

Academic Inquiry: Writing for Post-secondary Success

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This Canadian English for Academic Purposes (EAP) text is a brave new entry into a crowded market of texts focusing on EAP writing. Appropriate for Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) levels B1+-B2, the book is broken down into six units, each dealing with a different academic subject area: education, ecology, health science, science and engineering, political science, and business. It is nice to see the inclusion of science and engineering; many general EAP textbooks shy away from these subject areas in their reading texts, despite the fact that engineering students are proportionally well represented in EAP courses across the country. Most reading texts have a Canadian focus. Though *Academic Inquiry* is subtitled “Writing for Post-secondary Success,” it seems more appropriate for undergraduates than graduate students in terms of writing skills, choices, and readings.

Each unit comprises a series of modules and submodules related to the essay-writing process. For example, the *Academic Reading* module presents activities on reading and academic vocabulary, while the *Essay Fundamentals* module covers brainstorming and outlining, research, referencing, thesis statements, and introduction- and conclusion-writing skills activities. This modular approach, with sections clearly delineated, permits teachers flexibility in how the book is used, allowing activities to be cherry-picked and chapters to be easily divided up between lessons.

A definite strong point of *Academic Inquiry* is its approach to vocabulary. The first unit explains the frequency-based approach to vocabulary acquisition, in terms of both the Academic Word List and frequency bands. These then figure throughout the book, allowing students to embrace a principled approach to their own vocabulary development. Vocabulary lists for each chapter make review easy. The book’s promotional material emphasizes its learner-centred approach and, indeed, in addition to these vocabulary lists, each unit includes self-assessment rubrics, checklists, questionnaires, and writing samples, all of which facilitate learners’ taking an independent and self-led approach.

The presence of and approach to web research skills is another strong point. In Unit 2, students are presented with the principles of digital research: how to manipulate search strings and operators, and evaluating digital resources, among other skills. These are key skills for the modern student and ones too often outdated (or simply lacking) in many EAP writing texts.

The graphic design of the book is quite text-heavy, with some pages simply long blocks of text. More use of sidebars, margins, columns, and graphic elements such as boxes and headings would have made for a more dynamic interface.

A major limitation of this book is that its sole focus in terms of the text type for production is the five-paragraph essay (or variations thereupon). This shows a lack of alignment with current trends in EAP research, namely, the genre approach. A key aspect of EAP writing is that different academic disciplines have their own text genres, unified by a common communicative purpose, structure, style, content, and intended audience (Swales, 1990, p. 58). As recent corpus-based research suggests (for example, with the British Academic Written English Corpus), the five-paragraph essay is not a genre that students in many disciplines will ever actually be required to write. Why do publishers still continue to mandate texts focusing solely on the essay?

The other side of the coin is that the five-paragraph essay can be a useful vehicle for teaching the elements of sentence structure, grammar, and organization, which may then be applied more broadly in a variety of writing contexts. Regardless, a minimum of genre awareness should be a basic component of any modern EAP writing text. Both student and teacher users of a book should be made aware of what genre is, the ways in which genres can differ, and which writing skills are widely applicable and which will have to be adapted to different communicative contexts.

Overall, *Academic Inquiry* is a resource that allows for much flexibility in its classroom application, has great Canadian content, and contains some strong features and activities. Had it moved beyond the realm of the five-paragraph essay, it could have stood out even further from the crowd.

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The Reviewer

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Reference

Swales, J. (1990). *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.