been previously covered in the lessons and learning material. Only attending students, defined as those who had attended at least ten of fifteen two-hour lessons, were eligible for extra credit at the end of the semester. Attending students were awarded half a bonus point added to their portfolio grade for each quiz on which they scored a minimum of 60%. Students were awarded an additional half a point for perfect attendance and/or if they finished the semester on a top ten list for average quiz scores. After the application of extra credit, students could effectively earn a maximum score of 36 out of 30 points on their portfolio, but because the portfolio assignment only accounted for 25% of the cumulative course grade, the extra credit effectively increased the maximum final grade to 31.5 out of 30 points…. As students were required to pass all components of a final exam in order to pass the course, the portfolio score had no consequence on whether a student passed or failed the course. Extra credit only served as an extrinsic reward for passing students who had regularly attended lessons, actively participated in class, and completed ungraded assignments.

The extra credit scheme (see Table 5) produced very promising results. As reported in Ennis (2018), the average attendance rate rose from 45.6%, 95% CI [40.8%, 50.4%], in 2013–14 to 73.1%, 95% CI [68.2%, 78.0%], $t(183) = 7.87$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.16$, in 2014–15. In 2014–15 the trend in the attendance rate per lesson was also flatter and less volatile than in the previous two years (see Figure 1). The pass rate during the first exam session increased from 53.9%, 95% CI [w-=42.2%, w+=65.3%], in 2013–14 to 68.6%, 95% CI [w-=57.6%, w+=77.9%], $z(160) = 1.92$, $p = 0.027$, in 2014–15. There was also evidence that greater effort, as measured by attendance and pop quiz performance, was associated with improved end-of-course performance, while quiz performance was a stronger predictor of achievement than mere attendance. The 2014–15 cohort expressed positive attitudes toward the intervention and more positive attitudes about the course in general than the 2013–14 cohort on a course evaluation survey. Crucially, the extra scheme had minimal impact on grade inflation, as the addition of extra credit resulted in an average increase of only 3.8% on cumulative grades (see Ennis, 2018 for complete results).

Table 5 – Extra credit scheme for attending students (Ennis, 2018)

Pop quizzes passed	Portfolio bonus	Cumulative bonus
1	0.5	0.125
2	1.0	0.250
3	1.5	0.375
4	2.0	0.500
5	2.5	0.625
6	3.0	0.750
7	3.5	0.875
8	4.0	1.00
9	4.5	1.125
10	5.0	1.250
One leaderboard	5.5	1.375
Both leaderboards	6.0	1.500

However, there were two negative effects of the extra credit scheme with direct implication for the teaching and learning of writing skills. First, pop quizzes required on average 20 minutes to administer, or 11% of the 30 instructional hours, which greatly reduced class time available for collaborative writing tasks. Second, an increase in attendance implied a higher student-to-teacher ratio and, thus, less individualized instruction and instructor feedback during lessons. The net result was that while I was spending substantially more time preparing and marking pop quizzes outside of class, students remained reluctant to submit collaborative writing assignments, especially if they had to complete them at home (see Table 7).

Table 6 – Modified extra credit scheme in 2015–16 (Ennis, in press)

Quiz	Quiz Type	Task Type
1	Multiple choice	Individual
2	Multiple choice	Individual
3	Practice paragraph	Small Group
4	Practice paragraph	Small Group
5	Practice report	Small Group
6	Multiple choice	Individual
7	Practice essay	Small Group
8	Practice presentation outline	Small Group
9	Practice reading exam	Pair
10	Practice reading exam	Pair

The classroom experiment with extra credit pop quizzes was therefore replicated in 2015–16 with a modification intended to reallocate class time to collaborative writing, offer students more opportunities for feedback on their writing, and incentivize the completion and submission of writing tasks. Specifically, I decided to assign four of the collaborative writing tasks as unannounced extra credit assignments, in lieu of multiple-choice quizzes. I also replaced three further multiple-choice quizzes with two practice reading exams and one practice presentation outline (see Table 6). Students were informed that any task completed during lessons might be converted into an extra credit pop quiz at any moment without advance notification. In fact, on two occasions I converted a task into an extra credit assignment upon observing that students were putting forth minimal effort. The extra credit scheme, outlined in Table 5, as well as the course book and course assessment procedure, otherwise remained identical to those used in 2014–15.

Table 7 – Written assignment submissions in 2015–16 (Ennis, in press)

Unit	Capstone Task	14–15	15–16
2	Sentences	0	0
	Sentences	5	6
4	Paragraph*	6	25*
5	Paragraph*	1	22*
6	Essay	3	8
7	Report*	0	19*
8	Essay	0	2
9	Essay*	2	17*
	TOTAL	17	99
	AVERAGE	2.1	12.4

*Assigned as unannounced extra credit

The replication experiment (see Ennis, in press) maintained the positive impacts which extra credit had had on course attendance and the pass rate. The trend in attendance per lesson was nearly identical (see Figure 1), though slightly less volatile, and the average course attendance rate of 73.3%, 95% CI [67.5%, 79.1%], $t(200) = 0.04$, $p = 0.484$, $d = 0.005$, and the pass rate of 63.5%, 95% CI [w- = 52.3%, w+ = 73.5%], $z(182) = -0.70$, $p = 0.242$, were statistically unchanged in comparison to 2014–15. As expected, students submitted more collaborative writing tasks, where the greatest impact was observed for tasks which were assigned as extra credit (see Table 7). Students were noticeably more engaged during collaborative tasks than in previous years, and they had more time than in 2014–15 to complete tasks during lessons. As a result, the total number of submissions increased sharply from 17 in 2014–15 to 99 in 2015–16, while the average number of submissions per task increased from 2.1, 95% CI [0.5, 3.7] to 12.4, 95% CI [5.8, 14], $t(14) = 2.95$, $p = 0.005$, $d = 0.62$. The number of students receiving regular feedback on their written production

increased from approximately 7.4 to 43.4 per task. Grade inflation increased only marginally from 3.8% to 4.2%.

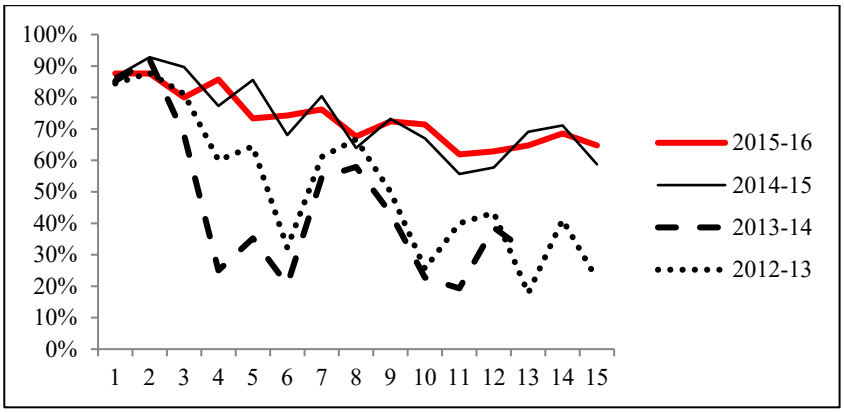

Figure 1 – Attendance rate per lesson by year (Ennis, in press)

The replication experiment produced four results which qualified the findings of the original experiment. First, while there was evidence that better quiz performance was a predictor of passing the course in 2015–16, attendance was no longer found to be a predictor. My interpretation of this observation was that attendance was merely an indicator of an effort to earn extra credit, whereas quiz performance was a better indicator of effort to actually practice and improve in response to the extra credit. Second, while there was no change in students' attitudes about the course overall, they did express less favorable opinions of the extra credit scheme than in 2014–15, which was interpreted as being a result of the extra effort necessary to complete collaborative writing tasks, in comparison to brief multiple choice quizzes. Finally, the substitution of collaborative tasks for multiple-choice quizzes resulted in an unverifiable number of students *freeloading* by signing their name to a submission without contributing much to group work, as well as substantially more time spent marking on my part. These final two observations were interpreted as unavoidable consequences of any extra credit scheme.

It was concluded that the use of extra credit to motivate my students was effective at increasing and sustaining student effort, but that their response to

the extra credit scheme constituted irrational behavior in light of the small value of the extrinsic reward in comparison to the significant increase in effort required to obtain it (for a complete description, see Ennis, in press).[4]

5. Phase 4: Was It All Worth It?

The obvious question is whether or not my efforts to be a reflective practitioner and meet my students' learning needs actually paid off. Did the countless hours spent collecting and analyzing data, designing a custom course book, writing and marking hundreds of extra assignments, and reflecting on every aspect of the course have a positive impact on my students' acquisition of the specialized English required for their field of study? The short answer to this question is that I will never know definitively.

While I had access to the certified CEFR proficiency level of most of my students upon matriculation, I never administered a diagnostic test as a baseline with which to compare my students' performance on the final exam. Even had I given them a pretest, the assessments I designed for the course were never formally tested for validity and reliability.

During the first experiment with extra credit pop quizzes in 2014–15, I did find a moderate correlation between effort—as measured by attendance and quiz performance—and performance on each component of the final exam (Ennis, 2018). There was also a statistically significant increase in the average oral exam score in comparison to the previous academic year. The mean oral exam score increased yet again during the replication experiment (Ennis, in press). However, likely because freeloaders were skewing the data, I found only low correlation between effort and each component of the final exam in 2015–16, despite the increase in collaborative writing submissions.

4 The positive effect of extra credit pop quizzes on regular attendance and active participation was subsequently verified by a colleague, who, upon hearing of my results, implemented a similar scheme in the spring of 2016 (Prior, 2018).

In terms of quantitative data, I will have to take solace in the finding that my efforts did have an observable effect on my students' engagement and did increase their probability of passing my course. However, the collaborative writing submissions also produced a rich set of quantitative data which provides evidence that the course was successful in promoting the desired form of learning.

For example, one of the collaborative writing tasks assigned as extra credit in 2015–16 was the capstone task in the fifth unit, which discusses the role of government in tourism and reviews the zero, first, and second conditionals for the purpose of describing the effects of government intervention (pp. 46–55). The readings in the unit, sourced from textbooks on tourism economics, define national tourism authorities and organizations, discuss the effects of taxes and subsidies on the tourism market, and present the conflicting interventionist and non-interventionist positions on the role of government. The capstone task asks the students to write a paragraph in which they take the position of an interventionist or non-interventionist in order to evaluate a hypothetical tourist tax:

> The local tourism office is considering a hotel tax during the winter so that it can subsidize the provision of summer tourist activities. They have asked you for your expert advice. Write a brief paragraph in favor of or against this proposal. Support your opinion with your position on the government's role in the market (i.e. interventionist vs. non-interventionist), a brief explanation of the effects of taxes and subsidies, and what would happen if the plan were implemented. (p. 55)

Despite the numerous typographical errors, transfer errors, comma splices, and somewhat superficial task completion, the two responses below (reported in Ennis, 2017b, pp. 155–156), submitted by groups of three or four students, provide ample evidence that the students attempted to apply the rules for purposeful paragraph writing introduced in the previous lesson and the grammar of conditional sentences reviewed during the present lesson. In addition, they were clearly scaffolding upon the input received and using new lexis from the texts appropriately. For instance, they made decent attempts at starting their paragraphs with concise topic sentences and linking sentences

with adverbs, and their responses borrow ideas, technical terms, and collocations and chunks directly from the texts in order to express their own opinion (examples marked in bold).

> The local tourism office should not introduce a hotel tax during the winter in order to **subsidize the provision of summer tourist activities**. A new tax **would increase** the room prices. As a consequence tourists **may spend** their holiday in another ski-resort, where there is no additional tax. The government should therefore **create favourable conditions for the service providers in tourism**, [sic] this **would make it possible** for them to decrease prices and to **attract more tourist**[s] in [sic] our area. (Group 1)

> In our opinion the proposal of **levying a hotel tax** during winter is not convenient [sic]. In fact, on one hand the government **would earn** more money thanks to this winter tax but on the other hand it **would be** a damage [sic] for hotels, because people would spend less money on rooms and local economies would be dramatically affected. However, governments [sic] investments play an important role also in the area of tourism, using some for **public services**, **infrastructures** [sic] and advertising and ensuring a **minimum wage** in order to permit workers to have [sic] a holiday. Although government investments are good, **hotel taxes should be imposed** both winter and summer season [sic], since **subsidies** are needed during the whole year. Some hotels work more during the winter while others during the summer. For this reason, not only winter hotels should **be taxed** [sic], because all hotels should receive **subsidies**. (Group 2)

Evidence of intercultural learning can be found in the student responses as well. On occasion, I would augment task instructions for more engaged groups in order to make the intercultural dimension of the course more explicit. Inspired by the concept of *destabilization* as used in intercultural training (e.g., Anderson & Boyle, 2017) as well as intercultural approaches to language teaching rooted in the tradition of phenomenology (Kramsch, 1993), I would first solicit a group's consensus view on the issue at hand, and then request that they write their text from the opposite perspective. The third response which follows (reported in Ennis, 2017b, pp. 156–157), comes from a group of

students who were convinced that government has a responsibility to intervene in support of the tourism market. They were therefore instructed to write their paragraph from the perspective of a *non-interventionist*.

> From our point of view the introduction of a hotel tax during the winter is not a good idea. In fact it is not the governments [sic] **duty to ensure market equilibrium** through imposing taxes and providing subsidies. Therefore [sic], if the government levies [sic] hotel taxes during the winter season, hotels have to raise [sic] their prices. As a consequence the amount [sic] of bookings and potential winter tourists decrease and this might **lead to market instability**. We believe that the tourism sector will grow, if we **trust the market to regulate itself**. (Group 3)

Like the previous two examples, this response contains evidence that the students made an attempt to scaffold and apply skills and grammar covered in the course. Unlike the previous responses, these students adopted a non-interventionist perspective and borrowed chunks of language from the non-interventionist discourse which did not appear in the previous two responses (i.e., "ensure market equilibrium," "lead to market instability," "trust the market to regulate itself"). Such articulation of opposing worldviews is not only a proven technique in intercultural language teaching, but is a skill which ensures academic honesty (see Ennis, 2017b for a full discussion).

Similar evidence can be found in all 99 of the collaborative writing tasks submitted in the autumn of 2015, as well as on the final exam administered in January 2016.[5] Common sense, my experience as a language teacher and lifelong language learner, and sixty-plus years of second language acquisition research available in print suggest that my students must have learned something.

5 Unfortunately, I never requested informed consent to share student responses on the final exam.

6. Conclusion: A Perpetual Work in Progress

Based on the observations made in the autumn of 2015, I had planned many short and long-term interventions to improve the course further. For instance, I was in the process of developing a series of inductive and deductive learning tasks to teach reading-for-writing skills more explicitly, including skimming, scanning, learning new words in context, and the thin line between borrowing new language and plagiarism. I was also considering integrating academic listening tasks (perhaps with some instruction on note-taking and active listening) as well as converting the writing and oral exams into collaborative assessment tasks so that I would be fully *testing how I teach*. In addition, I was planning to assign collaborative learning tasks as pair work, instead of group work. Although this would have almost doubled the time I spent marking, there was empirical evidence that less engaged students are more likely to participate in pairs than in small groups (Dobao, 2012). However, after accepting another job in 2016, I no longer teach the English for Tourism Studies course. Conceived as a perpetual work in progress, the course will forever remain an incomplete project. But the many useful insights gained from the experience will continue to influence how and what I teach and assess. Perhaps this experience will also be useful for colleagues who find themselves facing similar challenges and who strive to reflect on their teaching materials and methods.

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