

**DEVELOPING ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS IN EAP CLASSROOMS:
REFLECTIONS FROM PRACTICE IN UZBEKISTAN**

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Abstract: This article presents reflective insights and classroom practices from an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course taught to multilingual graduate students in Uzbekistan. The paper illustrates how explicit instruction in plagiarism prevention, citation, reporting verbs, hedges, boosters, and academic vocabulary can transform learners' understanding of academic writing conventions. Drawing on readings from Hyland (2008), Charles and Pecorari (2015), and other key scholars, the article demonstrates how teacher-designed activities and reflective practice can help students develop both technical accuracy and academic voice. The paper concludes with implications for EAP practitioners seeking to build ethically grounded, communicatively confident writers prepared for English-medium instruction (EMI) contexts.

Keywords: EAP pedagogy, academic writing, plagiarism prevention, citation skills, reporting verbs, hedges and boosters, teacher reflection

1. Introduction

For many learners in English-medium programs, academic writing is a challenging bridge between linguistic competence and disciplinary identity. As Hyland (2008) notes, writing is not simply a skill but a social practice, a means of positioning oneself within a discourse community. In Uzbekistan, the rapid expansion of English-medium higher education has increased the need for courses that teach academic literacy explicitly.

During my graduate studies in the MA TESOL program at Webster University Tashkent, I taught and reflected on an EAP course focused on academic integrity, source use, and stance. This article documents that experience from a teacher-practitioner perspective, offering concrete classroom practices that helped multilingual learners internalize the principles of academic writing.

The discussion proceeds through five pedagogical strands - academic integrity, citation competence, reporting verbs, hedges and boosters, and reflective vocabulary work - followed by challenges, reflections, and implications for practitioners.

2. Context and rationale

My students were advanced undergraduates and graduate-level learners preparing for English-medium instruction (EMI) or international postgraduate programs. Most were bilingual or trilingual, using Uzbek, Russian, and English in different domains. While they were proficient conversationally, few had received formal training in academic writing conventions.

Common difficulties included:

- translating sentences literally from L1s,
- fear of plagiarism due to limited understanding of citation systems, and

- uncertainty about how to express opinions without sounding impolite or overly assertive.

Charles and Pecorari (2015) argue that such challenges reflect a deeper issue: academic writing norms are culturally embedded and must be explicitly taught. My goal was to design tasks that made these conventions visible, practiced, and personally meaningful.

3. Building academic integrity through paraphrasing

The course began with academic integrity, a concept students had often encountered only as a set of rules rather than a value system. To demystify plagiarism, I adapted an

activity comparing two summaries of the same article (Naghavian, 2024).

Classroom activity

Students received the original text, a plagiarized version (direct copying and synonym swaps), and a model paraphrase. Working in pairs, they color-coded copied phrases in yellow and minimal word changes in green. We then discussed:

- why “small” changes still count as plagiarism,
- how understanding precedes paraphrasing, and
- how to balance paraphrasing with citation.

Student response and reflection

Before the activity, most defined plagiarism simply as “copy-paste.” Afterward, reflections showed a shift: learners wrote comments like “I didn’t know structure copying is also plagiarism.” During follow-up writing tasks, several voluntarily checked their summaries with plagiarism tools.

This activity transformed plagiarism from a fear-based concept into an ethical and intellectual practice, aligning with Hamp-Lyons’ (2011) notion of “learning to join the academic conversation.”

4. Developing citation competence

Once integrity was contextualized, we moved to citation. Many learners viewed referencing as decorative or bureaucratic rather than rhetorical. I introduced the difference between integral and non-integral citations:

- Integral: Naghavian (2024) investigates how learners perceive fluency.
- Non-integral: Fluency in second-language learning has been conceptualized as a journey (Naghavian, 2024).

Teaching technique

Students identified citation patterns in short literature review extracts, discussed author

prominence, and rewrote sentences to shift focus from author - idea and vice versa. The exercise built awareness that citation is a rhetorical choice shaping emphasis, not just a mechanical format.

Observed outcome

In subsequent essays, students began varying citation types appropriately. Their writing showed smoother integration of sources and fewer isolated quotations. The activity echoed Hyland's (2008) claim that form follows function in academic genres: knowing why conventions exist encourages flexible use.

5. Using reporting verbs to express critical voice

Another area of growth involved reporting verbs, words that signal how writers relate to sources. Initially, students relied heavily on "say" and "show." I presented a chart grouping verbs by stance strength:

Strong	Neutral	Cautious
argues / demonstrates	describes / explains	suggests / implies

Task sequence

1. Students matched verbs to excerpts from research articles.
2. They rewrote sample sentences, altering the reporting verb and discussing how tone changed.
3. Groups evaluated whether each verb reflected strong evidence or tentative interpretation.

This analytical exercise linked vocabulary to epistemology. Learners realized that verbs construct stance, the author's position in the dialogue of research. One student remarked, "When I use 'suggests,' I feel more academic than 'says.'"

The lesson operationalized Hyland's (2008) argument that expressing stance is central to disciplinary identity. It also empowered students to build their own academic voices instead of merely summarizing others'.

6. Balancing confidence and caution through hedges and boosters

To extend stance work, we explored hedges (expressing caution) and boosters (signaling certainty). Learners examined authentic research paragraphs, underlining hedging devices (may, might, possibly) and boosters (clearly, certainly, indeed).

Interactive practice

Students edited short literature review paragraphs to shift the author's certainty level. Example:

Original: "This study proves that peer feedback is effective."

Revised (hedged): "This study suggests that peer feedback may be effective."

They discussed which version felt more professional or persuasive. Most concluded that academic writing values measured confidence.

Pedagogical insight

This task also exposed cross-cultural perceptions. Uzbek and Russian academic traditions often reward authoritative tone; students initially feared that hedging sounded weak. Through peer discussion, they realized that in international academia, strategic hedging demonstrates sophistication, not insecurity.

By integrating this awareness, learners' writing gained subtlety and credibility — fulfilling Hyland's (2008) view that hedging and boosting are pragmatic tools for negotiating knowledge claims.

7. Integrating reflection and academic vocabulary

Beyond structural skills, I incorporated reflection and vocabulary expansion inspired by Warnby (n.d.) and Kim et al. (2024).

- Reflection journals: After each major task, students wrote short entries describing what they learned about themselves as academic writers. These reflections often revealed emotional growth, from anxiety about plagiarism to pride in having “my own words.”
- Vocabulary projects: Following Warnby's findings on the role of academic lexis, students built personal glossaries from readings, noting collocations and discipline-specific verbs (e.g., demonstrate a relationship, highlight a trend).

During presentations, I encouraged multimodal awareness: using Kim et al.'s (2024) work on nonverbal fluency, students analyzed gestures and tone in short research talks, learning that confidence communicates through body language as well as words.

These integrative activities supported deeper autonomy: students began viewing writing not as rule compliance but as self-expression within academic boundaries.

8. Challenges and reflections

Time and cognitive load

Balancing explicit instruction with writing practice proved demanding. Students needed repeated exposure before internalizing concepts like hedging or paraphrasing. Shorter, spiral reviews helped maintain retention.

Cultural beliefs about authorship

Some learners struggled to accept that knowledge must always be attributed. In Uzbek and Russian academic discourse, shared cultural knowledge often circulates anonymously. We held open discussions comparing citation norms across contexts, which reduced resistance and encouraged curiosity.

Assessment and feedback

Assessing paraphrasing fairly was challenging because originality can be subjective. Peer review sessions, guided by clear rubrics, helped create a supportive atmosphere.

Teacher learning

As an instructor, I learned to shift from correction to coaching, guiding students to notice and articulate choices rather than simply marking errors. This reflective stance mirrored the growth I wanted them to experience.

9. Pedagogical implications for EAP practitioners

From this experience, several principles emerged:

1. Teach conventions as social practices, not mechanical rules. When students understand why citation or hedging matters, motivation rises.
2. Visualize abstract concepts. Color-coding, rewriting, and highlighting make invisible conventions visible.
3. Integrate affective reflection. Encourage students to record emotional responses; academic confidence grows from self-awareness.
4. Use contrastive analysis. Compare local and global academic norms to validate students' backgrounds while introducing international standards.
5. Model authenticity. Sharing one's own drafts or mistakes humanizes academic writing and demystifies the process.

Collectively, these strategies transform EAP classes into communities of practice rather than correctional workshops.

10. Conclusion

Explicit, reflective teaching of academic writing conventions can profoundly influence multilingual learner's engagement with English-medium study. In my EAP classroom, activities on plagiarism prevention, citation variety, reporting verbs, and stance markers did more than improve technical accuracy, they cultivated academic identity, ethical awareness, and critical voice.

For teachers, the process reaffirmed that effective EAP pedagogy lies at the intersection of clarity and empathy. When learners see academic writing as a conversation they can join, not a code they must memorize, genuine growth occurs.

Future iterations of this course will integrate more corpus-based tools and collaborative online peer feedback to extend practice beyond the classroom. Yet the central insight remains: by making academic conventions explicit and reflective, EAP teachers empower students to think, write, and belong in the academic world.

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