

# Teaching Academic Writing to Adult English Learners

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**LINCS**

Literacy Information and Communication System



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# Webinar Plan

- Why focus on academic writing?
- What is the state of writing instruction in adult ESL classes?
- What are some promising approaches to academic writing?
- Questions
- Follow-up discussion next week

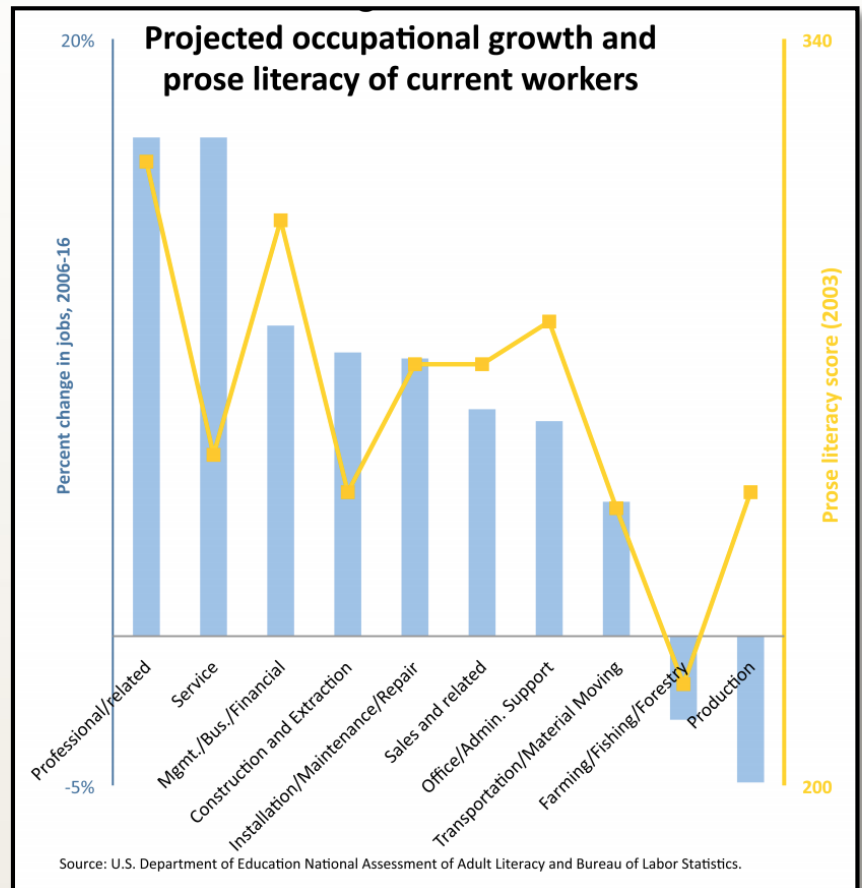


# **WHY FOCUS ON ACADEMIC WRITING**

# Meeting the Demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Workforce

[\*The Washington Post\*](#) (2017): “According to [national surveys](#), **employers want to hire college graduates who can write coherently, think creatively and analyze quantitative data.** But the Conference Board [a non-profit business membership and research group] has found in its surveys of corporate hiring leaders that **writing skill is one of the biggest gaps in workplace readiness.**”

[\*The New York Times\*](#) (2017): “Three-quarters of both 12th and 8th graders lack proficiency in writing, according to the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress. And 40 percent of those who took the ACT writing exam in the high school class of 2016 **lacked the reading and writing skills necessary to complete successfully a college-level English composition class**, according to the company’s data.”



# Academic Writing Skills

<b>Overall Academic Writing Skills</b> <b>The writer must be able to:</b>	<b>Top 6 Writing Skills</b> <b>identified by Rosenfeld et al., 2004;</b> <b>Survey of graduate and</b> <b>undergraduate faculty</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Articulate and support complex ideas</li><li>• Analyze an argument</li><li>• Sustain a focused and coherent discussion</li></ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Credit sources appropriately</li><li>2. Organize ideas and information coherently</li><li>3. Use grammar and syntax ... in standard written English ... avoid errors</li><li>4. Avoid errors in mechanics (spelling and punctuation)</li><li>5. Revise and edit text</li><li>6. Write precisely and concisely</li></ol>

# Explaining the Current State of Academic Writing

“Students may be stumbling during their general education courses, taken during the first years of a higher education program, because of their lack of academic reading and writing skills.” (Eli Hinkel, 2004)

Spurling, Seymour, & Chisman (2008):  
56% of ESL learners in non-credit classes did not advance a single level

*The Atlantic* (2014): “barely more than a third of community-college enrollees emerge with a certificate or degree within six years”

Figure 1: Enrollment in Developmental Courses

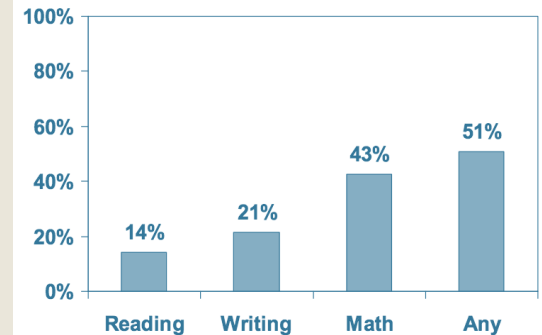
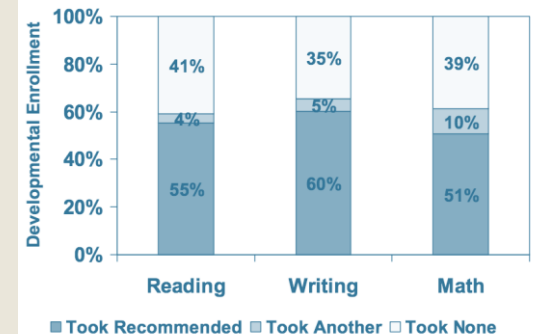


Figure 2: Enrollment in Developmental Courses by Placement Recommendation



“In my community college work, I noticed that a lot of students were coming in, but many weren’t making it out, just out of the writing courses, and sometimes this derailed their college plans and aspirations completely.”

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DeAnna Coon (Coon & Jacobsen, 2014)



# Importance of Academic Writing in Adult Education

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Reflects how professionals and academics in the U.S. organize and present their thoughts and ideas

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A key to success in academic institutions and many workplace contexts.

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A critical component of educational literacy practices (Hinkel, 2004; Street, Fox, & Ellis, 2010)

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An important component of some exams -- new GED®, Graduate Record Exam; Accuplacer and Compass now have a writing section

# A Current Focus in Adult Education

- *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act* (WIOA, 2014)  
<https://www.doleta.gov/wioa>

## **Past Research on the Needs of Adult English Learners in Academic Writing**

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Gillet (1997): Michigan survey of adult education teachers

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Rosenfeld, Courtney, & Fowles (2004): survey of graduate and undergraduate faculty

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Leki, Cumming, & Silva (2008): survey of adult ESL writing issues and research

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Coon & Jacobsen (2014): literature review of writing in community college programs

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**What is the current state of  
writing instruction in adult ESL classes?**



# **SURVEY OF WRITING IN ADULT EDUCATION**

**REBECA FERNANDEZ, JOY KREEFT PEYTON, KIRSTEN SCHAEZEL**

# Context for the Survey

- New focus in adult ESL programs on college and career transitions and academic writing
- A sense that historically, there has been neglect of academic writing in the field: Is this still true?
- A need to understand current practices and needs in this area: Can something more be done for the students who “*weren’t making it out, just out of the writing courses*”? (Coon & Jacobsen, 2014)



# Broad Questions the Survey Sought to Answer

- What do practitioners in the field believe about the importance of writing in their programs and classes?
- What writing practices do ESL teachers and English learners engage in?
- What support for the teaching and learning of writing do teachers and learners receive?
- How can we facilitate learner success?



# Survey Procedures

1

Sent to state directors, TESOL's AEIS listserv, LINC'S Adult English Language Learners listserv

2

Survey open  
12/5/14 - 2/1/15

3

43 questions:  
combination of types: yes/no & follow up, drop down, ranking, open ended (4 questions)

4

Respondents:  
96% adult educators

5

Respondents:  
471 started, 272 completed



The map displays the following case counts by state/territory:

- Alaska: 4
- British Columbia: 1
- Alberta: 0
- Saskatchewan: 0
- Manitoba: 0
- Ontario: 0
- Quebec: 0
- Newfoundland and Labrador: 0
- Washington: 0
- Montana: 0
- North Dakota: 0
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- Wisconsin: 0
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- From 25 states and Canada
- Most learned about the survey from their program administrator
- 41% working at community colleges
- 63% part-time instructors, 19% full-time instructors, 17% administrator, 6% volunteers, 8% other

## ***Qualifications***

- K-12 credential (38%)
- 15% of those also had an ESL endorsement
- Master's degree in TESOL (18%)
- TESOL certificate (18%)
- Other (44%), including short-term certificates

## ***Professional Development***

- Participate in workshops or short-term professional development (70%)
- Have taken second language writing courses (29%)
- Supervised teaching assistantship or internship in an adult ESL classroom (16%)
- Supervised tutoring of adult ESL students (17%)

# **Participant Backgrounds**

# Survey Findings: Conditions for and Approaches to Writing

- *Class sizes:* fewer than 10 to over 35 students (most 15 students or fewer)
- *Time spent writing:* Less than one hour per week (52%)
- *Amount of writing:* Many students wrote a paragraph or less (60%)



# Survey Findings: Types of Writing Done (“Often” or “Sometimes”)

- Grammar and punctuation exercises\*
- Class notes\*
- Short answers to essay questions\*
- Students wrote narratives and descriptions; a small amount of technical/instructional and argumentative/persuasive writing
- Wrote primarily for the teacher, fellow classmates, or themselves rather than for other audiences.
- Most texts were handwritten (48%)



# Survey Findings: Types of Writing Not Done ("Seldom" or "Never")

1. Reports or research papers
2. Reviews of a book, product, or movie
3. Editorials or advertisements
4. Scripts
5. Character sketches
6. Poems

# Survey Findings: Feedback and Revising

- Most respondents (89%) gave some kind of feedback on student writing.
- Feedback focused primarily on a few target areas or direct correction of most or all errors.
- A few respondents (17%) provided feedback through peer conferences or writer's workshop.
- Students revise “Sometimes” or “Often” (60%).



# Positive Practices in Place and Emerging

- Many teachers work with small classes (15 students or fewer).
- Many teachers have classes with the same students 2, 3, or 4 times a week.
- Some have classes with the same students 5 days per week.
- Many mentioned using a process approach to writing (brainstorm, outline, draft, revise).



# Positive Practices in Place and Emerging

- Some have received workshops and other professional development on teaching writing (but only around 30% have done coursework on teaching writing).
- Some programs and administrators are putting more emphasis on writing, shifting curriculum focus and materials.
- There is some institutional support for writing, with tutoring centers, tutors, and career counseling centers.





# Summary of Survey Findings

## Good News

- The field seems to be undergoing a promising shift that bodes well for the teaching of writing.
- Some programs have taken steps to articulate writing expectations across English proficiency levels, and some consider writing in placement decisions.
- A new generation of teachers who teach writing seems to understand process writing and to be better qualified than in the past, and students seem to be motivated to write.
- Individual classroom contexts (small class size, frequency and length of classes) and institutional support (career centers and tutoring) for adult ESL at many community colleges seem appropriate.



# Summary of Findings

## Remaining Challenges

- There is limited class time devoted to writing, and students are asked to do a limited amount of writing.
- There seems to persist a traditional emphasis on short, transactional, and personal writing, disconnected from the public lives of students.
- Writing seems to focus on note taking and grammar exercises, particularly at lower levels.
- Writing continues to be underemphasized by accountability systems and is thus low on lists of program priorities.
- Professional development offerings seem to be limited.



# More Can Be Done

- Academic and professional writing needs to be more of a focus in adult ESL classes.
- Types of writing taught and assigned need to be more aligned with types of assignments in college and university courses and professional settings.
- More professional development opportunities are needed on the teaching of academic and professional writing.



# To Learn More About the Survey Results



Fernandez, R., Peyton, J. K., & Schaetzel, K. (2017). A survey of writing instruction in adult ESL programs: Are teaching practices meeting adult learner needs? *COABE Journal* 6(2), 5-20.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55a158b4e4b0796a90f7c371/t/59782f28e58c62b0e4b701cc/1501048703128/Summer+Journal+Interactive+FINAL.pdf>

# Follow-up Interviews

Peyton, J. K., & Schaetzel, K. (2016). Teaching writing to adult English language learners: Lessons from the field. *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*. (6), 1407-1423.

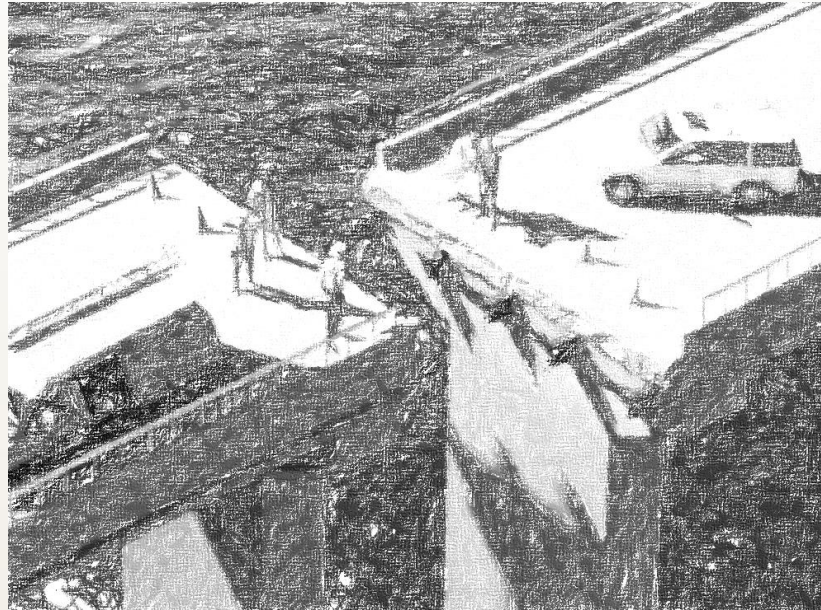
<http://www.davidpublisher.com/index.php/Home/Article/index?id=28304.html>



# Misalignments

## Adult ESL Writing

- **Types of writing:** narrative and descriptive
- **Length of assignments:** a paragraph or less
- **Feedback:** error correction
- **Modality:** hand writing



## Academic and Professional Writing

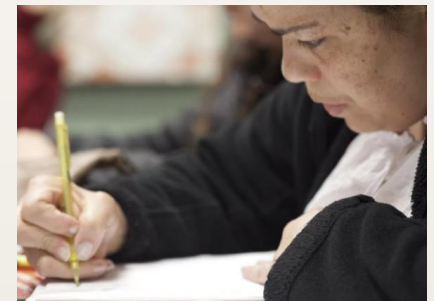
- **Types of writing:** argumentative, persuasive, informative
- **Length of assignments:** a paragraph to a 10-page paper
- **Feedback:** ideas and their presentation
- **Modality:** word processed



# Reflection: In light of these findings . . .



1. How much time do you spend on writing in your classes?
2. What writing activities do your students do?
3. What types of writing do they do?
4. What types of feedback do they receive?
5. Do they like to write? Why or why not?



What approaches can we adopt to better align instruction with academic writing skill development?

What might these approaches look like?



# 1. Understand and align writing instruction with national standards.

- To ensure that adult immigrants have access to jobs, Adult English language programs must emphasize college-and-career-focused academic language skills and content knowledge.
- The English Language Proficiency Standards for Adult Education, College and Career Readiness Standards, and English Language Arts and Literacy Standards guide instruction, competencies developed, and learning outcomes.

## *Questions to ask:*

- What curriculum, instruction, and assessments can be used in adult education classes, aligned with these standards?
- What can learners do outside the classroom to achieve their goals?

## 2. Start with writing from the beginning.

Adults (immigrants or refugees) with limited formal schooling and literacy in their home country language need to learn English language and literacy.

*Questions to ask:*

- What instructional practices can the teacher use to teach writing with an academic focus to adults at the lowest levels of English learner proficiency?
- What Habits of Mind can students develop to make academic writing easier for them to acquire?

### 3. Use oral language as a bridge to academic writing.

Teachers can leverage and build on adult English learners' oral language to develop academic writing, even when learners have limited formal schooling and English literacy.

Questions to ask:

- How can teachers encourage and facilitate academic conversations that form the basis for academic literacy, starting at beginning English proficiency levels?
- What tasks, tools, and scaffolds are available in different genres that move beyond narrative and include presenting an argument with evidence, describing a procedure, making comparisons, and reporting information?
- How can the teacher build academic writing skills for enhanced civic engagement? (e.g., emails for self-advocating at work, letters to local officials)

## 4. Build pathways for writing development in content areas.

Content-based instruction involves learning of content and related language skills, with content serving as the guide for selection and sequencing of language in the curriculum.

*Questions to ask:*

- How can academic content material, in English, provide a foundation for academic literacy development?
- How can content-based lessons provide a scaffold for students to acquire the organizational and genre-specific skills required for academic writing? (e.g., from American history, from biology, from civics lessons)
- What lessons and materials are available and appropriate?

## 5. Use writing as the basis for reading.

Many assessments, program standards, and funding streams emphasize reading rather than writing, and adult learners themselves want to focus on reading.

*Questions to ask:*

- How can writing take the place it needs to have in the effort to build academic knowledge and skills, critical thinking, interdisciplinary knowledge, and student agency?
- How can reading be used to build writing skills?

## 6. Develop varied options and supports for writing.

Students entering and participating in academic programs, when faced with the need to write an essay or other piece of writing, often feel alone and challenged. They are starting with a blank sheet of paper and must put words on it. They need to make a point clearly and turn in a finished product, on which they will be judged.

### *Questions to ask:*

- What role can interactive writing play in the development of academic writing?
- What approaches to interactive writing are effective?
- How can graphic organizers be used effectively to provide a framework for shaping the key ideas in a written piece?
- What graphic organizers can be used at different levels?

## 7. Use test prompts to develop academic writing.

Prompts used in high-stakes exams can provide excellent writing opportunities.

*Questions to ask:*

- What writing skills are needed to write good answers to exams? (e.g., GED®, HiSET, TASC)
- What Habits of Mind are needed to write good answers to these exams?
- How can test prompts be used in class activities to develop adult learners' academic writing abilities?
- What class activities and materials can be used to build learners' confidence and abilities, at all English proficiency levels?

## 8. Use the writing process.

Use of the writing process, popular in the 1980s and seeing a comeback, can inform instruction and learning outcomes in adult education programs.

*Questions to ask:*

- What writing behaviors do novice and competent writers engage in when producing a written text?
- How can these behaviors be supported and build on during a writing activity?
- What are the components of the writing process?
- How does knowledge of the writing process help adult learners become independent writers?



## 9. Provide feedback on learners' writing.

All writers need feedback, and learners who are building confidence and competence in writing in a second language especially need thoughtful, supportive feedback from expert mentors.

*Questions to ask:*

- What are best practices that teachers can use to provide feedback to learners about their texts?
- How can a teacher provide feedback that is selective and prioritized, clear and specific, and encouraging and empowering?
- Are there other sources of feedback that might also be helpful? E.g., peers, self-evaluation, and tutors

## 10. Use technology in writing instruction.

There are many ways that technology can be used for English language instruction and writing development; e.g., for exploring, organizing, and articulating ideas; for collaborating on projects; for publishing.

*Questions to ask:*

- What technologies are available and helpful with this learner population?
- What specific activities can teachers and learners engage in? e.g., multimedia to develop inspiration and background knowledge during pre-writing activities; commenting features to provide feedback; publishing options
- Where and how can a teacher's technology skills be developed and continually updated?

## To learn more about these approaches:

**Fernandez, R., Peyton, J. K., & Schaezel, K. (Eds.) (2019, forthcoming). *Teaching Academic Writing to Adults Learning English*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.**

Provides theory, research, and instructional approaches to help adult education ESL practitioners (teachers and administrators in adult education programs and university entry programs) know how to ...

- Teach writing in line with national and state educational standards
- Move adults into higher education and careers; help them be college and career ready
- Enrich and advance what teachers are already doing in adult education programs based on what has been learned about academic writing
- Integrate writing into the existing curriculum in adult education programs at all levels, adding academic writing into the curriculum that is being used

# To learn more about these approaches:

- From the LINCS Collection
  1. [Developing Writers: An 8-Part Professional Development Workshop](#)
  2. [Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools](#)
  3. [Writing to Read: Evidence for how Writing Can Improve Reading](#)
  4. [Excellence in Adult Literacy \(TEAL\) Just Write! Guide](#)

# Discussion

**Follow-up Online Discussion**  
**in English Language Acquisition & Reading & Writing CoPs**

***Teaching Academic Writing to Adult  
English Learners***

- Rebeca Fernandez – Monday, 3/5
- Joy Kreeft Peyton – Tuesday, 3/6
- Kirsten Schaetzel – Wednesday, 3/7



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- Link:  
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- Date: March 2, 2018
- Presenters: Rebeca Fernandez, Joy Kreeft Peyton, and Kirsten Schaetzel
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