Universidad de Oviedo

Facultad de Filosofía y Letras

Trabajo Fin de Grado en Estudios Ingleses

A Case Study on the Acquisition of some Academic Writing Conventions in the University of Oviedo English Studies Degree

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Introduction

The language used in academic contexts constitutes a particular discourse employed by academics in the different activities they undertake, namely, education and the construction of authorized knowledge (Hyland, 2009). Novices, that is, students must learn and adapt to the conventions of academic discourse if they want to successfully participate in the academic community. For that to happen, specific instruction should take place and has, in fact, been developed, as the field of English for Academic Purposes emerged for this purpose (Hyland and Saw 2016, 1).

EAP has provided us with comprehensive studies of academic discourse and its conventions. It is the instruction of these, and their acquisition by undergraduate students that concern this project. I was first introduced to EAP through a textbook in my first year of English Studies. However, I would not actually become actively familiar with the field itself until my third year, when I took an EAP course during my Erasmus time at the University of Glasgow. The combined experience of writing long(ish) essays for the first time, while also having a course exclusively dedicated to academic English made me wonder about my own and my peer's experiences with such a discipline, especially with academic English writing.

That experience ultimately led to this project, articulated by means of a case study, whose aim is to assess the knowledge about academic English writing that first and fourth-year English Studies undergraduates at the University of Oviedo possess, offering an overview of their general knowledge and skills from their expectations and first steps on the matter to a presumably more consolidated and scaffolded command. Moreover, a secondary intention is to draw some conclusions out of the investigation results in the hope that they might serve as a basis for further EAP research and curriculum development.

Regarding the structure of this practical project, this introduction precedes a section where the theoretical basis of the study is explained, followed by a longer chapter devoted to the case study itself. This has been divided into three parts: methodology, results, and discussion of the results, in line with current survey-based research. The study was conducted in the form of two quantitative questionnaires, one for first-year students and one for fourth-year students, and their design was based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and EAP instruction textbooks. The answers where then processed by the author of the project and commented extensively in the discussion section. Finally, the last section in the project will offer some useful hints for further consideration on EAP instruction design.

As a last comment, I would like to thank the people who made this study possible. My project tutor, first of all, Gabriela García, who curiously enough prompted this project years ago when as a 1st-year I also participated in a similar study by a 4th-year student through one of her courses. Thank you also to every lecturer that allowed us to take a not-so-small bit out of their class time: Carlos Prado, Maria Monaco, Miasol Eguíbar, and Marta Ramón. And last, but not least, for what would a study be without its subjects, I would like to thank every 1st and 4th year student that participated in the research.

Theoretical Background

This section presents first a brief description of the main framework which have served as the base for the development of this study, the field of English for Academic Purposes. Then, the academic genre that most concerns us, the essay, is also described and duly contextualized with a special emphasis on its relationship to the subjects of the study.

Introducing English for Academic Purposes

This project is concerned with the role that academic discourse has in shaping the different activities that are developed by academics (here meaning all members of the academic community, whether novices –like the subjects of our study– or established experts), from education to the construction, evaluation and dissemination of authorized knowledge (Hyland 2009). In this sense, we agree with Hyland (2009, 1) in broadly defining academic discourse as the language used by the academic community, and the way that thought is constructed by this discourse group. Issues regarding what exactly constitutes academic discourse, and how it should be described and approached have and are still being debated (see, for instance, Patterson and Weideman 2013, or Snow and Uccelli 2009). These fall far beyond the scope of this end-of-degree project, for which a generic description as the one offered above will do.

The real nature of academic discourse distinguishing it from other discourses (2009, 10) lies on the said dissemination of authorized knowledge, which likely grants it most of its social capital. However, teaching and learning academic discourse conventions and rules should not be overlooked, especially in higher education instruction.

Novices, that is, students must learn the particularities of academic discourse to become successfully engaged members of the academic community. As Hyland (2009, 3) notes, students comprise a culturally, socially, and linguistically heterogeneous group which cannot be assumed to possess the required academic literacy competencies for this engagement to happen. Our subjects of study, for instance, are non-native speakers of the language in which their academic community develops most of its activities.

Therefore, students must be taught not only their discipline's knowledge repertoire, but they should also be introduced to broader academic discourse matters.

This takes us to English for Academic Purposes (henceforth, EAP), a discipline which focuses on language research and instruction within academic contexts (Hyland and Saw 2016, 1). According to Hamp-Lyons (2011, 89), EAP emerges from the English for Specific Purposes field, and though still considered by many as a sub-discipline of ESP, its expansion and focus on academic discourse has also led to a differentiated understanding of EAP as its own, if related, field. Hamp-Lyons (2011, 94) briefly chronicles in her article the evolution of EAP, highlighting the creation of the *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* as a signal of the field's becoming independent.

EAP appeared as a response to the growth of English as the dominant language in academic discourse(s), prompted by the dominance of English-speaking countries and their higher education institutions, and the consequent increase of non-native English-speaking academics which would need to learn the conventions of English academic discourses (Hyland and Hamp-Lyons 2002). Though, as noted by Snow and Uccelli (2009, 113) or Hyland and Saw (2016, 2), it is not only non-native speakers that struggle with their initiation into the academic community, and, therefore, native speakers also benefit from EAP instruction and can be subjects of its research.

As regards those conventions, we can refer to two descriptions of their characteristics. Linton, Madigan, and Johnson (1994) identified three distinct categories of general academic writing conventions, while also acknowledging that disciplines may differ in how those are realized. They are conventions of structure, of reference, and of language. Conventions of structure are concerned with the flow of the argument(s) and the rhetorical moves available to writers. For instance, literary essays typically precede the discussion with a thesis statement. Conventions of explicitness, which refer to signposting elements, are also included in this category. Secondly, conventions of reference are concerned with the ways in which academics refer to other writers and texts, that is, the strategic ways in which citations and quotations are used. Finally, conventions of language cover the features of academic language. Regarding this category, we can highlight the ways in which disagreement with other writers is expressed, and the different degrees of expressing assertiveness (from certainty to hedging practices).

Teresa Thonney's 2011 contribution to this issue comprises the said conventions and expands on them, under six standard moves. First comes the reference to other works either to agree, disagree or build on them. The second points at the need to outline academic works to help readers navigate the text. In the conclusion, this is done by summarizing the work and restating its value. Additionally, academic discourse avoids

dogmatism using hedging language and uses a high percentage of lexical words, together with academic and discipline-specific vocabulary. The final move entails emphasizing evidence.

Currently, EAP encompasses a number of genres and disciplines, and its research, theories and practices are informed by different interdisciplinary influences (Hyland and Hamp-Lyons 2002, 3; see also Tribble 2015 for a relatively recent survey of current EAP approaches).[1] It is a broad and expanding field that not only comprises common core essential study-skills that every undergraduate student should be taught. However, the scope of this study aims at offering an overview of the acquisition of academic English writing conventions by English Studies undergraduates in the hope that they may eventually serve as a basis for further EAP research and curriculum development.

The essay as an academic genre

The previous sections have referred to the broader scope of the object of our study, academic English writing. Within that, the study focuses on *undergraduate* academic English writing, as it is their skills and knowledge that interest us regarding the aforementioned conventions. Here, a specific genre must be mentioned due to its prevalence in undergraduate writing and for prompting the concerns that resulted in the study itself: the essay.

Essays are not a genre exclusive to undergraduate writing, nor to academic writing in general. Thus, an undergraduate's essay may share certain features with, for instance, an essay published in a newspaper. To ground a description of undergraduate essays in their context we can refer to Sheena Gardner and Hilary Nest's classification of genre families in university students writing (2013, 26), which was based on a corpus of written assignments from different British universities across a wide range of disciplines and levels. The classification divides assignments into genre families (Gardner and Nest, 2013, 34-37), which are described by their educational and social purpose, their generic structure and their genre network, and then it gives some genre examples, including essays. It also notes the shared aims of all assignments, from which we could highlight the developing students' writing proficiency and the training to carry out research or be prepared for specific professions.

Regarding the essay, it is defined (Gardner and Nest, 2013, 38) by its purpose of demonstrating and/or developing "the ability to construct a coherent argument and employ critical thinking skills" and by its basic structure of introduction, series of

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[1] The different approaches identified by Tribble are the Social/Genre approach, the Intellectual/Rhetorical approach, and Academic Literacies. He also mentions the English as a Lingua Franca for Academic Purposes approach but expresses doubts regarding its being a distinct pedagogic paradigm.

arguments, and conclusion. Hyland (2009, 130) agrees with this, adding that students tend to draw on library sources rather than their own research to defend their position. Moreover, essays, present in all disciplines with 50 or more samples in Gardner and Nests' corpus (2013, 43), comprise the largest genre family in it, in line with other authors such as Wingate (2012) or Paltridge (2002).

Furthermore, due to their predominance in undergraduate assessment, it is not surprising that we can find many EAP instruction materials focused on essay writing. Tribble's 2015 survey of 30 EAP textbooks shows that 16 focus on the essay genre family, with other two that focus "Mainly [on] essay[s]" and on "Essay[s]/Report[s]" (Tribble, 2015, 446 & 450), and even those covering a greater number of genres always included essays. Among those essay-focused textbooks is one used for our questionnaires, the *Oxford English for Academic Purposes. Upper-Intermediate Student's Book*. The other textbooks also include specific instruction and practice on essays.

The presence of (academic) writing and essays in the English Studies degree at the University of Oviedo is also relevant for a better understanding of this project and its purpose.

The degree has one compulsory English Language-specific courses per term every year (Oral and Written Communication in English I and II –1st year–, English Language I, II –2nd year–, English Language III and IV –3rd year–, and Advanced Academic English and English for Professional Communication –4th year). As expected, one of their target skills is (academic) writing in English. Indeed, in the description of these courses we find mentions to written work in 18 of the competences that students should acquire in the course.[2] Three directly mention essays, and nine refer to academic discourse. Additionally, in the expected results list, eight refer to writing, two of which directly mention essays, and four of which refer to academic discourse.[3]

As regards the essays assigned throughout the degree, from the available information on the syllabi, and our own insider knowledge, we can observe a significant increase in essay length from 2nd year to 3rd year. From the two first years, only one non-English language practice course syllabus (Cultures of the British Isles, 2nd year) detailed the length of the type of short essay students are assigned in the course (300-400 words, for an essay part of the course assessment). As a comprehensive study of the assignments is outside the scope and resources of this project, the project author and

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[2] CGING 15; CGFB 6, 10 and 11; CGM 8 and 9; CEING 2, 7 and 8; CEFB 34, 39 and 41; CEM 1, 3, 14, 22 and 43; and CET 11. Source: Memoria de Verificación del Grado en Estudios Ingleses de la Universidad de Oviedo, consulted 26/04/2022

[3] RAFB 34, 35, 42, 45 and 46; and RAM 6, 7 and 15. Source: Memoria de Verificación del Grado en Estudios Ingleses de la Universidad de Oviedo, consulted 26/04/2022

her tutor's experience will have to serve as confirmation to this being the average written work in that period, not only as part of exams but as class tests and other assignments. Regarding 1st year, we know the maximum range of words in English language courses to be 200, so the leap to 2nd year is modest. It is from 3rd year onwards where we find longer essays as a common assignment, particularly in literature or cultural studies courses. The lengths range from 1500 to 2500 words in continuous assessment and can reach 3500-4000 in non-continuous one. This word-count increase should not be considered merely in terms of length, but in that it allows for academic writing practices that cannot be as properly developed or even applied at all in shorter texts, such as the use of secondary sources.

Case Study

Methodology

This study was carried out with first- and fourth-year English Studies undergraduates at the University of Oviedo in the academic year 2021-22. The aim of the study is to assess academic English writing skills and knowledge in the said groups of students so as to provide an overview that can help in a better-grounded design of EAP writing skills instruction.

An important factor that should be highlighted at this point is that of the researcher's insiderness as a current fourth-year English Studies undergraduate at the University of Oviedo, who consequently has previously been a first-year student in the same degree. This feature comes as a double-edged sword in the sense that it has endowed me with certain advantages in relation to this project's approach and procedure but, simultaneously, struggling against my own personal bias on the topic has been a constant. In fact, it was my experience as a student that prompted my questions and concerns over academic writing and EAP instruction, and what partially directed my decisions regarding what was to be assessed, such as academic exchanges abroad, whose impact on the project's topic might have been superseded by a more experienced education researcher with a different profile.

Moving onto the sample type and numbers, the study used a non-probability approach through the selection of a controlled quota (1st and 4th-year students of the University of Oviedo English Studies Degree) and convenience sampling, due to the pressing need to collect data from easily available respondents in a short period of time. More precisely, the final sample amounts to 58 first-year undergraduates (48.3% of the English Degree

first-year population, 120)[4] and of 18 fourth-year undergraduates (34% of the fourth-year population, 58).[5] The total undergraduate sample was, then, of 76 students. The quota selected was chosen from subjects in which they were enrolled in greater numbers (i.e. avoiding electives), and whose schedule allowed for a supervisor other than the subject lecturer to administer the survey questionnaires. As a result, the selected subjects for this intervention were "Comunicación Oral y Escrita en Inglés 1" (1st year) and "Pragmática y Análisis del Discurso en Inglés" (4th year). Permission of the subject lecturers was retrieved and obtained via email prior to the in-class administration of said survey.

Two different quantitative questionnaires, which can be consulted in full in the annexes, were developed for each group. Both questionnaires start with a "Personal Consent and Instructions" paragraph and are articulated in four sections; namely, "Personal and Background Information", "About Writing Procedures", "Writing Skills Self-Assessment" and "Language Correction", although they differ in length as the 1st year questionnaire encompasses 18 questions and the 4th year's has got 15. Due to the time and resource constraints of this end-of-degree project, they could not be pre-tested. However, the questions were developed in accordance with the rules and recommendations related to the notion of conventional wisdom on proper questionnaire design, as stated by Krosnick and Presser (2010, 264) to ensure the results were as well-founded and reliable as possible to portray a realistic panorama on the issue at stake.

Together with Linton, Madigan and Johnson's 1994 and Thonney's 2011 conventions of academic discourse, the main source considered to design the questionnaire items was the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (henceforward, CEFR), first published in 2001, and updated in 2020. The CEFR was developed as a common and comprehensive basis for different purposes related to the field of foreign/second language learning, such as the design of language learning materials or the assessment of foreign language proficiency (Council of Europe n.d.-a).

Its prevalence cannot be understated. Already in 2006, a survey by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe showed the major impact it was having on language education in all educational sectors as a reference tool (Waldemar and Noijons 2007, 7). Moreover, while designed for the European Union, it is now used worldwide. In addition, as regards our study, the University of Oviedo is among those institutions that adopted the framework for curricula development. Consequently, the English Studies

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[4] Data taken from the total English Studies undergraduates enrolled on the COEI1 course in 2021-2022.

[5] Data taken from the total English Studies undergraduates enrolled on the Pragmatics course in 2021-2022.

BA's English language courses syllabi have been designed following the CEFR scale, and the English language proficiency which an undergraduate is meant to have achieved to complete the degree is also characterized by it.

The structure of the CEFR descriptive scheme is first divided into four sections: general competences, communicative language competences, communicative language activities and communicative strategies. The last two replace the traditional four-skills model (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), and they are further divided into four modes of communication: reception, production, interaction and mediation. Those are, in turn, divided into further categories. We are interested in the category of written production activities and strategies. (Council of Europe 2020, 32-33).

The main division that the CEFR makes of language proficiency is six levels (A1-2, B1-2, and C1-2) which are defined through 'can-do' descriptors scales for the aforementioned aspects (Council of Europe n.d.-b).

The CEFR levels and items has facilitated the graded assessment by year. Specifically, we used the writing production items for B1 (COEI1 target level), and mostly, B2 and C1 (target levels for the rest of English Language undergraduate courses).

The CEFR also allowed us to find academic English textbooks conveniently graded for our purposes, which were consulted to develop the questionnaire items referring to academic writing skills without having to grade the different skills ourselves. But questionnaire items referring to general and more specific writing skills were not only taken from the CEFR standard descriptors, since four different academic English textbooks have also been used, namely: *Skillful. Reading & Writing 3. Student's Book; Skillful. Reading & Writing 4. Student's Book*; *Oxford English for Academic Purposes. Upper-Intermediate Student's Book*; and *Cambridge Academic English C1. Advanced Student's Book: An Integrated Skills Course for EAP.* Items coming from these different textbooks have been cross-referred for both questionnaires, to keep a sense of uniformity in the surveys. Different textbooks were used not just for the two groups, but to cross-refer the items.

Now we will turn into explaining further details on the development of each section of the questionnaires, as well as their relation to the specific objectives behind them.

In the first section of each questionnaire, the main target is to get personal information that may contribute to an average quota profiling. For instance, out of the answers given to questions 1 and 2, variables can be derived to indicate issues connected to academic inexperience or performance per gender. In addition, a linguistic profile of the respondents can be obtained in questions 3 to 5 in terms of their personal process of acquisition of the English language.

Since the selected quota of students belongs to two different instruction years, the rest of the questions in this first section needs to vary accordingly to meet their different learning stage. The last question in the 1st year survey, number 6, is intended to explore the expectations of these students on academic English writing. Instead, 4th year respondents have been required to answer four more questions in this section about their academic writing background so far and their perception of the influence of some particular experiences and external resources use in their current writing performance.

The second section of each questionnaire has been conceived to expose diverse aspects of the respondents' knowledge and attitude towards (academic) writing in English and is also sensitive to their difference in terms of training received and practical academic writing experience. Thus, this section is considerably longer in the 1st year questionnaire: eight questions versus three in the 4th year survey. Information on their average results in written assignments submitted for grading is required in both questionnaires (1st year's questions 7 and 8; 4th year's question 10). To check the extent to which correction feedback is incorporated by respondents in their subsequent writings, a multiple-choice question on this issue (1st year's questions 9; 4th year's question 11) has been included next. Both questionnaires also introduce a question (1st year's number 11; 4th year's number 12) on the general procedure respondents follow every time that they write a class assignment.

In the 1st year questionnaire, respondents are also required to answer five more questions (numbers 10 and 12 to 15) dealing with their previous knowledge, intuitions and/or possible pre-/mis-conceptions on identification of problematic areas in their writings, text structuring, (mis)use of dictionaries and incorporation of external sources of information to avoid overgeneralization, before proceeding to the third section.

In order to identify inconsistencies or unconsolidated academic writing features in respondents' answers, the third section in both questionnaires (especially, 1st year's question 16; 4th year's 13) was devoted to the respondents' self-assessment of their writing practice according to a long list of "can-do statements" (32 items in 1st year's questionnaire; 24 in 4th year's) derived from the CEFR writing skills descriptors and the aforementioned academic English language practice textbooks. Some "can-do" items were taken from the CEFR lists, in which case they were mostly unchanged. Yet, others needed to undergo minor "adaptations" such as further itemisation or simplification for clarity. More precisely, in the first-year questionnaire, these were items 3-6, 9, 11-14 and 21 (B2), and items 1-2, 7, 28 (B1). Finally, item 29 was adapted from C1 items (no restriction to familiar topics and register flexibility). In the fourth-year questionnaire, these were items 14 and 18 (B2), and 1-5, 8-9, 13 (C1). The rest of the items were adapted from the EAP textbooks. In the first-year questionnaire, these were items 8, 10, 15-20,

22-27 and 30-32 (EAP B2). In the fourth-year questionnaire, these were items 7 and 11 (EAP B2), and 6, 10, 12, 15-17, 19-24 (EAP C1).

A subsequent question (1st year's 17; 4th year's 14) was added in this section to challenge basic notions of standard academic text structure which are introduced in the early days of undergraduate English language instruction.

Finally, the fourth section of the survey has got only one question in both questionnaires (numbers 18 and 15, respectively). It involves analysing the frequency of error occurrence in the respondents' most recent class assignments against an assessment checklist. For this purpose, a checklist provided by the project's tutor's own practical CEFR B2 teaching has been adapted. In this way, possible structural errors concerning grammar and text structure in academic writing can hopefully be spotted.

Regarding the procedures followed in the collection and analysis of the data, all questionnaires were administered on paper and in person, and distributed by a supervisor (either the author of the project, or the tutor) at different dates at the University of Oviedo. The questionnaires were passed during class hours, for which a time slot of between approximately 20-30 minutes was allotted. The specific dates and venues in which the questionnaires were passed, and the supervisor in charge, were as follows:

Group	Date	Venue	Supervisor
Fourth Year	09/03/2022	Department Building	Project author
First Year	16/11/2021	Lecture Rooms Building, Classroom A03	Project tutor
		Lecture Rooms Building, Classroom A04	
		Lecture Rooms Building, Classroom A05	
		Lecture Rooms Building, Classroom A06	
	17/11/2021 Morning	Lecture Rooms Building, Classroom A03	Project author
		Lecture Rooms Building, Classroom A04	
	17/11/2021 Afternoon	Lecture Rooms Building, Classroom A03	
		Lecture Rooms Building, Classroom A04	

At the beginning of the allotted time, the supervisors explained the objective of the study and the consent and privacy procedures. The respondents subsequently filled in the questionnaires on their own, and the supervisors assisted in any questions they might have raised. Due to particular and unexpected circumstances, question number 8 in the first-year questionnaire needed to be slightly altered right on the spot. Further details on this are included in this project's data results section.

Finally, once all questionnaires were passed, the data was collected using Word and Excel processors to add together the answers to each question and calculate the pertinent statistics.

Results

First Year Sample

SECTION I. PERSONAL & BACKGROUND INFORMATION

GENDER: The majority of respondents were female (81%), the rest were male (17.3%) and non-binary (1.7%).

AGE: The majority of respondents were 18 (55.2%), followed by those who did not state their age (24.1%), then 17-year-olds (8.6%), 19-year-olds (5.2%), 21-year-olds (3.4%), a 20-year-old (1.7%) and a 23-year-old (1.7%).

NATIVE LANGUAGE(S): The majority of the respondents were non-native English speakers (91.4%), the remaining five were English and Spanish bilingual speakers (8.6%).[6]

LANGUAGE TUITION: The majority of respondents had received some kind of additional English language teaching outside school (67.2%), the remaining ones had not received additional tuition (32.8%). Out of the first group.

- 18 (31% of the total) had gone to private language schools.
- 8 (13.8% of the total) had gone to the EOI.
- 5 (8.6% of the total) had had a personal language tutor.
- 3 (5.2% of the total) had gone to a private language school and had had a personal tutor.
- 3 (5.2% of the total) had gone to a private language school and to the EOI.
- 1 (1.7% of the total) had gone to a bilingual school.
- 1 (1.7% of the total) had gone to the EOI and had had a personal tutor.

Note: One respondent chose 'other – academy with a native teacher', however, it was counted as 'private language school' as an 'academia' in Spanish is a language school. Same for a respondent who wrote 'English Academy'.

ENGLISH CERTIFICATION: The majority of the respondents had certified their English level (56.9%), while a 43.1% had not.

- 5 certified a C2 level (8.6%).
- 13 certified a C1 level (22.4%).
- 3 certified a B1 level (5.2%).
- 11 certified a B2 level (19%).
- 1 certified an IELTS level, though we cannot accurately translate that into a CERF level (1.7%).

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[6] R13, R22, R50, R52, R54

Note: If multiple certifications were indicated, the highest one was chosen. Additionally, some respondents did not choose any option. Given the size of the question, and the fact that both the previous and the following questions had been answered, those were taken as 'has not certified their level'.

QUESTION 6. What do you expect to learn about academic English writing during your degree? Note: R31, 43 and 55 are missing because no answer was given.

R1	Not to commit grammar and spelling mistakes.
R2	I want to be able to use academic vocabulary in the right way because I love writing and I'd like to improve my skills.
R3	How to write texts that can be understood easily, and have a pleasant writing skill (not packed with complex structures).
R4	To improve my written speech.
R5	To be able to express myself properly in all type of situations (informal, formal…)
R6	I am expecting to learn to think and write like a native speaker: without mistakes, etc.
R7	Improve my English in a more academic one.
R8	I expect learning how to express my ideas in a more professional way.
R9	Better usage of English and better ways to structure sentences.
R10	To improve my vocabulary and grammar and how to develop the main ideas in a better way.
R11	I expect to be able to write and express myself and my opinion on various themes in a fluent way.
R12	The evolution of the language, the culture of the places where English is spoken and more vocabulary than I already know.
R13	I hope that I will could express myself perfect thinking in my future.
R14	Punctuation because I always fail in it.
R15	How to properly write in english.
R16	How to make my essays more fluid and efficient.
R17	Write every type of text.
R18	I'm hoping to improve my written expression in order to be able to suit any kind of context possible.
R19	I expect having less difficulties when writing formal texts and expressing myself better.
R20	To be able to write a well-structured piece with technical language.
R21	I would like to achieve a fluent and complex level of writing.
R22	To complete the "gaps" in my knowledge of this language, I would like to facilitate the main points of correction of the writing.
R23	To express myself as much as possible and also new vocabulary to use.
R24	More vocabulary, more organization…
R25	I expect that at the end of the degree I will be able to make a great structure while doing writings.
R26	I expect to learn how to structure sentences and paragraphs in a correct way. Moreover, I hope learning more vocabulary to use.
R27	I'm still not sure about what I'm expecting from this degree.
R28	I expect to learn the appropriate ways to structure every type of text, how to link each part of it and using an engaging style for the readers.
R29	A better way of structuring essays, using the proper language and overall improve my style of writing.
R30	I expect to learn contents and many ways of vocabulary and writing skills.
R32	I expect to learn more about the formal ways in which I can express my statements.
R33	Since school I have been learning a more "colloquial" English, so I would like to improve my academic English for not always using the same structures, vocabulary, etc.
R34	I expect to learn how to express my opinion correctly and how to write about different topics.
R35	I expect to learn a way to systematically develop essays and formal writings even if I don't know much about the topic suggested.
R36	I would like to learn how to communicate in any field, formal and informal, and how to teach in the future.
R37	I hope to improve my academic English in a way that is possible for me to have it easy at my future job.

R38	I expect to overcome the main difficulties I usually have when writing a composition.
R39	I would like to be able to write good academic English writings on my own without difficulties.
R40	Proper register and vocabulary/linkers…
R41	Mostly more vocabulary and new sentence structures.
R42	Nowadays Im not so good at many fields when I talk and I want to improve it, so with academic English, it could help me a lot.
R44	I expect to learn from my mistakes and get better in my English.
R45	I expect to improve my writing and the expressions that I use.
R46	I hope I can learn how to express myself properly using academic English as well as get better in general.
R47	I expect to learn new writing skills, to improve them in order to make them useful in the future.
R48	How to write for every situation and also, maybe some day I can show my work in a book or in a newspaper.
R49	I expect to learn how to write properly without mistakes.
R50	Learn to write properly, because my writing is the worst aspect of my English.
R51	I expect to get better at expressing myself, with more connectors, adjectives and new words.
R52	Perfecting my grammar and spelling.
R53	To make my vocabulary more formal.
R54	I expect to learn how to structure and express my writing in a higher level.
R56	I expect to learn everythings needed to have the right writing skills and understandings.
R57	I hope I can express myself in a more formal way and make a correct use of English language.
R58	I expect to improve my writing adding new words and complex grammatical structures.

Figure 1. Responses to question 6 (1st-year). Processed by Marina Braña.

SECTION II. ABOUT WRITING PROCEDURES

QUESTION 7. Average marks in written compositions so far.

  - Mean: 8.7   - Mode: 9.5   - Standard Deviation: 0.8

QUESTION 8. Current term's average marks in written compositions.

  Note: 13 respondents did not answer the question, so the average grades have been calculated from the 45 who did. Two respondents used descriptions instead of marks, they were taken as follows:

  - Very Good – 9   - Excellent – 10   - Pretty Good – 8.

  - Mean: 364.2 / 45 = 8.1 - Mode: 8 - Standard Deviation: 1.3

QUESTION 9. Choose as many alternatives as you think fit to describe your current writing outcomes and performance.

I absolutely disagree with the lecturer's corrections.	1.7%
I always see the point behind the lecturer's corrections.	56.9%
I am used to asking for feedback about corrections.	31%
I cannot figure out what the lecturer's grading system is like.	3.4%
I cannot understand the point behind the lecturer's corrections.	5.2%
I find the lecturer's corrections objective.	58.6%
I find the lecturer's corrections subjective.	10.3%
I have a definite writing style despite the lecturer's suggestions.	10.3%
I try my best to incorporate the lecturer's suggestions in my subsequent writings.	84.5%
I usually incorporate the lecturer's suggestions in my subsequent writings.	36.2%

Figure 2. Rate of responses to question 9 (1st-year). Processed by Marina Braña.

QUESTION 10. Which element is the most different in this year's writings, in your view?

  - 34.5% chose language - 29.3% chose topics. - 25.9% chose style.

  - 17.3% chose tone.   - 17.3% chose structure

Note: one respondent that chose language (R21) also wrote that it was not very different from Bachillerato.

QUESTION 11. How often do you do the steps listed below?

	100% of times	75% of times	50% of times	25% of times	never	no answer
I carefully analyze the exercise instructions.	50%	34.5%	15.5%			
I write down several ideas after some brainstorming time.	20.7%	25.8%	32.8%	13.8%	6.9%	
I plan the structure of my writing.	39.7%	32.8%	13.8%	12.1%	1.7%	
I introduce my personal opinion.	29.3%	27.6%	31%	3.4%	5.2%	3.4%
I edit my compositions in search for grammar mistakes after finishing writing.	62.1%	19%	12.1%	6.9%		
I select expressions/collocations connected to the topic	36.2%	43.1%	17.3%	3.4%		
I develop just one idea per composition	8.6%	10.3%	31%	27.6%	22.4%	
I take good care of punctuation in my writings.	46.6%	36.2%	12.1%	3.4%	1.7%	
I check whether my writing meets all the requirements of the exercise	58.6%	25.9%	8.6%	1.7%	5.2%	
I use external sources of information to support my ideas.	10.3%	19%	39.7%	17.3%	13.8%	

Figure 3. Rate of responses to question 11 (1st-year). Processed by Marina Braña.

QUESTION 12. Say whether the statements on text structure below are True (T) or False (F). Circle the false bits in the statements, if any.

The statement '*Each paragraph can contain more than one idea related to the main issue of the writing*' was marked as true by 51.7% of the respondents and as false by 46.6%. One respondent (1.7%) did not answer.

- 1.7% (of the total) marked "*each paragraph* "as the false bit.
- 13.8% (of the total) marked "*more than one idea*" as the false bit.

The statement '*Generally speaking, paragraphs are composed of one idea and several arguments to support it*' was marked as true by 96.6% of the respondents and as false by 6.9%. Two respondents (3.4%) did not answer.

- 5.2% (of the total) marked "*one idea*" as the false bit.

The statement '*Generally speaking, the body of the writing paragraph will combine several ideas for discussion*' was marked as true by 87.9% of the respondents and as false by 12.1%.

- 1.7% (of the total) marked "*for discussion*" as the false bit.
- 3.4% (of the total) marked "*several ideas*" as the false bit. One also added: 'just one idea' instead.

The statement '*In the conclusion, one's own personal opinion must appear*' was marked as true by 41.4% of the respondents and as false by 56.9%. One respondent (1.7%) did not answer.

- 12.1% (of the total) marked "*one's own personal opinion*" as the false bit. One added: 'just one main idea' instead.
- 17.3% (of the total) marked "*must appear*" as the false bit. One also added: 'it depends on the writing genre'.

The statement '*The author's stance must appear in the concluding paragraph*' was marked as true by 62.1% of the respondents and as false by 31%. The remaining four respondents (6.9%) did not answer.

- 8.6% (of the total) marked '*author's stance must appear'* as false.

The statement '*The main idea of a writing must be fully developed in the first introductory paragraph*' was marked as true by 29.3% of the respondents and as false by 70.7%.

- 13.8% (of the total) marked '*fully developed*' as false. One also added: 'introduced' instead.
- 8.6% (of the total) marked '*in the first introductory paragraph*' as false.
- 6.9% (of the total) marked '*must be fully developed in the first introductory paragraph'* as false.
- 3.4% (of the total) marked '*main idea*' as false. One added that the introductory paragraph was 'more like a summary'.

The statement '*The main idea of a writing must be just highlighted in the first introductory paragraph*' was marked as true by 81% of the respondents and as false by 19%.

- 5.2% (of the total) marked "*just highlighted*" as false.

The statement '*The thesis statement must appear in the main body of the writing*' was marked as true by 58.6% of the respondents and as false by 39.7%. One respondent (1.7%) did not answer.

- 10.3% (of the total) marked "*main body*" as false. One added: 'introduction and conclusion' instead.
- 1.7% (of the total) marked '*must'* as false.
- 1.7% (of the total) marked '*thesis'* as false.

The statement '*The topic sentence must appear in the introductory paragraph*' was marked as true by 82.7% of the respondents and as false by 17.3%.

- 1.7% (of the total) marked '*must appear*' as false.
- 1.7% (of the total) marked '*sentence'* as false.

The statement '*There are no stated rules to structure paragraphs; that depends on each person's writing style*' was marked as true by 8.6% of the respondents and as false by 91.4%.

- 29.3% (of the total) marked "*no stated rules*" as false.

The statement '*Writings must be structured in three paragraphs: introduction, writing body and conclusion*' was marked as true by 75.9% of the respondents and as false by 24.1%.

- 10.3% (of the total) marked '*three paragraphs*' as false. One added: writing body should have more than one paragraph; another one also highlighted writing body; another added: 'body can be separated in some cases.'
- 1.7% (of the total) marked '*must*' as false.

QUESTION 13. What kind of dictionary do you usually resort to when writing on your own?

- 13.8% use a printed dictionary.
- 94.8% use an online dictionary.
- 24.1% use a bilingual dictionary.
- 6.9% use a monolingual dictionary.
- 17.3% use a thesaurus dictionary.

QUESTION 14. How do you select the best option in each dictionary entry?

- 8.6% focus on the two first alternatives given.
- 44.8% go through the complete entry.
- 65.5% check the examples in context throughout the entry.
- 1.7% check several dictionaries.

Note: Some respondents marked two items.

QUESTION 15. Have you ever tried to include an external source of information in any of your writings? If so, explain.

- 50% answer they had not. (Note: Blank answers were taken as 'No').
- 50% answer they had.

Answers that included more information than simply 'yes' or 'no' are the following:

RESPONDENT	ANSWER
R1	Yes, when I have to write about an especific field and the writing about advantages and disadvantages.
R2	If the writing is about a text that we have previously read, I will mention it.
R5	I have tried to but I do not always do it. Because I feel the person who is going to correct it will think it is false and I have come up with it.
R6	I always include an external source of information in my writings, because it helps with supporting my thoughts/ideas. It sheds light and confirms that what I statled [stated] is true.
R8	Sometimes, when I need more information to support my ideas, I include external sources of information, but usually I don't need to do so.
R12	Sometimes I look on-line pages to complete some information.

R13	Yes. For example to make the introduction of a particular topics I sometimes search a bit of information to make the introduction of my writing more interesting.
R15	I always give credit to some book I got the info from.
R18	Sometimes when we have to write an essay about some kind of economic situation country which I may be not aware of.
R19	Yes, in order to support my point of view or to add useful information.
R26	I have tried to look for information about a paragaphs structure or about connectors I should use, and the right way of using them. // Taken as no, since this is not what the question refers to.
R30	Yes, I have. Sometimes it's needed to provide examples, given the fact that some topics are complex.
R31	No answer – Taken as a no.
R32	I don't think so. I tend to focus on the general topic and explain a little bit of my opinion, but I can't remember a writing in which I included external information.
R36	Not at all. I try to do them by myself.
R37	No, I only read them but I never include them in it.
R39	Yes, sometimes I like to complement my writings with external source.
R40	No because in the exam I cannot check any sources and I don't normally rely on my knowledge (Note: I imagine they meant 'I normally rely on').
R42	Yes, obviously. I think it is important to contrast the information from many places, as books, webpages or so on.
R46	Yes, I do look for information if I can't think of anything. However, I do not copy anything word by word.
R47	Yes, I include information about real cases and studies, also biographies.
R48	Yes, sometimes videos or documents/ideas.
R59	Yes. In an essay about covid-19 I included the percentages of cases in some countries.
R51	I have not.
R52	Many times, to support the point I'm trying to make in regards to the topic given. I usually use a reference in such cases.
R53	Yes, in a writing about caffeine I added a blog I had read recently about its negative parts.
R58	I guess I done it but I can't remember well. It was in a context that I know so I know how to deal with it and in addition bring more ideas to the writing.

Figure 4. Selected responses to question 15 (1st-year). Processed by Marina Braña.

SECTION III. WRITING SKILLS SELF-ASSESSMENT

QUESTION 16. Rate your own skills by selecting the most suitable adverb for each "can do" statement in the grid below.

I can…	Hardly	Sometimes	Regularly	Well	Extremely well	No Answer
describe in simple sentences the main facts shown in visuals on familiar topics	1.7%	8.6%	17.3%	53.4%	19%	
describe trends in writing	1.7%	8.6%	41.4%	41.4%	3.4%	3.4%
distinguish an essay from an article, a report and a review.	1.7%	6.9%	17.3%	50%	24.1%	
evaluate different ideas or solutions to a problem.		1.7%	10.3%	51.7%	36.2%	
give clear, detailed descriptions of real or imaginary events and experiences.		5.2%	15.5%	44.8%	34.5%	
give clear, detailed descriptions on a variety of subjects related to my field of interest.		1.7%	10.3%	58.6%	29.3%	
link a series of shorter, discrete simple elements into a connected, linear sequence		6.9%	41.4%	41.4%	8.6%	1.7%
locate and read the topic sentences in a text in order to understand main ideas		3.4%	13.8%	65.5%	15.5%	1.7%

mark relationships between ideas in a clear and connected text.		1.7%	36.2%	43.1%	17.3%	1.7%
paraphrase short written passages in a simple fashion	1.7%	15.5%	32.8%	37.9%	10.3%	1.7%
produce a detailed description of a complex process.		13.8%	51.7%	22.4%	10.3%	1.7%
produce an essay or report which develops an argument systematically with appropriate highlighting of significant points and relevant supporting detail.		8.6%	37.9%	46.6%	5.2%	1.7%
produce an essay or report which develops an argument, giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view and explaining the advantages and disadvantages of various options.		5.2%	19%	43.1%	31%	1.7%
produce clear, detailed texts on a variety of subjects related to my field of interest.	1.7%		12.1%	65.5%	19%	1.7%
recognize bridging sentences in order to understand the connections between ideas		3.4%	46.6%	39.7%	8.6%	1.7%
recognize signposting elements	6.9%	12.1%	46.6%	22.4%	6.9%	5.2%
select the specific language needed for specialized topics	3.4%	5.2%	32.8%	43.1%	12.1%	3.4%
self-correct one's own occasional "slips"/non-systematic errors and minor flaws in sentence structure	3.4%	3.4%	24.1%	46.6%	20.7%	1.7%
structure longer texts in clear, logical paragraphs		8.6%	31%	37.9%	20.7%	1.7%
summarize a text efficiently, selecting its main ideas and avoiding unnecessary details.	1.7%	10.3%	29.3%	41.4%	15.5%	1.7%
synthesize and evaluate information and arguments from a number of sources and use them in your own writing.	3.4%	13.6%	37.9%	31%	12.1%	1.7%
use adjectives and adverbs to accurately describe statistics and trends.		6.9%	29.3%	46.6%	15.5%	1.7%
use different sentence patterns to give variation to the writing		8.6%	27.6%	41.4%	20.7%	1.7%
use effective hooks to grab the readers' interest.	5.2%	13.8%	37.9%	27.6%	10.3%	5.2%
use similes and metaphors	15.5%	31%	31%	6.9%	10.3%	5.2%
use topic sentences, bridging sentences and concluding sentences to link paragraphs together into a coherent text		8.6%	36.2%	41.4%	8.6%	5.2%
use transitions for introducing opposing ideas		3.4%	31%	41.4%	19%	5.2%
write a straightforward narrative or description following a linear sequence		10.3%	25.9%	39.7%	19%	5.2%
write about any topic, general or specific, keeping the right register	1.7%	6.9%	20.7%	56.9%	6.9%	6.9%
write about cause and effect.		12.1%	25.9%	34.5%	20.7%	6.9%
write an effective concluding paragraph	1.7%	8.6%	24.1%	37.9%	22.4%	5.2%
write an effective introductory paragraph	1.7%	5.2%	12.1%	50%	25.9%	5.2%

Figure 5. Rate of responses to question 16 (1st-year). Processed by Marina Braña.

QUESTION 17. Which of these definitions apply to a thesis statement?

- 12.1% of the respondents did not answer the question.

- 25.9% chose 'A sentence or sentences in the conclusion of an essay that restate the main points that have been developed throughout the paper.'
- **37.9% chose 'A sentence or sentences in the introduction of an essay that explain the main point(s) of the essay and the writer's views, together with an outline of the essay parts.'**
- 24.1% chose 'An introductory sentence or sentences of an essay that include its main point(s) and the writer's views on the essay topic, together with an outline of the essay parts and some background information.'

SECTION IV. LANGUAGE CORRECTION

QUESTION 18. In this term's writings, how often have you had corrections on…

Note: This question was verbally changed during the distribution of the questionnaires day to 'This term or previous ones' due to lack of writing practice from several groups.

	Never	Hardly ever	Sometimes	Often	In all of them	Not answered
Interference from Spanish/mother tongue errors?	29.3%	48.3%	10.3%	1.7%		10.3%
Sentences/clauses missing their subject?	34.5%	37.9%	15.5%	1.7%		10.3%
Tense formation mistakes?	20.7%	51.7%	13.8%		1.7%	12.1%
Tense combination mistakes?	22.4%	36.2%	29.4%	1.7%		10.3%
Lack of –s endings?	50%	29.3%	6.9%	1.7%		12.1%
Misuse of adjectives (number, degree.)?	34.5%	34.5%	17.3%	3.4%		10.3%
Too long and complicated sentences?	8.6%	27.6%	32.8%	19%		12.1%
Spots of informal language?	5.2%	22.4%	32.8%	19%	6.9%	13.8%
Exclusive use of basic sentences?	20.7%	25.9%	31%	6.9%	1.7%	13.8%
Lack of appropriate connectors?	17.3%	29.3%	22.4%	12.1%	3.4%	15.5%
Use of contracted forms?	17.3%	20.7%	25.9%	12.1%	10.3%	13.8%
Careless or wrong spelling mistakes?	19%	34.5%	25.9%	5.2%	1.7%	13.8%

Figure 6. Rate of responses to question 18 (1st-year). Processed by Marina Braña.

Fourth Year Sample

SECTION I. PERSONAL & BACKGROUND INFORMATION

GENDER: The majority of respondents were female (83.3%), two were male (11.1%) and one was non-binary (5.6%).

AGE: The majority of respondents were 21 (33.3%) or did not state their age (33.3%), followed by respondents who were 22 (11.1%), and one that was 23 (5.6%).

NATIVE LANGUAGE(S): All respondents from were non-native English speakers.

LANGUAGE TUITION: The majority of respondents had received some kind of additional English language teaching outside school (83.3%), only three students had not received additional tuition (16.6%). Out of that 83.3%:

- 10 (55.6% of the total) had gone to private language schools.
- 4 (22.2% of the total) had had a personal language tutor.

- 1 (5.6% of the total) had gone to a private language school and had had a personal tutor.

ENGLISH CERTIFICATION: If multiple certifications were indicated, the highest one was chosen. The majority of the respondents had certified their English level (72.2%), five had not (27.8%).

- 5 report having certified a C1 level. (27.8%)
- 1 reports having certified a C2 level (5.6%).
- 4 report having certified a B2 level (22.2%).
- 1 reports having certified a TOELF level, though we cannot accurately translate that into a CERF level (5.6%).

QUESTION 6. Did you have any experience with academic writing in English prior to starting this degree?

The majority of respondents (72.2%) had not had any prior experience with academic writing in English before starting the degree. One respondent did not answer the question (5.6%). Four respondents had had prior experience (22.2%), two mention the preparation for English certification as the reason for that experience, with one also mentioning compulsory secondary education.

QUESTION 7. Have you been on a studying exchange? If so, how do you consider it to have affected your academic writing skills?

55.6% of the respondents had not been on a studying exchange, or they had been on non-academic or non-tertiary education exchanges. 44.4% had been on exchanges, and they all report that their English writing skills improved, though one (5.6%) of the respondents expressed doubt on how much, saying that "maybe now I'm more fluent with the language but not much more". Three respondents (16.6%) remark that their skills improved greatly or significantly. One respondent (5.6%) mentions having "taking a course specifically aimed at [academic English writing]" and another one (5.6.%) mentions developing "a different perspective of what I'm supposed to do" and having "more practice in longer works."

QUESTION 8. How often have you relied on external sources to develop your academic writing skills?

50% of respondents have relied on external sources to develop their academic writing skills quite often, while 44.4% have relied on them but not often. Only one respondent (5.6%) said they had never relied on external sources. No respondent said that external sources had been their main resource.

QUESTION 9. If you answered 'yes' to the last question, please give some details on the resources you have used.

- Textbooks: 3 – 16.6%
- Academic articles digital libraries / search engines (Jstor, Google Scholar) + (academic) articles in general: 3 – 16.6%
- Style guides: 2 – 11.1%
- Dictionaries: 5 – 27.8%
- English, writing or proofreading (grammar/spelling)-specific websites, such as Wordreference forums (1) or writing labs e.g. Purdue University (1): 4 – 22.2%
- Webpages (unspecified): 3 – 16.6%
- Youtube / videos: 2 – 11.1%
- Literary books: 1 – 5.6%

SECTION II. ABOUT WRITING PROCEDURES

QUESTION 10. Average marks in written compositions so far, both compositions for English language courses, as well as essays written for other courses.

- Mean: 8.18   - Mode: 8.5   - Standard Deviation: 0.9

QUESTION 11. Choose as many alternatives as you think fit to describe your current writing outcomes and performance.

I absolutely disagree with the lecturer's corrections.	22.2%
I always see the point behind the lecturer's corrections.	
I am used to asking for feedback about corrections.	27.8%
I have developed my own writing style, which I can accommodate to different receptors as needed.	61.1%
I cannot figure out what the lecturer's grading system is like.	5.6%
I cannot understand the point behind the lecturer's corrections.	
I find the lecturer's corrections objective.	50%
I find the lecturer's corrections subjective.	27.8%
I understand the guidelines in essays and other written assignments.	72.2%
I have a definite writing style despite the lecturer's suggestions.	11.1%
I comply with key instruction words (e.g. discuss, assess, critically evaluate) in essay or other assignment titles.	72.2%
I try my best to incorporate the lecturer's suggestions in my subsequent writings.	94.4%
I usually incorporate the lecturer's suggestions in my subsequent writings.	27.8%

Figure 7. Rate of responses to question 11 (4th-year). Processed by Marina Braña.

QUESTION 12. How often do you do the steps below?

	100% of times	75% of times	50% of times	25% of times	never	invalid answer[7]
I carefully analyze the exercise instructions.	50%	33.3%	16.6%			
I write down several ideas after some brainstorming time.	22.2%	33.3%	27.8%	16.6%		
I plan the structure of my writing.	22.2%	44.4%	22.2%	11.1%		
I introduce my personal opinion.	16.6%	22.2%	44.4%	5.6%	5.6%	5.6%

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[7] One of the respondents answered two questions on the same row.

I edit my compositions in search for grammar mistakes after finishing writing.	66.7%	27.8%				5.6%
I select expressions/collocations connected to the topic	27.8%	11.1%	44.4%	22.2%		
I develop just one idea per composition		11.1%	27.8%	38.9%	22.2%	
I take good care of punctuation in my writings.	66.7%	27.8%	5.6%			
I check whether my writing meets all the requirements of the exercise	83.3%	5.6%	11.1%			
I use external sources of information to support my ideas.	16.6%	44.4%	27.8%	11.1%		
I proofread and edit my writings.	88.8%	5.6%	5.6%	5.6%		

Figure 8. Rate of responses to question 12 (4th-year). Processed by Marina Braña.

SECTION III. WRITING SKILLS SELF-ASSESSMENT

QUESTION 13. Rate your own skills by selecting the most suitable adverb for each "can do" statement in the grid below.

I can…	Hardly	Sometimes	Regularly	Well	Extremely well	Invalid answer[8]
employ the structure and conventions of a variety of genres.		11.1%	27.8%	50%	5.6%	5.6%
write clear, well-structured texts of complex subjects, underlining its relevant issues.		5.6%	5.6%	50%	38.9%	
vary your tone, style and register according to addressee, text type and theme.		11.1%	5.6%	50%	33.3%	
write clear, detailed, and well-structured and developed descriptions.		5.6%	11.1%	38.9%	44.4%	
expand and support points of view at some length with reasons and relevant examples.			16.6%	50%	33.3%	
self-correct your work in an effective manner.			11.1%	61.1%	27.8%	
use different sentence patterns to give variation to the writing.		5.6%	16.6%	38.9%	38.9%	
adopt formal writing conventions when needed.			11.1%	50%	38.9%	
write clear, detailed, and well-structured and developed imaginative texts.		5.6%	16.6%	55.6%	22.2%	
reformulate your ideas when faced with a difficulty in writing.		5.6%	27.8%	33.3%	33.3%	
select the specific language needed for specialized topics		11.1%	27.8%	44.4%	16.6%	
write an effective concluding paragraph		11.1%	22.2%	27.8%	38.9%	
write an effective introductory paragraph for a complex academic or professional topic		5.6%	22.2%	33.3%	38.9%	

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[8] Someone ticked both regularly and well.

write an essay or report which develops an argument systematically with appropriate highlighting of significant points and relevant supporting detail.		5.6%	27.8%	33.3%	33.3%	
use external sources without committing plagiarism.	5.6%			38.9%	55.6%	
use effective transition sentences.		11.1%	16.6%	33.3%	38.9%	
summarize a text efficiently, including academic texts like articles or research papers, selecting its main ideas and avoiding unnecessary details.[9]		11.1%	16.6%	38.9%	33.3%	
synthesize and evaluate information and arguments from a number of sources, and use them in your own writing.			27.8%	44.4%	27.8%	
discern what information is relevant for your essay.			33.3%	44.4%	22.2%	
emphasize your point by using techniques like cleft sentences.			27.8%	44.4%	27.8%	
develop and defend a consistent and coherent argument.			16.6%	55.6%	27.8%	
write adequate definitions for key terms used in your essay.			22.2%	55.6%	22.2%	
include external sources using different techniques (e.g. direct quotation, paraphrasing)		5.6%	5.6%	66.7%	22.2%	
recognize and use hedging language to ensure your essay presents information fairly and accurately.			27.8%	38.9%	33.3%	

Figure 9. Rate of responses to question 13 (4th-year). Processed by Marina Braña.

QUESTION 14. Which of these definitions apply to a thesis statement?

- **66.7% chose 'A sentence or sentences in the introduction of an essay that explain the main point(s) of the essay and the writer's views, together with an outline of the essay parts.'**

- 27.8% chose 'An introductory sentence or sentences of an essay that include its main point(s) and the writer's views on the essay topic, together with an outline of the essay parts and some background information.'

- 5.6% of the respondents marked both those two options.

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[9] This item was separated into two pages in the printed questionnaire, which resulted in some respondents missing the coma after 'papers' and reading it as two items. In the cases in which the ticked boxes were different, the first one was chosen, as it belongs to the text which contains the core skills being evaluated (summarizing).

SECTION IV. LANGUAGE CORRECTION

QUESTION 14. In this term's writings, how often have you had corrections on…

	Never	Hardly ever	Sometimes	Often	In all of them	Not answered
Inference from Spanish/mother tongue errors?	27.8%	55.6%	16.6%			
Sentence/clauses missing their subject?	66.7%	33.3%				
Tense formation mistakes?	50%	33.3%	11.1%	5.6%		
Tense combination mistakes?	55.6%	33.3%	11.1%			
Lack of -s endings?	77.8%	22.2%				
Misuse of adjectives (number, degree…)?	38.9%	44.4%	16.6%			
Too long and complicated sentences?	11.1%	33.3%	44.4%	11.1%		
Spots of informal language?	16.6%	55.6%	22.2%			5.6%
Exclusive use of basic sentences?	61.1%	66.7%	27.8%			
Lack of appropriate connectors?	50%	33.3%	16.6%			
Use of contracted forms?	83.3%	16.6%		5.6%		
Careless or wrong spelling mistakes?	5.6%	44.4%	38.9%	11.1%		
Lack of appropriate less common lexis?	27.8%	33.3%	38.9%			
Repetitive use of a model auxiliary?	61.1%	27.8%	5.6%	5.6%		
Low command of complex grammatical structures (non-finite forms, hypothetical, conditional, inverted sentences)?	50%	22.2%	27.8%			
Too frequent use of basic general words/expressions?	44.4%	38.9%	16.6%			
Scarce use of nominalization?	50%	38.9%	11.1%			
Insufficient use of passive voice and impersonality?	50%	22.2%	27.8%			

Figure 10. Rate of responses to question 14 (4th-year). Processed by Marina Braña.

Discussion

This discussion is structured around the four questionnaire sections, following the linear order of the questions. After each question number, the questionnaire(s) –1º or 4º– it belongs to is indicated. This division highlights similar topics and facilitates the identification of trends and issues that can provide guidance for further EAP instruction.

Section I. Personal and background information

As stated in the Methodology section, some of the questions can be found in both questionnaires, especially those trying to retrieve personal information on the respondents and their background as to the issues at stake.

QUESTION 1 (1º + 4º). English Studies is overwhelmingly comprised by women, and this is a trend that can be seen through both 1st and 4th-year questionnaires. Out of the 104 students currently enrolled in the 1st year of the English Studies Degree at our University[10], 83 are female for 21 male, with a very similar proportion in the 4th year of the Degree (118 students enrolled: 84 female and 34 male). Though it provides quite a comprehensive view of the average student profile, it is not significant enough as a variable for our study.

QUESTION 2 (1º + 4º). The age of the majority of the 1st-year respondents (18 or slightly under it) indicates that they must be enrolling in university for the first time, and thus, it is quite likely they are also encountering and participating in academic discourse (academic writing included) for the first time. The ages of 4th-year respondents also point to English Studies likely being their first and only experience with academic discourse. Further studies may want to explore this matter (prior university-level academic experience in the field) directly, however, it is unlikely for the number to be of any significance regarding differentiated EAP instruction needs.

QUESTIONS 3-4-5 (1º + 4º). As regards their English background, the average first-year respondent is a non-native speaker who has had some sort of additional English tuition off the regular compulsory education circuit and who has certified a CEFR English level equivalent or above the teaching levels of the two English language courses in the current English Studies Degree first year: COEI 1 (B1 – 53.5% of the students) and COEI 2 (B2 – 48.3%). The average profile of a fourth-year student is identical as regards this issue.

These results clearly indicate that the average respondent is quite well-prepared in terms of general English language skills. While they are, of course, not the same as academic (writing) skills, they should provide a great foundation.

QUESTION 6 (1º). The answers to this question reveal that most first-year students are almost completely unaware of and/or unfamiliar with academic English, though not every answer is misguided.

Most answers in the 1st-year questionnaire indicate an expectation of a general improvement of their English (writing included) skills and, therefore, suggest a mistaken identification of academic English as merely 'advanced English'. A few respondents have misinterpreted the question and answered regarding to their general expectations of the

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[10] Data provided by the Sección de Gestión de Estudiantes at the Humanities Campus on request for this end-of-degree project last 03/05/2022.

degree (see R12 or R27), possibly due to simply not knowing what 'academic English writing' really entails.

A small but significant minority (9 - 15.5%), which can also be counted as part of the group that simply expects to improve their language skills, markedly mischaracterizes academic English by mentioning learning to write for *any* type of text/topic/register.

Nevertheless, there are some answers that offer more positive considerations. There is a good deal of mentions (22 - 37.9%) of different elements in writing (vocabulary –the most common–, structure, grammar, spelling or punctuation). While these could still be classed as "advanced English learning", they account for, at least, an awareness of the relevance of said elements, which do have their particularities within academic English writing and will or should be learnt during the degree. Additionally, there are also mentions of formal register (6 – 10.3%)[11], which point to an understanding of academic English as working at a different register than other texts. Finally, though it comes from a very small minority (3 – 5.2%), some respondents have acknowledged the existence of an academic writing genre (essays). However, whether it is properly identified as an academic essay or just as a synonym of 'writing composition' cannot be fully pinpointed.

Overall, the knowledge about academic English writing is unsurprisingly poor, and while that does not mean the students have no skills related to it, it does stress the need to familiarize students with it and explicitly help them develop those skills from the beginning.

QUESTION 6 (4º). The great majority of students had no prior experience with academic writing in English before starting the degree, and the experience of the few who had was outside tertiary education levels. Therefore, their undergraduate years are arguably the main influence for the development of their academic writing skills and habits, which they will carry on to their professional or academic future. Other possible influences are explored in the following questions.

QUESTION 7 (4º). A significant minority of students had been on studying exchanges. Their first-hand experience with two –more or less– different academic systems can prove very insightful as regards how EAP instruction may benefit English Studies undergraduates most, especially since all respondents affirmed that the exchange improved their academic writing skills with the sole exception of a hesitant student that doubted about this presumed influence and three others that believed they had improved greatly or significantly. The three comments that expand on the experience offer a small sample of why their insight is valuable: from providing the different perspectives they

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[11] In this regard, one respondent did not explicitly mention it as such, but it was counted because the answer set academic English against 'colloquial' English.

may learn, to hinting at options that may be considered in a reassessment of EAP instruction (e.g. an EAP specific course, longer essays/works).

QUESTION 8 (4º). It has been already mentioned that the respondents' undergraduate years were arguably the moment when they first fully immersed themselves in the world of academic writing. The answers to this question show that the main influence in their writing development is the instruction they receive from their courses, as no student has relied on external sources as a main support for the development of their skills.

The frequency of their use is almost evenly split between those who used external sources quite often (50%) and those who did not use them often (44.4%) –the remaining 5.6% corresponding to a student that had never relied on them. Moreover, a few different assumptions can be drawn from the second group: they may feel satisfied with the instruction they receive from their lecturers and/or they may not be interested in developing their skills further, or they may be reticent to explore and use external sources due to, for instance, not knowing how to navigate the vast number of resources they have available, particularly in or through the Internet.

QUESTION 9 (4º). This question is directly linked to the previous one, as only those respondents answering question 8 positively were targeted for this question. Though it asked for details on the external sources usually consulted for developing academic writing skills, the answers were a bit meagre and scarce. Most mentioned one or two resources, and some were quite vague (e.g. 'webpages' or 'YouTube'). The most common resource, at a relatively small 27.3%, was dictionaries, which are quite general and could be related to English language skills as well as to academic English writing. Moreover, a few of the answers seem to indicate resources used while *engaging in* academic writing (e.g. literary books, academic articles) rather than resources to *develop* academic writing skills.

Despite the lack of details and out of the examples given, we can consider that external sources do not seem to be particularly specialized or broadly shared among students. Considering questions 8 and 9 together, we can say that the influence of external sources and the importance of guiding students to reliable ones should not be understated.

Section II. About writing procedures

QUESTIONS 7-8 (1º) – 10 (4º). The average marks of 1st year's pre-university writing composition correspond with the average English skills profile drawn in the previous section. The standard deviation is small, and the mode is almost a full point above the mean. Therefore, in general, they portray themselves as well-prepared students that

have so far received excellent results. This also aligns with the self-assessment they make of their skills.

The good marks were maintained in the few months of university they had completed by the time the questionnaires were answered, though not every student had produced or handed in written compositions[12]. There is a slight drop, which does not reach a full point. In addition, the deviation is higher, and the mode drops from a 9.5 to an 8. There is, thus, more variety in the marks, and there are less (near) excellent ones. This could be explained by an increase in difficulty and/or different correction standards or types of writings. That the drop is not bigger may suggest, then, that most students adapted to those conditions successfully, or that the change in their new university scenario was not very significant.

Regarding 4th year students, they also acknowledge very good marks in their written production and a small deviation, which also matches their self-assessment. Compared to the second section of 1st-year marks, the mean is almost the same, but less dispersed. In addition, the mode is considerably higher, therefore suggesting a positive tendency – though, of course, this would be clearer if we could have followed the group throughout the years in a longitudinal study.

QUESTION 9 (1º) / 11 (4º). These questions, articulated around several statements for respondents to select those applicable to their own personal learning circumstance, reveal students understanding of the feedback and correction of their assignments and their subsequent reactions. We can highlight the following points.

In both groups, a mismatch can be observed between the percentage of students that find the corrections objective and those who find them subjective. 31.1% of first-year students and 22.2% of fourth-year ones did not choose any of them. This suggests a hesitation as to when those adjectives should be applied. The mismatch is greater in the 1st-year's, though a greater majority selected the 'objective' option (1st year - 58.6% vs 4th year – 50%). 1st-year's respondents are more uncertain about the use of the terms, but they are more likely to find the corrections objective than 4th-year's. This may be because more experienced students have developed their individual criteria further over time. It is also possible that lecturers would disagree with what students consider to be subjective, though that falls outside the scope of this questionnaire. No 4th-year student, however, claimed to '*absolutely disagree with the lecturer's corrections*', while one 1st-year student openly did. The number is too small to make generalizations, but it does make one wonder about this particular student's experiences with or ideas about writing.

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[12] One of the participant groups had not started with the course writing practice module yet when the questionnaire was administered to the students.

Another statement that arguably shows 4th-year respondents' development of their own separate criteria is '*I always see the point behind the lecturer's correction'*. The majority of 1st-year's chose this option, precisely the opposite among 4th-year's. Given the seniority of the latter, we can rule out the statement having been interpreted as 'I always understand the lecturer's correction'. Moreover, no 4th-year respondent opted for '*I cannot understand […] the lecture's correction'*, while a very small minority of 1st-year's did. The percentages are similarly low regarding the understanding of the grading system. The issue seems to be, then, of acquiescence rather than understanding.

Related to writing style, the resistance to change one's own personal style following the lecturers' suggestions (indicated by selecting '*I have a definite writing style **despite** the lecturer's suggestions*') is similarly low in both groups (10.3% in first year, 11.1% in fourth year). In comparison, 61.1% of fourth-year students *'have developed […] own writing style, which […] can accommodate to different receptors as needed.'* 1st-year's respondents did not have this option due to their having less experience as writers. This could suggest that students usually follow corrections regarding style, whether they agree with them or not, or that most corrections do not involve style modifications. The 39.9% of 4th-year's respondents with no individual style could be due to their simply following the style expected from their lecturers, without developing their own. However, it could also be that they have developed a personal style, but they struggle with adapting it to particular audiences if needed.

Next, we have the statements dealing with feedback and its implementation. The percentage of students that are used to asking for supplementary feedback about corrections is a minority in both years, and the numbers are very similar (slightly higher in 1st-year's). However, the percentage that is not used to asking for feedback is higher than the percentage that does not always see the point behind the corrections in both groups, with the difference being particularly large in 4th year. This seems to suggest that, since they mostly disagree with corrections, they do not really care about getting any more feedback –regardless of how appropriate this practice might be.

Another significant difference in both groups is that between the percentage of students who try their best to incorporate the lecturer's suggestions in their subsequent writings (most chosen statement in both groups), and that of students that usually go beyond trying into fully incorporating the feedback suggestions. That the latter is lower in 4th year is also peculiar, since they would be more likely to have had more chances to incorporate those suggestions. Had they not chosen the 'I try to' statement, it could have been claimed that, again, this related to their disagreement with corrections, but that is not the case. We can only imagine the reason behind this, be it that the students might not have been totally sincere when answering, that they may struggle with the

application of received corrections, or that they may not have had enough opportunities to do so (i.e. lack of a new assignment that requires it).

As for the last two statements, both indicate that a large majority of students understand and comply with their assignment's instructions. However, since it is a group of 4th-year students, the minority that does not cannot be understated as this is one of the items for immediate assessment in all undergraduate English language practice courses in the University of Oviedo.

QUESTION 10 (1º). This question asked about the element of writing in the term's writings students had found most different to their previous experiences. The answers show no clear prominence of any element, due to the lack of significant difference between the frequency in which the options were chosen, and the fact that there is no simple majority. This could suggest a lack of very clear or strong differences with the previous year, resulting in answers being based more on personal writing experiences. In fact, one respondent added a written comment explicitly stating so.

Additionally, we could link the low percentage for structure with one of the true and false question 12 options about writing composition distribution.

QUESTION 11 (1º) / 12 (4º). As regards writing habits, from the results of this question we can highlight the following points.

Out of the most established habits, shown with higher percentages in the first column of the table in figure 8, 4th-year respondents apparently have them more strongly consolidated (i.e. they have a couple of 100% of time boxes, and over 80% or 60%, while the highest in the other group is 62.1%), which arguably correlates to their most extensive and recurrent writing practice. Both groups, then, coincide strongly in their most common habits, and there is a clear care for following assignment instructions and editing.

The most consolidated habits in the first-year answers are editing compositions in search for grammar mistakes, checking that the writings meet all the requirements of the exercise and carefully analysing the exercise instructions. In fourth year, they are proofreading and editing, checking that their writings meet all the requirements of the exercise, taking good care of punctuation and editing in search for grammar mistakes. It deserves mentioning that the percentage of respondents admitting editing grammar mistakes is about 20% lower than the first item in the ranking (proofreading and editing), despite their obvious connection to each other. Such a deviation clearly points at two ideas: either the respondents may not have been totally honest in their answers, or checking grammar is not precisely a priority in their proofreading/editing practices as they care most for other features.

As regards the less established habits (those with higher-than-average percentages in the last two columns, not necessarily adding up to a majority), in first year those are developing just one idea per composition, using external sources, and writing down ideas after brainstorming.

In fourth year, they are developing one idea per composition and selecting expressions/collocations connected to the topic. The former is less common than in first year, which could be linked to regularly working on longer texts. Conversely, selecting expressions/collocations connected to the topic has been acknowledged as a quite common practice by 1st-year respondents, a possible explanation for this being that this kind of students are in the first stages of active acquisition of such specific vocabulary while 4th-year's have already incorporated it to their passive or general vocabulary.

Emphasis should be made on the surprisingly reduced number of 4th-year students always planning the structure of their writings (22,2%). Besides, those that only do so 50% and 25% of times adds to a significant minority: 44.4%, resulting in an overwhelming majority of respondents that simply do not admit the full value of such an essential feature. This is perhaps more surprising when compared with the rather more predictable answers by 1st year respondents, where the always-planning option rate almost doubles that of 4th year, and the percentage of "planning unbelievers" adds up to 27.6%. These numbers seem contradictory to the type of texts that those groups work with, since 4th-year respondents are more likely to work with longer ones, for which planning is highly relevant. One possible explanation may hint at the efforts being carried out by current lecturers in 1st-year English language practice courses towards a deeper understanding of text structure[13].

QUESTION 12 (1º). The appropriate answer (true for statements 2-3-5-7, false for statements 1-4-6-8-9-10-11) was chosen by the majority in most statements, though not by a big difference. What is perhaps more revealing is the contradictions that arise.

There are mismatches between pairs of statements that indicate opposite ideas, namely, the ones about the relationship between ideas and paragraphing and, secondly, the presence of the main idea in the introductory paragraph. The former shows the greater divergence, which could be triggered by the 'generally speaking' formula added in one of the T/F statements. This suggests that students understand to a certain extent the usefulness of the one-idea-per-paragraph structure, but it is not consolidated in their minds as an essential feature of paragraphs.

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[13] Both coursebooks for COEI1 and COEI2 include a significant section devoted to planning writings in each unit, with contents such as proper paragraph building, identification of thesis statements, topic sentences, supporting arguments, stance and introduction-conclusion cohesion, etc.

Another notable misconception is that of the three-paragraph structure for short writings. A great majority of students mistakenly believes short and mid-length writings must follow a three-paragraph or three-tier introduction-body-conclusion structure. Accordingly, nobody noticed that the third statement mentioned a singular 'writing paragraph', which most agreed combined several ideas for discussion. It suggests they understand writings include several ideas, but not how these are presented.

This result seems to be in line with the low percentage of 4th-year respondents admitting consistently planning the structure of their writings every time (22,2%), already commented previously, and it could suggest that this three-tier misleading idea has not yet been properly challenged during the degree.

Overall, though there is a general consensus on the fact that there *are* rules, the mismatches and contractions suggest an ignorance (e.g. topic sentence, thesis statement) or a superficial understanding (e.g. structure) of these rules or concepts, which is arguably also reinforced by the fact that many students did not identify the false bits. The percentage of students that corrected the sentences they marked as false is lower than 35% for 6 of the statements, between 40% and 50% for another 3, and 51.5% and 75% for the remaining two.

QUESTION 13 (1º). The vast majority of students use, unsurprisingly, an online dictionary to help them through their writing chores. However, the percentages drop significantly in regard to a second classification of those dictionaries: very few students specified whether they used monolingual (6.9%), bilingual (24.1%) and/or thesaurus dictionaries (17.3%). We can make a few suppositions from this. Firstly, they do not use dictionaries very often; secondly, when they do, they do not stop to carefully analyze the options offered in every entry and which may be most useful for them; thirdly, they do not use specific online dictionaries, but rather Google results or similar. Therefore, considering not only this but the huge numbers of online dictionaries available, instruction on which and how to use dictionaries should be deemed important, and this knowledge should not be understood as default or pre-existing.

QUESTION 14 (1º). Here we get some more detail on their use of dictionaries. The most comprehensive option, "*going through the complete entry*", was not chosen by more than half of the respondents, though, the percentage of those who did (44.8%) shows this is not an insignificant minority. It suggests, in line with the previous question, that students use dictionaries with a certain carelessness or time-pressed, which also may explain why they favour checking the examples in context throughout the entry, which is usually faster than reading it in full. However, the fact that that is the most chosen option and that a

very reduced minority chose the opposite (focusing on the two first alternatives supplied), also suggest that the tendency is turning to attentiveness rather than to sloppiness.

QUESTION 15. While the percentages show evenness between students who had used sources and those who had not, the comments suggest that most of the former have little experience working with external sources (i.e. many have resorted to them just 'sometimes', a few refer to one specific writing, and only two refer to a recurrent use through the 'always' and 'many times' formulae), probably because the complexity or nature of the texts they are used to writing did not require their use; that is, dealing with commonplace topics, very short or limited length and/or exams.

We also need to highlight an incongruency with question 11, in which only 13.8% of students stated that they never used external sources of information to support their ideas. However, in this question 50% of students stated that they had never tried to include an external source of information in their writing. As it was asked later in the questionnaire, and requested further explanations in affirmative answers, its answers are arguably more reliable, implying that students overstated their writing habits in question 11. Another explanation could be that they interpreted 'use' as a broadly general 'checking' or 'reading' that helped them develop their ideas rather than distinguishing a more precise 'including' that entails making an explicit reference to those sources.

Furthermore, a couple of comments do certainly reveal some ideas about the use of sources that EAP instruction should work to disprove, namely:

-   R5's fear of "*the person who is going to correct [the writing] will think it is false and I have come up with it*" could be understood as an ignorance of proper use of sources (i.e. citation and knowing what sources are reliable).
-   R36 comment "*I try to do [my writings] by myself*" indicates a misconception of equating using external sources with not being original.

Overall, then, the proper use of sources is a skill that will be totally or quite unfamiliar to a significant number of first-year students –who seem to be usually prone to fall into particular misconceptions and anxiety–, and its relevance in academic writing makes it a crucial element in EAP instruction.

Section III. Writing skills self-assessment

QUESTION 16 (1º) - 13 (4º). In general, both groups of respondents have graded their skills highly (i.e. the 'hardly' and 'sometimes' columns in figures 5 and 9 have the lowest percentages), which correspond to their average marks.

Furthermore, fourth years assess their writing skills as being overall higher than first year's: the '(extremely) well' columns have higher percentages, and the first two have

lower percentages or more empty spaces. This suggests that not only have 4th-year students kept up with the increase of complexity but further developed their skills along the way. The same is true of the items that are repeated in both questionnaires, though we can highlight four items in particular:

1) "*produce/write an essay or report which develops an argument systematically…*" has the most marked drop in the 'extremely well' column (1º - 5.2% vs 4º - 33.3%). Conversely, 1st-year's show a considerably higher 31% percentage in that column when the essay deals with "*giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view*", which could be explained by the simpler structure of for-and-against essays. Emphasis should be made on their awareness of the difficulty that other more complex writing variants entail. When the structure is more open, unfamiliar or unclear from the essay type/title, it understandably poses a greater challenge to these students.

2) "*select the specific language needed for specialized topics*" shows very similar percentages in both years, when one would expect that the rate would be significantly higher in 4th year respondents, since they are certainly expected to have practiced more extensively with specialized vocabulary.

3) "*writ[ing] an effective concluding paragraph*" is more challenging for both groups than "*writ[ing] and introductory paragraph*", as it has slightly higher percentages in the 'hardly', 'sometimes' and 'regularly' columns. This suggests that first-years have not been well-trained into writing proper closures. The improvement is clear in 4th-year (38.9% in the extremely well column vs first-years' 22.4%), but the difference with writing introductions, though small, remains. This could be connected with the ability (or lack thereof) to rewrite ideas, as the conclusion will entail a rephrasing of the introduction.

Other points we could highlight are the contradictions that arise in the 1st-year sample. 1st-year respondents claim to be quite good at finding topic sentences in a text. However, according to their answers to question 12, the majority does not know that, depending on their length, texts can have multiple topic sentences, undermining credibility to their answer. Moreover, they once again contradict themselves when stating their ability to use sources: only 3.4% declared they could hardly synthesize and evaluate information from external sources to eventually use them in their own writing.

Regarding 4th-year respondents, though it is an almost insignificant percentage, it is still quite shocking that one student (5.6%) can hardly use external sources without committing plagiarism. Moreover, avoiding plagiarism seems to be a more consolidated skill than including external sources using different techniques. The slight difference

could suggest they know how to use references, but they are not as competent at effectively introducing and using external sources.

Lastly, 4th-year students rate their ability to '*write an essay or report which develops an argument systematically…*' as lower than their ability at different skills that are involved in that (e.g. developing and defending a consistent and coherent argument, or writing clear, well-structured texts of complex subjects, underlining its relevant issues, among others). This is likely because specific and precise skills are easier to understand, assess and acquire than broader ones, which are harder to master. Though a more thorough study should be done, we can bring the focus on some specific problematic areas of essay writing from the items that have similar (or lower in the last columns) percentages to this item: selecting the specific language needed for specialized topics, writing an effective concluding paragraph, or reformulating ideas when faced with a difficulty in writing.

QUESTION 17 (1º) - 14 (4º). The highest percentage in both groups belongs to the correct answer, that is, the second option. However, in the 1st-year sample that percentage falls below 50%, meaning that a wrong answer or a non-answer was picked by the majority, while in the 4th-year group a large majority (66.7%) chose correctly. Therefore, we can see a marked difference in acquired overall academic writing knowledge. Besides, it is crucial to highlight that while the percentages of wrong answers are very similar in the 1st year's questionnaire, no 4th-year respondent chose the 'conclusion' option. We can assume that the mistake comes from the inclusion of the "some background information" formula in the statement. The 4th-year sample knows the concept better than the 1st year's, but, still, a number of students seem not to be fully certain about its specificities.

Section IV. Language correction

QUESTION 18 (1º) - 15 (4º). The results from this question are similar to those in the first question in Section III of both questionnaires, in that both groups of respondents allegedly claim to be in possession of a great generalized language correction, with the highest percentages belonging to the two columns ('never' and 'hardly ever') that rule out expression mistakes. Nevertheless, a steady tendency towards improvement from 1st to 4th year can be appreciated in the grid showing the results in both questionnaires.

We can highlight the 'too long and complicated sentences' being the most persistent mistake among 4th-year respondents -and also highly recurring in the 1st-year sample- while grammar or spelling mistakes are presumably less common. While both groups state that they edit their writings frequently, this seems to be a problem they do not

identify as easily. Moreover, issues related on register (informal language, contracted forms) seem not to persist in 4th year according to the survey data, contrary to the approximate 40% of 1st-year respondents acknowledging problems in this area. This may hint at the fact that 1st-year students need more classwork to successfully tackle this issue rather than just pointing out the mistake in one-to-one writing correctional feedback.

Finally, the second most common mistake in 4th year –lack of appropriate less common lexis– confirms an issue that has already been addressed, when dealing with the inclusion of '*specific vocabulary for specialized topics.'* It was a skill that had similar percentages of ability in both groups, when one would expect a clearer difference. It was also proposed that 4th year students were more likely to have already incorporated that lexicon and used it in their writings as if it were common vocabulary. However, when confronted with the results about this matter in the final question of both questionnaires, it seems that such a suggestion understandably loses weight, and indicates the need to focus on more extensive in-class instruction of specialized vocabulary.

Conclusion

This study set out to identify the academic writing skills and knowledge on conventions that first-year English Studies undergraduates enrolled with, and how that compared with the knowledge acquired by fourth-year students. The overview of such matters that is offered by the answers to the questionnaires, moreover, was also intended to reveal trends and issues that could help design future EAP instruction.

Regarding the results, they have shown that the average first-year student is quite well-prepared in terms of general English language skills but has a total or significant lack of experience with and a poor awareness of academic writing. This background should be considered when deciding on the focus that general English language skills should be given in contrast to specific academic skills, which should have a considerable presence.

Moreover, however competent undergraduates seem to be based on their English-learning background, average grades, and the self-assessment of their writing skills, we should stress the inconsistencies and knowledge gaps that have been revealed by their answers. Students are aware of writing rules or concepts to a certain degree, but that understanding seems to be sometimes superficial or non-existent (for instance, regarding paragraph and text structure, concepts like thesis statement, or the use of external sources or dictionaries).

With respect to 4th-year respondents, we could highlight the fact that there does seem to be a general acquisition of skills and knowledge, and of confidence in those. However, there is also still room for improvement. For instance, 39.9% had not developed their own writing style, very few planned all their writing compositions, and 33.3% failed to properly characterize a thesis statement. These seem to point to a lack of extensive writing practice, either in terms of length or number of written works, or of some notions about academic writing not being (properly) acquired.

Finally, the relationship of 4th-years with feedback should also be noted. A minority of students requests supplementary comments, while the number that disagreed with lecturer's corrections or found them subjective was notable. Understanding the sources of this disagreement and resistance to asking for further feedback will be crucial both for teachers to offer effective feedback and for students to implement it.

Notwithstanding the time and resource limitations, this study has offered insight into the current state of academic writing knowledge in English Studies undergraduates, and it can, therefore, provide guidance as to what issues should be taken into consideration both in further EAP research, and curriculum design.

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Annex I

Questionnaires 1st-year and 4th-year students

DATE AND VENUE:

PERSONAL CONSENT AND INSTRUCTIONS

The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect information from real English Studies students in their first year about issues connected to writing skills. By answering it you will be explicitly consenting to participate in Marina Braña's research leading to the elaboration of her final degree project. To keep due privacy, no names will be used to identify participants in this study, just numbers assigned at random after all the questionnaires have been completed and collected. Thank you.

Please answer the following questions according to your own personal experience.

SECTION I. PERSONAL & BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. **Age of the participant:**

2. **Tick ONE option:**

   ☐ Male   ☐ Female   ☐ Non binary

3. **You are a…**

   ☐ native speaker of English   ☐ bilingual speaker[1]   ☐ non-native speaker of English

4. **Have you received any additional language teaching outside school? Choose as many as needed to match your personal circumstances**

   ☐ No additional tuition   ☐ Private language school   ☐ Escuela Oficial de Idiomas   ☐ Personal tutor   ☐ Other (please state):_____

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[1] We consider bilingual speakers all those non-native speakers who have been consistently raised in two languages at home, one of them being English.

5. **Your competence in English has been certified by means of…**

   ☐ I have not had my competence certified   ☐ EOI B1   ☐

   EOI B2   ☐ EOI C1   ☐ IELTS (results range 4-8)   ☐

   TOEFL (results range 50-109)   ☐ Cambridge PET Certificate   ☐

   Cambridge FCE   ☐ Cambridge CAE   ☐ Cambridge Proficiency   ☐ Oxford Test of English B1   ☐ Oxford Test of English B2   ☐ Trinity GESE B1   ☐ Trinity GESE B2   ☐

   Trinity GESE C1   ☐ Trinity ISE B1   ☐ Trinity ISE B2

   ☐ Trinity ISE C1

6. **What do you expect to learn about academic English writing during your degree? Explain.**

SECTION II. ABOUT WRITING PROCEDURES

7. **What have your average marks in written compositions been like so far? Please use labels and numbers in the Spanish grading system.**

8. **What are your current average marks in written compositions this term? Please use labels and numbers in the Spanish grading system.**

9. **Choose as many alternatives as you think fit to describe your current writing outcomes and performance.**

☐ I absolutely disagree with the lecturer's corrections.

☐ I always see the point behind the lecturer's corrections.

☐ I am used to asking for feedback about corrections.

☐ I cannot figure out what the lecturer's grading system is like.

☐ I cannot understand the point behind the lecturer's corrections.

☐ I find the lecturer's corrections objective.

☐ I find the lecturer's corrections subjective.

☐ I have a definite writing style despite the lecturer's suggestions.

☐ I try my best to incorporate the lecturer's suggestions in my subsequent writings.

☐ I usually incorporate the lecturer's suggestions in my subsequent writings.

10. **Which element is the most different in this year's writings, in your view?**

☐ Topics   ☐ Structure   ☐ Language   ☐ Tone   ☐ Style

11. **How often do you do the steps listed below?**

	100% of times	75% of times	50% of times	25% of times	never
I carefully analyze the exercise instructions.					
I write down several ideas after some brainstorming time.					
I plan the structure of my writing.					
I introduce my personal opinion.					
I edit my compositions in search for grammar mistakes after finishing writing.					
I select expressions/collocations connected to the topic					
I develop just one idea per composition					
I take good care of punctuation in my writings.					
I check whether my writing meets all the requirements of the exercise					
I use external sources of information to support my ideas.					

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12. Say whether the statements on text structure below are True (T) or False (F). Circle the false bits in the statements, if any.

	T/F
Each paragraph can contain more than one idea related to the main issue of the writing.	
Generally speaking, paragraphs are composed of one idea and several arguments to support it.	
Generally speaking, the body of the writing paragraph will combine several ideas for discussion.	
In the conclusion, one's own personal opinion must appear.	
The author's stance must appear in the concluding paragraph.	
The main idea of a writing must be fully developed in the first introductory paragraph.	
The main idea of a writing must be just highlighted in the first introductory paragraph.	
The thesis statement must appear in the main body of the writing.	
The topic sentence must appear in the introductory paragraph.	
There are no stated rules to structure paragraphs; that depends on each person's writing style.	
Writings must be structured in three paragraphs: introduction, writing body and conclusion.	

13. What kind of dictionary do you usually resort to when writing on your own? Choose as many options as required.

☐ Printed   ☐ Online   ☐ Bilingual   ☐ Monolingual
☐ Thesaurus

14. How do you select the best option in each dictionary entry?

☐ Focusing on the two first alternatives given.

☐ Going through the complete entry.

☐ Checking the examples in context throughout the entry

☐ Other: _____

15. Have you ever tried to include an external source of information in any of your writings? If so, explain

SECTION III. WRITING SKILLS SELF-ASSESSMENT

16. Rate your own skills by selecting the most suitable adverb for each "can do" statement in the grid below.

I can…	Hardly	Sometimes	Regularly	Well	Extremely well
describe in simple sentences the main facts shown in visuals on familiar topics					
describe trends in writing					
distinguish an essay from an article, a report and a review.					
evaluate different ideas or solutions to a problem.					

give clear, detailed descriptions of real or imaginary events and experiences.						understand the connections between ideas					
give clear, detailed descriptions on a variety of subjects related to my field of interest.						recognize signposting elements					
link a series of shorter, discrete simple elements into a connected, linear sequence						select the specific language needed for specialized topics					
locate and read the topic sentences in a text in order to understand main ideas						self-correct one's own occasional "slips"/non-systematic errors and minor flaws in sentence structure					
mark relationships between ideas in a clear and connected text.						structure longer texts in clear, logical paragraphs					
paraphrase short written passages in a simple fashion						summarize a text efficiently, selecting its main ideas and avoiding unnecessary details.					
produce a detailed description of a complex process.						synthesize and evaluate information and arguments from a number of sources, and use them in your own writing.					
produce an essay or report which develops an argument systematically with appropriate highlighting of significant points and relevant supporting detail.						use adjectives and adverbs to accurately describe statistics and trends.					
produce an essay or report which develops an argument, giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view and explaining the advantages and disadvantages of various options.						use different sentence patterns to give variation to the writing					
						use effective hooks to grab the readers' interest.					
produce clear, detailed texts on a variety of subjects related to my field of interest.						use similes and metaphors					
recognize bridging sentences in order to						use topic sentences, bridging sentences and concluding sentences to link paragraphs together into a coherent text					

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	Hardly	Sometimes	Regularly	Well	Extremely well
use transitions for introducing opposing ideas					
write a straightforward narrative or description following a linear sequence					
write about any topic, general or specific, keeping the right register					
write about cause and effect.					
write an effective concluding paragraph					
write an effective introductory paragraph					
I can…					

17. Which of these definitions apply to a thesis statement?

☐ A sentence or sentences in the conclusion of an essay that restate the main points that have been developed throughout the paper.

☐ A sentence or sentences in the introduction of an essay that explain the main point(s) of the essay and the writer's views, together with an outline of the essay parts.

☐ An introductory sentence or sentences of an essay that include its main point(s) and the writer's views on the essay topic, together with an outline of the essay parts and some background information.

SECTION IV. LANGUAGE CORRECTION

18. In this term's writings, how often have you had corrections on…

	Never	Hardly ever	Sometimes	Often	In all of them
Interference from Spanish/mother tongue errors?					
Sentences/clauses missing their subject?					
Tense formation mistakes?					
Tense combination mistakes?					
Lack of –s endings?					
Misuse of adjectives (number, degree..)?					
Too long and complicated sentences?					
Spots of informal language?					
Exclusive use of basic sentences?					
Lack of appropriate connectors?					
Use of contracted forms?					
Careless or wrong spelling mistakes?					

You have come to the end of the questionnaire. Thank you for your participation.

DATE AND VENUE:

PERSONAL CONSENT AND INSTRUCTIONS

The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect information from real English Studies students in their first year about issues connected to writing skills. By answering it you will be explicitly consenting to participate in Marina Braña's research leading to the elaboration of her final degree project. To keep due privacy, no names will be used to identify participants in this study, just numbers assigned at random after all the questionnaires have been completed and collected. Thank you.
Please answer the following questions according to your own personal experience.

Section I. Personal & Background Information

1. **Age of the participant:**

2. **Tick ONE option:**

    ☐ Male   ☐ Female   ☐ Non binary

3. **You are a…**

    ☐ native speaker of English   ☐ bilingual speaker[1]   ☐ non-native speaker of English

4. **Have you received any additional language teaching outside school? Choose as many as needed to match your personal circumstances**

    ☐ No additional tuition   ☐ Private language school   ☐ Escuela Oficial de Idiomas   ☐ Personal tutor   ☐ Other (please state):_____

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[1] We consider bilingual speakers all those non-native speakers who have been consistently raised in two languages at home, one of them being English.

5. **Your competence in English has been certified by means of…**

    ☐ I have not had my competence certified   ☐ EOI B1   ☐

    EOI B2   ☐ EOI C1   ☐ IELTS (results range 4-8)   ☐

    TOEFL (results range 50-109)   ☐ Cambridge PET Certificate   ☐

    Cambridge FCE   ☐ Cambridge CAE   ☐ Cambridge Proficiency   ☐ Oxford Test of English B1   ☐ Oxford Test of English B2   ☐ Trinity GESE B1   ☐ Trinity GESE B2   ☐

    Trinity GESE C1   ☐ Trinity ISE B1   ☐ Trinity ISE B2

    ☐ Trinity ISE C1

6. **Did you have any experience with academic writing in English prior to starting this degree?**

7. **Have you been on a studying exchange (e.g. Erasmus)? If so, how do you consider it to have affected your academic writing skills?**

8. **Have you relied on external resources (e.g. Internet-based, printed textbooks) to develop your academic writing skills?**

    ☐ No, never.
    ☐ Yes, but not often.
    ☐ Yes, quite often.
    ☐ Yes, they have been my main resource.

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9. **If you answered 'yes' in the last question, please give some details on the resources you have used.**

SECTION II. ABOUT WRITING PROCEDURES

10. **What have your average marks in written compositions been like so far? Think of both compositions for English language courses, as well as essays written for other courses. Please use labels and numbers in the Spanish grading system.**

11. **Choose as many alternatives as you think fit to describe your current writing outcomes and performance.**

☐ I absolutely disagree with the lecturer's corrections.

☐ I always see the point behind the lecturer's corrections.

☐ I am used to asking for feedback about corrections.

☐ I have developed my own writing style, which I can accommodate to different receptors as needed.

☐ I cannot figure out what the lecturer's grading system is like.

☐ I cannot understand the point behind the lecturer's corrections.

☐ I find the lecturer's corrections objective.

☐ I find the lecturer's corrections subjective.

☐ I understand the guidelines in essays and other writing assignments.

☐ I have a definite writing style despite the lecturer's suggestions.

☐ I comply with key instruction words (e.g. discuss, assess, critically evaluate) in essay or other assignments titles.

☐ I try my best to incorporate the lecturer's suggestions in my subsequent writings.

☐ I usually incorporate the lecturer's suggestions in my subsequent writings.

12. **How often do you do the steps listed below?**

	100% of times	75% of times	50% of times	25% of times	never
I carefully analyze the exercise instructions.					
I write down several ideas after some brainstorming time.					
I plan the structure of my writing.					
I introduce my personal opinion.					
I edit my compositions in search for grammar mistakes after finishing writing.					
I select expressions/collocations connected to the topic					
I develop just one idea per composition					

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I take good care of punctuation in my writings.					
I check whether my writing meets all the requirements of the exercise					
I use external sources of information to support my ideas.					
I proofread and edit my writings.					

SECTION III. WRITING SKILLS SELF-ASSESSMENT

13. Rate your own skills by selecting the most suitable adverb for each "can do" statement in the grid below

I can…	Hardly	Sometimes	Regularly	Well	Extremely well
employ the structure and conventions of a variety of genres.					
write clear, well-structured texts of complex subjects, underlining its relevant issues.					
vary your tone, style and register according to addressee, text type and theme.					
write clear, detailed, and well-structured and developed descriptions.					
expand and support points of view at some length with reasons and relevant examples.					
self-correct your work in an effective manner.					
use different sentence patterns to give variation to the writing.					
adopt formal writing conventions when needed.					
write clear, detailed, and well-structured and developed imaginative texts.					
reformulate your ideas when faced with a difficulty in writing.					
select the specific language needed for specialized topics					
write an effective concluding paragraph					
write an effective introductory paragraph for a complex academic or professional topic					
write an essay or report which develops an argument systematically with appropriate highlighting of significant points and relevant supporting detail.					
use external sources without committing plagiarism.					
use effective transition sentences.					
summarize a text efficiently, including academic texts like articles or research papers,					

	Hardly	Sometimes	Regularly	Well	Extremely well
selecting its main ideas and avoiding unnecessary details.					
synthesize and evaluate information and arguments from a number of sources, and use them in your own writing.					
discern what information is relevant for your essay.					
emphasize your point by using techniques like cleft sentences.					
develop and defend a consistent and coherent argument.					
write adequate definitions for key terms used in your essay.					
include external sources using different techniques (e.g. direct quotation, paraphrasing)					
recognize and use hedging language to ensure your essay presents information fairly and accurately.					
I can…					

14. Which of these definitions apply to a thesis statement?

☐ A sentence or sentences in the conclusion of an essay that restate the main points that have been developed throughout the paper.

☐ A sentence or sentences in the introduction of an essay that explain the main point(s) of the essay and the writer's views, together with an outline of the essay parts.

☐ An introductory sentence or sentences of an essay that include its main point(s) and the writer's views on the essay topic, together with an outline of the essay parts and some background information.

SECTION IV. LANGUAGE CORRECTION

15. In your writings, how often do you do the following…

	Never	Hardly ever	Sometimes	Often	In all of them
Interference from Spanish/mother tongue errors?					
Sentences/clauses missing their subject?					
Tense formation mistakes?					
Tense combination mistakes?					
Lack of –s endings?					
Misuse of adjectives (number, degree..)?					

	Never	Hardly ever	Sometimes	Often	In all of them
Too long and complicated sentences?					
Spots of informal language?					
Exclusive use of basic sentences?					
Lack of appropriate connectors?					
Use of contracted forms?					
Careless or wrong spelling mistakes?					
Lack of appropriate less common lexis?					
Repetitive use of a modal auxiliary?					
Low command of complex grammatical structures (non-finite forms, hypothetical, conditional, inverted sentences)?					
Too frequent use of basic general words/expressions?					
Scarce use of nominalization?					
Insufficient use of passive voice and impersonality?					

You have come to the end of the questionnaire. Thank you for your participation.