

Studying at University Level

Studying at University Level:

*Essential Skills for Entry Level
Education and Humanities
Students*

By

Linda O. Enow and Karima Kadi-Hanifi

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and Humanities Students

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To our students

*This book is dedicated to all our students; past and present. Thank
you for the privilege to teach you and your openness to learn.
Teaching you has been joyful.*

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The book idea comes from our joyful experience of teaching our students and we must begin by acknowledging that you have all inspired us to write this book. We have numerous conversations with our colleagues across the universities which we have worked at, endlessly exploring how we can make the academic journey of our students easier. To our dear colleagues, we say thank you for taking time from your incredibly busy schedules for these invaluable chats. To our families, for the times we have removed and excused ourselves from family engagements, we can only apologise; again. You always understand, and we love you dearly.

PREFACE

This book pays close attention to the sequence in which students encounter university or Higher Education (HE) work. We take the natural sequence of listening, speaking, reading and writing. You might have come across or experienced a different sequence to ours, but that is fine too. We do not dictate how things should be, and we value your individual personal experiences. As you will soon find out as you read our book, our sequence is based on a recurrent natural engagement which we have found from our combined many years of teaching in Higher Education Institutions (HEI) and on Higher Education (HE) programmes.

With this book you are empowered with the skills you need to actively engage with academic reading, academic writing, and listening and speaking for academic purposes, and in academic contexts. Contemporary academic skills require you to be comfortable with accessing course content in various modes; on screen, hard copies of books, journal articles; online via the university Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), research outlets; for example conferences, and a range of other academic events. Accessing information from these multimodal avenues brings with it some challenges. This book takes a contemporary outlook and ensures you develop the modern skills essential for today's university. You will engage with multimodal texts as an intrinsic part of reading on your course.

Using this book guarantees you swiftly develop the aptitude for navigating huge amounts of information, narrowing down to relevant content, and developing precision in selecting pertinent information which you require. After gaining reading efficiency, this book helps you establish the nature and quality of academic writing expected at university. At university level, showcasing your understanding is presented in a range of assessment formats and using this book prepares you to gain a deeper understanding of essential written and verbal communication skills.

When we refer to HEIs we are inclusive and welcoming students who study in universities, university colleges, and the contemporary range of HEI providers. Our book is also beneficial to students who are on HE programmes in settings, for example Further Education (FE), which are offering HE courses. Our aim of writing this book is because we have

noticed that very few academic skills books are designated for new entrants to HE studies who are so-called non-traditional students (see Burrough, 2019:20-21), and we want to address this gap. In consolidating our aim to write a book, which is useful for a wider inclusive range of higher education students, we wanted our book to appeal to students with very limited knowledge of the contemporary university structure, organisation, expected mode and standard of study. Our one and only purpose is for you to improve your academic skills.

For the purposes of data collection, the term non-traditional students is used regularly across the HE sector to describe students who have not progressed to university directly from school or 6th Form and have not followed the standard or traditional routes into HE e.g. after their A-Levels. In the description of non-traditional students, the terminology of *mature student* is also embedded. According to the OfS (2020) and as applied in Burrough (2019), mature students are those who have started university after the age of 21. Whilst we contest these descriptors on the basis that the global outlook towards education is not one which is age-based, we acknowledge that education in the UK follows an age-based approach.

Our argument is that age is not the sole determinant of success at university, even though it might impact on decision-making on learning on a personal basis for some students. Although age could be a factor, age is not the sole determinant or even, we might suggest, the factor with the strongest impact. Let us use an example to support our point. One of the descriptors of a non-traditional student is the fact that they might be working on a full time or part time basis. You will agree with me that in the contemporary UK university context almost all, or at least a huge percentage of students work, and work incredibly long hours whether or not they are under 21 or over 21. The definitions of non-traditional and mature student would therefore need to be reviewed; hence our focus is more on the contemporary university or students undertaking HE studies in the contemporary UK context; one of post pandemic, over a decade of cost-of-living crisis, inflation-impacted fees, the long term student finance loan repayment and debt burden.

The lack of targeted skills development resources appears to be a bigger issue than we first anticipated. In addition, we have also found that books to support academic skills for HE in FE students are almost non-existent. There are many generic books, toolkits and resources, which can be quite useful, but for some students they appear oblivious to their everyday

reality of navigating higher education. The contemporary HE landscape is a fascinating one and it is moving constantly. There are so many ongoing changes. Between us, the authors, our experience of studying at university at undergraduate level was over 40 years ago and our most recent experience of studying at postgraduate doctoral level is nearly 10 years ago, and we can assure you that so much has changed in that time.

The implication of this is, even for university students whose parents, family members and friends went to university, their knowledge of university life, studies, expectations and demands on students' time is completely different to current experience. Of course, for students with this support structure of having someone who has themselves been to university is helpful, you will still navigate the contemporary world with national and global changes, for example in the UK with the current cost-of-living crisis, which pushes some students to take on the maximum hours of work which the legislation allows as well as doing full-time study.

The average age of new entrants to university has also changed significantly compared to 20 or 30 years ago. The numbers of students termed as *mature students* (OfS 2020) in the UK that is, students who are 21 years old and over when they join university, have been on the increase. Mature students tend to join university after some work experience and might be experienced professionals and sometimes with leadership positions in their careers. As they combine studies with leadership or management work, even if this is part-time, there is a huge demand on their time. For some students, they are at the phase of their lives where they have caring responsibilities for their own growing families, and for some, both parental responsibilities for their own children, and caring responsibilities for their aging parents. When the university became a space which was open to all, the founders might not have anticipated the landscape which we have today.

Our book therefore is a companion for all entry-level higher education students. We situate the content in this contemporary landscape with its personal, professional, political and economic influences. Globalisation is at its peak as our book goes to press and the intercultural competence required in HEI learning spaces also underpins the explorations in this book. Learning is now ever-more flexible, portable, with varied opportunities to experiment with and implement innovative ideas. With technology spreading its tentacles across all areas of life, we want to

assure you that our book is a key companion as you begin your higher education journey.

How this book is organised

Section A has seven (7) chapters which cover academic listening and how to develop listening skills. We explore listening to the self, to lecturers and to your peers. Sometimes, there can be so many others to listen to in academia that students might not find the space to listen to how they are processing their ongoing learning, internally. Section B with ten (10) chapters, focuses on speaking skills with content ranging from speaking in one-to-one tutorials to speaking in large lectures. Our reading section; Section C, is all about discovery through reading and the investigative nature of academic reading which is absolutely fascinating. This section also has ten (10) chapters. Feedback on assignments would regularly recommend that students read widely and examine varied perspectives. There's the start of your investigation as you look for these varied perspectives in a range of sources. We position writing in this book, in the fourteen (14) chapters of Section D, as a celebration of where you are in your enriching academic journey and who you are becoming academically. We help you to see your personal and academic growth and we truly believe that at each milestone stage where you showcase your knowledge and understanding you are, in reality, doing a mini celebration of your achievement so far or to that point. The incremental structure of this book mirrors your journey of academic growth which we always have in mind as we support you in navigating through academia. As with any journey the distance covered increases gradually towards your destination, and in this case, your goal.

We absolutely believe that learning is precious, but we do not think that the learning instruments should be so precious that you feel restricted from actually touching them. The sensory nature of learning is a critical underlay in how we have presented the resources which you need to develop your academic skills in this book. You will, in your studies in Education and the Humanities discover Aristotle and his philosophising on the sensory composition of learning, and we borrow from this philosophical outlook in our understanding of what learning is and how it should be facilitated, nurtured and ignited. We therefore invite you to read this book, add notes in the margins, and be tactile in your approach to learning. We have demonstrated our invitation to you being tactile by providing a designated space at the end of each section for you to write a summary,

add notes on how you can apply or have applied some of your learning from the book, experiential learning opportunities, and points to ponder as you continue to process your daily academic experiences. We embed problem-solving skills development through the use of vignettes. Wouldn't it be such fun to return to some of your notes one, two, or three years or even decades down the line? This is the journey of self-discovery and academia which we thread through this book.

Learning is iterative and our design of this book exemplifies how much we value what you have to contribute. You might dread to think that should your book be misplaced someone else might get to see your notes, your thoughts your reflections, as you might have treated the notes section almost as a diary. This vulnerability, you might not know, is a key developmental phase of academia and the academe is your most treasured space to be intellectually vulnerable. Let them 'see' your thoughts, let them see you, allow your ideas to be absorbed, analysed and reused; that is exactly what you do when you reference authors. You never know, you too could be an author one day. Do we wholeheartedly practice what we teach – as we invite your thoughts on some of our key ideas? We are also making ourselves as authors of this book academically vulnerable – what if you do not agree with us? The retriever of your misplaced book will also see your thoughts on our content and we welcome their feedback when they do.

This book addresses, and is organised, using core academic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Embedded within these are time management strategies, problem-solving aptitude development, experiential learning and knowledge application, technology-use for academic purposes, emotional self-awareness which improves studying resilience, and a whole host of contemporary elements which interweave with academic skills development. In this book we take a holistic approach based on the understanding that core academic skills development is much better understood in an individual or a personal capacity as they sit alongside each student's levels of self-management. HE studies emphasises independent study and, in this book, we explore independent study as an offshoot of self-management; we take the road least trodden with this one and look at independent study differently. There is a distinct expectation by society and employers of degree holders to be able to be innovative, show initiative, work independently, manage themselves and manage others; these we believe can only be achieved to the optimum level with a strong sense of self-management. If students are shown how to do this, then it is more likely that many will be more effective and efficient self-

managers. We un-wrap the ‘present’ or treasure which is HE studies and open up this beautiful journey and experience just for you!

ABBREVIATIONS

Academic English (AE)

Advanced Level (A-Level)

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Academic Skills Development (ASD)

Academic Vocabulary List (AVL)

Academic Word List (AWL)

Communities of Practice (CoP)

English for Academic Purposes (EAP)

Further Education (FE)

General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)

Higher Education (HE)

Higher Education Institution (HEI)

Office for Students (OfS)

Personal Academic Vocabulary List (pAVL)

Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)

Question and Answer (Q & A)

Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)

INTRODUCTION

This book on English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has been written to support students who are new to university level studies. In particular, Education Studies students at Foundation Degree level and Undergraduate students in their first year and we acknowledge that this book will be beneficial to students beyond these target groups depending on levels of confidence with English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Due to the course content requirements which we deal with and from which we draw most of our examples, students in the wider field of Humanities would find this a helpful resource to support them in their academic pursuit.

This book does not group students into one big group and recognises identifiers and descriptors which are unique and this means that for some students their HE journey requires a more targeted approach. There is a growing number of entry-level higher education students who work long hours, are highly experienced professionals sometimes with leadership and management responsibilities, have parental and caring responsibilities, and for some, require individual adjustments to facilitate their learning at university level. Furthermore, first-generation university students tend to be absorbed in the whirlwind of academia within which they are expected to study. Using the definition by López, Santelices and Taveras (2023:2) first-generation students are first in their nuclear family to attend a post secondary institution, or in the case of the United Kingdom (UK), go to university. However, without a thorough breakdown of the learning, teaching, assessment, and pastoral processes, for these students the start of their higher education studies can be rather overwhelming. The ramifications of political and economic changes have an added impact on the quality of experience for these groups of students. Their performance is therefore a result of external factors rather than their aptitude, readiness and passion for HE studies.

This book breaks down the nature of listening in HE; both the internal listening to the self and listening to others, the range of speaking contexts and their varied requirements, the discovery and enriching opportunities from reading, and the celebration of knowledge and understanding through writing. Academic listening, speaking, reading and writing generate various emotions in students. This book supports students with understanding

what each skill requires and how they can strengthen their aptitude for learning and overcome some of the perceived barriers to their learning.

The Interaction of Core Academic Skills

There is a state of listening to yourself and subsequently to your lecturers and your peers, which results in you finding spaces to make contributions through speaking activities. After listening and speaking, the next area in our structure or outline of this book is reading. There is only one way forward with academic texts and it is; read; read and read some more. Of course, we do not expect you to read everything all in one go, which is indeed unrealistic, we want you to plan your reading carefully, pace it out in ways which enable you to really engage with the content and really enjoy the process. When reading is rushed and pressured, you might end up losing the enjoyment quality. Technology offers scope for supporting reading in various ways, for example audio books, and it is important, in this opening section, for us to centre the place of technology in Academic Skills Development (ASD). Academic writing can be both intriguing and liberating, whilst for some students especially at the beginning of their studies, it can be seen as a barrier. This conflicting relationship with academic writing might explain the popularity of academic writing books in the domain of Academic Skills Development (ASD).

We take the stance in this book that there is an intertwined relationship between all the four core areas of academic skills development and you have to be very intentional in how you work on developing all these four areas. In other words, we do not perceive one skill to be more important than the others. If you develop academic skills more holistically you will notice a stronger improvement in your studying aptitude. The initial intentional work which you invest in developing these skills could, as the expression goes – pay forward, in the long run as you journey through your studies from foundation level, the first year of your degree, or any entry higher education studies which you are doing in Education or the Humanities. Our main language in this book is English, therefore it goes without saying that our focus is on Academic English (AE) skills development.

Technology is central in all university work and studying at university requires a high level of efficiency with technology-based learning. How efficiently you use technology in your university studies has a strong influence on how you engage with your studies and the impact on your academic performance. As authors, in this book we do not take it for

granted that you already use technology efficiently but for your university studies, we review with you the procedure to improve your efficiency. From the process of application, to taking lectures, completing assignments and providing you with certification upon graduation, the use of technology, as with all areas of contemporary life, is indispensable. The approach we have taken in this book is one which is multimodal in nature and reflects the wide variety of ways in which you will engage and interact with resources on your courses.

The unique contribution we make to the domain of Academic Skills Development (ASD) is in our take on sequence of engagement with the four core academic skills; as we follow the natural human experience or even, you could say, Aristotelian philosophy of learning through the senses as we begin your skills development with listening, then we progress to speaking, followed by reading and writing. You might have come across texts or toolkits which prioritise level of difficulty for students and their content will be arranged in a different way. For us, it is about *being human* and working with the natural humanistic order of things.

It is generally agreed within the field that there are four main academic skills. What is different however, is how these skills are prioritised and sometimes where the emphasis is laid when they are taught to students. In this book we have organised the content from listening skills to speaking skills, reading skills and writing skills. The reality is that when you are engaging in your studies, it is not easy to demarcate one of the skills from the others as they are all interconnected. But, in this book we pull out these core skills and help you to understand each one and what you should do to develop it. Our rationale for breaking them up in this way is for you to have an improved understanding of each skill so that when you engage with them in their combined form you have a level of clarity, and you can identify how they come together as a whole.

Students tend to say things along the lines of – *I really struggle with academic skills*, when they really mean they are *currently* struggling with academic writing. If you can break it down in this way, you will discover that you face challenges with only one of four skill areas. Also, by paying close attention to the different skills on an individual basis, you are more able to pinpoint aspects within each of the core skills which you should develop. It is therefore important to break it down in order to understand, although you have to remember that in the classroom experience it is rarely possible to demarcate the four main academic skills. Do also

remember that the word *currently* is italicised, and this means that it is at a specific point in time, not forever. We argue in this book that no skill is more important than the other and it will be worth your time to invest in actively developing all the four skills.

Being New and Embracing Newness

For entry level university students; foundation level and first year students, the world of academia can feel somewhat strange, distant, and overwhelming. The natural human aspiration in life is to inhabit and experience most spaces in our areas of interest. So, whilst some who are interested in exploring educational spaces see higher education studies as a space to be experienced, there can sometimes be elements of academia which might warrant some self-reflection and reconsideration of that aspiration. This means, some students who apply to go to university, join for a few weeks and at times a few months and decide to withdraw; stop attending and dropout. The decision to terminate their studies, after so much preparation to go to university in the first place is never an easy one.

In this book, we present academic skills as one of many potential barriers which could contribute to a new starter's decision to discontinue their studies. We are therefore trying in our own small way to support your decision to stay in university and continue with your studies in the institution of your choice. Through this book we will help you to understand what is required at this level of study. This book is not a subject guide, but it is an academic skills companion which, we hope, goes with you on your academic journey. We posit that anxieties with academic skills have the potential to contribute to attrition rates. For students going to university, university feels like a new world, for students who are first-generation university students this new world is even more complex. Navigating this new world for entry level students appears to be an assumed expectation of universities and very little is currently available in the form of publications which brings home this complexity to students. Our book makes the processes explicit; empowering entry level students for success in their university studies.

This book supports new entrants to academic study with accessing the multimodal content of programmes within Education Studies and Humanities. This book is essential for all Education Studies courses and the wider Humanities discipline across subject specialism. It is a supplementary textbook supporting academic skills. It cuts across subject boundaries, but as authors and lecturers we target Education and Humanities based on our

expertise and knowledge of the nature of study in these disciplines. Most students taking courses in Education and Humanities will find this book invaluable. As an entry level text which guarantees excellence with academic skills, there is the potential for this book to become a reference book beyond foundation degree university courses and first year university studies.

Definition of Key Terms

- (1) EAP
- (2) Multimodality

What is English for Academic Purposes (EAP)?

Whilst most students who study at university level in the United Kingdom (UK) are advanced users of English, there is still a challenge accessing Academic English (AE). Considering that a significant and growing number of the new entrants to university level study either in universities, Further Education (FE) study and related universities centres are the first in their families to go to university or first-generation students, the change to Academic English can, in some cases, be a challenge. Judging from the range and number of books, toolkits and websites dedicated to English for Academic Purposes, the demand in this area is quite high. This demonstrates to an extent that EAP is not English in the way entry level students know and use it, and some students and academics have even gone on to describe EAP as a language in its own right. Frankenberg-Garcia et al (2018:24) claim that “there are no native speakers of academic language”. Basically, we all have to learn academic language as no one is born using academic language. This claim could be interpreted to mean that you have to work to develop academic language skills and it is through putting in the effort to improve that you will get better and more proficient at using it. This is a language which gains access to university level work; a language which is unique and must be understood, used and mastered, in order to engage and thrive in your studies at this level.

The Challenge of Multimodality

We have taken an inverted approach of the academic study process. It is vital to invert this process that is to an extent, turn it upside-down, because changes in the contemporary university experience require entry level university students to work differently. There is no longer a sequential or

step-by-step process of engaging with your studies. Due to the extensive use of technology across all areas of university life, new entrants are bombarded with an incredible amount of information and you as a student will need to navigate through this mountain of information. For some students, based on our experience as university lecturers for many years, this sudden pile of information, compounded with the newness of university level study could at times lead to confusion, cause distractions, generate disorientation, and generally is incredibly frustrating. These initial feelings, if not overcome at this entry-to-university point, eventually grow potentially introducing attendance issues, increased risk of dropping-out and adding to the university attrition rates [perhaps of first-generation university students, more than others]. It is not possible to have a sequenced approach, even though sequencing, prioritising, organising and accessing are essential skills. This book empowers you with the essential skills required to navigate this new university world.

Academic Integrity and Integration

In accessing higher education taught in a university, the most important feature to be aware of is how responsible and independent the student needs to become in order to thrive academically. Being aware of this kind of studentship and the skills that it requires is very important, as it also leads to developments that are beneficial in the long run and result in a professional attitude that can guarantee effective employability too. EAP as a language/discourse variety of English, which is analytical and critical, both orally and in writing, whilst following protocols that earn respect, also means striving to develop holistically, expressing oneself in a confident, convincing and clear manner.

In order to achieve well at university, academic integration (i.e., feeling utterly part of the course, university and its support systems) is vital. From when the first step is taken through the doors of the university, striving for integration will help overcome all types of barriers, including low self-esteem. It means the student is responsibly taking ownership of their own place and space for study (online and physically). This responsible attitude towards studentship gives confidence to develop all of the skills essential to perform well in the academic language and discourse that is expected, including assessments. This also means attending regularly, meeting peers, tutors (including consciously setting up tutorials with the personal tutor), visiting and indulging in the library resources; hence developing a love of

higher learning from day one, or, in a nutshell, feeling excited about being in that space and certain that one belongs there!

The integrity part follows as the developing studentship ensures actions and behaviours are ethical and trustworthy. As the university student develops from novice to advanced adult learner, the mastery of EAP and its benefits become a way of achieving more than just an education, but also, a respected love of high learning, a holistic well-being and self-efficacy in all spheres of life.

This book has been organised into the core sections of (a) listening skills, (b) speaking skills, (c) reading skills, and (d) writing skills. There is some logic to organising the content of this book in this way, but we also welcome the debate this structure might also stir, which is great as it gets all of us interested in this area to rethink where and on what we place our emphases. There is always a conversation to be had about studying at higher education level, more commonly presented as going to university. We must not underestimate the thought which goes into this process, and for some students, for instance mature students this thinking process has gone on for many years and for many decades. The stories we have heard of life journeys until arriving at university have been both inspiring and humbling to us as lecturers of our students over the years. We therefore begin our book by thanking all our students we have taught over the years for sharing their journeys with us and this book, we hope, celebrates your journeys and paves the way for more students to navigate their way through university and enjoy the experience which through this book should be just a little bit easier. Thank you.

The book begins with listening skills because there is an internal ignition of the thought, followed by a soliloquy and various phases of listening to the self and dialoguing with the self. At some point, there is building the courage to share these internal ramblings with a carefully selected someone; friend, partner, family member, colleague, neighbour etc. This can be quite a delicate phase of encouragement, surprise, incredulity, or plain ridicule. We believe listening is happening at this stage; whether it is the listening to hear more about university or it is listening to process the internal and external opinions. Some prospective university students never get past this phase and so never follow through their thought of going to university. Although this may or may not reflect your thinking at some point in the past, we are glad you are reading this and you now are in university or pursuing your HE studies.

Whether listening to one's self or to others we believe that in order to work on building the skills, knowledge and aptitude for studying at university level, you have to be a very engaged listener. Sometimes you can be your own biggest critique, it is therefore important that you engage with your own thoughts, listen to yourself attentively and learn how to manage your thinking processes. There is an immense amount of external input which you will have to listen to as well as your internal workings of your mind. We therefore prioritise listening skills, unlike other books which you might have come across already on academic skills.

There is a taken-for-granted skill in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in particular if you do not use English as an Additional Language (EAL); speaking skill. Whilst we make this point, we set the context that using English as an additional language is not necessarily a disadvantage as globally huge swathes of the population are bilingual and multilingual. We must however highlight the fact that academic speaking does require, in some instances, structure, content and organisational accuracy similar to an academic essay which you should strive to master. It is therefore not a given that you have strong academic speaking skills based on your proximity to English. There is work to be done by every student irrespective of general linguistic aptitude or description. In this book we provide the content for you to use to review the nature of academic speaking, the variation of contexts and the opportunities to be taken to refine your use of academic English. Obviously, you do not necessarily have to use a specific structure to speak however there are contexts where and times when structure is critical. There is also the time-critical nature of speaking opportunities in academic contexts which, through, this book we help you not to squander and to prepare and take advantage of.

In terms of academic reading, there is beauty to it which you will absolutely enjoy when you get the hang of it. There is so much knowledge, research and understanding locked in books, journal articles, professional and specialist reports, and policy documents, amongst other sources, which you can only truly access and find the time and space to enjoy when you are at university. You might never have imagined thinking about doing all that extended reading at university as enjoyable; but it truly is, and we will leave you to discover as you go along. We will not leave you on your own; in this book we aim to help you to decipher texts and to prepare you with pointers and strategies to access the gold which academic texts hold. Enjoy! For sure, this will be only the beginning of the lifelong critical analytical frame of mind you will take to future policy documents and related reading which you will engage with beyond your university