

A Framework for Developing the Basic Academic Competencies in ESL Programs

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Abstract

This paper aims to establish a research-based framework for developing the basic academic competencies that focuses on the core, academic survival-level skills students need to be successful in their university work. The paper takes as a central premise that developing the basic academic competencies is essential to education and to the development of linguistic proficiency among ESL students. The study is carried out in three phases, the first of which is the construction of the framework, based on an extensive literature review for the term "academic competence". Phase two consisted of a theoretical overview of the basic academic competencies comprising six elements: listening, speaking, reading, writing, thinking and studying. Phase three includes a comprehensive list of the specific academic tasks underlying each element of the basic academic competencies which are needed for ESL learners. Subsequently, the paper contributes thirty-one suggested activities, intended to develop the basic academic competencies.

Keywords: Academic competence; basic academic competencies; linguistic proficiency; content course; mainstream courses

Introduction:

True academic competence depends upon a set of perceptions and behaviors acquired while preparing for more advanced academic work. Therefore, a description of abilities necessary for success in college must reflect what college educators recognize as the intellectual and practical dispositions of their successful students. Academic success depends upon students' exercising the stamina and persistence useful in other areas of their lives (Clark, et. al., 2002).

While education is clearly a collaborative effort, students must ultimately assume considerable responsibility for their own education. Successful students seek assistance when they need it and advocate for their own learning in diverse situations. Sowden (2003) remarks that college students and faculty do not think in isolation. They think with, around, and against other thinkers in a culture of academic literacy. Consequently, educators need to examine the habits of mind essential to successful participation in this culture.

The dispositions and habits of mind that enable students to enter the ongoing conversations appropriate to college thinking, listening, reading, writing, and speaking are inter-related. Students should be aware of the various logical, emotional, and personal appeals used in argument; additionally, they need skills enabling them to define, summarize, detail, evaluate, compare/contrast, and analyze. Students should also have a fundamental understanding of audience, tone, language usage, and rhetorical strategies to navigate appropriately in various disciplines (Clark, et. al., 2002).

The purpose of this paper is to establish a research-based framework for developing the basic academic competencies that focuses on the core, academic survival-level skills students need to be successful in their university work. This paper takes as a central premise that developing the basic academic competencies is essential to education and to the development of linguistic proficiency among ESL students. Learners' progress takes place over time as they encounter different contexts, tasks, audiences, and purposes.

Audience for the Framework

The primary audience for this framework is instructors who teach in ESL programs. Additionally, because academic success is of concern for those inside and outside education, audiences beyond the classroom-including parents, policy makers, employers, and the general public- also can use this framework.

Context for the Framework

To describe the basic academic competencies and related tasks that are central to success in college and beyond, this paper demonstrates theories and strategies from research in academic fields, and English education that focus on the development of listening, speaking, reading, writing, thinking, studying, and the academic abilities related to these competencies. At its essence, the framework suggests that the basic academic competencies should be obvious and clearly defined and supported with genuine purposes and practical teaching strategies that will enable ESL students to meet the language requirements in university programs, where the medium of instruction is English.

The study was carried out in three consecutive phases:

Phase I- Constructing the research framework.

Phase II- Presenting a theoretical overview of the basic academic competencies.

Phase III- Producing a comprehensive list of the specific academic tasks.

Phase I- Constructing the Research Framework

An overview of the term "Academic Competence"

Academic competence is defined somewhat differently depending on the instrument used to assess it. With reference to DiPerna and Elliott (1999), the notion of "academic competence" can be important in understanding college performance and helping differentiate between achievers and non-achievers.

DiPerna and Elliott (2000) propose the term "competence" as a means of describing both traditional and nontraditional academic factors. According to DiPerna and Elliott (2000), the construct of competence, although more comprehensive than traditional measures of academic success, is somewhat elusive. Those authors define *academic competence* as a multidimensional construct pertaining to the skills, attitudes, and behaviors that a learner needs to contribute to academic success (DiPerna & Elliott, 2000). Using this nomenclature, skills are considered traditional academic factors that are well-accepted predictors of college performance. Attitudes and behaviors are believed to represent nontraditional factors associated with academic performance.

Researchers (e.g., DiPerna & Elliott, 2000; Reynolds, & Walberg, 1991) demonstrate that prior academic skills are the largest single predictor of current achievement, regardless of other student, classroom, or home variables. As such, the first step in developing an intervention for a student experiencing academic difficulty must be to assess the student's current proficiency in core academic skills (e.g., listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking). After determining the student's level of proficiency relative to the academic skill expectations in the classroom, academic enablers should be assessed to determine if they are contributing to the current problem. Motivation appears to be the first academic enabler that should be assessed given the strength of its relationship with current achievement (Hutto, 2004).

Academic competence in ESL/EFL context

One of the first researchers to call attention to the fact that ESL students need more than fluency in English to learn content material was Saville-Troike (1984), who observed nineteen ESL students, ages six to twelve, for one academic year, videotaping the students in their classes and on the playground. All of these students have very little or no exposure to English. At the end of the school year, the subjects took three tests of English proficiency and the Comprehensive Test of Basic, an achievement test that covers the areas of reading, language, social studies, science, and math. Saville-Troike finds that there are large differences in the achievement test scores: some students do well, but others do very poorly. She also finds that the students' scores on the tests of content subjects do not correlate with their scores on the English proficiency tests (Saville-Troike, 1984).

These findings support Cummins's (1984) and Collier's (1989) claims that proficiency in English is not the most important factor in school success and suggest that specific school-related knowledge and skills are important. Saville-Troike also finds that students' abilities in their native language have an influence on their test scores.

Saville-Troike's conclusions about what ESL students need to succeed in content courses are different from what many ESL specialists have conceived. It was common that the most important factors in academic success were general language proficiency and sociolinguistic competence (knowledge of how to interact in socially appropriate ways). But Saville-Troike (1984) shows that specifically academic factors are necessary as well, and she introduced the

term academic *competence* to include these factors. She did not attempt to define academic competence but gave some guidelines for preparing ESL/EFL students for content courses. These conclusions support Wright's (1998) claim that the initial support work for EFL students should concentrate on developing academic competence rather than linguistic proficiency.

Adamson (1993: 5) remarks that "*Saville-Troike introduces a new direction in the schooling of ESL/EFL students by coining the term **academic competence** and suggesting some of the factors this competence includes*".

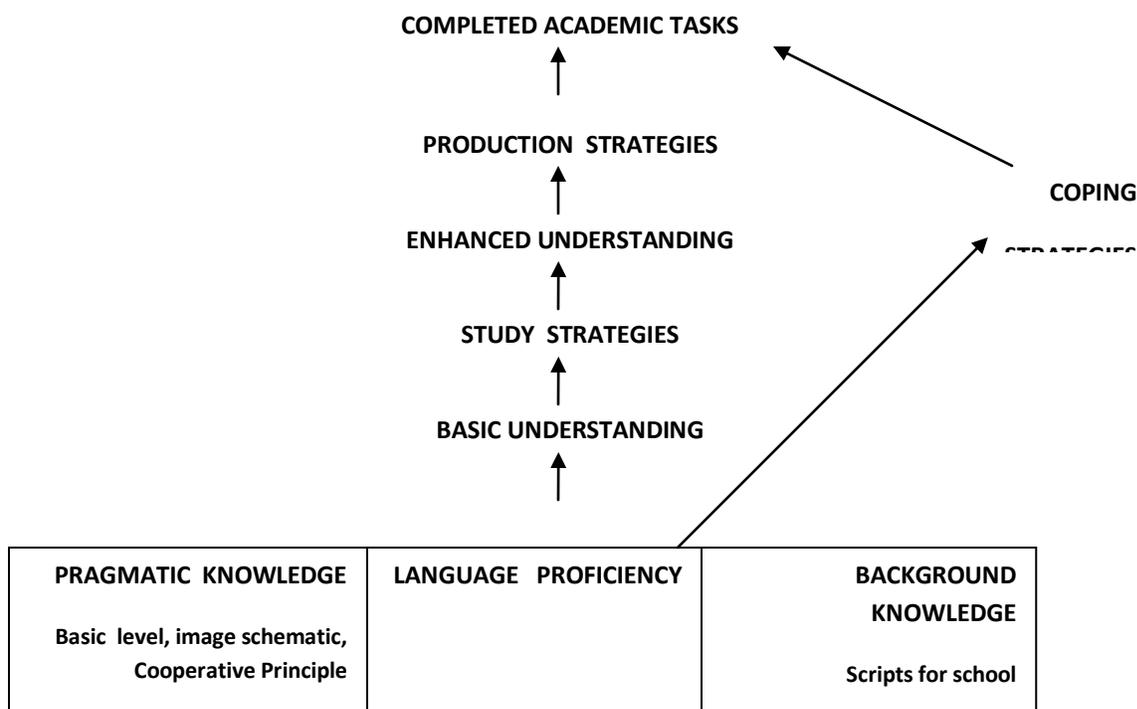
Adamson's Model

The term "academic competence" coined in scholarly literature by Saville-Troike (1984) to call attention to the fact that EFL students' academic success does not entirely depend on their explicit grammatical knowledge in English but on their background knowledge of academic content, their academic skills, and the context in which such skills are employed. Ouellette (2004) asserts that the term itself can be seen as an extension of the Hymesian notion of "communicative competence".

The sociolinguist Dell Hymes (1972) used the term "communicative competence" to explain how individuals in a particular speech community are able to function communicatively using their cultural knowledge of the norms of interaction and interpretation. Communicative competence, in the Hymesian sense, involves not merely the explicit knowledge of grammatical rules but the knowledge of how the language is used in particular contexts. It is the knowledge that a speaker has concerning "when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about to whom, when, where, in what manner" (Hymes, 1972: 277).

Building on both Saville-Troike's "academic competence" and Hymes' "communicative competence", Adamson (1993) presents a model to describe how ESL students accomplish academic tasks by drawing on basic knowledge and using strategies for academic success. This model particularly describes how ESL learners draw upon knowledge and abilities of three types: *universal pragmatic knowledge* (i.e., the pragmatic use of language in academic contexts), *language proficiency in the target language* (i.e., the use of typical structural features in academic discourse, both verbal and written), and *background knowledge* (i.e., the knowledge of the expectations of academic settings and strategies for meeting them) (Adamson, 1993).

Figure 1. How ESL Students Accomplish Academic Tasks



As illustrated in figure1, the role of academic strategies is to enhance the student's understanding of content material and to allow the student to complete assignments as well as possible with less than a perfect understanding. However, when their level of understanding drops below a certain point, many of them resort to coping strategies. Adamson (1993) emphasizes that the use of coping strategies can result in acceptable and even highly praised academic work. Coping strategies are presented in figure1, as production strategies that bypass enhance understanding.

Concerning this model, Adamson states that, three abilities contribute to academic competence: (1) the ability to use a combination of linguistic, pragmatic, and background knowledge to reach a basic understanding of content material; (2) the ability to use appropriate strategies (which vary according to the degree of basic understanding) to enhance knowledge of content material; and (3) the ability to use appropriate strategies to complete academic assignments with less than a full understanding of the content material. Thus academic competence amounts to possessing a critical mass of understanding and appropriate strategies. When understanding falls below a certain point, the process of learning fails and the only alternative is to try coping strategies (Adamson, 1993, pp.106).

Both Adamson (1993) and Saville-Troike (1984) highlight language proficiency and pragmatic knowledge in social interaction as key elements to academic success. However, Saville-Troike offers three conclusions. First, she finds that vocabulary knowledge when learning content is more important than grammatical accuracy, and that both should be related to the immediate academic needs of ESL-EFL learners. Second, she further states that

communicative competence in social interaction is not a guarantee of communicative competence in academic settings. And, third, she asserts that the use of L1 enhances conceptual development in ESL learners (Saville-Troike, 1984).

What these conclusions highlight for Adamson's model is that academic competence involves cultural and social factors that ESL learners might draw upon, as well as the relevant abilities and strategies necessary for academic success.

Principles for helping ESL students develop academic competence:

The theory of academic competence suggests five general principles and two corollaries for preparing ESL students for mainstream courses.

1. Academic strategies should be explicitly taught on an individualized basis.
2. Students can best learn strategies in a language through content course that uses authentic texts.
 - a. The content material should be studied in depth.
 - b. The course should provide contact with native speakers.
3. Teaching should be interactive in ways that are compatible with students' learning styles and prior scripts for school.
4. Teaching should be experiential.
5. The content subject should be one that students will need to know when they are mainstreamed (Adamson, 1993, p.114).

Phase II- Presenting a theoretical overview of the basic academic competencies

Basic academic competencies are developed abilities; they are the outcomes of learning and intellectual discourse. They are acquired when there are incentives and stimulation to learning and when there is an encouraging learning environment. Basic academic competencies are listening, speaking, reading, writing, mathematics, reasoning, and studying. These competencies are interrelated to and interdependent with the basic subject-matter areas. Without such competencies, the knowledge of literature, history, science, languages, mathematics, and all other disciplines are unattainable (Wentzel, 1993). They provide a link across the disciplines of knowledge although they are not specific to any discipline. Teaching that is done in ignorance of, or in disregard for, such competencies and their interrelationships to each of the subject-matter areas is inadequate if not incompetent (Reason, 2005).

The following is a theoretical overview of the basic academic competencies comprising six elements; **listening, speaking, reading, writing, thinking, and studying**. (Mathematics will be excluded as it has no direct impact on language learning). The aim of this overview is to identify the specific academic tasks, underlying each element of the basic academic competencies. At the end of this phase, a list of the basic academic competencies needed for ESL learners is developed.

Academic Listening

Academic listening has distinct characteristics and places high demands upon listeners (Flowerdew, 1995). It requires listeners to have relevant background information on the lecture delivered. It also requires listeners to be able to distinguish between what is relevant and what is not relevant because an academic lecture contains both relevant and irrelevant information on the topic discussed. Academic listening contains long stretches of talk when listeners do not have the

opportunity to engage in the facilitating functions of interactive discourse, so it places high demands upon listeners (Huang, 2005).

Flowerdew and Miller (1997) described some additional features that differentiate authentic lecture discourse from written text or scripted lectures. An authentic lecture is often structured according to "tone groups" and in the form of incomplete clauses. It is often signaled by "micro-level discourse markers" such as "and" "so" "but" "now" "okay". What's more, in an authentic lecture, speakers use many false starts, hesitations, corrections, and repetitions. Speakers often organize their thoughts poorly and present their ideas in incomplete grammatical sentences. This makes it difficult for the listeners to understand the information delivered in the lecture.

Finally, Ferries and Tagg (1996) comment that there is frequent "give" and "take" between teacher and students in an academic classroom situation. This includes formal, planned lecture material, informal questions or comments from the students, and unplanned responses to students by professor. During these give-and-take activities, students become more involved. On the one hand, they have to actively participate in these activities; on the other hand they have to comprehend what is going on in class and try to get the important points of the lecture. So understanding lectures poses formidable challenges for ESL students, even those highly proficient in English.

Academic reading

There is general consensus that reading involves the interaction of a vast array of processes, knowledge, and abilities. These include basic decoding processes such as grapheme recognition, lexical access, phonological representation, and linguistic structure processing, as well as higher order cognitive processes such as the application of background knowledge, processing strategies, text structure understanding, and some aspects of vocabulary knowledge. Reading also involves interactional processes such as the application of evaluative skills, use of metacognitive knowledge, and self-monitoring. However, a major issue in reading literature relates to the specific relationships between these components (Hudson, 2000:3).

Early theories viewed reading as a bottom-up process in which the reader constructs meaning in a sequential manner from letters, words, and sentences (Gough, 1972; LaBerge & Samuels, 1974). Other theories of reading stressed that the efficient reader makes the fewest text processing, since that reader predicts the meaning of the text by applying knowledge of the world and language (Goodman, 1967; Smith, 1971). More recent views acknowledge a strong interplay between both of these processes.

Current theories emphasize the interactive nature of reading and accept the fact that good readers make extensive use of printed information. In the interactive approach, some have argued in favor of an interactive system strongly constrained by bottom-up processes, and have consequently emphasized linguistic processing (Stanovich, 1990; Grabe, 1991; Perfetti, 1992). Others have tended to place less emphasis on the bottom-up linguistic components and more emphasis on the role of top-down processing (Hudson, 1991; Hill & Parry, 1992). Which emphasis is given seems often to be influenced by how the researchers address – explicitly or implicitly – the four issues of (a) how uniform the reading process is within any particular individual reading across contexts; (b) the importance of background and culture in reading and learning to read; (c) the extent to which reading skills are implicationally ordered in their acquisition and application as opposed to being overlapping and compensatory in nature; and (d)

the extent to which an individual may avoid close linguistic processing and still comprehend a message (Hudson, 2000).

Hudson (2000) highlights that success or failure in reading performance can be addressed in terms of the interactions between the reader's (a) *automaticity*, the extent to which the performance of procedures no longer requires large amounts of attention; (b) *content and formal schemata*, the reader's mental representations of facts and skills; (c) *strategies and metacognitive skills*, the reader's strategies for monitoring the selection and application of actions; (d) *purpose*, the goal striven for by the reader; and (e) *context*, the interactional environment in which the reading activity takes place. Thus, regardless of the approach to reading performance, there is a need to indicate how the interactive processes in reading involve both the underlying cognitive processing and the purpose or contextual aspects of reading.

Academic Speaking

Discourse competence is an important part of many courses of academic study. Lectures may involve question/answer interludes, and many courses of study involve tutorials and seminar type events in later years of study. Discussion-based classes and question/answer sessions within lectures demand a high level of proficiency in speaking for the participants. This demand is one which non-native speakers (NNSs) may feel themselves ill-prepared to meet.

Oral communication is a complex and multifaceted language process. The ability to speak coherently and intelligibly on a focused topic is generally recognized as a necessary goal for ESL students. Because the coming decade will see increasing pressure placed upon ESL high school, college, and university graduates to possess excellent skills in both speech and writing, ESL teachers of oral communication commonly turn to widely accepted L2 teaching methods and materials (Murphy, 1991).

In the L2 classroom, speaking activities can be planned to introduce everything from dyadic to small-group, to whole-class interaction patterns. Byrne (1987), Klippel (1987), and Golebiowska (1990), for example present teacher reference materials that are useful for getting ESL students to speak with one another in these different groupings. The L2 literature is rich in resources for engaging students in speaking activities such as rehearsing dialogues, completing information-gap activities, playing interactive games, discussing topical issues, problem solving, role playing, and completing speaking tasks (Hedge, 2000).

Students at higher levels of proficiency sometimes need to gain experience in expressing themselves in front of a whole class. Several writers take the position that more proficient L2 speakers benefit from generating and developing their own topics to present in class (Dale & Wolf, 1988; Meloni & Thompson, 1980). Students can develop their topics through classroom procedures that are parallel to ones advocated in the teaching of the writing process (Mangelsdorf, 1989; Zamel, 1987).

Academic Writing

Within the last decade, numerous approaches to the teaching of writing in programs for ESL college students have been tried, and much discussion has focused on the most appropriate approach to adopt. ESL writing researchers and teachers have generally agreed that the goal of college-level L2 writing programs is to prepare students to become better academic writers (Spack, 1988).

To learn to write in any discipline, students must become immersed in the subject matter; this is accomplished through reading, lectures, seminars, and so on. They learn by participating

in the field, by doing, by sharing, and by talking about it with those who know more. They can also learn by observing the process through which professional academic writers produce texts or by studying that process. They will learn most efficiently from teachers who have a solid grounding in the subject matter and who have been through the process themselves (Hedge, 2000).

Researchers have long noted that writing classes differ considerably from other academic courses in the emphasis placed on various aspects of writing. Bridgeman and Carlson (1984) note that writing classes emphasize linguistic and rhetorical forms more than content whereas in other courses the emphasis is reversed. In a survey of ESL students in the U.S. (Leki & Carson, 1993) indicate that they experience writing differently depending on the source of information drawn on in writing a text. The sources fall into three broad categories:

- 1- Information from writers own personal experiences.
- 2- A source text to which writers respond. In this type of writing, writers are not responsible for explaining or demonstrating comprehension of the source text but are using it as the springboard for their writing.
- 3- A text to which writers are exposed and required to account for in some way. In this type of writing, the writers are responsible for demonstrating an understanding of the source text. In other words, they must produce *text responsible* prose based on content acquired primarily from text.

The findings suggest that writing classes require students to demonstrate knowledge of a source text much less frequently than other academic courses do. The researchers argue that English for Academic Purpose classes that limit students to writing without source texts or to writing without responsibility for the content of source texts miss the opportunity to engage L2 writing students in the kinds of interactions with text that promote linguistic and intellectual growth. (Leki & Carson, 1997)

In their findings the researchers call for a deep interaction between language, personal interests, needs, and backgrounds. Thus, learners need to implement the three sources in their writing tasks with much emphasis on the third source; the text responsible writing.

Academic Thinking (reasoning)

Since the advent research into cognitive development, language teachers and linguists generally put emphasis on the close connection between language learning and thinking processes. In particular, ESL reading research has shown some correlation between reading comprehension and familiarity with the formal or content schemata of English texts (Carrell, 1987). Furthermore, noting the unreflective character of many languages teaching approaches that only encourage verbal output or passive input, Tarvin and Al-arishi (1991) have explored some methods to make language teaching more thoughtful. Similarly, Chamot (1995) argues from current educational trends promoting higher-order thinking that ESL teachers also need to turn the classroom into a "community of thinkers." As informal observations indicate, that thinking skills can indeed be taught in an ESL context.

A broad, general finding from the research base is that nearly all of the skills programs and practices investigated were found to make a positive difference in the achievement levels of participating students. Studies which looked at achievement over time found that thinking skills instruction accelerated the learning gains of participants, and those with true or quasi-experimental designs generally found that experimental students outperformed controls to a

significant degree. Reports with such findings include: Bass and Perkins (1984), Barba and Merchant (1990), and Freseman (1990).

Various Instructional Approaches Enhance Thinking Skills:

Research supports the use of several teaching practices as effective in fostering the development of thinking skills, including:

- **Redirection/probing/reinforcement:** known to increase students' content knowledge, these techniques also enhance the development of critical and creative thinking skills (Cotton 1991; Pearson 1982; Robinson 1987).
- **Asking higher-order questions:** (Sternberg and Bhana 1986).
- **Lengthening wait-time:** e.g., the amount of time the teacher is willing to wait for a student to respond after posing a question (Pogrow 1988).

Academic Studying:

Although the need for more research on academic studying in higher education context is great, there is a large body of related research that informs current understanding of studying in learning contexts (Butler & Winne, 1995; Mayer, 1996; Pressley et al., 1997; Slavin, 2003; Zimmerman, 1990, 1998). Most of this research has focused on the topic of self-regulation in academic studying. Although the concept of self-regulation is hard to define because of the many different theoretical perspectives on self-regulation available in the literature, Zimmerman (1990) has identified a number of common concepts that are typically descriptive of self-regulated learning.

Self-regulated learners are *"metacognitively aware as well as motivationally and behaviorally active in their own learning"* (Zimmerman, 1990, p.4). Students who self-regulate are aware of their success in learning efforts and constantly evaluate the need to modify their approach to learning. This is accomplished as students set goals and plan their learning activities, implement the learning activities and monitor their effectiveness, and then make changes based on the conclusions derived from the results of the monitoring.

A number of self-regulatory processes that are important to academic studying have been identified (Zimmerman, 1998). These include goal setting, task strategies, imagery self-instruction, time management, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, self-sequences, environmental restructuring, and help seeking. A Number of studies have confirmed that these self-regulatory processes are important for academic achievement, and that high achievers engage in almost all of these processes much more frequently than low achievers (Purdie, Hattie, & Douglas, 1996).

Phase III- Producing a comprehensive list of the specific academic tasks.

After presenting the theoretical overview of the basic academic competencies, the present framework contributes a comprehensive list of the specific academic tasks needed for ESL learners, underlying each element of the basic academic competencies.

Table (1) List of the specific academic tasks needed for ESL learners

	Academic Listening	Academic Speaking	Academic Reading	Academic Writing	Academic Thinking	Academic Studying
1-	Listen and simultaneously take notes	Ask questions for discussions	Identify the purposes and types of texts	Conceive ideas about a topic for the	Sustain and express intellectual	Take accurate and useful notes from

	Academic Listening	Academic Speaking	Academic Reading	Academic Writing	Academic Thinking	Academic Studying
			(e.g., descriptive, narrative, argumentative...) before reading	purpose of writing	curiosity	reading and lectures
2-	Identify key ideas of speakers in lectures or discussion	Express information to individuals or groups taking into account the audience and the nature of information	Define unfamiliar words by decoding, using contextual clues, or by using a dictionary	Organize, select, and relate ideas and to outline and develop them in coherent paragraphs	Prepare and ask provocative questions	Set study goals and priorities consistent with stated course objectives and one's own progress
3-	Identify the evidence which supports, confutes, or contradicts the thesis	Track audience responses and react appropriately to those responses	Summarize information	Write informational pieces (e.g., descriptions, letters, reports, instructions) using illustrations when relevant	Challenge their own beliefs	Establish surroundings and habits conducive to learning independently or with others
4-	Infer the meaning of unfamiliar terms	Speak clearly and confidently	Analyze information and argument	Write Standard English sentences with correct : Sentence structure, verb forms, punctuation, capitalization, word choice, and spelling	Compare and contrast own ideas with others'	Locate and use resources external to the classroom (Ex. Libraries, computers, interviews, and direct observation)
5-	Identify digressions and illustrations	Employ transitional language to show how various ideas are related	Retain the information read	Report facts and narrate events	Sustain and support arguments with evidence	Develop and use general specialized vocabularies, and use them for reading, writing, listening, and speaking
6-	Retain information	Engage in intellectual discussions and serious	Identify the main idea of a text	Competent use of vocabulary	Identify and formulate problems, and propose ways	Understand and follow customary instructions

	Academic Listening	Academic Speaking	Academic Reading	Academic Writing	Academic Thinking	Academic Studying
		interrogation of diverse views		and structures	to solve them	for academic work in order to recall, comprehend, analyze, summarize, and report the main ideas
7-	Ask questions as an aid to understanding	Recognize the spoken form of vocabulary including idiomatic expressions	Read texts of complexity without instruction and guidance	Good development of topic	Work collaboratively on reading and writing	Take notes from sources using a structured format
8-	Participate in class discussions	Demonstrate a full range of pronunciation skills including: phonemic control, mastery of stress, and intonation patterns	Relate prior knowledge and experience to new information	Use revision techniques to improve focus, support, and organization	Enjoy the exchange of ideas	Synthesize knowledge and apply it to new situations
9-	Produce comprehensible speech	Answer and ask questions coherently and concisely	Identify and comprehend the main and subordinate ideas in a written work and to summarize the ideas in one's own words	Edit or proofread to eliminate errors in grammar, mechanics, and spelling, using standard English conventions	Recognize and use inductive and deductive reasoning	Prepare for various types of examinations
10-	Attend to and understand directions to assignments	Effectively use eye contact and non-verbal expressions	Identify a writer's point of view and tone, and to interpret a writer's meaning inferentially as well as literally	Critically analyze or evaluate the ideas or arguments of others	Exercise civility	Navigate the internet and use search engines effectively

	Academic Listening	Academic Speaking	Academic Reading	Academic Writing	Academic Thinking	Academic Studying
11-	Comprehend English spoken by various speakers whose language styles include a variety of pitches, rates of speech, accents, and regional variations	Speak using skills appropriate to formal speech situations: use appropriate volume, pace speech so that is understandable, and demonstrate an awareness of audience	Separate one's personal opinions and assumptions from a writer's	Conduct college-level research to develop and support their own opinions and conclusions	Draw reasonable conclusions from information found in various sources	Accept constructive criticism and learn from it
12-	Listen to a selection of literature (fiction or nonfiction) to recognize character and tone	Contribute to discussions by: Asking relevant questions, Responding with appropriate information or opinions to questions asked, and displaying appropriate turn-taking behaviors	Vary one's reading speed and method (survey, skim, review, question , and master) according to the type of material and one's purpose for reading	Use the library catalogue and the internet to locate relevant sources	Comprehend, develop, and use concepts and generalizations	Meet deadlines for assignments

Suggested activities intended to develop the basic academic competencies

In this final section, the paper offers thirty-one short suggestions in the form of classroom activities. The author hopes that after reading this paper, the ESL teacher will have a good idea of how the suggestions offered here apply to his or her own teaching situation and will be able to expand and adapt these activities to fit the needs of the students.

- 1- Students make notes in the margins of a text and share them with other students. (Provide texts with large margins.)
- 2- Students formulate and write questions on a topic as they listen to a text read or a lecture delivered on this topic.
- 3- Students speak for three minutes about a topic without having prepared notes. Then they are allowed to have another topic with a three-minute period of note-taking preparation. After the second three-minute monologue, let them compare experiences.
- 4- Students take notes planning a weekend or a shopping trip.
- 5- Students take notes that summarize a movie they have seen recently. Have them read their summaries to the class.

- 6- Give students a two-sentence summary of a well-known story and ask them, in small groups, to expand it.
- 7- Students work in groups to contract a well-known story into three sentences. Each group passes its contraction on to another group, which expands on it.
- 8- Students evaluate one another's note-taking.
- 9- Students listen to a song and note its central ideas. It can be listened to several times for checking.
- 10- Start the reading of a dialogue, perhaps an opening scene from a play; plays by Oscar Wilde are very suitable. Ask students to take notes on how they might finish the dialogue.
- 11- Students make out a list of common speech markers used by lecturers. Examples include transitional expressions such as numbers (first, second, and third) and adverbs (moreover, nevertheless, however, although), as well as expressions of emphasis (I want to stress, it is significant).
- 12- Give students the first and the last lines of a text and ask them to predict the content of the text to be read.
- 13- In a text that contains several numbers, list them on the board and ask students to scan the article, finding what each number refers to.
- 14- On the board list key words and phrases from a text recently read. Write the words in the same order as they appear in the text. Ask students to retell the content of the text using the words on the board as clues.
- 15- Give timed readings lasting two minutes. Let students keep self-monitoring charts on which they mark how much they read each time.
- 16- Give students the central idea of the text they are about to read and ask them to brainstorm for content. Example: "Our next article is about turtles. What kind of issues do you think it might bring up?"
- 17- As a pre-reading activity, ask the class to brainstorm vocabulary they think might appear in a text on a certain topic. For example: "We are going to read an article about air pollution. What words do you think might appear in such an article?"
- 18- Give the class sentences from a text to be read. Tell them that these sentences are answers and ask them to make up the questions that could prompt such answers.
- 19- Ask students to complete, in writing, any evocative sentence, such as "My life will be a success if _____," and then in pairs explain their completion to each other.
- 20- Students are asked to provide both positive and negative arguments for controversial topics.
- 21- Ask students to guess information about each other's countries, size of population, name of capital city, national food, and so on. Students verify information about their own countries.
- 22- Students guess information about one another – family, hobbies, and so on – which is then verified.
- 23- Students present information, and the rest of the class guesses where and how it was obtained.
- 24- Students interview locals about professions, marriage customs, life and job opportunities. This can be part of an I-search paper or report.
- 25- Students keep an alphabetized vocabulary notebook to go through before each test.
- 26- Before each test, students make out test questions and do a practice test.
- 27- Students mark and evaluate each other's test.

- 28- Students relate stories about their most or least successful test experience.
- 29- Students make rules regarding test-taking – open or closed book? Essay or short answers? and so forth.
- 30- Students write lists of positive and negative aspects of testing.
- 31- Together with the class, make out a list of ten to thirty often repeated mistakes. Declare these the "terrible tens," "terrible twenties," and "terrible thirties." Students are allowed to keep the list in front of them during all exams.

Conclusion

Many ESL teachers lead sheltered lives. The goal of those who teach in public schools, colleges, and universities is to prepare students to take mainstream content courses such as history, science, and math, yet the teachers themselves may know very little about what is expected of students in these courses. One reason of this ignorance is that ESL teachers often have little chance to talk to teachers of content subjects. At colleges and universities, ESL instructors often teach at an English Language Institute, where their status and duties are different from those of other faculty members. In public schools, ESL teachers may be part of an isolated intensive ESL program, or they may be itinerant teachers moving from school to school. Such teachers have little time to find out what happens to their students when they join the academic mainstream.

Alternatively, many ESL students have great difficulty in content courses, a fact documented by studies of ESL students' achievement test scores. It follows that many ESL programs do not adequately prepare students for mainstream courses. The main reason for this failure is that ESL programs are usually isolated from mainstream programs. For example, many ESL programs attempt to prepare students for mainstream courses by using "theme-based" textbooks, which contain selected readings, lectures, and exercises from high school or college textbooks. These texts devote one or two chapters to a variety of subjects such as psychology, US history, and literature. Thus, the ESL students study bits and pieces of "canned" academic material, only some of which is relevant to their academic goals, while real academic material, including textbooks, lectures, and assignments, is available in the school all around them. In this framework it is suggested that before students leave the ESL program, they should have some access to the real academic environment while they still have the support of their ESL teachers and peers. In other words, the walls surrounding the ESL program need to be broken down.

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