AN INVESTIGATION OF ASSESSED WRITING REQUIREMENTS AT UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL IN THE HUMANITIES

by
Elizabeth Turner

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgement.

Signed: ………………………………………….

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This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Joan Church, and to the memory of my father, Robert John Allan Church.

Abstract

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses play an increasingly important role in supporting non-English speaking background students in their academic studies. Such courses have traditionally prioritised writing as the most significant literacy requirement (Johns, 1981). This prioritisation of writing reflects the perception that expertise in writing is an indication that students have acquired the cognitive skills demanded for university work (Weigle, 2002). It also reflects the fact that the majority of assessment tasks, which tend to drive student learning (Schwartz & Webb, 2002), require some form of writing. For EAP courses to be effective, curriculum design needs to be informed by knowledge of current academic discourse demands and writing requirements in relevant discipline areas.

Analysis of previous studies indicates that written assessment tasks vary between discipline areas. Findings also suggest that the most frequent assessment types vary over time as theoretical approaches to assessment change. This suggests the need to investigate the discipline-specific demands faced by different student cohorts enrolled on EAP courses. Some studies have identified the need for students to develop the skills involved in interpreting task instructions, as well as addressing the relevant topic and meeting the specific assessment requirements (Gravatt et al., 1997 and Carson, 2001). A key impetus for this study relates to this finding and was the fact that students enrolled on EAP courses were having difficulties interpreting instructions and marking criteria provided for some assessments in discipline-specific papers.

The aims of this study were three-fold. The first was to investigate and analyse the type and form of written assessment tasks and related requirements, in three undergraduate courses. The second was to investigate lecturers' perceptions and intentions in producing these tasks. Thirdly, the study aimed to investigate and describe students' understandings and experiences of the same tasks. The study therefore involved a triangulated methodology in terms of data collection. The three methods employed were analysis of assessment documents, semi-structured interviews with the lecturers concerned, and questionnaire surveys of students enrolled on the three papers.

The results of the study reinforce the findings of earlier studies in that there are considerable differences between discipline areas in assessment types and in the levels of associated cognitive demands. Although the study identifies what appears to be a new assessment type at undergraduate level – the 'literature review' assignment - lecturers' expectations for this assessment appear to vary between discipline areas. The differences identified appear to be influenced by lecturers' perceptions of the role of assessment, which in this case seem to be limited to the concept of assessment as the certification of learning, and as being predominantly summative in function. Furthermore the study shows that a significant proportion of student respondents found the majority of assessment instructions difficult to understand, and that only one of the papers provided assessment criteria. The findings suggest that the absence of explicit marking criteria appears to disadvantage non-English speaking background students in particular.

The conclusions of the thesis focus primarily on the dual, 'critical pragmatic', role of EAP practitioners in seeking to inform curriculum design and also to influence assessment practice; the implications of the study for the university's assessment and academic literacies policies and their implementation; the implications of the findings for EAP curriculum design, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Rationale for the study

The number of students who speak English as an additional language (EAL students) studying at English-speaking tertiary institutions has increased significantly since the 1980s. In New Zealand, for example, foreign-fee paying students at tertiary level increased by 191% between 1994 and 2000 (Ministry of Education, 2003) and the Ministry forecasts that this trend is likely to continue. As a consequence, the tertiary student body in these institutions has become increasingly diverse in terms of cultural, educational, and linguistic backgrounds (Borland & Pearce, 2002; Lea & Stierer, 2000). This growth in the numbers of EAL students has led in turn to an increasing demand for the provision of courses which support students in the development of the literacies and skills required for success in the English-speaking academic environment, as well as students' understanding of the paradigms that dominate discipline areas and academic English. At Auckland University of Technology, for example, the demand for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) papers at undergraduate level grew by approximately 200% between 2004 and 2005. University departments increasingly recognise the need to formalise the academic English support provided for EAL students, and to grant course credits for such papers.

For courses to be effective in addressing the academic English needs of students, the design of course curricula and of teaching and learning materials has to be informed by knowledge of current academic discourse types and requirements in a range of discipline areas. The field of EAP is not a new one, and there is therefore a body of related research which stretches back to the 1960s. This research can be loosely divided into two main strands: the analysis of the characteristics of discipline-specific texts, and the identification and analysis of students' actual needs.

In the past forty years the focus of the former strand of research has gone through a series of changes. In essence these changes reflect a movement from initial, descriptive analysis of discipline-specific texts, through a more pragmatic analysis of the linguistic expression of rhetorical functions, to contextual analysis of communicative and rhetorical purposes of academic texts (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001). More recently, in the current period,

research is influenced particularly by theories of discourse and genre analysis (see for example, Swales, 1990).

Inevitably, the second strand of needs analysis has been influenced by the theoretical approaches to textual analysis current at the time. Furthermore, as Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002) note, EAP course curriculum design is now influenced by a variety of research methods, theories and practices from other disciplines. However, none of the relevant studies reviewed in the following chapter has been explicitly framed by developments in educational theory or assessment practice. In other words, these earlier studies have not referred explicitly to assessment theories current at the time, nor to the fact that university assessment practice has been through a process of transition and continues to change. Perhaps as a consequence, none of these studies has investigated the rationale for assessment choices or assessment criteria.

The majority of EAP needs analysis studies have tended to focus on the investigation of writing requirements, and on the writing requirements of university assessment tasks in particular. Within this overall focus, studies have investigated a range of issues. These include student perceptions of academic writing needs (Kroll, 1979) and of difficulties in general terms (Gravatt, Richards, & Lewis, 1997), type and frequency of writing tasks (Bridgeman & Carlson, 1984; Carson, 2001; Gravatt et al., 1997; Horowitz, 1986; Moore & Morton, 2005), and staff priorities for evaluating student writing (Bridgeman & Carlson, 1984; Carson, 2001; Gravatt et al., 1997; Moore & Morton, 2005). Among the most significant findings that emerge from analysis of these studies is that there is diversity in the types of writing required. It is therefore, perhaps, not possible to identify typical writing tasks at any given time or over a period of time. This suggests the need for EAP practitioners to keep up-to-date with requirements, which vary from discipline to discipline, between undergraduate and graduate levels, and over time as assessment theory changes.

There is a further, apparently as yet uninvestigated finding that emerges from an analysis of earlier studies. This is the need for students to develop the skills involved in interpreting and meeting the requirements of task instructions, as well as the need to accurately address the relevant topic (Gravatt et al., 1997; Carson, 2001). It appears that to date, no study has investigated this beyond identifying the need itself.

The main impetus for the research outlined in this thesis relates particularly to this identified need. Students taking an undergraduate EAP paper began to bring assessment instructions from other first year papers with them to EAP tutorials. These students were asking for assistance in interpreting the assessment rubric and marking criteria. Superficial investigation of examples of these assessment instructions pointed to some considerable diversity in writing task types and their apparent cognitive demands. There also appeared to be differences in the nature and level of provision of both instructions and marking criteria.

1.2 Purposes of the study

One purpose of the study described in the following chapters, therefore, is to investigate this apparent diversity by analysing written assessment tasks, associated requirements and marking criteria. This investigation focuses on three first year undergraduate papers commonly taken by EAP students in one faculty at a single university. A further purpose is to investigate the academic paper coordinators' rationale for assessment choices and marking criteria; and the interpretations and intentions which produce these. The intention is to achieve a description of the relationship between the discipline area, the rationale for particular forms of written assessment, and the ways in which this relationship is expressed in actual assessment documents. The third purpose is to investigate students' understanding and experience of these same assessment tasks, with an emphasis on the challenges faced by EAL students in particular.

1.3 Outline of thesis structure

The following chapter reviews literature relating to the role of EAP and the scope of EAP research, relevant issues related to assessment theory, and selected previous research studies. The final sections of Chapter 2 include a summary of significant findings from research into university assessed writing tasks and the implications of these for EAP curriculum design. This is followed by summaries of the writing task types identified in the reviewed studies, and of the focus of these studies and methods employed. The final section presents a brief rationale for the method employed in the thesis study. Chapter 3 outlines the context of the study, the rationale for the selection of courses and informants, the methodological approach and the instruments and data analysis employed. Chapter 4 describes the significant findings of the study and discusses these. The last sections of

Chapter 4 identify significant emerging themes. Finally, Chapter 5 presents conclusions drawn from the study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The period since the 1980s has seen the increasing internationalisation of the higher education student body, with a dramatic increase in the numbers of non-English speaking background (NESB[1]) students studying at English-speaking universities. In New Zealand, the growth in the numbers of international and foreign-fee paying (FFP) students studying at tertiary level has been significant over recent years. Between 1994 and 2000, for example, FFP student numbers grew from 3,945 to 11,498, an increase of 191% (Ministry of Education, 2003). According to Ministry of Education statistics, in 2000 only 6.6% of these students came from English speaking countries, and the largest proportion (79.1%) came from Asian countries (ibid.). This continued growth in NESB student numbers has resulted in a parallel growth in provision of both pre-sessional and concurrent EAP-type courses, designed to either prepare students for, or support students in their academic studies.

An additional significant feature of the same period is that university assessment has gone through a process of change in its nature and purposes, which reflects developments in terms of the purpose of higher education itself . It seems relevant and useful therefore to position research aimed at informing the design of EAP-type course curricula in the context of a brief overview of the role of EAP and the scope of EAP research, as well as a review of changes in university assessment and of current perceptions of the purposes of university assessment.

The literature review in this chapter therefore firstly summarises the role of EAP and scope of EAP-related research. It then defines key assessment terms. The next sections of the review further establish the context of the present study by presenting a summary of the changes and forces for change in university assessment, and of current perceptions of the purposes of assessment. The review then summarises relevant research into skills and

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[1] The term NESB is used, rather than ESL (English as a second language) or EAL (English as an additional language) for consistency and in order to facilitate the distinction between NESB and ESB (English speaking background students).

writing task requirements in discipline-specific courses. This is followed by a summary of the main findings of task analysis studies and their methodological approaches. Finally, the review indicates the focus of the present study in terms of the key research questions and method.

2.2 The role of EAP and scope of EAP research
"English for Academic Purposes (EAP) – the teaching of English with the specific aim of helping learners to study, conduct research or teach in that language – is an international activity of tremendous scope." (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001, p.8)

As has already been indicated in the introduction to this chapter, the increase in the numbers of international students studying at English-speaking universities has been dramatic. In addition the dominant position of English - both as the second language in post-colonial territories and countries where English is used as the language of instruction, such as Hong Kong and Nigeria, and as an international language in the global economic and academic environments - has further increased the demand for English language courses in general. The fact that the education of many students has been influenced by their need to achieve fluency in "…the conventions of English language academic discourses to understand their disciplines and to successfully navigate their learning" (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002, p.1) has led to the growth in demand for EAP in particular.

EAP has developed in the past two and a half decades as one of two sub-divisions of English for Specific Purposes or ESP (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002), within the broader field of English as Second or Foreign Language (ESL or EFL). The second sub-division is English for Occupational purposes (EOP). Although the divisions may not always be clear-cut in practice, ESP tends to focus on providing English-language support and preparation for specific occupations (for example, English for Medical Professionals), whereas EAP focuses on the academic context. EAP courses therefore differ from 'General English' courses in that they focus on "…the specific communicative needs and practices of particular groups in academic contexts" (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002, p. 2). They are therefore designed to meet the specific needs of (generally university-level) learners, to be related in terms of content to relevant disciplines, associated activities and occupations, and to centre on appropriate and relevant language including semantics, syntax, lexis, discourse and the analysis of discourse (Strevens, 1988).

Today's EAP course curricula design is informed by "…a range of interdisciplinary influences for research methods, theories and practices" (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002, p.3). The growth and significance of EAP research itself is illustrated by the recent launch in 2002 of the *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* - an international journal dedicated to the dissemination of research in the field of "linguistic, sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic description of English as it occurs in the contexts of academic study and scholarly exchange…" (JEAP, 2002). The scope of relevant research is indicated by the (not exclusive) range of linguistic, applied linguistic and educational topics invited for submission:

> Classroom language, teaching methodology, teacher education, assessment of language, needs analysis; materials development and evaluation; discourse analysis; acquisition studies in EAP contexts, research writing and speaking at all academic levels, the sociopolitics of English in academic uses and language planning. (ibid.)

However, the prime focus of EAP research has been in terms of descriptions of the language of target discipline communities, and of their communicative practices and related activities (now generally referred to as discourse analysis), with the aim of informing course syllabus design and pedagogy. Flowerdew and Peacock (2001) provide a useful description of the ways in which the focus of such research has changed. The initial phase, current in the 1960s, was typified by register analysis, relating to the use of syntax and lexis in discipline-specific texts (see for example, Barber, 1962). This is characterised as a descriptive approach, rather than one which explains the function played by the presence or absence of particular registers or linguistic characteristics. In contrast, pragmatic analysis, more common in the 1980s, focuses on particular rhetorical functions (such as describing or classifying) and investigates the ways in which these functions are realized through particular linguistic forms. The next phase, as described by Flowerdew and Peacock, is characterised by contextual and in-depth analysis. This research focuses more on the communicative or rhetorical purposes reflected in the use of particular linguistic features in specific texts (see for example, Tarone, Dwyer, Gillette, & Icke, 1981), and sections of texts. It does not tend, however, to differentiate between the ways in which such functions

vary in different types of texts. The developments in information technology and access to large corpora of text for analysis, have allowed for more sophisticated techniques in rhetorical and pragmatic analysis, and for analysis and comparison of particular academic text types. The beginning of the 1990s saw the development of a new and influential phase based on the methodology of genre analysis, focussing on specific text-types and their linguistic characteristics, rhetorical structure and purposes (see Swales, 1990).

Hyland and Hamp-Lyons point out that more recent methods of pragmatic and rhetorical analysis provide evidence that use of language is invariably "socially situated and indicative of broader social practices" (2002, p.9). They describe current research as being increasingly influenced by the recognition that explanations of discourse practices are more and more seen in terms of the ways in which the distributions of particular textual features, and the ways in which texts are used, express the ideologies, beliefs and values of writers and speakers.

It can be argued that there would be little value in analysing the linguistic, rhetorical and socio-political features of academic discourse without research into the types of discourse and concomitant literacies and skills actually required of EAP students. The strand of discourse analysis research has therefore been paralleled by an area of research referred to as needs analysis. Generally accepted as fundamental to EAP (see for example, Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Jordan, 1997), needs analysis aims to identify the English language needs of EAP learners at either undergraduate or graduate level (or both). There are two main areas of needs analysis, which can be categorised as focusing on target situation needs (or external needs) and student learning needs - in other words what learners need to be able to do in the discipline-specific or target situation, and what learners need to learn in order to operate effectively in the target situation, respectively.

More recent research in the area of external or target needs analysis in particular has taken place in the context of a significant debate between advocates of different approaches to the teaching of EAP. The crux of this debate centres on criticism of EAP's "ideology of pragmatism" (Benesch, 2001). Benesch, for example, argues that EAP is traditionally based on the assumption that students should "...accommodate themselves to the demands of academic assignments, behaviors expected in academic classes and hierarchical

arrangements within academic institutions" (ibid., p.41) and that much needs analysis "…accepts target goals as immutable" (ibid., p.42). In other words, EAP is seen by some as having traditionally and unquestioningly accepted and promoted the target goals of other disciplines in order to develop students' academic literacies and skills, and so equip them to participate effectively in their academic communities (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002), rather than having recognised these goals but challenged them. Benesch responds to this analysis of the ideological shortcomings of much needs analysis research by supporting an approach based on 'critical pragmatism', discussed by (Pennycook, 1997). In short, rather than view academic discourses and their contexts as neutral and so base curricula on "slavish devotion to content course demands" (Benesch, 2001. p.41), Benesch argues that EAP should engage in scrutinising (and by implication, critiquing) target goals and conditions, and in evaluating and expressing its own ideological position in the academic cultural environment.

Wherever individual EAP researchers and practitioners may position themselves in terms of a political – pragmatic spectrum, and for whatever ideological reasons, the debate outlined has served to raise an important awareness that EAP can play a role, as Benesch signals, in influencing and possibly improving conditions for students in academic culture. More specifically, critical needs analysis can serve the purpose of identifying discipline-specific needs in terms of academic literacies and skills, as well as providing the opportunity to raise critical questions about the nature of those target needs (see Turner, Jackson-Potter & Jenner, 2004).

Target needs analysis then has focussed on a range of areas in terms of investigating required literacies and skills. These include: the importance to teachers of reading and writing, as well as aural and oral skills (for example, Johns, 1981), and the importance of these skills to students (see Ostler, 1980), teachers' requirements and expectations in terms of academic speaking skills (Ferris & Tagg, 1996), students' perceptions of listening and speaking skills requirements (Ferris, 1998), students' writing experience in discipline-specific classes (for example Leki & Carson, 1997), the relative importance of reading and writing skills (Carson, 2001) and the analysis of conceptual requirements for academic writing (for example Currie, 1993).

However, the majority of studies have tended to focus on writing requirements. This focus may in part reflect the perception that expertise in academic writing is particularly significant as "an indication that students have mastered the cognitive skills required for university work" (Weigle, 2002). This emphasis is certainly reflected in the priority traditionally given to writing as the most significant literacy requirement (Johns, 1981) in EAP courses.

Investigations of writing needs have tended to focus on the writing requirements of university assessment tasks in particular (Braine, 1989; Canseco & Byrd, 1989; Hale et al., 1996; Horowitz, 1986; Moore & Morton, 2005; Zhu, 2003, 2004). The rationale for this focus on task analysis relates perhaps to the fundamental purpose of EAP, in supporting students in their academic studies. Educational research has shown that students tend to take an instrumental approach to learning, and therefore to direct their learning activities in terms of the requirements of assessments. Assessment is seen therefore to "define what students regard as important" (Brown & Knight, 1994, p.12) and as the principal 'driver' of student learning (Schwartz & Webb, 2002). If writing is seen as a key indicator of students' mastery of the cognitive skills required to succeed in their university studies, and if most assessments require some form of writing, it is logical that much EAP research will have a primary focus on the type and nature of assessed writing requirements, and on associated literacies and skills.

EAP studies of university writing tasks tend to be framed by the theoretical and methodological approaches current at the time they are undertaken. For example recent studies such as Moore and Morton's investigation of university writing tasks across a wide range of undergraduate and graduate courses (2005), and Zhu's analysis of assignment types in Business courses (2004) are framed largely by the current and influential genre analysis approach to text analysis. In contrast, studies undertaken by educationalists into best current practice in university assessment (for example Nightingale et al., 1996) tend to be framed by the changes that have taken place in university assessment, as well as by current perceptions of the purposes of such assessment. It is argued here that EAP research into discipline-specific assessment requirements should also be informed by an understanding that the nature and purpose of university assessment has evolved significantly, and that it continues to change. As the editors of the *Journal for English for*

Academic Purposes point out, "Context and purpose are fundamental elements of EAP" (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2005, p.1). The following sections therefore review selected literature describing the ways in which university assessment has changed, as well as current perceptions of its characteristics and role.

2.3 Definitions of assessment

"Assessment is an integrated process for determining the nature and extent of student learning and development" (Linn & Gronlund, 2000, p.33)

The following sections present brief definitions of assessment terms which are relevant to the discussion of developments in terms of the nature and purposes of university assessment tasks.

2.3.1 Four types of assessment

Assessment procedures can be classified according to their "functional role in classroom instruction"(Linn and Gronlund, 2000, p.40). The authors identify four main categories of assessment in terms of function. In brief terms, the first of these is placement assessment, used for determining student performance at the beginning of instruction and with the objective of placing students in an "instructional sequence and the mode of instruction that is most beneficial" (ibid., p.41). Formative assessment has the purpose of monitoring learning progress and providing feedback to students and teachers. Diagnostic assessment is described as "a highly specialised procedure… to determine the causes of persistent learning problems and to formulate a plan for remedial action" (ibid., p.41). (However, the term diagnostic can also be used in a broader sense to describe assessment which aims to identify learners' specific language needs – at the beginning of a course, for example). Finally, summative assessment is described as coming typically at the end of a course or unit of instruction. The authors define this category of assessment as "designed to determine the extent to which instructional goals have been achieved and used primarily for assigning course grades or for certifying student mastery of the intended learning outcomes" (p.41-42). Techniques for summative assessment are influenced by the instructional goals, but they typically include teacher-made achievement tests (or exams), ratings on various types of performance, such as oral presentations, and the assessment of products, such as research reports.

Given that the focus of this study is to explore and describe on-course written assessment requirements for first year undergraduate students, rather than pre-course placement or diagnostic assessments, the following section deals in more detail with the differences between formative and summative assessment.

2.3.2 Formative assessment
"...formative assessment is a central element of learning, in that the feedback students receive enables them to develop and extend themselves in ways that end-point assessment cannot" (Brown and Knight, 1994, Preface)

Brown & Knight (1994, p. 15), describe formative assessment as having the purpose of providing an "estimate of achievement" which is then used to assist the process of learning. Their definition is a broad one in that the authors argue that formative assessment includes course work and its associated feedback, as well as discussions between students and their mentors, and examinations at the end of modules, where the results are used as the basis for identifying "areas for attention" in future modules. In line with this broad definition, Brown and Knight describe formative assessments as having a sense of being 'provisional' in that they are subject to discussion and negotiation as an element in the process of improving student performance. Harris & Bell (1994, p. 99) similarly define formative assessment in general terms as "using the process and results of assessing to influence (hopefully to facilitate) the learning process". This form of assessment is therefore used with the intention of improving student learning and course teaching, and so, according to Linn and Gronlund, is not used typically for the purpose of assigning course grades (2000). The purpose is to provide feedback about success and failures in learning to both students and teachers, enabling teachers to modify teaching and also to prescribe work for individual students and groups. Lynn and Gronlund (ibid.) describe it as depending largely on specially prepared, teacher-produced assessments and tests for each section of instruction.

2.3.3 Summative assessment and reliability
"Summative assessment ...is assessment which produces a measure which sums up someone's achievement and which has no other real use except as a description of what has been achieved" (Brown and Knight, 1994, p.15)

Although, as Rowntree (1987) points out, summative assessments such as end-of-course examinations may incidentally lead the learner to recognize weaknesses and strengths, and therefore to the modification of learning, this type of assessment generally focuses more on the use of results for external purposes (Harris & Bell, 1994). These results are usually

communicated as percentages and grades. There tends, therefore, to be an emphasis on their reliability - on ensuring that "any assessment result describes the phenomenon being assessed" (Brown & Knight, 1994, p. 14) and is therefore able to produce consistent results when repeated (Schwartz & Webb, 2002).

The terms formative and summative therefore relate to the purposes and intentions of the assessor, rather than to the methods of assessment (Brown and Knight, 1994; Rowntree, 1987). Methods are described as neutral and able to be used for both purposes of assessment. Therefore both formative and summative assessments may use the same methods and theoretically, measurements may have both purposes. Furthermore, Brown and Knight point out that there may be blends of purpose in assessment – in other words assessments may be designed to fulfil both formative and summative purposes (Brown & Knight, 1994; Schwartz & Webb, 2002). This point is relevant to the following set of terms used to describe a distinction in assessment which has become increasingly significant in recent years.

2.3.4 Continuous versus end-point assessment
"Continuous assessing is generally taken to mean assessing periodically throughout a particular learning process…" (Harris & Bell, 1994, p. 102)

Students in the past tended to be assessed at the end of a course of learning, which in some cases meant a final examination at the end of a three or four year degree programme. However, in recent years there has been a shift to a pattern of periodic assessment throughout individual learning processes, including at their end. This trend reflects and supports the recognition of the importance of formative assessment, and in theory allows teachers to give feedback to students on their development, and also to adjust teaching strategies (Rowntree, 1987). Continuous or periodic assessment may take the form for example, of written assignments, various forms of course work or oral presentations.

The distinction between these two types of assessment is often used to indicate the frequency of assessment as opposed to its purpose. However, Rowntree (ibid.) argues that the most significant distinction is whether continuous assessment is graded and therefore counts towards a final summative evaluation of students. It is possible for graded

continuous assessment to be used for formative purposes but also to form elements of a final, cummulative, summative evaluation of student performance.

A further feature of assessment procedures relates to the ways in which student performance is interpreted. There are two main methods of interpretation, referred to as norm-referenced and criterion-referenced assessments.

2.3.5 Norm-referenced assessment
"Norm-referenced assessments describe where performances lie in relation to other performances" (Brown & Knight, 1994, p.18)

A norm-referenced interpretation of assessment results describes a student's performance in terms of his or her relative position in a known group of students (Linn & Gronlund, 2000). The interpretation of results therefore is dependent on a comparison of performances against a norm which may be based on a local, national or international student group. Results are usually expressed in percentages. Rowntree (1987) articulates two major criticisms of this type of interpretation. The first of these is that it does not allow for the recognition of significant personal improvement or effort reflected in a student's work. Secondly, norm-referencing tends to reveal little of what a student has actually mastered in terms of subject matter or specific learning objectives. This is because a student's assessment position is dependent on how well he or she has performed in relation to other students. Or as Brown and Knight (1994, p.18) argue, the summative, norm-referenced grade "tells us little about anything, except the student's ability in relation to another group of students of unknown characteristics" - it reveals nothing about what a student does well, or competently or what they barely know (ibid.).

2.3.6 Criterion-referenced or standards-based assessment and validity
"provide(s) a measure of performance that is interpretable in terms of a clearly defined and delimited domain of learning task" (Linn & Gronlund, 2000, p. 42)

Rowntree (1987) summarises the philosophy underlying the criterion-referenced approach to assessment. He describes it as having the intention to show whether students have learned sufficiently well to attain given learning objectives and criteria , rather than to show whether some have outstripped others in terms of achievement. Such assessment allows for alignment of specific content or skills-based standards (or criteria) with different levels of performance based on descriptors of performance standards. Assessment tasks therefore,

will include items that are relevant to the learning objectives or outcomes to be assessed (Linn & Gronlund, 2000). The goal of such assessment is to achieve a description of the skills or knowledge students are able to demonstrate.

Brown and Knight (1994) also argue that criterion-referenced assessment lends itself particularly effectively to formative assessment, in that it provides the agenda for feedback and discussion with students. They emphasise the importance of validity with this method of interpretation, in that effective assessment must show whether a student is able to fulfil the criteria for which the curriculum has been designed. In other words, valid assessment measures what it is intended to measure (Schwartz & Webb, 2002). A further consideration highlighted in terms of criterion-referenced assessment, is the importance of careful development of criteria, and clear explanation of these to students (ibid.). Brown and Knight (1994, p.113) make the point that the most likely significant problem associated with the issue of providing feedback on criterion-referenced assessment is that "…tutors typically have multiple criteria that are often poorly articulated". Teachers' perceptions of quality tend to be framed as tacit knowledge – not always effectively articulated in written form. Thus, even when criteria are identified, students may only come to understand these through experience and feedback (ibid.). In other words, the fact that criteria may be named or described does not necessarily mean that students will interpret them in the ways intended by teachers.

2.4 Changes in university assessment
"Assessment in universities is changing – in its intent and in its methods" (Nightingale, Te Wiata, Toohey, Ryan, Hughes and Magin, 1996, p.6)

A recurring theme in the literature is that assessment in universities has changed and continues to change. These changes reflect changes in the role and nature of higher education itself, and a number of major factors are cited as influencing the development of current approaches to university assessment. One of the factors identified is developments in conceptions of professional learning, which have led to a move from norm-referenced to criteria-referenced, competence-based assessments (Brown & Knight, 1994). Boud (1998) argues that moves by professional bodies to ensure a closer relationship between courses in higher education and professional practice have had a significant impact on assessment practice. He cites in particular concerns about the validity of earlier assessment approaches,

in particular about the relationship between what was traditionally assessed and what students were actually expected to be able to do after graduation. Boud also highlights concerns about the suitability of traditional assessments in terms of their ability to test understanding and performance as opposed to knowledge acquisition.

A second significant factor is the diversity in higher education institutions as a consequence of the increase in student numbers (Atkins, Beattie, & Dockrell, 1993). This is perceived in general terms as a catalyst for re-evaluation of the purpose of higher education in a new "mass system" (ibid., p. 10) and of assumptions in terms of teaching and learning (Brown & Knight, 1994). It is also described as specifically influencing the change to criterion-based assessment in Australian universities, thereby allowing the range of needs of an increasingly large and diverse university population to be met (Boud, 1998).

The third major influence is the development of information technology (Brown & Knight, 1994). Apart from examples of its role in student-self-assessment and the acceleration of marking of multiple-choice tests (ibid.), Mason (1998) also cites the impact of computer technology and the Internet on the 'globalisation' of education. Mason refers to the changes required in higher education as a result of the influence of technology. These are characterised by some as requiring a "move from content to process: ability to communicate, especially across cultures, ability to work in, form and lead teams, and particularly the ability to find, synthesise and manipulate information" (ibid., p. 41). He suggests that summative assessment systems are rarely able to assess these types of non-cognitive and transformative learning objectives.

Other factors cited as influencing changes in assessment include the wider range of abilities and skills seen as required by graduates. For example, the Australian Higher Education Council in 1992, referred to the desirable characteristics of graduates as not only including the acquisition of knowledge, but also:

> …the mastery of the technical skills of a discipline, the development of abilities such as problem solving, critical thinking and effective communication as well as development of attitudes and dispositions such as commitment to working in groups and to ethical practice within one's discipline. (cited in Nightingale et al., 1996, p. 7)

The current graduate profile for Auckland University of Technology is similar. In addition to graduates having a "thorough understanding of the relevant body of knowledge", programmes (and by implication the assessment on these) are described as ensuring that graduates are skilled in communication, problem solving, critical analysis and relevant technologies (Auckland University of Technology, 2002a).

Schwartz and Webb (2002) similarly identify a shift in major objectives of the curriculum from the testing of disciplinary or conceptual knowledge to the more flexible assessment of knowledge in different contexts, and the development and assessment of general or generic transferable skills, seen as required by graduate students. They point out that this shift has led to the development of new and different assessment 'vehicles'. The traditional timed essay-based exam is alone no longer an adequate vehicle for the new approach to integrated assessment of "…a range of knowledge, skills and attitudes…" (Nightingale et al., 1996, p.3).

In addition, Atkins (1995) argues that modularisation of courses and the introduction of credit transfers have contributed to the recognition of deficiencies in earlier forms of assessment. Atkins et al (1995) point out that assessment has also been influenced by the increase in the number of non-traditional and mature students as a result of the growth in student numbers, as well as growth in continuing professional development and vocational courses for specific local markets.

Traditionally accepted forms of assessment - the norm-referenced, summative assessments of the 1970s - focused on ranking and comparing students, according to a quantitative 'measurement' of the knowledge they had acquired in a particular subject area or course. The achievements of students were seen in quantitative terms, and assessors' judgements were viewed as definitive statements of students' abilities (Nightingale, et al, 1996). Thus in terms of four contemporary purposes of higher education proposed by Atkins (1995), assessment traditionally focused largely on the "acquisition of conceptual frameworks, (and) major current theories" (ibid., p.30) as well as detailed and in-depth knowledge of certain aspects of the subject studied. This focus reflects only three aspects of the second purpose of

higher education identified by Atkins as the preparation of students for "knowledge creation, application and dissemination" (ibid., p. 26). (Other purposes identified by Atkins are the provision of "a general educational experience of intrinsic worth in its own right" (ibid., p.25), the preparation of students for specific professions or occupations, and the preparation of students for employment in general.)

These traditional forms have given way, in general terms, to assessment which allows for the development and assessment of a wider range of abilities, and in particular to a shift towards criterion-referenced assessment of students' transferable personal skills in addition to the traditional assessment of academic content (Brown & Knight, 1994). Furthermore, formative assessment plays an increasingly central role in supporting and providing feedback for students' learning, and assists students in the development of independent critical judgement and self-reflection (Nightingale et al., 1996).

This shift in the nature of university assessment mirrors a change in academic perceptions of the purposes of university assessment, as described by Ashcroft and Palacio (1996). Some twenty years ago in the U.K., for example, the main purpose of assessment for many lecturers, according to Ashcroft and Palacio, was "quite clear, and relatively unproblematic: it was to collect marks…so as to inform registrars (and ultimately students) of how well students had done in end of year or end of course examinations" (1996, p.10). According to Ashcroft and Palacio, this approach reflected the assumption that assessments of students' knowledge and understanding, and of what they could do, were viewed as the key measurable outcomes of the educational process. More recently however, there has been a move to viewing assessment as a "learning experience" (ibid., p.26), where assessment tasks in themselves require the acquisition of new learning.

It is useful to note here that the institution concerned in this study has a policy on the assessment of student achievement, which reflects current theory and recent changes in university assessment (Auckland University of Technology, 2002b). The policy emphasises standards-based approaches to assessment "so that the entire process [of assessment] is …transparent, fair and valid" (ibid. p.1). It further states that for individual papers the specific assessment requirements and criteria will be "clearly communicated to students in

writing in advance of any assessment" (ibid. p.2), and that these will be consistent with the graduate profile for the relevant programme. Guidelines produced to supplement this policy (Auckland University of Technology, 2003) make it clear that the focus is mainly on summative assessment, while acknowledging the importance of formative assessment.

Developments in the nature of university assessment have led to general consensus as to the current purposes of university-level assessment which are summarised in the following section.

2.5 Current perceptions of the purposes of university assessment
 "Assessment is at the heart of the undergraduate experience. Assessment defines what students regard as important, how they spend their time, and how they come to see themselves as students and then as graduates. It follows then that it is not the curriculum which shapes assessment, but assessment which shapes the curriculum and embodies the purposes of higher education" (Brown & Knight, 1994, p.12)

The literature in terms of current definitions of the purposes of university assessment varies in depth and detail according to different contexts. Boud, for example, in a conference paper presented at the University of Queensland, summarises the purposes succinctly as twofold, namely to "certify and prompt learning" (1998, p.6). Atkins et al (1993) in their report to the UK Department of Employment, present a more detailed analysis, which is summarised below. Analysis of purposes identified in a range of sources reveals that these generally fall into one of three categories, which are to certify learning, to act as a prompt for learning, or to act as a performance indicator in terms of teaching.

Brown and Knight, in *Assessing Learners in Higher Education* (1994) suggest that apart from allowing for grading and final degree classification (certification) there are a number of other reasons for assessment. One of these is that students are used to it and expect it. Furthermore, it can provide feedback and therefore act as a source of motivation, as well as providing the basis for diagnosis of faults and for helping students to improve their performance (prompt for learning). In addition they suggest that assessment helps students make choices about further study, as well as acting as a "performance indicator" for staff and for the course and institution (for example, in signalling shortcomings in teaching methodologies or in terms of assignment briefings). Their final point, also relating to the concept of assessment as a prompt for learning, is that "assessment is learning" (ibid., p.36).

Atkins et al (1993) in their report, *Assessment Issues in Higher Education,* for the UK Department of Employment, present a list of 13 reasons for assessing students, which are listed in three (un-named) groups:

- to establish the level of achievement reached at the end of a course or unit
- to establish progress during a course or unit and give feedback on it
- to diagnose strengths and weaknesses leading to remedial action or to extension of learning if needed
- to consolidate work done so far – a learning experience in itself
- to motivate students

- to predict a student's likely performance level in the future
- to determine whether a student is 'safe to practice'
- to select for entry to further training, employment etc.
- to conform to the requirements of external regulatory bodies

- to give individual staff feedback on the effectiveness of their teaching
- to determine the extent to which course aims have been achieved
- to obtain information on the effectiveness of the learning environment
- to monitor standards over time

(Atkins et al., 1993, p. 8-9)

These groups, however, confirm the analysis already described, in that they can be categorised as reasons relating to firstly motivation for and feedback on student learning and achievement (prompts for learning), secondly to students' qualifications for future study and employment (certification), and thirdly to the effectiveness and quality of teaching (performance indicator).

Brown, Race and Rust (1995) focus specifically on lecturers' perceptions of the purposes of assessment. They identify and list ten key reasons given by lecturers for undertaking assessment. It is interesting that the reasons identified can again be classified into three categories. The first category relates to certification - classifying or grading achievement, estimating the potential for learners to graduate to higher levels or courses, and guiding students' course or option choices. The second category is assessment as a prompt for learning - providing feedback to students, enabling students to correct errors and rectify shortcomings, motivating learners, and assisting in the application of "abstract principles to practical contexts" (ibid., p. 77). The third relates to assessment as a means of evaluation or performance indicator for teaching and courses - providing feedback to lecturers on the

effectiveness of their teaching or promotion of learning, and providing statistics for both institution-based and external bodies.

EAP research into assessment requirements investigates those aspects of tasks that relate to the role of university assessment in certifying achievement (summative purposes), and as a prompt for learning with associated feedback (formative purposes). It seems relevant for critical needs analysis to recognise the broader context outlined above, as well as to consider the effectiveness of assessments in fulfilling these purposes.

2.6 Relevant previous studies

The study of assessed writing requirements described here relates particularly to two strands of EAP needs analysis research. The first of these includes investigations of English language *skills* requirements in university courses. The second focuses on discipline-specific *tasks analysis*. Both strands have the general aim of assisting in assuring the relevance of EAP course-content, by informing EAP curriculum planners in broad terms about the "linguistic and cultural demands of authentic university classes" (Johns, 1998). The following sections of this review summarise significant previous studies in these two strands. The analysis of these studies focuses predominantly on findings related to writing skills and writing assessment requirements.

2.6.1 Needs analysis: academic skills

"Assessing English skills requirements is becoming a common practice among researchers and curriculum designers, especially those responsible for service or developmental courses for colleges or universities where the English taught is intended to fulfil the specific communication requirements of academic subjects" (Johns, 1981, p.51)

There have been a number of significant investigations of "necessary English skills" (Johns, 1981, p.52). One of the earliest relevant studies of this type was carried out by Ostler (1980), who argues that needs analysis allows curriculum planners to work on statistical data rather than assumptions about the academic skills required by non English-speaking background (NESB) students.

Ostler's aim was to investigate students' assessments of the academic skills needed to complete their studies successfully. Ostler's study involved 131 undergraduate and post-graduate students at a single North American university. They represented 27 disciplines

which were classified into 10 discipline areas, with approximately three quarters of students from the 'Soft Sciences', Hard Science, Business and Engineering. Students were asked to respond to a questionnaire listing 16 skills and to identify the skills needed according to their level of study and major discipline area at the time of survey. They were also asked to undertake a self-assessment of their success in communicating and comprehending English in a number of academic and social settings. In addition respondents were asked to complete three sentence-combining exercises.

Ostler found that the need to read text books and take notes in class, was high for both undergraduate and post-graduate students. The results reveal that at both graduate and post-graduate levels, students identified their greatest overall needs (averaging across discipline areas) as follows: the ability to read text books (90%), take notes in class (84%) and ask questions in class (68%), and to write research papers and read academic journals (58% respectively). These priorities were followed by essay exams (48%) and book reviews or critiques (46%).

The findings revealed differences in needs across the different discipline areas. For example, students majoring in Soft Sciences and Public Affairs identified a particular need to be able to write research proposals and participate in panel discussions. There were also significant differences between the academic levels in terms of required academic skills. For example, while note taking and text reading skills were ranked at over 80% across all academic levels, perhaps predictably writing research papers ranked at 80% for Ph.D. students and only 53% for year one and two students.

Ostler qualifies the findings by pointing out that "…a need to possess a skill must not be equated with not having acquired that skill" (ibid., p.498). She argues, however, for the need to move beyond the teaching of general reading skills in EAP, to include a focus on reading strategies for understanding the rhetoric of different types of writing, in particular those in academic journals and papers. She also identified the need at undergraduate level to include the writing of critiques or book reviews in the curriculum, as well as more work in sentence combining and related grammar skills, and further work on summarising skills at both undergraduate and graduate level.

John's questionnaire-based survey (1981) focused on academic faculties' perceptions of the most important skills. The study sought data from 140 randomly-selected academic staff members at a single North American university. Respondents were asked to focus on one of their classes at either undergraduate or graduate level, and to rank listed English skills in order of their importance in terms of success in those classes. The responses were considered to represent a reasonable distribution of a total of 11 departments or disciplines, including satisfactory representation from Engineering and Business, the most popular major discipline areas for NESB students at that institution.

In terms of general skills, reading was ranked first more frequently than writing. More than 50% of respondents from Business, Engineering, Humanities and Social Science faculties ranked reading as most important and overall 45% ranked reading first, with 23% ranking writing as most important. A comparison of data related to undergraduate and graduate classes revealed a considerable degree of agreement between faculty at the two levels. Overall, reading, listening, writing and speaking were ranked in that order of importance (speaking was ranked first only by faculty members of departments where courses involved oral presentations).

Johns suggests that these results raise questions in terms of the traditional emphasis on writing as the most significant literacy requirement for university students. In terms of the ways in which the study informs curriculum development, Johns argues that writing and speaking should be secondary to reading & listening, as opposed to being central aspects of the curriculum, and should be related to reading and listening skills. However, it seems relevant here to quote from the wording of the questionnaire (Johns, 1981, p.56), which asks: "Of the four major skills categories, which are the most essential to *success in your classes*?" (emphasis added). It can be argued that the same academic staff asked to respond in terms of essential skills for assessment tasks, rather than for success in classes, might respond with different priorities.

Other relevant studies in this strand of skills needs analysis focus on the specific area of writing skill needs, rather than on investigating the relative importance of all four major skill areas. An example of these is the study undertaken by Eblen (1983). Although the purpose of the study was to inform the institute's English department in its assessment of

students' written English competency at graduation, the findings also have significance for EAP.

The specific aim of the study was to identify the qualities of student writing valued by academic staff, major problems associated with student writing, and the relationship between faculty standards and the university's competency requirement on graduation. The study took the form of a questionnaire-based survey of academic teaching staff at a single North American university. 266 responses from full-time lecturers in five academic discipline areas were received. These areas were Education, Humanities and Fine Arts, Natural Sciences, Social and Behavioural Sciences, and Business.

In terms of the most important writing quality, respondents considered "overall quality of ideas" (ibid., p.344) as most significant, followed by organisation, development, grammatical form and coherence. The major problems identified with student writing fell into two groups. The first and most frequently cited of these related to 'maturity of communication' (57% of problems listed). In order of significance these problems were: logical organisation of ideas, development of and support for ideas, audience awareness, clarity of ideas, coherence, and failure to follow directions. The second group (43%) related to standards of written English, including, in order of importance, grammar, spelling and punctuation, sentence structure, referencing and vocabulary choice. The study also revealed that the most frequent form of writing was the essay test – which was cited most often in Social and Behavioural Sciences - followed by various types of report writing. Eblen (ibid., p.347) found that writing was significantly weighted towards "extensive and transactional mode" and towards writing as a means of testing of material learned, rather than as a means of learning.

The most significant overall finding, perhaps, is that the quality, organisation and development of ideas is reported as more highly valued by lecturers than correct grammatical form and coherence. At the same time, however, clarity of ideas and coherence are seen by the same lecturers as significant writing problems. It can be argued that the cognitive, grammatical and language skills necessary for coherence at sentence level are to an extent prerequisites for clarity of meaning and coherence of argument at discourse level. In other words, the overall quality of ideas most valued by the lecturers in

Eblen's study is arguably to a large extent dependent on the ability to be coherent at sentence level. This issue becomes increasingly significant as students progress through their academic careers. Inaccuracy at sentence level in first-year undergraduate student writing may be overlooked by discipline-specific lecturers for pragmatic reasons. However these inaccuracies become increasingly problematic for staff and students. At graduate level, for example, Strauss, Walton and Madsen (2003) found that thesis supervisors reported that time spent on language issues was frequently viewed as a distraction from time that should preferably be dedicated to reviewing the content of the thesis. Furthermore supervisors felt that students' inadequacies in terms of language, interfered with the accurate expression of ideas.

A further example of skill-specific needs analysis is the study carried out by Leki and Carson (1997). This research draws on an earlier study by the authors (Leki & Carson, 1994) which surveyed NESB students on the types of writing required of them in ESL writing or composition classes, and in their academic courses. The most significant finding of the 1994 study was that in discipline-specific courses, student writing is predominantly based on or refers to knowledge from source texts. This contrasts with writing for EAP classes where the source of information for writing was predominantly personal experience.

The aim of the 1997 study was to explore students' experiences of writing without a source text (any source of relevant information), with a source text as a 'springboard' for ideas, and with writing "with responsibility for a source text" (ibid. p.43). Data collection involved a first set of interviews at the beginning of term, with 27 undergraduate and graduate NESB students from a range of 13 discipline areas, who were enrolled in EAP writing classes. 12 of these students participated in a second round of interviews towards the end of the term, along with nine new interviewees.

Students identified a number of advantages and disadvantages for all three writing conditions. What is perhaps most significant, although perhaps not surprising, is the finding that writing for academic courses was characterised by responsibility for text-related content, with the related challenges of the need for a perception of audience, language needs in terms of vocabulary and knowledge of academic genres, avoiding plagiarism, and the need for formal language. In contrast, the main focus of EAP classes was perceived as

being self-expression and as 'practising writing'. Although students generally found writing without responsibility for source texts in EAP to be helpful in developing linguistic skills, Leki and Carson argue that basing EAP writing classes on 'text-responsible' writing transforms these from being "solipsistic and self-referential" (ibid., p. 64) to classes that are fundamental to students' personal and academic development. Students in such classes learn how to "encounter, manage, and come to terms with new information by learning how to integrate it textually with existing knowledge schemes" (ibid., p.64).

In summary, the four studies reviewed in this section investigated the skills required by students at both undergraduate and graduate levels in single universities. The studies aimed to identify either students' perceptions and experiences of needed skills (Ostler, 1980; Leki & Carson, 1997), or academic staff respondents' perceptions of required skills (John, 1981; Eblen, 1983). Three of the studies involved the use of a questionnaire which either listed preconceived skills (Ostler, op cit.; John, op cit.) or listed qualities of writing, which reflect the need for certain skills (Eblen, op cit.). The fourth study collected data by means of recorded interviews with students (Leki & Carson, 1997.). The most significant relevant findings are as follows. Firstly, there are differences between undergraduate and graduate skills requirements. Secondly, the most frequently occurring written genres identified at undergraduate level are essay exams, book reviews or critiques and report writing or research papers. Students also require reading skills for academic texts and note taking skills and the ability to write with responsibility for source texts. Finally, overall, academic staff ranked reading, listening, writing and speaking skills in that order of importance and value the quality of ideas and structure over correct surface features in student writing.

Issues of methodology will be discussed in more detail at the end of the following section. However, Ostler's point remains significant (op cit.). Identifying student and staff perceptions of 'necessary' English skills does not necessarily identify learners' actual needs in terms of skills development. Nor do these perceptions necessarily accurately reflect the specific skills required in completing assessment tasks – perhaps the most pragmatic and significant measure of success in university classes. This issue not only raises questions in terms of the conclusions for EAP course curricula drawn by John (op cit.) in particular, but also points to the need to investigate the specific requirements of assessment tasks. The following section, therefore, outlines significant studies relating to academic task analysis.

2.6.2 Needs analysis: task analysis

"By placing writing practice squarely in academic contexts, EAP teachers can insure (sic) the maximum transferability of the skills they teach. To do this in an informed way, however, they need to have a clear idea of the tasks students will face in the university…"(Horowitz, 1986, p.460).

" task (is) defined as the way in which the mastery of the text / course content is measured and / or the course requirements are fulfilled" (Carson, 2001, p. 53)

A number of studies in the area of analysis of writing tasks have focused on specific discipline areas – for example Braine's investigation of writing assignments in Science and Technology (1989), and Zhu's study (2004), which focussed on analysis of writing assignment types in Business courses. There are two main rationales for this selective focus. The first is that few studies had previously been done in those discipline areas (for example, Braine, 1989), and yet those studies that had been done identified differences between different disciplines in terms of writing requirements. The second reason is that the areas concerned were, or are, particularly popular with international students. At the time of Braine's study, 40% of foreign students at American universities were enrolled in Science and Technology, while according to Zhu (2004), Business is the most popular field of study for international students in the United States.

A further related trend has been for studies to investigate graduate writing assignments (for example, Canseco & Byrd, 1989; Casanave & Hubbard, 1992) and these also tend to be in single discipline areas (for example, Business in the case of Canseco & Byrd's study and engineering in that of Jenkins, Jordan, & Weiland (1993) The key reasons cited for this focus in terms of graduate level writing requirements in particular, in addition to those already mentioned, include the increasing proportion of graduate NESB students, compared with a reduction in numbers at undergraduate level. Furthermore there is an increasing tendency at US and Australian universities in particular to include credit bearing ESL courses in graduate academic programs (see Canseco & Byrd, 1989 and English Language Study Skills Centre, 2002).

Although these trends may be significant and worth noting, the following paragraphs focus on needs analysis studies which incorporate one or more discipline areas related to Social Sciences or Arts subjects. This selection reflects the fact that the study described in this

thesis is in the limited context of Faculty of Arts courses. The studies that follow are discussed in chronological order. This is to allow for some analysis of the ways in which research in this area has generally become increasingly detailed and complex in terms of its scope.

The earliest relevant study cited here was undertaken by Kroll (1979), and aimed to inform curriculum planners deciding on the types of writing students should be exposed to in EAP courses. Kroll surveyed past English writing experience, present writing needs (in terms of tasks in classes other than English classes, as well as non-academic needs) and student perceptions of future English writing needs. There were 35 international student respondents (24 male & 11 female) enrolled at a North American university in first year 'freshman' English courses specifically for NESB students. In addition, there were 20 native speaker (NS) student respondents enrolled in equivalent first year English courses for native speakers – a "traditional expository essay course" (ibid., p.225). Data was collected by means of a questionnaire, which listed six types of written academic discourse-types, as well as interviews with 24 of the international student sample.

Past writing needs are not relevant in the context of this thesis. Furthermore, students' perceptions of future writing needs can only be speculative, and are acknowledged as such by Kroll (ibid). However, given that caveat, international students thought that reports of various types and business letters would be their most significant future writing needs. Most relevant here are the 'present' academic writing needs of international students in terms of course work. The relevant results are presented according to the percentage of NESB students indicating that they were required to write each of the different types of activity, and in order of significance: "write reports of lab experiments in continuous discourse" [54%], write term papers (exams) [54%], "integrate mathematical or statistical data into a report" [33%]; "write outlines" [17%]; "write book reports" [14%]; and "report in writing on library research" [7%] (Kroll, 1979, p.223).

In addition, international students identified (perhaps not surprisingly) that the most challenging writing assignments they had encountered were term papers in discipline areas not related to their major program of study. (One example cited was an American history

paper for a Chemistry student.) 80% of NS speakers are reported as identifying papers they had to write for their first year English course as most challenging.

There are a number of criticisms that can be made of this study. Firstly, Kroll (ibid., p.224) comments that the types of academic writing activities identified were predictable and in any case already "frequently" formed part of the core of English writing courses offered as service courses to other departments. However, it is not clear whether the international students involved in the study would be required to enrol in one of these service courses, and thus possibly have their needs in terms of academic writing addressed (given that the relevant academic discourse are frequently covered, but not invariably). The implication is that the international students were enrolled on one of the institution's "traditional expository essay course(s)" for first year students (ibid., p.225). Kroll comments that this type of course does not expose students to some of the types of writing identified as required in academic courses. She argues that such expository essay-based English courses should, however, give students the opportunity to become familiar with types of discourse required of them in other courses. This raises the question as to why essay writing was not explicitly included in the listed writing activities in the questionnaire. Kroll defends the continuation of these courses based on belief in the "connection between clear and logical thinking and clear expository and argumentative prose" (ibid., pp. 226-227). She then acknowledges the need to include in courses genres relevant to students' future English needs related to employment – but not *academic* needs. The rationale given for this is that it is not difficult to motivate students to undertake writing tasks they perceive as having some practical relevance "to their lives" (ibid., p. 227). This appears to assume that students will not see the relevance of discipline-specific discourse types to their academic lives.

A further criticism is that the study does not make it possible to make comparisons between academic writing requirements in different discipline areas. All we learn in terms of the international students' majors is that "the majority are future engineers, scientists, and businessmen (sic) of various sorts" (ibid., p.220). This would perhaps explain the ranking of discourse types noted above. Finally, no attempt is made to address the issue of how international students' needs might be met in terms of their difficulties with term papers in fields not related to their major area of study.

A large-scale study, aimed at identifying academic writing tasks required of students at first-year undergraduate and graduate level, was carried out by Bridgeman and Carlson (1984). Although the overall purpose of the study was to inform the design of pre-entry writing evaluation procedures – in particular for Test of English as a Foreign language (TOEFL) – the findings also have significance for EAP course design.

The questionnaire-based survey investigated 190 departments in 34 United States and Canadian universities with over 1000 foreign student enrolments. At undergraduate level the survey was directed at English departments on the basis of information that for first-year students, this area required the highest amount of writing. Six graduate discipline areas were also investigated: Electrical Engineering, Civil Engineering, Computer Science, Chemistry, Psychology (with the highest NESB student enrolments among social science departments) and Master of Business Administration.

Academic staff respondents were asked to respond to 10 listed writing tasks or "topic types" (ibid., p. 254), with two examples of actual tasks given to illustrate each topic type. These topic types are described as having been arrived at through extensive preliminary discussions with a range of informants. Respondents were asked to indicate the frequency of each writing task in first year courses, and to rate tasks in terms of importance.

As with earlier studies the results showed considerable variation across discipline areas and between levels of study. However, the most relevant findings relate to undergraduate writing requirements. In this respect, expository or critical writing assignments were reported as frequent for undergraduates in English departments and exams with essay questions were quite common across both levels. Writing which requires organising an argument using several sources, and arguing a particular point of view was regarded as very important, as was analysing or critiquing ideas. The compare and contrast topic type was most popular with undergraduate English faculty, with this topic type seen as above average in terms of complexity, and requiring a comparatively high level of personal involvement on the part of the writer. Academic staff also reported that discourse level characteristics (for example quality of content, paper organisation) were more significant in evaluating student writing than sentence or word level features.

A later study by Horowitz (1986) investigated the demands placed on the student writer - particularly in terms of form and organisation - by writing tasks. Horowitz analysed university handouts, and in contrast to earlier studies (Kroll, 1979; Bridgeman & Carlson, 1984), employed an inductive approach to the classification of tasks – particularly in terms of genre and the variety and nature of writing tasks. The aim was to inform EAP teachers as to the most appropriate writing models and discourse structures for students, and also to provide information for curriculum design relevant to the tasks students are likely to encounter.

The main rationale for Horowitz's study was that designing authentic writing tasks in EAP remained fundamentally a matter of guesswork. This, he argues, was due to the fact that previous studies (for example Bridgeman & Carlson, 1984; Johns, 1981; Kroll, 1979 and Ostler, 1980) – which asked academic staff or students to rank lists of academic skills or tasks in order of importance and /or to indicate how frequently these tasks were assigned to students - had not adequately identified the types of academic writing tasks that were *typical*. His second major criticism was that these earlier studies were based on a list of preconceived task types to which respondents must respond. These lists vary from study to study and thus indicate a lack of agreement as to task classification.

Horowitz analysed handouts on 54 writing assignments and essay exams given to students at a single North American university. These consisted of assignments from 29 courses (only one of which was aimed exclusively at graduates) in 17 departments.

Horowitz acknowledges that the low rate of response to the request for task documents (5%) limits the ability to generalise in terms of differences between departments. None the less the findings allow for some informative preliminary conclusions concerning the range and characteristics of undergraduate tasks in that university. To summarise relevant findings, the analysis showed that assignments appeared to be classifiable into seven categories, some of which are not referred to in previous studies. These categories were: summary of or reaction to an article or book (9 assignments); annotated bibliography (1); report on specified participatory experience (9); (expository) connection of theory and data (10); problem-solving case study (5); research project (5), synthesis of multiple sources (15 from 11 departments). The last category, conforming most closely to the previous

classification of the library research paper (Kroll, 1979) is characterised as mainly informative but a minority of assignments (3) required evaluation.

Horowitz also found that writing tasks were generally controlled. Many (65%) specified content and organisation of content in detail, with lists or headings and subheadings. Others contained a "topicless thesis statement" (ibid., p. 452) – where the specific topic focus is not given, but where nonetheless the content of the relevant course provides a significant degree of control over the writing required. (An example cited is an international marketing recommendation to management where students select the country and product.)

He concludes that the most significant aspect of the "generalized American academic writing task" (ibid., p.455) is that it emphasises recognition of (relevant) data and its reorganisation.

Ten years after Horowitz's study, Hale, Taylor, Bridgeman, Carson, Kroll and Kantor (1996) published a large-scale study of writing tasks. Its main purpose, like that of Bridgeman and Carlson (1984), was to inform the development of the TOEFL English language proficiency test, by identifying the assessed writing tasks required of students in the academic environment. What differentiates this study from preceding ones, however, and makes the findings particularly useful for EAP practitioners, is the degree of detail involved in differentiating between types of assignments.

The authors collected writing tasks in 162 first-year undergraduate & graduate courses at eight universities - one in Canada and seven in the USA. They chose courses enrolling substantial numbers of international students. Their intention was to identify types of writing assignments students in general, and international students in particular, might be expected to produce in courses teachers identified as requiring assigned writing. Five disciplines at graduate level were included: Business, Chemistry, Civil Engineering, Computer Science, and Psychology. Eight subjects were included at undergraduate level, consisting of the five included at graduate level, and also economics, English and History, representing courses from the core undergraduate curriculum.

Data collection was based on requests for task materials and course syllabuses as well as a questionnaire for academic staff relating to the courses concerned. An analysis of a sample of assignments identified the most significant variables or 'dimensions of difference', which formed the basis of the classification scheme - arrived at by means of "largely subjective and iterative process" (ibid., p.40). In total 110 assignments were analysed. The study also identified the frequency or prevalence of the range of assignment types.

The classification scheme is based on six key variables, which are described in the following paragraphs. The first is 'locus' which differentiates between in-class assignments involving time constraints, and out of class ones, which allow for considerable re-writing. The second factor is expected length. Three categories are identified: short pieces (one to two pages) which allow for "minimal exposition & development" (ibid., p.40), more extended development in one to five pages; and more than 10 pages, which may involve background research, and several parts requiring different types of writing. The third variable distinguishes between genres. 10 genres are identified, which are: essays, library research papers (described as related to essays in terms of exposition and development, but which also require searching source texts, and the incorporation or citation of information), reports of experiment or observation without interpretation (largely descriptive), reports with interpretation, summaries of information, case studies, plans or proposals, computer programs, book or article reviews, and unstructured writing such as notes or journal entries. In addition the other variables in the classification scheme developed by Hale et al (ibid.) are identified as different cognitive demands, rhetorical tasks (narration, description, exposition and argument) and patterns of exposition, such as classification or enumeration, definition, and analysis.

Hale et al acknowledge a number of limitations of the study - particularly in terms of the level of inference of teachers' expectations required by judges in assigning classification. A further problem was the limited written information, for example as to cognitive demands which were not clear from assignment wording. In addition there was a lack of information about the weighting of different assignments on courses and therefore it was not possible to interpret the relative importance of different assignment types.

The results predictably showed differences between academic levels and between disciplines, and a number of useful generalisations for EAP can be made in terms of undergraduate courses, which are most relevant here. Firstly, in in-class writing assignments, short tasks tended to be most frequent in sciences, mathematics and engineering. In social science and humanities courses, essays tended to predominate. In addition, these two task types were most frequent in out-of-class assignments. Secondly, library research papers were only assigned in 9% of undergraduate courses. Thirdly, short tasks (less than half a page) were assigned more frequently at undergraduate level and essays of more than one page were more commonly assigned in social sciences and humanities at both undergraduate and graduate level.

In terms of essay writing requirements in particular, higher-level cognitive demands tended to be more frequent in out-of-class longer essays. Virtually all essays involved exposition rather than narration or description, and argumentation was involved only "to a moderate degree" (ibid., p. 47). Finally, patterns of exposition involved cause-effect or problem-solution most often, with classification or enumeration, comparison / contrast, and analysis also frequently occurring.

A further single-site study was undertaken by Gravatt, Richards and Lewis (1997), who investigated the needs of NESB students enrolled at the University of Auckland. They surveyed 136 academic staff representing 156 papers in 32 discipline areas, and 305 students representing a range of first, second and third year courses in 14 departments. They selected courses with a substantial proportion of NESB students. The largest number of students were in the Commerce Faculty (40%), with a further 20% in Science.

The staff questionnaire investigated the linguistic demands of the papers concerned in terms of the four key skill areas and the difficulties experienced by students in those areas. Staff respondents were also asked to indicate the frequency of activities or tasks involving writing, listening and speaking, and reading, whether they used the same standards for marking NESB and ESB student writing, and to make suggestions for language skill focus in English courses for NESB students. The student questionnaire focused particularly on the problems encountered.

Staff perceptions of the frequency of use of the four skills on the papers concerned were that listening was most frequently used, followed by reading and then writing. This finding matched the overall response of students in terms of most frequent skills. Good note-taking skills were considered essential in 65% of the papers. Writing was considered by staff to be the main area of difficulty for NESB students (and also for ESB students to a lesser extent). NESB students were perceived as having more problems with sentence and paragraph organisation than with content or ideas. Gravatt et al (ibid.) comment that this finding is relatively good news in that 'structural' aspects of writing are more easily addressed than those relating to conceptual difficulties.

In terms of frequency of 10 listed writing task types, these differed between faculties. However, overall, written reports were the most frequent form (45% of surveyed papers), followed by expository or critical essays (42%) and then case studies (26%). In general, all features of writing were considered important, but staff perceived writing features concerned with content as more significant than features relating to the organisation of sentences and paragraphs, or to spelling and punctuation. Out of 11 listed writing features, overall staff rated "meeting specific assignment requirements" as most important, followed by content, then "addressing topic", and fourthly, "development of ideas" (ibid., p.19). These were also identified as the most important features of written assignments in terms of gaining marks. A number of staff also commented that language weaknesses in writing exam questions and assignments reflected the fact that students did not know "how to interpret the question" (ibid., p.46) as well as a lack of understanding of paraphrasing and citation conventions.

30% of the lecturers surveyed (including over 50% of Arts Faculty lecturers) reported that they marked NESB student writing more leniently than that of ESB students. Those features relating to punctuation, spelling, and sentence structure were reported as being assessed more leniently than others relating to content, which is consistent with the findings in terms of the relative importance of writing features. As Gravatt et al point out, this approach means, however, that these language weaknesses are likely to continue:

> "By making allowances for poor English skills, staff effectively
> reinforce the status quo, yet by not doing so, they could be accused of
> both judging and discriminating against students on the basis of their

English competence (rather) than their understanding of material"

(ibid., p.49).

This issue also raises problematic questions in terms of equity of treatment for NESB and ESB students. Gravatt et al report that staff suggested that English courses for NESB students should address general language skills - for example, "general reading comprehension" headed the list of priorities (ibid., p.29) - as opposed to specific skills, such as writing case studies. Otherwise staff tended to prioritise the writing tasks required of students in their courses.

Students reported that writing within time constraints, then the expression of ideas, followed by clear expression were the three most important writing skills, with "addressing the topic" (ibid., p.38) considerably less important than these (ranked at tenth out of 14 writing skills). This is in contrast to staff perceptions that addressing the topic was the second most significant writing skill. Furthermore, students perceived their most frequent difficulties as relating to clear expression and the expression of ideas. Again, addressing the topic was ranked towards the end of the listed skills (eleventh) and was followed by paragraph organisation, although sentence structure was ranked more highly at fourth position. The study reveals considerable differences therefore between staff and student perceptions in terms of the importance of writing skills and difficulties encountered with these.

Carson undertook a later single-site study at Georgia State University (2001), which focused in particular on the relative importance of reading and writing, and the degree of integration of these skills in the performance of assessed tasks. She aimed also to identify the similarities and differences between academic tasks across six entry-level undergraduate and graduate courses in three discipline areas in a life science (Biology), a humanities subject (History) and a social science (Psychology).

The largely qualitative study focuses on data collection from assessed activities and products through analysis of course texts and tasks , combined with interviews with academic staff and up to eight NESB and eight ESB students on those courses. Course materials were analysed in terms of course objectives, course texts and tasks. Students were

asked about their experiences in task production – in preparing and completing relevant products.

Oral and written course texts were analysed for topics, number of pages, as well as features of organisation, content and function in relation to the relevant course. In-class and out-of-class tasks (evaluated products) were analysed for general parameters (such as time allowed, number of words required and instruction details), prompt type (for example, essay), language and cognitive demands as well as required response, sources needed and their relative importance, and student preparation required.

The findings of most interest here relate to the undergraduate courses. In all three, the main form of evaluation (86% of assessed tasks) consisted of in-class, timed exams or quizzes based on multiple-choice questions. All in-class assessments required the synthesis of information from texts. The cognitive demands for these mirrored course objectives at this level – the acquisition of basic discipline-relevant principles and concepts. The predominant focus of questions was on recognition/retrieval/identification – classified into sub-categories of definition, general text information, and synthesized text information. Further elements included application or inference and analogy.

In terms of undertaking tests or exams, students referred to the importance of understanding the questions and potential answers, the need to retrieve information from memory, and to recognise responses as well as reject incorrect responses. In some cases students needed also to apply information.

To prepare for an out-of-class essay (14% of undergraduate assessed tasks), Carson found that students needed a range of cognitive processes including identifying relevant information, retrieving information from memory, analysing relations between and among facts and events, organising information chronologically and in terms of topic or geography, and interpreting meaning. Skills required in preparation for an essay task were reading relevant sources and writing subskills of paraphrasing, synthesising and summarising.

In producing an essay, cognitive processes included the identification of important information and separation of this from unimportant, supplementing this with further information, retrieving prepared information, organising information, making connections between facts and events, as well as analysis, synthesis and interpretation of information. Reading was particularly important in preparation. Writing skills identified were logical organisation, paraphrasing, the provision of relevant support, as well as a focus on form and grammar. As Eblen (1983) and Bridgeman and Carlson (1984) found, lecturers indicated however, that grammar was secondary to clarity of meaning.

In terms of overall conclusions and most significant findings, Carson suggests that task preparation is an appropriate focus of exploration for the purposes of informing teaching, as it includes the cognitive academic language skills necessary for entry-level academic study. In line with previous research, reading is identified as one of the most significant language skills, in this case for successful preparation and production of academic tasks. However this study identifies the additional importance of reading for understanding exam questions and task instructions. There is considerable difference between the findings of earlier studies in terms of the range of written assignment types at undergraduate level (Kroll, 1979; Bridgeman & Carlson, 1984; Horowitz, 1986; Hale et al, 1996) and Carson's finding that multiple choice exams and quizzes were the predominant form of assessment type at this level. Presumably the fact that writing is found to be important for note taking in particular, reflects the fact that writing is "…less represented in the tasks described in this data at undergraduate level" (ibid., p.80).

Carson also concludes that the relationship between reading and writing skills is significant, particularly in the context of discipline specific tasks, and that there is therefore a need for greater emphasis in EAP on integrated reading and writing related to task preparation, rather than merely production.

The final study to be reviewed (Moore & Morton, 2005) was published after the completion of data collection for the study described in this thesis. However, it offers useful additional information in terms of the discussion of findings. The aim of Moore and Morton's comparative study was to investigate, analyse and classify assignment writing tasks at two Australian universities, as well as IELTS Task 2 rubric (composition test in response to

statement or question). The study was undertaken in order to better inform the design of pre-sessional EAP programs, which often have had two aims - to prepare students for their future studies and to prepare them for the IELTS test. IELTS test results are the only ones recognised by all universities in Australia (ibid.).

The study analysed a corpus of 20 IELTS Task 2 rubrics and 155 tasks from 28 first-year undergraduate and graduate subjects, collected from 79 academic staff members. The approach to classification of tasks was based on discourse analysis methods – as the authors argue assessment tasks constitute whole texts with the communicative function of prescribing composition of a further text, that is, the product to be evaluated. The method of classification includes (acknowledged) elements of interpretation and inference in that it is based also on prediction of types of texts that would be produced in response to tasks.

Rather than base classification on a preconceived set of categories, Moore and Morton initially focused on four "dimensions of difference" (Hale et al., 1996, p.1). This procedure led to four broad categories of difference: 12 categories of genre (the name given in task rubric for the required written response, for example 'essay') ; information source (the type of information to be used in responding to the task); rhetorical function (what a particular unit of discourse aims to achieve, or in the case of writing tasks, what it instructs students to do), and object of enquiry (topic).

This review focuses on the university task findings as most relevant. Overall, the study found that there appears to be "great diversity in the type of writing required" in university level coursework (ibid., p.63). In terms of genre the findings were that the essay was the most common genre (nearly 60%). These were most frequent in humanities and social science subjects, and most commonly students were required to argue a particular perspective in terms of a given proposition or question. Essays were followed in frequency by the case study (10%) in applied disciplines such as law. The next most common genre was the exercise (8%), in minor tasks requiring demonstration of understanding of a particular technique or concept, by its application to a given set of circumstances. The majority of tasks required students to engage in some sort of research, with reference to external provided primary sources (data) or secondary interpretive sources (such as text

books or journal articles), or both. Secondary sources were most frequently prescribed in task instructions (55%).

Moore and Morton (ibid.) further found, as did earlier studies, that the content of assessed writing is most significant in university writing assessments. The focus of assessment of writing is on students' understanding of key areas of discipline-specific knowledge, and on the disciplines' methods of analysis and discursive practices - or to assess, in the words of Horowitz (1991, p. 74), "…mastery of a specific body of knowledge and a specific disciplinary approach to that knowledge".

In line with the findings of Leki and Carson (1997), and the assertion of Weigle (2002) that university writing is normally based on previous reading, Moore and Morton's interpretation of assessment tasks suggests that valid evidence in a piece of writing is most often seen as relating to research findings or information from authorities in the field.

The majority of assignment tasks required more than one rhetorical function , with on average two to three functions per task. The majority of such functions are categorised semantically as epistemic or analytical. Evaluation (in 67% of tasks) was found to occur most frequently across a large number of disciplines, followed by description (49%), summarisation and comparison (35%), and explanation (28%). More practical, 'deontic' functions were found to be less common, and related to more applied discipline areas. Recommendation was the most frequent sub-category (in 23% of tasks) followed by hortation (in 15% of tasks) involving judgements related to the concept of "necessary action" (ibid., p.58).

In terms of objects of inquiry (or topics), some tasks required a focus on the 'real world' or the phenomenal, whereas others related to more abstract or metaphenomenal areas of theory, concepts, laws and so on. However, the majority of assignment tasks related to the phenomenal category (61%), with 39% - particularly humanities subjects - concerned with metaphenomenal topic areas, although the latter were found in a variety of different discipline areas.

Moore and Morton's overall recommendation in terms of EAP course curricula is that these should focus on the essay genre, be based on multiple readings and concerned perhaps with abstract or metaphenomenal content.

2.6.3 Summary of research into writing task analysis: findings
With the exception of the studies by Bridgeman and Carlson (1984) and Hale et al (1996), which relate to the design of writing evaluation procedures in the TOEFL test, the main aim of the studies reviewed in the previous section was to inform EAP curriculum development. It is suggested that current EAP curriculum design should be influenced in particular by the following conclusions drawn from the analysis of these studies:

- there is a need to expose students to the types of discourse required of them in discipline-specific papers (Kroll, 1979; Horowitz, 1986)
- assignment tasks vary between disciplines and between undergraduate and graduate levels, and the range of tasks can be classified in at least 12 different genres
- discipline-specific writing tasks tend to be controlled in that content and organisation are specified in some way (Horowitz, 1986)
- writing tasks focus on the assessment of students' understanding of significant areas of discipline knowledge, methods of analysis, and patterns of discourse (Moore & Morton, 2005)
- academic writing is in general terms 'text-responsible', and based on some degree of student research (Moore & Morton, op. cit.)
- evaluation is a common rhetorical function of assessed writing tasks (Moore & Morton, opus cit.), while exposition is involved in essays in particular (Hale et al., op. cit.)
- inferred cognitive demands posed by assessment tasks tend to emphasise the recognition and reorganisation of data (Horowitz, op. cit.), and in essay writing also include analysis, organisation and synthesis of textual information (Carson, 2001)
- preparation and production of writing tasks tends to involve reading relevant academic sources, as well as writing sub-skills of paraphrasing, synthesising, summarising and citation
- students need to develop the skills involved in interpreting task instructions, addressing the relevant topic and meeting the specific requirements of assessments (Gravatt et al., op. Cit.; Carson, op. Cit.).
- discourse level characteristics, such as quality of content and organisation, are reported by academic staff to be more significant in discipline-specific assessment of student writing than sentence or word level features, such as grammar or spelling (Bridgeman & Carlson, opus cit.; Gravatt et al., opus cit.). However, the point has already been made in the discussion of Johns' findings (1981) that the skills involved in sentence level coherence can be seen as intrinsic to effective organisation and clarity of meaning at discourse level.

As Table 2.1 indicates, there are however, significant differences in terms of the most frequent types of writing tasks identified in the seven studies summarised above. The fact

that there are variations amongst the most frequently assessed writing tasks is perhaps particularly significant for concurrent EAP course design.

Author(s) & context	Academic level	Most frequent types of assignment tasks identified * indicates descending order of frequency
Kroll (1979) single-site USA	1st-year undergraduate	laboratory reports; term papers; reports + mathematical or statistical data; outlines; book reports; library research reports*
Bridgeman & Carlson (1984) USA & Canada	undergraduate [English depts.]	expository or critical writing assignments; exam essay questions*
Horowitz (1986) single-site USA	96% undergraduate courses	synthesis of multiple sources/library research paper; connection of theory and data; summary/reaction to article or book; report on participatory experience; problem-solving case study; research project; annotated bibliography(graduate level only)*
Hale et al (1996) USA & Canada	undergraduate and graduate	*undergraduate in-class writing assignments*: short tasks most frequent in sciences, mathematics and engineering; essays predominate in social science and humanities *undergraduate out-of-class assignments*: short tasks & essays
Gravatt et al (1997) single-site New Zealand	undergraduate	written reports; expository or critical essays; case studies*
Carson (2001) single-site USA	undergraduate & graduate	multiple-choice exams or quizzes (in-class, timed)
Moore & Morton (2005) dual-site Australia	1st year undergraduate & graduate	research-based essays; case studies; exercises*

Table 2.1. Summary of writing tasks identified in cited task analysis studies

Table 2.1 shows that the most frequent assessment types identified include variously laboratory reports, library research reports, multiple-choice exams, and essays. These differences reflect reported variation between disciplines and may be explained by the fact that discipline-specific writing requirements reflect dominant disciplinary discourses. Differences may therefore be a result of the nature of the student or course sample included

in the studies. Changes in assessment practices over time may also be relevant. For example, with the exception of Carson's findings (2001), the more recent studies tend to indicate the increasing predominance of the essay. Institutional preferences, may also be a factor, although the rationale for assessment choices has not so far been investigated. Whatever the specific reasons for this "great diversity in the type of writing required" (Moore & Morton, 2005, p.63), the studies summarised here offer no coherent pattern in terms of the most frequent written task types. The answer to Horowitz's criticism that earlier studies had not identified typical writing tasks (op. cit.) may well be that it is not possible to usefully identify *typical* tasks. Consequently, if students are to be exposed in EAP courses to the types of discourse required of them in their discipline-specific course assessments, and to related writing requirements and literacies, it follows that course designers need to be informed of the specific writing requirements faced by the particular students they teach.

2.6.4 Summary of research into writing task analysis: focus and methods
Table 2.2 summarises the seven studies reviewed in terms of key aspects of their focus and methods of research. As can be seen, over the past 25 years represented by these studies the areas of investigation have become increasingly complex. This complexity is in terms of the range of issues investigated, as well as the number of data sources and methods of data collection involved.

While the frequency of writing task types has been a consistent focus, the study by Hale et al (1996) was the first to investigate the cognitive and rhetorical demands of writing tasks, as well as the detail of patterns of written exposition. Later studies included respectively, an investigation of cognitive demands (Carson, 2001) and rhetorical function (Moore & Morton, 2005). A number of studies have investigated academic staff priorities in terms of evaluating student written work, although none have investigated the rationale for assessment choices, or assessment criteria, or the formative function of assessments in any detail. Others have included specific areas such as sources of information required (Carson, 2001; Moore & Morton, 2005), and staff and student perceptions of difficulties (Gravatt et al., 1997). However the focus on student difficulties has been in general terms, and not based on an investigation of difficulties related to specific assessments.

Study & institutional scope	Relevant areas of investigation	Data source(s)	Method
Kroll (1979) ▪ single university ▪ discipline areas unspecified	▪ student perceptions of academic needs	▪ students	▪ questionnaire [listed 6 written discourse types] ▪ interviews
Bridgeman & Carlson (1984) ▪ 34 universities ▪ 6 graduate discipline areas; undergraduate English depts.	▪ frequency & importance of writing tasks; ▪ staff priorities for evaluating student writing	▪ academic staff	▪ questionnaire [listed 10 writing task types]
Horowitz (1986) ▪ single university ▪ 7 departments (only 1 undergraduate course)	▪ classification & frequency of writing tasks; ▪ ways in which tasks are controlled	▪ writing assignment & essay exam handouts	▪ content analysis [inductive approach to task classification]
Hale et al (1996) ▪ 8 universities ▪ 5 graduate & 8 undergraduate discipline areas	▪ classification & frequency of writing task types ▪ cognitive & rhetorical demands ▪ patterns of exposition	▪ task materials & syllabuses ▪ academic staff	▪ content analysis [inductive approach to task classification] ▪ questionnaire
Gravatt et al (1997) ▪ single university ▪ 32 undergraduate discipline areas	▪ frequency of task types ▪ staff perceptions of student difficulties ▪ evaluation priorities ▪ students' perceptions of difficulties	▪ staff ▪ students	▪ questionnaires [listed 10 writing task types]
Carson (2001) ▪ single university ▪ 6 undergraduate & graduate courses	▪ frequency of task types ▪ writing skills ▪ cognitive demands ▪ sources & student preparation required ▪ staff priorities for evaluating student writing	▪ assessed tasks & course texts ▪ academic staff ▪ students	▪ content analysis ▪ interviews
Moore & Morton (2005) ▪ 2 universities ▪ 28 undergraduate & graduate subjects	▪ classification & frequency of task types ▪ information sources; rhetorical function; topic ▪ staff priorities for evaluating student writing	▪ assessed tasks	▪ content / discourse analysis [inductive approach to task classification]

Table 2.2 Writing task analysis: scope, focus and methods of summarised studies

In terms of data sources and methods of data collection, four of the studies collected data from a single source utilising either questionnaires or content analysis of tasks materials. Kroll's study also included interviews with students. Two studies gathered data from two sources. Hale et al (1996) collected data from task materials and syllabuses as well as from academic staff, using content and analysis and a questionnaire while Gravatt et al (1997) administered questionnaires to staff and students. Carson's investigation (2001) is the only study based on a triangulated approach in terms of sources of data – employing content analysis of assessed tasks and course texts, and interviews with academic staff and students.

2.7 Methodology for assessed writing task analysis
In the studies discussed, questionnaires and content analysis are the most frequent instruments employed to obtain information about assessment tasks and related issues. Horowitz (1986) raises a shortcoming of questionnaires and interviews administered to academic staff, which is also highlighted by Zemelman (1978) and Johns (1981). The problem identified is that data from questionnaires (and to some extent also from interviews) may indeed reflect what respondents actually do, but may also reflect what they believe they do, or equally, what they think the researcher expects them to do. Zemelman (ibid.) argues that this can be mitigated to some degree by constructing interview questions in particular which move from general issues to more specific questions. The degree to which respondents answer general questions with specific detail is, Zemelman suggests, an indication as to the level of consideration the given issue has received by the respondent. Another shortcoming in using questionnaires to identify assessment types is that academic staff are usually expected to respond to preconceived, listed assessment types. This method risks reducing a possibly wide range of assessment task types in order to fit the listed categories. Research findings are therefore limited by an untested assumption of shared meanings and interpretations in terms of lecturers' descriptions and categorisation of assessment tasks. In addition a quantitative approach does not allow for an adequate exploration of a number of significant issues. These include the rationale for assessment choices, what lecturers actually understand assessment task terms to signify, what lecturers' expectations of students are, and how such tasks are described in assessment documents and scaffolded for students. Content analysis, in contrast, allows for either an inductive approach to classifying task types (as in the studies undertaken by Horowitz, 1986; Hale et al., 1996 and Moore & Morton, 2005) or an approach based on the use of given genre

names, but also on an in-depth analysis of the actual tasks (as in Carson, 2001). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews allow for an in-depth exploration of lecturers' meanings, intentions and expectations in relation to assessment tasks.

The present study draws on these previous studies, but uses a triangulated methodology in terms of both data sources and instruments. This consists of analysis of assessed writing tasks and related documents, interviews with academic staff, and questionnaires administered to students. The study is therefore framed by a predominantly interpretive paradigm (Gephart, 1999), but also includes a largely quantitative post-assessment survey of students' self-reported interpretations and experiences of the assessments on the three courses investigated. Multiple data collection techniques, according to Berg (1989, p.5) are not only "a means of mutual confirmation of measures and validation of findings" but also an attempt "to relate (different kinds of data) so as to counteract the threats to validity of each". It is hoped that this small-scale study will contribute to research in this area by providing data related to the following key areas:

1. a description and analysis of the type and form of written assessment tasks in three first year undergraduate courses at one university
2. a description of the rationale, meanings, interpretations and processes which produce these tasks
3. a description of the target students' experiences of these assessments and their perceptions of and attitudes to these.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology used in collecting and analysing the data. The chapter is divided into six sections. The first section describes the context of the study. The second section describes the rationale for selection of courses and informants. The third section outlines the recruitment and data collection methods. Section four outlines the methodological approach. Section five describes data collection instruments and data analysis. Finally, section six describes document analysis.

3.1 The context

The study was site specific as it related to the target student population for the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) paper in the Faculty of Arts at Auckland University of Technology. The Faculty offers a Bachelor of Arts (Applied) degree programme in which students can major in either one or two subject areas, or choose to study for an extended major in one area. The subject areas at the time of the study were Chinese, Japanese, Psychology and Social Sciences. The generic degree programme includes six core papers, four of which are compulsory. Students must pass five of these core papers for a total of 90 points. They have the option of taking either the Writing or the EAP papers as their fifth core paper. The Research and Analysis, Information Technology 1 and Communicating papers (15 points each) and either Writing or EAP (15 points each) are prerequisites for the compulsory Cooperative Education Practicum core paper (30 points).

The EAP paper is only an option for students who have English as an additional language (EAL students), and for English speaking background students (ESB students) who require support in terms of academic English writing, and who are therefore directed to take the paper by their programme leader. Usually, the vast majority of students are EAL students – in semester two 2002, for example all enrolled students were EAL students. The EAP paper is also a credit-bearing option for EAL students taking the Bachelor of Communications Studies degree and for students on the Diploma in Japanese and Diploma in Travel and Tourism programmes. Students usually take the EAP paper in their first year of study.

The EAP paper is offered in both academic semesters each year. Students have three hours of lectures over a 13-week period (total 39 hours) with three individual tutorials of 20 minutes duration each over the semester. The aim of the paper, as described in the Paper Descriptor, is as follows:

> This module is designed to help students who are in need of English language support, and who are enrolled in University Degree and Diploma programmes, to express their ideas effectively at tertiary level. The focus is primarily on the development of academic writing skills with the aim of fostering independence in this area.

3.2 Rationale for selection of courses and informants
Data was collected relating to three first year courses taken by students taking the EAP paper. The intention was to select papers that were representative of the range of courses taken by EAL students in their first year of study in their degree programme. In semester two 2002, 55% of enrolled EAP students were studying for a BA degree in either Chinese or Japanese. It seemed logical therefore to select an English-language based paper (Paper One) from one of these programmes as one of the target courses. In addition, one of the other five core papers was selected for the study (Paper Two). This paper is offered by the School of Social Science and taken by all students, generally in their first year of study. Finally, a first year compulsory paper from the Bachelor of Communication Studies Degree programme was selected as the third course (Paper Three). The three courses selected for the study therefore represent each of the three relevant schools in the Faculty of Arts at the time of the study.

The intention of the study was to carry out an analysis of documents relating to assessments on the selected courses, as well as to analyse data from recorded interviews with the course leaders, and from a survey of students enrolled on these courses. The participants and respondents chosen therefore were the three course leaders responsible for the delivery and assessment of the three papers (Lecturers A, B and C respectively), and the EAL and ESB students enrolled on the courses concerned at the time of the study. Paper One runs over two semesters, Paper Two is offered in both semesters, while Paper Three runs only in semester two each year. Data collection from interviews with lecturers and student questionnaires was therefore scheduled for semester two 2003.

In terms of course delivery, Paper One consists of one two-hour lecture in each of 28 teaching weeks over the two semesters (fourteen teaching weeks per semester). There were 25 students enrolled for the paper in 2002. Paper Two is delivered through two one-hour lectures per week over a 13-week semester. In addition, the students are divided between five tutorial groups with one two-hour group tutorial each week. At the time of the study there were 127 students enrolled on the paper, giving a tutorial group size of approximately 25. Paper Three consists of one one-hour lecture for each of 13 teaching weeks plus an additional one-and-a-half hour group tutorial each week. There were 189 students enrolled on Paper Three with a group tutorial size of approximately 24.

3.3 Recruitment and data collection methods
Following approval of the research project and the granting of ethical approval in January 2003, the three lecturers were approached individually by e-mail. The lecturers received a summary of the research aims, methods and timetable, and a request for them to participate (see Appendix 1). All three lecturers indicated their willingness to do so. Each lecturer was then sent a copy of an information letter with further details of the project (Appendix 2) and a copy of an informed consent form to sign and return (Appendix 3).

The three lecturers were subsequently asked to supply relevant documents for the year 2002 for initial analysis. It was recognised by the researcher that materials for 2003 were unlikely to be available or complete at this stage, and that an initial analysis of assessment documents for 2002 would be useful. An analysis of documents for both 2002 and 2003 would also allow for some investigation of the lecturers' rationale for changes in assessment. The lecturers were asked to supply course outlines, assessment instructions, marking schedules and any other relevant supplementary materials relating to assessments, such as writing style guidelines issued to students. The analysis of course documentation was used as the basis for establishing a framework of draft questions for the planned semi-structured interviews with the lecturers concerned. Up-dated documentation for 2003 was later requested and received in advance of scheduled interviews with the lecturers. The draft interview questions were than amended to reflect changes to assessments in 2003 (see Appendices 4A, B and C).

The lecturer responsible for Paper Two resigned at the beginning of semester one 2003 and was replaced by a part-time member of staff. A new full-time member of staff was later appointed to take charge of the paper for semester two of that year. This lecturer agreed to participate in the research and supplied additional documentation for 2003. The staff changeover had some effect in delaying receipt of documents and the scheduling of interviews. This, in conjunction with other delays in receiving 2003 documentation for Paper Three, resulted in an overall delay in arranging interviews with the three lecturers.

The interviews with Lecturers A and B took place on 10th and 22nd October 2003 respectively, followed by the interview with Lecturer C on 22nd November. The lecturers were provided with a copy of the proposed questions before each interview took place. The data from the analysis of documents and from the three interviews with lecturers informed the content of student questionnaires written for each of the three papers. Although the three questionnaires followed the same overall structure, each was individually related to the specific assessment requirements and content of the paper concerned. The questionnaires were therefore completed after each of the relevant interviews and each was submitted for individual ethical approval under the delegated authority regulations of the Faculty's Ethics Committee. The questionnaire for Course One (see Appendix 5) was completed first and was administered to students in the final week of lectures (week 14). This was before students had submitted their final assessment. In the case of Papers Two and Three, the timing of the interviews and the need to write the questionnaires and obtain ethics approval for these after the interviews meant that by the time ethics approval had been obtained the courses had finished. Therefore the questionnaires were posted to students at their home addresses in December (see Appendices 6 and 7). These questionnaires were sent out with a student participation information sheet (see Appendix 8).

3.4 Methodological approach

The study is framed in a predominantly interpretive paradigm (Gephart, 1999). The intention was to explore and describe the assessment requirements of the three papers as expressed in the documentation; the ways in which the lecturers expressed their intentions and interpretations of these documents; and the interpretations of the students, who were the receivers of the documents. The study also sought to explore the process by which

assessments are produced as well as patterns of meaning across the three courses. The use of two interpretive methodologies – document analysis of documents and semi-structured interviews with lecturers – was intended to allow therefore for an exploration of the meanings expressed in the texts and the descriptions and definitions of the three lecturers. In addition, the interpretations, experiences and attitudes to assessments of enrolled students were investigated by means of a largely quantitative survey.

3.5 Description of instruments

Apart from an analysis of the assessment materials, which is described in Section 3.6, data was collected from lecturers and students by means of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The instruments designed for this data collection were three schedules of questions for semi-structured interviews with the three course co-ordinators (Appendix 4) and three questionnaires for students enrolled on the three papers (Appendices 5 to 7).

3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews lie mid-way on a quantitative-qualitative continuum between formal, structured or standardised interviews and those which are unstructured or focused (Berg, 1989; May, 2001). Structured interviews allow little or no deviation from a pre-planned schedule of questions and therefore little or no opportunity to prompt the person being interviewed or to probe or interpret meanings (May, 2001). In contrast, semi-structured interviews allow for key questions to be posed at each interview, with the freedom to change the sequence of questions and to probe for further information (Fielding & Thomas, 2001). While structured interviews allow for quantitative comparability between responses, the interviewer in a semi-structured interview may enter into a dialogue with the interviewee in seeking and recording qualitative clarification and elaboration of answers (May, 2001). Thus the semi-structured interview provides more structure for comparability than a focused interview at the same time as yielding rich insights into opinions, values and attitudes (ibid.). Given the aims of the study (see Section 3.4) it was important to employ a method which allowed for the exploration of lecturers' meanings and perceptions.

3.5.1.1 Schedules of questions for semi-structured interviews

Each schedule of interview questions therefore included a common set of questions, which are outlined as follows. Lecturers were asked about the length of their involvement with the

paper and to describe its aims. They were also asked to explain their perceptions of the purpose of assessment in general and of assessment on the paper concerned in particular, as well as their role in writing the assessments. Next, the respondents were asked to describe the reasons for the choice of assessment topics and assessment types. In addition they were asked to explain the marking criteria for each assessment and their perceptions of student performance. The final set of questions investigated whether scaffolding for writing tasks was provided, the nature of feedback given to students following the assessments, and any plans for changes to assessments.

Supplementary questions were included for two main purposes. The first was to help clarify the specific detail of issues related to the assessments in each paper. For example, it was not clear from the assessment materials provided for Paper One whether the assessments were completed as out-of-class assignments, or in-class assessments. Therefore a supplementary question was included to clarify this. Secondly, supplementary questions were added, where relevant, in order to explore issues such as lecturers' interpretation of the meaning of specific wording of assessment requirements, or the specific meaning of marking criteria. As an example, a supplementary question for Paper Two related to the lecturer's expectations in terms of the requirement that students should "lay the basis for the (literature) review". Another question investigated expectations in terms of the use of direct quotations and paraphrasing in written summaries of texts. As a further example, supplementary questions for the interview for Paper Three asked the lecturer to explain expectations related to the requirement that students "critically evaluate" and to marking criteria based on "clarity and fluency of writing". In addition, a question was added to the schedule for Paper Three to investigate whether student plagiarism was a problem and if so, how it was dealt with.

3.5.1.2 Interview transcript analysis
The organisation of data into conceptual categories is described by Neuman (1997) as an integral element of data analysis, although the approaches to this organisation vary. Tesch (1990) identifies the understanding of the meaning of texts as one of four categories of approach to qualitative analysis. This appears to parallel Crabtree and Miller's 'editing' approach (1992), characterised as more interpretive and flexible than other approaches, with the absence of preconceived codes, and based on interpretations of meanings or of

textual patterns (Robson, 2002). The majority of themes are therefore generated in the process of reading transcripts or other forms of qualitative data (Robson, ibid.). Robson also highlights the fact that human analysts suffer from a number of weaknesses, including the risk of an excessive confidence in the researcher's own judgement. Such weaknesses need to be recognised.

In this study the approach to analysis of the interview transcripts was based on the interpretation of meaning, and the identification of significant themes, patterns and differences in meaning. The transcripts were read carefully a number of times. During these successive readings the data was searched for "similar phrases, patterns, themes …[as well as] differences…" (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These were then analysed for categories of significant themes and concepts (Neuman, 1997).

3.5.2 Questionnaires

Questionnaires can be useful in collecting factual and attitudinal data (Dörnyei, 2003), which is relevant here, but there are both advantages and disadvantages to their use. One of the main advantages of self-completed questionnaires is the fact that large-scale samples – such as large groups of enrolled students - can be surveyed relatively cheaply compared to the use of interviews, in terms of time, the researcher's effort and financial costs (Dörnyei, 2003; Simmons, 2001). Further advantages are that respondents can complete questionnaires when it is convenient for them to do so (Simmons, 2001); and if the questionnaire is well-designed data processing can be relatively simple and efficient (Dörnyei, 2003). However, a disadvantage in the case of postal questionnaires (used for Papers Two and Three) is that researchers are dependent on respondents completing and returning the questionnaire (Dörnyei, 2003), and therefore response rates tends to be low (Simmons, 2001). Furthermore, answers may be illegible, difficult to understand or incomplete, although this is perhaps less likely in this particular study. In addition, the need for clarity and simplicity of questions, as well as the need to limit demands on the time of respondents, mitigate against depth of responses (Dörnyei, 2003). However, as there were three different methods of data collection used in this study, in the case of data collection from potentially large numbers of students the advantages of efficiency of scale and data processing were considered to outweigh the disadvantages noted above.

The student questionnaires (Appendices 5, 6 and 7) were designed to elicit both quantitative and qualitative data related to students' experiences and perceptions of the paper assessments. Questions for each questionnaire were drafted after analysis of the relevant assessment documents and after the interview with the paper co-ordinator. Question types included closed-response answers, multi-choice options, agree or disagree responses using a Likert-type 5-point scale, ranked answers in order of importance to the respondent, and others seeking open-response comments.

3.5.2.1 Schedule of questions

Instructions for each of the assessments on the relevant papers were reproduced as a reminder in Sections B, C and D, respectively, followed by a series of questions. In the case of Paper One, assessment one took the form of gap-fill questions and short answer questions, while assessment two took the same form with the addition of two short essay questions. Assessments three and four repeated the form of assessment one. As a result, Section D of the questionnaire for this paper was restricted to a synopsis reminder of the question types. Otherwise, the first question in Sections B, C and D of the questionnaire, where relevant, elicited details of respondents' knowledge of the relevant writing genre, prior to their completion of the assessment. Questions also elicited students' perceptions of the clarity of assessment instructions and marking criteria as well as the students' responses to the assessment in terms of ease of completion, enjoyment and learning. Further questions in these sections investigated the respondents' interpretation of the meaning of particular wording from the assessment instructions. Students were also asked to rank the importance of listed marking criteria, and to give their evaluation of each assessment in terms of its effect on their motivation, understanding, writing skills and learning.

As the number of respondents was relatively small, responses to questions which could be analysed quantitatively were analysed on a simple, numerical basis. Responses to open-ended questions were analysed for significant patterns or emergent themes, using the same approach outlined for interview transcript analysis (see Section 3.5.1.2).

3.6 Document analysis

Two of the key advantages of document analysis are its un-obtrusiveness, in that the document is not affected by the researcher's enquiries, and the fact that it is a relatively low-cost data collection method (Robson, 2002). That is, it is low-cost apart from the time

involved in some cases for informants' in supplying and perhaps copying documents, or for the researcher in searching for and collecting documents. Macdonald (2001) points out that while documents can be readily recognised as being social products, they are also socially produced. That is, official documents (including by implication those produced by educational institutions) may be intended as objective "statements of fact" (Macdonald, 2001, p.196), but are in fact produced on the basis of particular theories and concepts, or "commonly accepted, taken-for-granted principles" (ibid.).

Analysis of documents is characterised by Macdonald (2001) as deductive in method. In general terms this means that the analysis of documents leads to conclusions which may need to be revised or validated by reference to other "facts". This characterisation, it can be argued, is the underlying factor in the perception of document analysis as an "invaluable" element of triangulated research methods (Macdonald, 2001, p.12). May's discussion of document analysis (2001) supports this point. May cites a definition of the meaning of a document in terms of content, intended meanings, and received meanings (Scott 1990, cited in May, 2001). By implication it is not possible to accurately revise or verify assumptions about content meaning without investigating intended and received meanings. Thus, in qualitative document analysis, the author of a text and its intended audience become crucial to the construction of textual meaning (May, ibid.). In this study, document analysis formed the initial stage in a triangulated investigation of written assessment requirements. Conclusions drawn from the analysis of documents were then further investigated with the lecturers whose intentions produced the documents, and with the students who received them.

Assessment and related course documents for 2002 were analysed in the first phase of document analysis. Documents for 2003 were examined in the second phase, and changes to assessment details and requirements were identified. Course materials were examined for content which related to written assessment tasks. The focus therefore was on the aims of each course and the learning outcomes as described in course handbooks, assessment task details and instructions, and marking criteria details provided for students or staff. Tasks were defined as the methods and written products by which the understanding and application of course content and the achievement of learning outcomes are evaluated. Each

task was analysed in detail and the descriptions noted for further investigation in interviews and questionnaires. Analysis of data from documents was undertaken as follows.

Course aims and learning outcomes were noted as described in the course handbooks and understood as the context or overall parameters for the course and assessment events.

Assessment tasks were analysed in terms of a number of features. These included assessment type or genre. This category reflected the title of the task or its written product as used in the course materials. Where the type was not named, the task was identified by prompt-type (for example, gap-fill exercise). Other features examined were the form of the instructions, required word length of the written task product, task weightings as a percentage of the final grade, and the distribution of marks for each question. Wording which implied specific cognitive skills was noted. In addition wording or phrasing from task instructions which might be open to different interpretations was identified and noted.

Marking criteria and grade descriptors were identified and noted. Specific wording or phrasing which might be ambiguous was noted.

The following chapter presents and discusses the most significant findings of the study.

Chapter 4

Results and Discussion

Chapter 4 is divided into six sections. The first of these deals with an overview of key findings related to assessments on the three papers, as well as background information about the paper coordinators and the student respondents. The second section provides contextual information by summarising the lecturers' views on the role of assessment. Sections 3, 4 and 5 present the most significant findings related to Papers One, Two and Three, respectively. Each includes details of the assessments for the paper concerned and the lecturer's rationale for these, student perceptions of assessment instructions and marking criteria, student preferences for assessment types, a summary of students' performance in assessments and finally, where relevant, the lecturers' plans for changes to assessments, instructions and marking criteria. Finally, Section 6 presents a summary of the most significant emerging themes.

4.1 Overview of assessment details and of staff and student informants

4.1.1 Assessment Types
The range of documents provided by the course coordinators included student handbooks or Paper guidelines with details of the aims of the courses and learning outcomes (for Papers Two and Three only), requirements for passing the courses, course outlines or schedules of lectures, lists of prescribed and recommended texts, assessments task details and instructions, and in some cases marking criteria for students. In addition there were a briefing sheet for marking and grade descriptors for staff , a generic handout on writing literature reviews, guidelines on essay writing with a student checklist, a set of guidelines for writing reference lists, as well as two examples of marked assignments (from Paper One).

Table 4.1 outlines the types of assessment in each of the three papers, the weighting of each assessment, and where given, the distribution of marks for each question type, as revealed by analysis of these documents. The table also indicates the length of each course in column one.

Paper	Assessment Type
One 30 weeks	Assignment 25%: *gap-fill questions* 50% [½ mark per answer] + *brief answers* 50% [5x10]
	Assignment 25%: *gap-fill questions* 50% [1 mark per answer] + *brief answers* [3x10] *& short essay answers* 50%[2x10]
	Assignment 25%: *gap-fill questions* 60% [1 mark per answer] + *brief answers* 40% [4x10]
	Assignment 25%: *gap-fill questions* 40% [1 mark per answer] + *brief answers* 60% [2x10 + 5x5 + 3x5]
Two 13 weeks	Assignment 30%: *3 library & Internet research tasks* [10 marks each] 1. catalogue search for articles & books on topic chosen out of 4; 200 word summary of one text + APA reference 2. key-word search of given database; 200 word summary of article + APA reference 3. key-words Internet search with chosen search engine; 200 word summary of one text + APA reference
	Assignment 30%: *Research data presentation task* ❑ presentation of data ❑ written analysis ❑ conclusions re data & methods of analysis
	Assignment 40%: *Literature review* on given topic ❑ 1500 words ❑ minimum 8 texts ❑ APA reference list
Three 13 weeks	Assignment 15%: *literature review* 1500 words; based on topic selected from lectures weeks 3 [to] 7 ; 4 to 5 texts
	Assignment 25%: *essay* 2,500 words; topic chosen from 6
	Exam 60%: [3 hours + 10 minutes reading time] 4 *essay questions* chosen from 11 15 marks each

Table 4.1. Assessment Types in Papers One, Two and Three

As Table 4.1 indicates, writing assessment tasks varied from relatively undemanding gap-fill assignment exercises (Paper One), through brief expository answers, paragraph-based data analysis and conclusion, and short essay answers, to 1,500 word literature review assignments based on between four and eight texts, a 2,500 word text-responsible essay, and one timed, essay-based examination (Paper Three). Apart from these written genres, one assessment focused on information research literacies, and two explicitly assessed referencing skills. Perhaps the most significant feature, given that these are all first year undergraduate assessments, is the apparent disparity in terms of the levels of cognitive demands of the range of assessment types. These are discussed in Sections 3, 4 and 5 below.

The analysis also revealed that there was disparity in terms of the provision for students of written task instructions and marking criteria. Table 4.2 summarises this provision.

Paper	Assessments		
One	minimal written task instructions – no marking criteria		
Two	task instructions provided – no marking criteria		
Three	Assignment One: ❑ task instructions ❑ list of assessment criteria ❑ minimal criteria for grades A, B, C supplied for tutors only	Assignment Two: ❑ checklist on research, analysis, structure & presentation ❑ handout "How to write an academic essay"	Exam: basic descriptors for grades A, B, C

Table 4.2. Provision of task instructions and marking criteria

Paper Three was the only one to provide both task instructions and marking criteria for students and staff. Task instructions for Paper One consisted of *"Fill in the blanks with missing information",* and *"Briefly answer the questions"* or *"Answer the following questions briefly"* or *"Answer the following questions in English"[2].* The single section requiring short essay answers (Assignment Two) was headed "Short essays". The absence of more detailed task instructions for Paper One may be partly explained by the relatively straightforward nature of the assessment tasks. Further possible explanation for the absence of marking criteria relates to the primary focus on content in these summative assignments, rather than any objectives related to the development and formative assessment of English academic literacies (see Section 4.3 below).

4.1.2 Paper coordinators
Initial interview questions to the three paper coordinators investigated their length of involvement with the respective papers and their role in designing assessments.

Lecturer A, who had a non-English speaking background, explained that she has been teaching the course *"for a short time"* – about two and a half years.

> **Lecturer A**: …so I just follow up other people's design of the assessment so actually I have no role in writing the assessment.
>
> **Researcher**: … so you're just taking over these assessments that someone else has written?

---

[2] Note: all the assessments required students to write in English

> **Lecturer A:** … yes. The only changes I made is that …my schedule is different …maybe I put some new topics but the assessment did not change … so the general design did not change.

Lecturer B, who was teaching Paper Two for the first time, re-wrote the assessments in consultation with colleagues. He reported that there had been some concerns over weaknesses identified in students who had done the course in the past.

> **Lecturer B:** Primarily I wrote the assessments myself, but in consultation with several colleagues who had expressed historical concerns over this paper…and the weaknesses they had identified in the students who progressed from doing this course in the past few years. So I wrote the assignments …from the advice given from my colleagues ....

Lecturer C, who had been involved with Paper Three for approximately five years, wrote the assessments following a pattern established by a previous lecturer, which is that each set of exam questions is recycled as essay assignment questions (Assessment Two) in the following delivery of the paper. In essence, none of the lecturers was responsible for designing assessments 'from scratch'. There was either a precedent to follow which implies an established a framework, or collaboration with colleagues, which implies a degree of consensus.

4.1. 3 Student respondents

As detailed in Section 3.3, questionnaires for students on Paper One were administered in a lecture before the end of the course, whereas those for Papers Two and Three were sent to home addresses, after lectures had ended. This affected the levels of response. Table 4.3 summarises information relating to student respondents in terms of the total possible sample size for each paper, numbers of actual NESB and ESB respondents, their gender, and age range.

Paper	Total enrolled	NESB respondents	Gender [NESB]	ESB respondents	Gender [ESB]	% response	Age range
One	16	13	10 F 3 M	2	M F	94	18-30
Two	127	4	F	16	11F 5 M	18	18-54
Three	194	4	F	30	26F 4 M	17.5	18-39

Table 4.3 Data on student respondents

In total there were 69 student respondents. For the reasons already outlined, the response rate for Paper One is very high compared with those for Papers Two and Three, although the latter two are consistent at approximately 18% respectively. The overall response rate was 20.4% and the majority of respondents (80%) were female. The NESB students enrolled on Paper One came from a range of countries of origin, which were Cambodia, China, Dubai, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Philippines, and Vietnam. Those on Paper Two came from China, Dubai, and Korea (2). Finally the four NESB students on Paper Three came from the Philippines, China, Vietnam and Indonesia.

4.2 Paper co-ordinators' views on the role of assessment
The interviews with the lecturers' revealed their perceptions of the role of assessment in general. Lecturer A identified three functions of assessment as follow:

> **Lecturer A**: … one is to test whether the students have learned what the teacher expects them to learn. The second is to let the students have a review of what they have learned, go over what they have learned and thirdly, to see how much they have improved in this respect.

> **Researcher**: Improved in terms of learning?

> **Lecturer A**: Yes.

In effect, Lecturer A appears to perceive the purpose of assessment as the certification of learning.

Lecturer B referred to the role of assessment in terms of quality standards and students' acquisition and retention of knowledge and skills (the certification of learning):

> **Researcher:** Can you explain what you see as the purpose of assessments in general?

> **Lecturer B:** (Assessments are) really a quality control measure to make sure that they actually have skills, that they can do what is required of them at that basic level. …You have to maintain some standards in quality, and ensure that there are key aspects of whatever curriculum you're teaching that are absorbed by the students, and they retain that knowledge. So really, the assessment is just a measure of that ability to retain it – sort of an objective measure…to ensure they actually have the skills in a very real sense.

Lecturer C, in answering the same question responded in terms of students' understanding of course content:

> **Lecturer C**: You're really trying to test the student's understanding of the course content, just simply that. … As I said, I explain to the students…I sort of ask them rhetorically: *Why write an essay?* And then try and convince them why it's a good idea for them to do that… *Your essay provides the evidence of your understanding so your progress can be assessed.*

It is interesting that these perceptions tend to reflect the traditional view of assessment as the measurement and certifying of knowledge and understanding (see Boud, 1998 and Nightingale et al, 1996). The lecturers do not refer to the potentially wider role of assessment in the development of a range of abilities (Nightingale et al, 1996), or as a prompt to learning (Boud, 1998; Brown and Knight, 1994), or as an opportunity to provide feedback in order to improve student performance (Brown and Knight, 1994). Lecturer B however does make implicit reference to the role of assessment as a performance indicator for staff (Brown and Knight, 1994), in terms of the effectiveness and quality of teaching (Atkins et al, 1993).

Given that these are first year papers, and that in the case of Paper One 13 out of 16 enrolled students came from a non-English speaking background, it is also interesting that the lecturers made no reference to the potential role of assessment in specifically developing students' cognitive skills and English academic literacies (MacKinnon & Manathunga, 2003).

4.3 Paper One
As can be seen from Table 4.4 below, all four assessments in Paper One followed the same form with gap-fill and brief answer questions, apart from Assignment Two, which had an additional "short essay" section. Examples of the form of question in the brief answer sections included *"Why do…?"*, *"What are the characteristics of…?"*, *"Give at least three reasons for…"* and *"Describe the general structure of…"*. The two short essay questions (Section C, Assignment 2) involved task instruction verbs which required students to discuss differences (*"Discuss some (at least three) differences between…"*) and illustrate significance (*"…illustrate briefly the significance of …"*). Cognitive demands implied by the instructions were identified as the recognition of correct responses, identification and

retrieval of relevant information from memory, and organising information according to essay topics (see Carson, 2001). The key rhetorical tasks inferred from the brief answer questions and essay topics were explanation and description.

4.3.1 Details of assessments and rationale

Assignment Number	% of final paper mark	Types of questions	Mark allocation per question
One	25%:	gap-fill answers	½ mark per answer [50% of total mark]
		brief answers	5x10 marks per answer [50% of total marks]
Two	25%	gap-fill answers	1 mark per answer [50% of total mark]
		brief answers	3x10 marks per answer [30% of total mark]
		short essay answers	2x10 marks per answer [20% of total mark]
Three	25%	gap-fill answers	1 mark per answer [60% of total marks]
		brief answers	4x10 marks per answer [40% of total marks]
Four	25%	gap fill answers	1 mark per question [40% of total marks]
		brief answers	2x10 + 5x5 + 3x5 marks [60% of total marks]

Table 4.4. Paper One: outline of assessment types

Responses to interview questions from Lecturer A shed further light on the form and content of the four assignments (see Table 4.4), as well as the requirements of the gap-fill assessment questions in particular.

> **Lecturer A:** … each assessment is just a review of what has been taught in the (previous) few weeks….
> …
> **Researcher:** Are the gap-fill questions that you use based on a text that students are familiar with, that students know?
>
> **Lecturer A**: Yes. The students can find all the answers if they attend every class and if they have got the handouts.
>
> **Researcher:** Right, so are the sentences in the gap-fill answers based on the material in the handouts?
>
> **Lecturer A:** Yes…If they work hard – just go through those handouts, they can find all the answers…. Each gap takes up one percent of the total marks, so it's easy to count.

This explanation appears to reflect the view of this lecturer, that the role of assessment is to allow students to review what they have learned (or studied). The gap-fill questions required students to select the correct information from handouts, and the focus was on correct content. Given that all four assessments on Paper One are in fact completed out of class, it can be argued that what is being assessed is largely the ability to identify and retrieve information from given sources. The researcher's initial interpretation of the written instructions as implying the need for retrieval of relevant information from memory (see above) was therefore proven incorrect.

Lecturer A described the required form of answer to the brief answer questions as "a very short essay" or paragraph. She was also asked to explain the way that marks were allocated for the questions that required brief answers and short essay answers:

> **Researcher:** Could you tell me, again on Section B (brief answers), how marks are allocated? There's 10% for each of the questions. I wondered how you allocate that 10%.

> **Lecturer A:** Usually, for each question there are several points that students should at least mention. For example, for this question… I illustrate that students have to mention at least five points, so according to the five main points.

> **Researcher**: I understand. So in fact you're largely marking for content, rather than for example, language?

> **Lecturer A**: Yes, content… because some students are very poor in their English, the sentences are not very grammatical so you cannot mark them according to the language, it must be based on content…

> **Researcher**: …I wondered if you could just explain how you allocate the marks for the short essays. Is that again on content or is it partly on essay structure and so on?

> **Lecturer A**: Also on content… these short essay questions will be having longer answers.

There is perhaps logic in Lecturer A's argument that because some students' use of English is poor, they 'cannot' be marked for use of language. It would also suggest that NESB and ESB students have an equal chance of success in these assignments. This approach however appears to do little to support the development of students' cognitive abilities and academic

literacies, such as writing academic paragraphs or essays, and associated citation and referencing skills, or of NESB students' English language skills.

4.3.2 Student perceptions of assessment instructions and marking criteria for Paper One

Paper	Total enrolled	NESB respondents	Gender [NESB]	ESB respondents	Gender [ESB]	% response	Age range
One	16	13	10 F 3 M	2	M F	94	18-30

Table 4.5. Data on student respondents for Paper One

The most significant findings centre on students' reported perceptions of the clarity of the task instructions and of the ways in which the assignment tasks would be marked. The majority (11) of students (10 NESB and 1 ESB) agreed that they "understood the instructions" for the gap-fill and brief answer questions easily. For Assignment Two, which included the two short essay questions, more than a third of the NESB students were either neutral (2) or disagreed (3) that the instructions were easy to understand. As indicated in Section 4.3.1 and in Table 4.2 (Section 4.1), the written task instructions for the four assignments on this paper were minimal, and the short essay questions were headed "Short essays 20%". It is not clear then what it was that some students found difficult to understand. However, when asked whether they had known how to structure and write an academic essay in English before this assignment, of the five NESB students who did not find the instructions easy to understand in Assessment Two, four were neutral (perhaps not sure) and one disagreed. Seven of the NESB students had taken the English for Academic Purposes paper and agreed that they had known how to write an essay. Students' perceptions of instructions as not easy to understand might therefore relate to uncertainty as to what constituted a "short essay" and to lack of clarity about what was being assessed (see below).

In response to a question about their understanding of how the questions would be marked in the assignments, six NESB students were neutral about the gap-fill and brief answer questions, and five about Assignment Two, which included the short essay questions. Students were apparently not clear that the focus of these assessments was solely on content. This interpretation is reinforced by the students' responses to a more detailed question about how they thought the questions were marked. Although the majority (10 NESB students and both ESB students) thought that the questions were marked for *"using*

correct information from your lecture handouts", four NESB students and one ESB student thought that paragraph structure was also being assessed. One ESB student also thought that grammar and spelling would be marked. These responses suggest that the absence of more explicit written task instructions and of any written marking criteria led to some confusion.

It is also interesting to note that although the majority (9 NESB and both (2) ESB students) ranked *"using correct information from handouts"* as the most important feature to be marked in the gap-fill and brief answer questions, two NESB students ranked *"well-structured paragraphs"* as most important and 10 students ranked this as the second most important criterion. In addition, one NESB student ranked *"grammatical sentence structure"* and another ranked *"correct use of grammar and spelling"* as the most important. Similarly, for the short essay questions, seven students thought that these were also marked for paragraph and essay structure, and two NESB students ranked one of these as the most important marking criterion. This seems to indicate a difference between the lecturer's perception that the focus should be on content only, and that of the majority of students who considered that paragraph and essay structure should also be marked. The students' perception is perhaps reinforced by the fact that the majority of students were either neutral (4 NESB and 2 ESB students) or disagreed (4 NESB students) that gap-fill and brief answer questions helped to improve their English writing skills.

4.3.3 Student preferences for question types and student performance (Paper One)
When asked to rank the three types of assessment questions in terms of their preferences, a clear majority (11) ranked gap-fill questions first, followed by brief answer questions and then short essay questions. Their main reasons for their preferences ranged from thinking they would get a good mark (5 students) to improving their knowledge (3 students) and finding the type of question preferred easy to complete and interesting to do (2 students respectively). The most common reason therefore was the fact that students thought they would get a good mark. Only one ranked brief answers before gap-fill questions, describing gap-fill questions as *"too easy to complete"*.

The lecturer's comments on student performance appear to support the students' preferences for assessments that would allow them to achieve a good mark, and her

perception that NESB and ESB students could perform equally well (see Section 4.3.1).
When asked how students performed in the four assessments, Lecturer A responded:

> **Lecturer A**: Most students can do it very well…I think if they work
> hard, they can do it perfectly.
> …
> **Researcher**: Yes, so (student performance) doesn't relate to whether
> they are first language English speakers or not?
>
> **Lecturer A**: No, it doesn't make any difference.

Only four students reported their grades for the three assignments that had been marked at the time the questionnaires were administered. However, their grades suggest that the form and focus of these assessments enabled both NESB and ESB students to achieve good grades. One ESB and three NESB students achieved A+ on all three assignments and a further NESB student achieved two A+ grades and one A grade. It is understandable from a pragmatic point of view that students might prefer an assessment form which appears to guarantee them a good mark. However, when asked whether they "learned a lot" from doing the assignments, although the two ESB students agreed that they did, eight NESB students were either neutral or disagreed.

One of the final questions to Lecturer A asked about plans for changes to the form of assessments. Her response appears to reflect the perception that the assessments are "too easy":

> **Lecturer A**: I think it is too easy…They don't have to do a lot of
> research, a lot of thinking – they just have to find out those materials
> and copy them down… so not a lot of thinking, just the facts.

4.4 Paper Two

4.4.1 Summary of assessment tasks and apparent cognitive and rhetorical demands

Table 4.6 summarises the details of the three assessments in Paper Two.

Paper Two	Assignment One 30%: *3 Library & Internet research tasks* [10 marks each] A. catalogue search for articles & books on topic chosen out of 4. 200 word summary of one text + APA reference B. key-word search of given database. 200 word summary of article + APA reference C. key-words Internet search with chosen search engine. 200 word summary of one text + APA reference
	Assignment Two 30%: *Research data presentation task* ❑ presentation of data & justification of choice ❑ written analysis ❑ conclusions re data & methods of analysis
	Assignment Three 40%: *Literature review* on given topic ❑ 1500 words ❑ minimum 8 texts ❑ APA reference list

Table 4.6. Paper Two: outline of assessment details

Each assessment was an out-of-class assignment. Assessment One involved three information search tasks. Each of these required a short summary of the retrieved text with an APA reference. Assessment Two was a task based on students' primary research involving the graphical presentation and analysis of data. The third assessment was identified in the instructions as a literature review and involved searching for and retrieving eight relevant texts. Initial analysis of the instructions suggested that the key cognitive demands involved in these assignments were recognition, identification, retrieval and organisation of relevant information (Assignments One and Three), and analysis of relationships between data (Assignment Two). The instructions for the literature review implied the need to evaluate and synthesise information from a number of sources. Otherwise the main rhetorical tasks or rhetorical writing functions identified were explanation or justification (in Assignment One), summarising (Assignments One and Three) and analysis (Assignment Two). Students also needed to read and interpret relevant information sources. Writing sub-skills appeared to include paraphrasing, summarising, synthesis, the provision of relevant support, logical organisation, citation and referencing.

4.4.2 Rationale for choice of assessments
Lecturer B was asked to explain the choice of the three assessments. He explained the focus of the assessments in Paper Two as being predominantly related to assessing whether students had acquired "identifiable skills":

> **Lecturer B:** …the topics were restructured to reflect the need to ensure that students had identifiable skills at the end of it, so the identifiable skills such as information retrieval, they'll actually locate and identify material. The identifiable skills of being able to present the figures and

tables appropriately, the identifiable skills of being able to conduct a literature review…(the assessments) just seemed the most appropriate methods of evaluation for those particular skills that we wanted the students to attain.

The comments illustrate Lecturer B's view of assessment as "a quality control measure to make sure that they actually have skills" (see Section 4.2). This focus on skills acquisition also reflects a number of the learning outcomes and assessment criteria for this paper. These include the ability to conduct a basic literature search, access databases, interpret basic statistical reports, present data in appropriate form and complete a full literature review. The final learning outcome and assessment criterion refers to students' ability to *"Recognize and reproduce the key elements of academic writing."*

While Lecturer B refers to the skills of information retrieval, data presentation and conducting a literature review (above), he does not explicitly mention the final learning outcome for the paper. This outcome is expanded upon briefly in a section of the Student Handbook entitled "Content". The section states that the content of the course focuses, in addition to improving students' understanding of data and basic statistical methods and information retrieval skills, on *"research writing skills"*. A list of content follows and includes: *"Writing: academic style and structure; the literature review: structure, language, referencing"*.

4.4.3 Details of Assessment One (Paper Two)

Assignment One 30%: *3 library & Internet research tasks* [10 marks each]
A. catalogue search for articles & books on topic chosen out of 4. 200 word summary of one text + APA reference
B. key-word search of given database. 200 word summary of article + APA reference
C. key-words Internet search with chosen search engine. 200 word summary of one text + APA reference

Table 4.7. Outline of Assessment One (Paper Two)

For Assessment One, students were required to search for information on one of four given topics. They were provided with instructions relating to three library and Internet based research tasks (see Table 4.7). In terms of writing requirements, for each task students had to summarise either a book or article found as a result of their search. Instructions for the individual tasks ranged from four to six lines. There were also two paragraphs providing guidance on the required numbers of words, the structure of the submitted document (three

sections), and the requirement to use the APA referencing system. Students were finally referred to a six-page description of the APA referencing system given with the guide to Paper Two. There were no written marking criteria apart from those implied in the listed requirements.

As discussed in Section 4.4.1, Lecturer B's explanation and the documented focus of this assessment related to information retrieval skills. In order to clarify the writing requirements and marking criteria for these, Lecturer B was asked to explain expectations in terms of student academic writing skills in the three summaries of texts:

> **Lecturer B:** I wasn't actually looking for too much from the summaries. The primary purpose of the summary was to identify that the student had actually located a text and could just give a broad overview, essentially a blurb for a particular book or a paraphrase of an abstract…
> …
>
> **Researcher:** So in the content section of the booklet for students it mentions academic style and structure and language, but that's not a marking priority really? How much priority do you give to that when you're marking the summaries?
>
> **Lecturer B:** Once they are clearly written, once they're understandable. (I know that sounds like a fairly basic criteria but you'd be surprised at what's handed up - that is very difficult to decipher what the students actually intend). But once it was understandable and reasonably well-structured with a sort of start, middle and finish…that was really the criteria we were looking for.
>
> …
>
> **Researcher:** You're focusing mainly on having fulfilled the task, rather than the quality of the writing?
>
> **Lecturer B**: Yes

This explanation reflects the emphasis of the learning outcomes for this paper in terms of information retrieval, interpretation and presentation skills. It is also consistent with Lecturer B's lack of specific reference to academic writing style and structure, even though these are included in the final learning outcome for the paper and content section of the student handbook. The learning outcomes include a statement that students will be assessed on their ability to *"recognize and reproduce the key elements of academic writing".* However, as far as written summaries are concerned in Assessment One, the criteria for this

appear to amount to little more than these should be *"understandable and reasonably well-structured"*.

Lecturer B was also asked to clarify expectations in terms of students' paraphrasing and the use of direct quotations in the writing of summaries.

> **Researcher:** …in terms of paraphrasing, (do you) expect students to paraphrase key points in their summaries or…?
>
> **Lecturer B:** Yes, I would.
>
> **Researcher**: To what extent do you accept direct quotations?
>
> **Lecturer B:** I try to encourage students not to include direct quotations – particularly actually with foreign language students, international students. They have a tendency to…give you quotations that are a half page long, and so they seem to miss the point a little bit on a quotation representing a succinct identifiable point…or reinforcing a particular point they're making…

Each of the three tasks was worth a maximum 10 marks (see Table 4.7). However, there seemed to be some lack of clarity in terms of the specific distribution of marks within this allocation. In terms of marks for the summaries, Lecturer B explained:

> **Lecturer B:** …I think it was three or two marks for each summary if it's clear and representative of the material…

Lecturer B also explained that students were not provided with a copy of marking criteria but are simply informed that each task is out of a total of 10 marks. Lecturer B recognised *"some ambiguity in the handbook"* in terms of marking criteria, and explained that there would be *"some major modifications made to them in the next semester"*. The following section deals with students' perceptions of the requirements and marking criteria for Assessment One.

4.4.4 Student perceptions of assessment instructions and marking criteria for Assessment One (Paper Two)

Paper	Total enrolled	NESB respondents	Gender [NESB]	ESB respondents	Gender [ESB]	% response	Age range
Two	127	4	F	16	11F 5 M	18	18-54

Table 4.8. Data on student respondents for Paper Two

As in Paper One, the most significant findings relate to the assessment instructions and marking criteria. Although the majority of students found the instructions easy to understand (3 NESB and 12 ESB students), with one describing it as a *"good assignment – not too complicated"* and another as *"well-structured"*, three students commented that the instructions were "*vague*", "*a bit vague and broad*", and "*need process explained more clearly*". In terms of marking criteria, all four NESB students agreed that they understood how the assessment would be marked. However, interestingly six ESB students were neutral and three disagreed that they understood how the assessment would be marked. One of the ESB students commented "*I remember clearly that this particular question was interpreted differently by most students – wording of the question is not explained properly*". These differences in understanding are also apparent in the students' perceptions of the lecturer's priority in terms of marking criteria. Table 4.9 summarises these different understandings.

Lecturer B:	"primary purpose …was to identify that the student had actually *located a text* and could just give a broad overview"
4 NESB students:	showing that you had *found the articles/books* in your searches [4 students]
16 ESB students:	writing an *accurate summary* of the content of an article or book [7 students]
	showing that you had *found the articles / books* in your searches [4 students]
	writing so that you could be *easily understood* [3 students]
	academic writing style [1 student]

Table 4.9. Different understandings of lecturer's main marking criterion for written summaries of texts (Assessment One, Paper Two)

It is interesting that the four NESB students shared Lecturer B's perception of the most important marking criterion for the written summaries, compared with only a quarter of the ESB students. However, as Table 4.9 indicates, almost half of the ESB students understood, mistakenly, that the main criterion related to the accuracy of the summary. This understanding may reflect ESB students' expectations of what a university course at this level should assess.

For whatever reason, particularly given that there were no written marking criteria, the NESB respondents appear to be confident in their understanding both of the instructions

and of the key marking criterion for the written summaries, whereas the ESB students report a level of confusion in both areas. This confusion may arise from the fact that, as has been discussed in Section 4.4.1, the learning outcomes refer to "academic writing" and the content section of the handbook to "writing: academic style and structure", which are not apparently being assessed.

4.4.5 Student's understanding of key assessment verbs and phrases (Assessment One, Paper Two)

Students were asked in the questionnaire to indicate what they understood by the meaning of the verb *"evaluate"* and the phrase *"write a brief summary"* in the instructions. They were given a number of options and were asked to select the meaning they thought most accurate in each case. The former was in the instructions for Part B: "*Evaluate your choice of keyword. Was it an effective keyword?*" in the database search. The majority of students (3 NESB and 12 ESB students) agreed that the verb meant *"explain whether and why the keyword was useful or not in finding relevant results"*. However one NESB student and a further ESB student thought that it meant "*describe the number of results you found with your keyword*" and two ESB students thought that it meant "*describe in writing the way you chose your keyword*". Again in the case of "*write a brief summary*" a minority (1 NESB and 2 ESB students) thought that this meant they should *"read the abstract of a journal article and quote sections of it"*. The majority agreed that it meant *"read the abstract of a journal article and write the main points in your own words"*.

4.4.6 Details of Assessment Two (Paper Two)

The key findings for Assessment Two relate again to the clarity of, and perceptions of instructions and marking criteria. The assessment focused on a data presentation task with writing requirements that related to the justification of data presentation methods, analysis of data and conclusions drawn (see Table 4.10).

Paper Two	Assignment Two 30%: *Research data presentation task* ❑ presentation of data & justification of choice ❑ written analysis ❑ conclusions re data & methods of analysis

Table 4.10. Outline of Assessment Two (Paper Two)

The single document provided for students included the weighting of the assessment (30%), due date, and a list of six points under the heading "Task". There were no written marking

criteria. The list of instructions appeared confusing in that some points provided further detail of method for previous points or earlier parts of the assignment process, rather than being new task instructions. For example the first point began "*Appropriately present your data…*"; whereas the second point related to data collection procedures. Furthermore, points three, four and five related to the analysis of data, as follow:

3. *Analyse the data as presented in the graphs. What conclusions can be drawn?*

4. *Use your calculations to assist in your analysis of the data.*

5. *Describe the relationships in your data. Use an appropriate program to arrive at a correlation coefficient. Use this in your analysis.*

It would perhaps have been clearer if the instructions relating to the process of analysis had preceded the instruction to draw a conclusion form the analysis, and if all three points listed above had been included together as one. The issue of moderation of assessments was not specifically investigated. However, these problems suggest that these instructions had not been moderated.

Lecturer B explained the requirement that students should "*justify the way you have chosen to present the data*" as being *"a verbalisation of the appropriateness of the technique that they use…"*. However, further comments seemed to imply that this "justification" was not separate to, but part of the written analysis and conclusion. Lecturer B was asked to outline the marking criteria. There seemed to be an element of confusion, and the most explicit explanation was that: *"…there were three sorts of sections. There was the presentation of numerical data, then presentation of categorical data and the correlational analysis – each again given 10 marks*" (out of a total of 30) *with "five marks for the graph and five marks divided up for the analysis and conclusion".* So the written analysis and conclusion appear to be worth five out of a total of 30 marks.

4.4.7 Student perceptions of instructions and marking criteria (Assessment Two, Paper Two)

The most striking finding is that, as in Assessment One, a higher proportion of NESB respondents reported a clearer understanding of the lecturer's meaning in terms of assessment instructions and marking criteria than the ESB students. Two of the NESB students (50%) agreed that they understood the instructions easily, with one being neutral

on this question and one disagreeing. In contrast, fourteen of the ESB students disagreed (87.5%), with only one agreeing that the instructions were easy to understand. Similarly, three NESB students reported that they understood the way the assessment would be marked, with only one disagreeing, whereas three quarters of the ESB students (12) disagreed. Also interesting is the fact that seven of the ESB respondents thought that NESB students would find it more difficult to do well in this assessment than ESB students. The majority of NESB students (3) disagreed, however. It is possible that NESB students found the instructions and marking criteria less problematic because of their less sophisticated command of English. ESB students may have been more likely to perceive different possible interpretations.

Six ESB students commented that they found the assessment instructions *"inadequate…needed to be explained multiple times… needed to be clearer in order to understand how the assignment would be marked"*, *"hard to follow"*, *"difficult to understand what was being asked'*, *"vague"*, *"not very clear"*, and *"unclear and confusing"* . In general terms four ESB students found the assignment *"more difficult than it could have been"*, *"very confusing"*, *"the most difficult"*, and *"badly presented…no idea what we were doing"*.

In terms of students' interpretation of specific wording, there was some confusion among ESB students in terms of the meanings of two key phrases in the instructions. When asked to match the phrase *"justify the way you have chosen to present data"* with the most accurate definition, the majority (12) chose *"explain that the graph/chart/table you chose summarises your data and informs the reader well"*, but three chose *"explain what the graph shows"*. Similarly, when asked to match the most accurate definition of *"analyse the data"*, which related to a written analysis, two ESB students chose *"organising the information to present it in a graph/chart/table"*. Although these results may indicate something about the ability of certain students to analyse instructions and key words effectively, they may also be related to the fact that the majority of these students found the instructions difficult to understand.

Students displayed a similar level of confusion in terms of their reported understanding of the lecturer's marking priority. It was noted above that Lecturer A saw the focus of this

assessment as *"the identifiable skills of being able to present the figures and table appropriately"*. It has also been noted that the lecturer's explanation of the marking criteria (Section 4.4.5) appeared a little confused, apart from the division of 30 marks into three sections, with five marks in total for the written analysis and conclusion. Table 4.11 summarises the range of student responses to a question about what they thought was the most important marking criterion as far as the lecturer was concerned.

Most important marking criterion	ESB students	NESB students
Writing so that you can be clearly understood	1	
Academic writing style	4	
Producing a scattergraph from your data		1
Producing a graph/chart/table showing relationships between your data	6	1
Explaining why you chose the graph/chart/table	2	2
Writing an explanation of what the graph/chart/table shows	1	
"All equally important apart from academic writing style"	1 (own comment)	

Table 4.11. Different student understandings of the most important marking criterion for Assessment Two (Paper Two)

As the table shows, the largest group (6 ESB students) agreed with the lecturer's perception of the main marking criterion. But this group represents only 30% of the total student respondents. The next largest group thought that academic writing style was the marking priority.

4.4.8 Details of Assessment Three (Paper Two)
For Assessment Three students were required to undertake and write a literature review on a particular topic (see Table 4.12). The instructions outlined the task which was to "review the debate concerning (the topic)". Five aims of the assignment were also listed, as well as six requirements related to the task. These requirements indicated what was required in terms of content (an introduction, an outline of "major studies and discoveries", a summary that "draws these together", a conclusion and bibliography). In addition, the order of these requirements implied the structure of the review. There were no written marking criteria.

Interestingly, given Lecturer B's argument (see Section 4.4.1) that the focus of assessments in this paper was on identifiable skills, including the ability to "conduct" a literature review, none of the listed task aims referred to the ability to search for and retrieve relevant literature. Rather the focus of this assessment, as reflected in the aims and requirements, appears to be on the organisational and writing skills involved in *writing* a literature review – referred to in the listed content as "structure, language, referencing".

Paper	Assessment Type
Two	Assignment 40%: *Literature review* on given topic ❑ 1500 words ❑ minimum 8 texts ❑ APA reference list

Table 4.12. Outline of Assessment Three (Paper Two)

In addition students were given a two-page handout entitled "Write a Literature Review". This presented generic guidelines for literature reviews, rather than apparently being specifically produced for this assignment. Lecturer B explained that this handout was given to students in tutorials. Students were also invited to submit drafts of this assignment and were given feedback on these. Lecturer B estimated that 10% of the class had submitted drafts and of which eight were international students and two were "kiwis.*"*

One of the requirements was to include an "outline of the major studies and discoveries" in the topic area. Lecturer B was asked to explain any guidance given to students in identifying major studies. He responded:

> **Lecturer B:** I wasn't very happy with the wording to be honest. It's not very clear and has caused some students some difficulty…I do give them some guidance into where they can look…"

4.4.9 Student perceptions of instructions, marking criteria and of task (Assessment Three, Paper Two)

As a literature review was possibly an unfamiliar academic genre for students taking Paper Two, respondents were asked about their previous knowledge, or experience of writing literature reviews prior to doing this assessment. Only one NESB student and two ESB students (15%) agreed that they had already known how to structure and write a literature review. For the majority therefore the literature review was a new academic genre.

In terms of task instructions, only approximately a third (5) of the ESB students agreed that they understood these. Two commented that they found the instructions *"weren't very clear'*, and were *"vague – even contradictory – making this assignment difficult to understand"*. None of the NESB students found the instructions easy to understand. However, while only a quarter (4) ESB students agreed that they understood the way the assessment would be marked, three (75%) of NESB students reported that they did understand. Overall, most students therefore had difficulties in terms of the clarity of instructions, although the majority of NESB students appeared to be confident about their understanding of the way the assignment would be marked.

To further investigate the students' understanding, respondents were also asked to indicate whether they understood the meaning of wording in the listed aims and requirements for the assessment. Table 4.13 summarises the number of NESB and ESB respondents who agreed that they understood these particular meanings.

Extracts from assessment wording	Number of students who understood wording	
	ESB (16)	NESB (4)
outline the direction of research	6	1
place the review in context	6	2
identify flaws in the debate	14	1
lay the basis for the review	9	1

Table 4.13. Number of students agreeing that they understood meanings of assessment wording

The table shows that the majority of ESB students reported that they understood what is meant by "identify the flaws in the debate" and over half understood the meaning of "lay the basis for the review". However, less than 50% of the ESB students understood the first two meanings, and overall, the majority of NESB students did not understand the meanings listed. This last finding supports the fact that NESB students found the instructions difficult to understand, even though three reported that they understood the way the assignment would be marked. It can be argued that the wording of these instructions requires relatively sophisticated mastery of abstract concepts such as "direction", "context" and to "lay the

basis". Given that this is a paper normally taken by first year undergraduate students, it is perhaps not surprising that NESB students in particular found these terms difficult to understand.

Students were asked to rank suggested marking criteria in order of importance for the lecturer. Although 8 (50%) of the ESB students and three (75%) of the NESB students ranked "writing all parts of the literature review listed in the "required" section of instructions" as most important, a number of different criteria were also selected as the priority (see Table 4.14).

Most important marking criterion	ESB students (16)	NESB students (4)
Writing all "required" parts	8	3
Academic writing style	4	
Writing so that you could be clearly understood	1	1
Accuracy in APA reference list	1	

Table 4.14. Different understandings of lecturer's main marking criterion for literature review (Assessment Three, Paper Two)

At the time of the interview with lecturer B, Assessment Three had not been marked. In the light of this, and in the absence of any written marking criteria, these findings appear to confirm the confidence of three of the NESB students that they understood the way the assessment would be marked. That is, the first criterion in Table 4.14 reflects the list of requirements in the task instructions, and is all the students had *in writing* as a basis for their understanding of marking criteria.

Interestingly, the majority (3) of the NESB students "learned a lot" from doing the assignment and felt that NESB students could do as well as ESB students. In contrast, only six ESB students reported that they had "learned a lot", and 8 (50%) thought that NESB students could not do as well. There were, however, very positive comments from two ESB students, who had not written a literature review before: *"good assignment, learnt a lot"* and *"good assignment. Tested ability to research and critique current ideas in this field"*.

4.4.10 Student preferences for assessment types and student performance (Paper Two)

Table 4.15 summarises students' reported preferences in terms of assessment type. There are some interesting differences, which do not appear to correlate with students' performances in the three assessments.

Assessment Type	Students' preferred assessment type	
	ESB students (16)	**NESB students (4)**
1. Library and Internet research tasks	9	
2. Data Presentation task	1	3
3. Literature Review	5	1

Table 4.15. Students' first preferences for assessment types and student performance (Paper Two)

As the table shows, more than half the ESB students ranked the library and Internet research task first, with three of these explaining that their preference related to the fact that the assessment was "easy to complete" and one saying that it was because she would get a good mark . One student added the comment *"I'm here to pass. Easy is good"*. Others preferred this assessment because it would either improve their knowledge, understanding and skills (2 students) or was interesting to complete (3 students). Only one chose the data presentation task because it was "easy to complete". A further five ranked the literature review first, even though they either had not received their highest grade for this assessment, or had not yet received their grade for this assessment. For three of these students the reason was that the preferred assessment would improve knowledge, understanding and skills. Two preferred the literature review on the grounds that it was interesting to do.

In contrast, three of the NESB students ranked the data presentation task first, even though one had received a higher grade for another assessment and one had received A+ for all three. Their choice again related to improvement in knowledge, understanding and skills. The fourth NESB student ranked the literature review (for which she received her highest grade) as first preference on the basis that it was "interesting to do". It appears then that the most popular assessment among ESB students was the research task with approximately 50% of these students citing pragmatic reasons for their preference. However, the majority of NESB students preferred the data presentation task. Furthermore, all four NESB students and two thirds of the ESB students cited their main reason for their preference as either

related to improving knowledge, understanding and skills (8 students) or because it was interesting (6 students).

The comments of three ESB students who understood the instructions and preferred the literature review assessment shed further light on their reasons for doing so. These were: "*(it) engages the student to look at different research styles and research; it involves a pro active style for learning*", "*(it) was more interesting to me, because I had never done one before. Also because I could express my views more and be more original*", and finally, "*I don't mind a challenging assessment as long as I am learning and applying new knowledge*". However the comment of another ESB student implies a lack of understanding of the academic significance of the literature review: "*The assignment was a waste of time. When will I ever write a literature review in my life?*".

Three NESB and 11 ESB students gave their grades for the three assessments. Table 4.16 presents the students' self-reported mean grades.

Assessments	NESB students	ESB students
One	A+	B+
Two	A+	B+
Three	A	B

Table 4.16. Mean grades for assessments (Paper Two)

The differences between NESB and ESB students in their understanding of instructions and marking criteria for assessments One and Two (outlined in Sections 4.4.4 and 4.4.7) appear in general terms to have affected levels of student achievement. As can be seen, in all three assessments the average grade for NESB students is higher than that of the ESB students. This finding supports the NESB students' apparent high level of confidence in their understanding of the task instructions and key marking criterion in Assessments One and Two. It is also supported by a comment from Lecturer B, who stated *"I find particularly the international students tend to do very, very well"*. When asked to explain the possible reasons for this, Lecturer B responded:

> **Lecturer B:** …I think it's because they're aware that they may suffer later on…in a large piece of text like a literature review…I think it's because it's such a small piece of text that's required …so they put a great deal of attention into ensuring that that paragraph or two paragraphs is well written.

It also confirms Lecturer B's perceptions after marking assessments One and Two:

> **Lecturer B:** I found (NESB students) did extremely well. I don't have the statistics, we haven't got a detailed analysis, but anecdotally I would imagine they performed better than your average student.

Lecturer B offered further explanation for this difference in performance:

> **Lecturer B:** Yeah, and I think it was because of…maybe because of their experience in the first semester that they realise for those sort of more structured tasks that they need to get the marks there. Because maybe they feel they might suffer later on with some of the…larger writing assignments.

Although Lecturer B had predicted that NESB students might "suffer" (in terms of level of achievement) in a longer writing assessment such as a literature review, the mean grade for these students for that assessment was higher than that of the ESB students. This may reflect the fact that the majority of the NESB students reported that they understood how the review would be marked, even though all four had difficulty in understanding the instructions. If this is so, it might suggest that for NESB students, an accurate understanding of marking criteria (in terms of sharing the lecturer's perceptions of these) is a significant factor in terms of successful achievement. This finding also appears to confirm that the relatively complex range of cognitive demands and rhetorical tasks inferred initially from the assessment instructions (see Section 4.4.1) are not priorities in the marking of these tasks.

4.4.11 Student perceptions of role of assessments in improving writing skills (Paper Two)

Students were asked to state whether they agreed or disagreed that each assessment had improved their writing skills. In the case of the research tasks (Assessment One), only three students agreed (2ESB and 1 NESB). For the data presentation task (Assessment Two) only

two NESB students agreed. However, a quarter of the ESB students (4) and all four NESB students agreed that the literature review had improved their writing skills. Although six students stated that they had received written feedback on their writing, it is difficult to draw any particular conclusions from this finding. It may be the case that more students perceived Assessment Three as improving their writing skills by the mere fact that it was a 1500 word writing assignment.

4.4.12 Lecturer B's plans for changes to assessments
Lecturer B explained that there were no plans to change the form of assessment. However he did plan to improve guidelines for students and the marking criteria:

> **Lecturer B:** …The guidelines will be improved, the structure will be improved…there (are) some ambiguous statements within the marking criteria … a more structured marking criteria certainly…

4.5 Paper Three

4.5.1 Summary of assessment tasks and apparent cognitive and rhetorical demands

Table 4.17 summarises the details of the three assessments on Paper Three. Assessments One and Two were out-of-class assignments and were identified in the instructions as a literature review and an essay, respectively. Assessment Three was a timed exam involving the production of four essays.

Paper	Assessment Type
Three	Assignment 15%: *literature review* 1500 words; based on topic selected from lectures weeks 3 [to] 7 ; 4 to 5 texts
	Assignment 25%: *essay* 2,500 words; topic chosen from 6
	Exam 60%: [3 hours + 10 minutes reading time] 4 *essay questions* chosen from 11 15 marks each

Table 4.17. Paper Three: outline of assessment details

Analysis of the assignment instructions indicated that Assessment One involved similar cognitive skills to those implied by the literature review assignment in Paper Two. Inferred cognitive demands were recognition, identification, retrieval, evaluation (by comparison) and logical organisation of relevant information. Key rhetorical tasks for this assessment appeared to involve summarising, synthesis and analysis. In all three assessments students

also needed to read and interpret relevant information sources and to paraphrase, summarise, synthesise, cite, and reference information from multiple sources. For assessments Two and Three, the essays appeared to require similar cognitive skills in terms of identification, retrieval, evaluation (in the case of some topics) and organisation of relevant information. Inferred rhetorical tasks involved description or explanation, synthesis, and the application of information, as well as analysis in some cases. In addition the timed exams required the retrieval of information from memory.

4.5.2 Rationale for choice of assessments

The purpose of the paper as identified in the student handbook is to *"introduce students to academic analysis of (the subject area)"*. Lecturer C explained that the purpose of assessments in general and on this paper was to *"test the student's understanding of course content"* and that the topics of the three assessments therefore reflect the way that the course content is structured. Instructions for Assignment One stated that students could choose a topic for the literature review from those covered in lectures between weeks three and seven of the course. Essay topics for Assignment Two relate to the content of lectures eight to ten. The final exam questions offer a choice from the range of topics covered in the course. The learning outcomes for the paper, reproduced for students in the handbook, illustrate the focus on understanding of course content. These include the ability to *"identify and explain the differences (between two relevant concepts)", "explain in broad terms (a particular development)", "understand (a particular relationship)", "account for (particular pressures on relevant organisations)", "demonstrate how (those pressures affect a given phenomenon)",* and *"decode the manifest and latent meanings (of a given phenomenon)".* There were no specific written learning outcomes relating to academic literacies or skills, such as those involved in writing literature reviews or essays.

4.5.3   Details of Assessment One (Paper Three)

Assessment One (see Table 4.18) was a literature review assignment. Students could choose one of five topic areas covered in lectures by week seven of the course. Instructions to students related to choice of literature, review method and assessment criteria.

Paper	Assessment Type
Three	Assignment One 15%: *literature review* 1500 words; based on topic selected from lectures weeks 3 [to] 7 ; 4 to 5 texts

Table 4.18. Outline of Assessment One (Paper Three)

The instructions as to choice of literature were specific, and the method section was particular in terms of the content and structure of the review. Students were instructed to select, as the basis for their review, one reading from those listed in the booklists for each lecture, or one discussed at tutorial sessions. Those wishing to choose a different reading were told to check this choice with their tutor. The method section instructed students to write a summary of the key points in the argument of the author(s) of the chosen reading (*"to demonstrate your understanding of the argument"*). They were then instructed to *critically evaluate* this argument *"by comparing this piece of literature with other pieces of writing on the same subject or theme"*, referring to four or five pieces of literature in total. A further instruction asked students to *"identify the particular point of view or perspective taken by the writer/s... Evaluate this perspective against the perspectives in the other pieces of writing"*.

As the last instruction was a separate bullet point students may have understood this as further elaboration on what was required in terms of critical evaluation (comparison), or as a different requirement. If the former interpretation is the intended one, then "argument" in the earlier instruction is used here synonymously with "perspective".

Lecturer C was asked to clarify what was required in terms of critical evaluation:

> **Researcher:** Can you explain what you expect in terms of thinking and writing skills when you ask students to *"critically evaluate the writer's argument"* in the literature review?
>
> **Lecturer C:** …I think it's very important that you are asking students to read something first of all – you want to know they understand what the writer is saying, and then you want them to actually think about it and evaluate it critically…first of all you have to summarise the key points in a piece of literature …(using the analogy of a film review) then you're inviting them to think more about how you decide one film was better than another …they have to identify what the different approaches are and that sort of thing…to assess whether someone has a very comprehensive argument or not, or to have some way of evaluating whether the argument's convincing…

The lecturer appears to be arguing here, therefore, that the critical evaluation required relates to whether an argument is "very comprehensive" or "whether the argument's convincing".

> **Researcher:** So the second sort of wording I was interested in is "*Evaluate this perspective*". The evaluation of this perspective follows from the critical comparison with the other texts does it?

> **Lecturer C:** Yes, and sometimes in one or two (readings), a lot of people are taking the same point of view; so they're saying "Well all the perspectives are the same" but at least they're recognising (that)…at least they know that it is a particular point of view.

It appears that the main focus in terms of critical evaluation relates to students' ability to identify, explain and compare different approaches taken by, or perspectives of different authors related to the same topic area. It also appears that the separate instruction to "evaluate this perspective" is in fact an elaboration on the form of the comparison between texts.

The written assessment criteria given to students reflect the lecturer's interpretation of critical evaluation as the identification and comparison of perspectives. Criteria were presented as bullet points and included: *"clarity and fluency"* of writing, understanding of material and of complex material, ability to summarise key points, evaluation and analysis, the *"ability to link concepts and integrate different points"*, and *"the ability to identify and compare perspectives"*.

Lecturer C was asked to explain what was required in terms of "clarity and fluency" of writing.

> **Lecturer C:** the fluency would mean the way you're structuring it and organising the material. But the clarity is sort of making the meaning really clear…to keep their language use so that other people can understand what they're getting at…and it's to do with the way they connect points as well…students who write really well, whose thinking is very clear and good, and write really well…they're going to get better marks than someone who doesn't express themselves as clearly and well.

Lecturer C also explained that incorrect forms of citation are not penalised in this assignment:

> **Lecturer C:** And we're also quite keen on them doing citations correctly but I'd tell them, we're not going to deduct marks for that. But by the time they come to their second assignment…we would expect them to be on top of that, because we've taught it to them.

The documents provided by Lecturer C also included brief grade descriptors for tutors. For grade C these referred to summarising and demonstrating understanding of appropriate literature with *"some comment/analysis"*. For grade B students had to meet the criteria for grade C but with an increased level of analysis and comparison as well as fluency in writing (*"writes fluently/well"*). For an A, as well as meeting the criteria for grade B, the review had to be "*substantially analytical*" with "*comparative aspects (drawing) out similarities and differences in perspectives*". For grade A, in other words, there had to be a high level of analysis and comparison of perspectives. The emphasis in the descriptors therefore appears to be on the level of analysis and comparison in the reviews. This contrasts with the assessment criteria given to students which were listed and un-weighted.

Lecturer C also explained that tutors responsible for marking are given examples of assignments done in previous years as models of the three grades. Tutors mark sets of assignments after a group marking exercise takes place. Finally, Lecturer C moderates examples of good and weak assignments in order to standardise marking.

4.5.4 Student perceptions of assessment instructions and marking criteria for Assignment One (Paper Three)

Table 4.19 summarises information about the student respondents taking Paper Three.

Paper	Total enrolled	NESB respondents	Gender [NESB]	ESB respondents	Gender [ESB]	% response	Age range
Three	194	4	F	30	26F 4 M	17.5	18-39

Table 4.19. Data on student respondents for Paper Three

Firstly it is useful to summarise students' previous knowledge of this academic genre. Only one NESB student agreed that she knew how to structure and write a literature review before completing Assessment One. Of the ESB students, over half (19) reported that they did not know how to write one, with only six agreeing that they did. There was some disagreement among students as to whether their tutors had taught them how to write a literature review, with nine students reporting that this had been taught. This difference might be explained by the fact that the respondents would have been in one of eight different tutorial groups, with possibly different approaches to this assignment. Overall less than a fifth of students (7) therefore felt that they knew how to write a review.

In terms of understanding the assignment instructions, less than a quarter of respondents (1 NESB student and 7 ESB) agreed that they understood these easily. A number of students commented on the instructions. One NESB student wrote that:

For someone who never did a literature review before the instructions was not at all clear. I asked for further clarification from the tutor but still I don't really get the concept"

A second NESB student, having also sought clarification of the written instructions wrote:

Instructions from lecturers and tutors is unclear…more instructions needed.

Six ESB students commented respectively that the assignment was *"confusing", "not well-designed", "…I didn't know what to deliver or how to deliver it", "not explained …at all well", "tutors needed to explain more about how to do this assignment"* and *"…it was not clear that the main focus of the article should have been its comparison to other articles…".*

Two ESB students also expressed confusion about the aims of the assignment. Their comments were:

I was not sure of the objective of the assignment or what doing it would mean to our learning.

There seems little point to summarising & comparing different perspectives as the sole purpose of this assignment. It was a tedious task, & proved of little value when it came to revision.

Some students illustrated their confusion about the nature and purpose of an academic literature review:

As we were not informed on the differences between a normal essay and a literature review and not shown an example of a literature essay it was hard to know exactly what to do, by following the instructions. I hadn't done one at high school.

"There was a lot of confusion between what is written in a literary essay and a literature review."

"the literature review structure was different to the one I learnt at high school".

"…I modelled my answer off 2 movie reviews …"

Usually if I read a literature review (in the "Herald" or "Listener") it does not focus so much on comparison with other literature."

Lecturer C had attempted in some detail, as described above, to indicate what the response to the instructions should consist of in terms of cognitive skills and rhetorical functions. The fact that the majority of student respondents appear not to have understood the task instructions clearly, and the comments above might both be due to a fundamental lack of understanding of the nature of literature review in the academic context. Furthermore, although students were given a list of marking criteria, less than a third (1 NESB and 10 ESB students) stated that they understood the way the assignment would be marked.

Students were asked what they thought was meant by the instruction to "critically evaluate the argument". Although the majority (3 NESB and 21 ESB students) agreed with Lecturer C's perception that this meant *"explain how comprehensive and/or convincing the first writer's ideas are by comparing these with those of other writers"*, a number (2 NESB and 5 ESB students) thought that this meant to *"summarise the key points"* while others (1 NESB and 6 ESB students) were not sure what it meant. While Lecturer C seemed to be arguing that "evaluate this perspective" and "evaluate the argument" were the same point, students were confused about this. Thirteen stated that these meant the same thing, while the majority (21) thought these were two separate requirements.

As with Papers One and Two, students were asked to rank the listed marking criteria in order of what they thought their importance was to the lecturer. As was seen above (Section 4.5.2), the emphasis in the marking descriptors provided for staff appeared to be on the level of analysis and comparison in the reviews. Table 4.20 summarises students' perceptions of the most important marking criterion. The marking criteria listed are copied from those given to students. The largest group of students identified the basic criterion for a pass (C grade), which referred to summarising and demonstrating understanding of appropriate literature with *"some comment/analysis"*. As Table 4.20 shows, therefore, there appears to be agreement between the lecturer and most students as to the assessment focus of this assignment.

Most important marking criterion	ESB students	NESB students
clarity & fluency of writing	2	
accurate referencing	1	
understanding of material	14*	1
understanding of complex material	2	1
ability to summarise key points	1	
evaluation/analysis of material	6	1
ability to link concepts & integrate different points	3*	1
ability to identify & compare perspectives	3*	
	*One student chose all 3 criteria	

Table 4.20. Different students' understanding of the most important marking criterion for Assessment One (Paper Three)

4.5.5 Details of Assessment Two (Paper Three)

Assessment Two was an essay assignment (see Table 4.21). Students were instructed to answer one question out of six essay topics listed.

Paper	Assessment Type
Three	Assignment 25%: *essay* 2,500 words; topic chosen from 6

Table 4.21. Outline of Assessment Two (Paper Three)

In addition, students were provided with a checklist for submission with the assignment. This listed instructions under the headings "Research and Summary of Research" (for example, "locate relevant material" and "demonstrate understanding of material"); "Analysis" (for example, "distinguish between fact and opinion", "evaluate the quality of evidence from your sources" and "link related points"); and essay "Structure" and "Presentation" (for example, "clarity and fluency of writing"). The section on structure referred students to a two-page handout entitled "*How to write an academic essay*". This provided guidelines on the essay writing process and referencing and, according to Lecturer C, is covered in tutorials in some detail.

Wording for the six essay topics included *"Discuss the claim that…"*, *"Explain…and critically examine the explanations for their development"*, *"What are…? Examine the*

claim that…", *"Describe the functions of …and consider to what extent…"*, *"Explain the term…and evaluate whether it is a useful explanation…"* and finally, *"Explain the notion of…Analyse claims that… "*. Lecturer C explained that in each case students were expected to define and explain relevant terms or concepts in terms of, and with reference to, discipline-specific theory. Students were then required to "scrutinise" or "evaluate" the relevant claim or explanation by testing this against examples from the real world. The terms "critically examine" and "analyse" are therefore used by the lecturer as synonyms for "evaluate".

Lecturer C explained that the checklist and handout on essay writing provided for students also formed the marking criteria. Marks are allocated *"in a holistic way"*. Lecturer C further explained that if students *"do something brilliantly, (they) have to get an A, even though they might not have done one aspect of it quite…in the way you were expecting"*. When asked to identify the section of the checklist that carried the most weight in terms of marks, Lecturer C argued, *"I think they're all related, I wouldn't want to separate them"*.

4.5.6 Student perceptions of assessment instructions and marking criteria for Assignment Two (Paper Three)

Approximately 75% of student respondents agreed that they knew how to structure and write an academic essay in English, with six students unsure (1NESB and 5 ESB students) and two ESB students disagreeing . Over half the ESB students (18) found the instructions easy to understand, with only three disagreeing and nine unsure. Similarly, seventeen ESB students understood the way this assignment would be marked, while seven did not. However, only one NESB student found the instructions easy to understand and understood how the assignment would be marked, the remaining three were unsure.

One ESB student commented on the wording of the instructions positively: *"Straight forward and simple instructions and questions,(these) let me concentrate more on the content and essay rather than wasting time trying to figure out what the question means"*. Another two ESB students commented on the assessment itself: *"compared to assignment # 1 this was much easier to prepare, research and answer"* and *"Good assignment…very interesting and helped with (other paper)"*.

Students were asked whether they thought that the wording of the six essay topics indicated that the same thinking and writing skills were involved in each case, or whether the different essays required different skills. More than half (16) of the 30 ESB students and half of the 4 NESB students thought that the topics required different skills. This contrasts with the lecturer's perception that each topic required identification, explanation and evaluation.

Students were also asked to rank the points listed in each section of the checklist in terms of what they thought the teacher regarded as the most important marking criterion in each case. In retrospect this question should have included the option to rank these checklist items equally. The lecturer had indicated that this checklist formed the marking criteria, that the assessment was *"marked in a holistic way"* and that therefore the criteria were *"all related"*. Although this was not clear in the written instructions, it is likely that this was clarified in lectures or tutorials. Two ESB students made it clear that they shared the lecturer's perception that the total of 18 marking criteria were related. One ranked the checklist points equally, commenting that *"All of these need to be taken into account (not ranked)"*. The other ranked all the points equally with the exception of *"generate your own insights"* and keeping to the word length. All other students selected more than one criterion as most important. Table 4.22 summarises the criteria ranked "most important" by the largest number of students in each of the four sections of the checklist.

Checklist section	Most important marking criteria	ESB Students [total 30[	NESB Students [total 4]
Research and summary of research:	*demonstrate understanding of material*	15	3
Analysis:	*distinguish between fact & opinion*	8	0
Structure:	*answers the question*	22	4
Presentation:	*clarity & fluency of writing*	17	3

Table 4.22. Summary of student perceptions of most important marking criteria in the four checklist sections (Assessment Two, Paper Three)

Students may have been rather reluctant to rank these criteria. Nonetheless the largest number, identified *demonstrating understanding of the material* as the most significant criterion. This reflects the lecturer's perception of the purpose of assessments on this paper as testing the students' understanding of course content (see Section 4.5.2).

4.5.7   Details of Assessment Three (Paper Three)

Assessment Three was a timed exam worth 60% of total marks for Paper Three (see Table 4.23). According to Lecturer C, the questions relate to lecture topics covered from week two of the course. Students were therefore able to answer two questions on the same topic areas they covered in Assessments One and Two, with two additional topic areas. Each of the four essay questions answered was worth 15 marks.

Paper	Assessment Type
Three	Assessment Three: Exam 60% [3 hours + 10 minutes reading time] 4 *essay questions* chosen from 11 15 marks each

Table 4.23. Outline of Assessment Three (Paper Three)

The essay questions are similar to those in Assessment Two in that students are required to define and explain discipline specific terms, concepts or developments and to evaluate a claim or statement relating to this. The instructions ask students to "*Use New Zealand examples where appropriate*".

Students were provided with a copy of the marking descriptors for the exam essay before the end of lectures. For a C grade essays had to answer the question asked, demonstrate "*clear understanding of course material*", substantiate points using relevant New Zealand material and be "*clearly expressed*". For a B grade, essays had to meet these criteria and also show "*evidence of wider reading*" as well as be "*analytical*". For an A grade, essays had to meet the criteria for a B, as well as being "*substantially analytical*".

4.5.8   Student perceptions of instructions and marking criteria (Assessment Three, Paper Three)

The majority of students reported that they found the exam instructions easy to understand (23 ESB and 3 NESB students). In addition, more than half the ESB students (17) stated that they found the exam easy to complete, however only one NESB student did so. One of the ESB students commented that "*the time limit was probably more difficult for NESB*

students – 4 essays in three hours is too much". This perception appears to be confirmed by an NESB student who commented that international students would be penalised by facing *"more difficulties, provided the time constraints…they will need twice as long to construct their sentences so that they make sense compared to a local student with English as their first language"*. Another NESB student argued that the 60% percent weighting of the exam was *"…unfair and long and complicated. This should be changed…"*.

Eight ESB students also commented about the number of essays and the time constraints. They stated that *"4 essays was too much"*, with *"too many questions to be answered well in the time allotted"* and that this *"…limited the ability to include all relevant information…a longer time or less essays would improve this"*. Another said *"I struggled to complete my last exam question…"* and a fifth argued that students *"can't physically write enough for 4 adequate essays in 3 hours"*.

In terms of marking criteria, only one NESB student reported that she had understood how the essays would be marked, compared with over half of the 30 ESB students (17). Students were also asked whether they understood the meaning of wording from the marking descriptors. Half the ESB students but only one NESB student understood the meaning of *"substantiates points"*. Just over half the ESB students (17) and half of the NESB students reported that they understood *"analytical"*. Finally, less than half the ESB students (11) and two NESB students understood the meaning *of "substantially analytical"*. Other students were either unsure or did not understand these meanings.

Finally, students were asked to rank the marking criteria in order of importance to the teacher. The majority (19 ESB and all 4 NESB students) ranked *"answers the questions asked"* first, followed by *"demonstrates clear understanding of course material"*. These priorities reflect two elements of the descriptor for a pass or C grade. The latter also summarises the stated purpose of the course, which was to *"test the student's understanding of course content"*.

4.5.9 Student preferences for assessment types and student performance (Paper Three)

When asked to rank the three assessments in terms of their preferences, all four NESB students ranked the essay assignment (Assessment Two) first. Three ranked the literature review assignment as their second preference with only one ranking the exam ahead of the literature review. The majority of the 30 ESB students (18) also preferred the essay assignment. Seven ESB students preferred the literature review, and only five ranked the exam as their first preference. The largest number (2 NESB and 15 ESB students) gave the fact that the assessment was "interesting to do" as the main reason for their preference.

A number of students commented on the reasons for their preferences. One saw the literature review assignment as *"academic buncombe (sic)"* which resulted in frustration. Another felt that this assignment *"didn't seem necessary"*. A third reported that they *"didn't understand how to write one",* and so found it *"unfamiliar and poorly explained"*. However, another student *"enjoyed the literature review immensely, from the point of view that the material was challenging, informative and interesting"* although it *"would have been better if tutors were allowed to give us a clearer indication of what was expected"*. She added *"The assignment was extremely interesting, and the exam an exercise in rote learning"*. A fifth student preferred the literature review because of *"Clear instructions – freedom and clarity in the assignment making it easier"*. Of those who preferred the exam most, one wrote *"...the exam at least felt worthwhile, being 60%. I learnt more cramming for the exam than I did all semester"*. Another felt that *"exams are out of the way quicker"*. Finally one student who ranked the essay assignment as first preference noted *"I am familiar with essay writing & argument and am good at it. Hate the pressure of exams"*.

All four NESB students reported their grades for the three assessments. 19 ESB students reported their grades for Assessment One, with 18 giving their grades for the other two assessments. Table 4.24 presents mean grades for NESB and ESB students on the assessments.

Assessment	ESB students	NESB students
One	B-	C+
Two	B	B-
Three	B-	C+

Table 4.24. Mean grades for assessments (Paper Three)

The highest number of fails (1 NESB and 2 ESB students) was on Assessment One. For each of the subsequent assessments there was one ESB student who failed. Although the sample size is small, the results tend to indicate that both groups of students did better in the essay writing assignment, which the majority preferred. Interestingly, in the case of each assessment less than a fifth of the ESB students felt that NESB students could do as well as students from an English speaking background. The NESB students either agreed with this perception or were unsure. The results tend to support the accuracy of this perception in that overall the ESB students had slightly higher average grades.

4.5.10 Student perceptions of role of assessments in improving writing skills (Paper Three)

The majority of NESB students (3) thought that all three assessments helped to improve their writing skills. As for the ESB students, the largest number (14) felt that the essay assignment helped improve their writing skills. Only seven agreed that the literature review did so, and even fewer (3) agreed that that writing the exam essays did so. This perception of the ESB students coincides with the fact that the essay assignment was the preferred assessment type for the majority. It may be that confidence in understanding instructions and marking criteria, and previous experience with the written genre make for an opportunity to focus on developing writing skills.

However, for those ESB students who reported that they had received written feedback, only seven reported that they had had feedback on their writing and only six said that this feedback had been helpful in improving their writing. Lecturer C explained in the interview that each student submitted an assignment mark sheet which had space for written feedback. Students were also able to seek extra feedback through discussion with tutors at tutorial sessions, or on a one-to-one basis. The greatest amount of feedback reported by

ESB students related to corrections or comments about content. Three NESB students, however, had received written corrections to writing errors.

4.5.11 Lecturer C's plans for changes to assessments

Lecturer C intended to review the assessments after marking the exam scripts. She did report that she intended to reduce the exam mark *"because I think that's quite a high weighting…especially (for students) who aren't first language English speakers"*. She also voiced the concern that this paper was not suitable or relevant for international students because of the New Zealand content. She planned to review the performance of these students.

4.6 Emerging themes

The most significant findings can be categorised into two main emerging themes. The first of these centres on differences in approaches to assessment. The second relates to student difficulties in understanding assessment instructions and marking criteria. These are discussed in the following two sections.

4.6.1 Diversity in approaches to assessment

This investigation reinforces the findings of earlier studies in that it identifies considerable differences in assessment types between the three discipline areas. These range from gap-fill answer exercises to a 2,500 word essay. Two courses included a literature review assignment. However only one of these can be described as resembling the library research paper identified in earlier studies (see Kroll, 1979 and Horowitz, 1986), in that it required students to search for relevant texts. Otherwise these two assignments appear to indicate the emergence of a new assessment type – the 'free-standing' literature review genre, with relatively high-level cognitive demands and comparatively sophisticated rhetorical elements. However, the two approaches to these assessments, as implied in the instructions and lecturers' explanations, differed. The findings suggest that the assessment focus for the literature review in Paper Two was on the ability to "conduct" a literature review search and to structure the content of the review. This is in contrast to Paper Three which emphasised the cognitive and rhetorical skills involved in writing a review.

As indicated by Moore and Morton (2005), differences in assessment types reflect discipline knowledge, methods of analysis and patterns of discourse. These are in turn

reflected in the learning outcomes of papers. However, the findings suggest that choice of assessment types may also reflect lecturers' perceptions of the role of assessment. The predominant perception of the three lecturers in this study appears to be that the function of assessment is to certify the acquisition of learning. Learning is defined variously as learning, understanding course content, and as acquired knowledge and skills. The concept that assessment may act as a prompt for learning was not articulated, and only one of the lecturers referred (indirectly) to the role of assessment as a performance indicator. Furthermore the lecturers appeared to view assessment as predominantly summative. There was no explicit reference to the formative role of assessment in providing feedback to students in order that they might improve - either in terms of their understanding of course content or in terms of discipline-specific or academic writing skills.

The study also reveals differences in the provision of marking criteria. In fact Paper Three was the only one to provide marking criteria. Given current assessment theory and the focus on standards-based assessment, as well as current perceptions of the purposes of university assessment (reviewed in Chapter 2), this is perhaps surprising. It can be argued that the lack of an articulated perception that assessment plays an important role as a prompt for learning mitigates against the provision of clear marking criteria. The absence of marking criteria may also be seen as generally disadvantaging students. This issue is discussed further in the next section.

In general terms, the lecturers' criteria in relation to use of language reflect the findings of earlier studies (see Bridgeman & Carlson, 1984 and Gravatt et al., 1997). There were, however, some differences in emphasis. In Paper One there was a clear focus on content, rather than word, sentence or structural features. In Paper Two, the focus was on the acquisition of information retrieval and presentation skills. Written texts had to be "clearly written" and "understandable". For Paper Three there was also an emphasis on clarity as well as "fluency" of thinking and the expression of this in students' writing.

Further differences in approach can be identified in the number of assessments, the different weightings assigned to these, and the length of assignments. Equal weightings allocated to the four assessments in Paper One perhaps reflect Lecturer A's view of assessment as a "review" of sections of content. Furthermore, the gap-fill answers, single

paragraph brief answers, and short, one page, hand-written, essays are not particularly demanding in terms of length. In contrast, the weightings of the three assessments in Paper One (30%, 30% and 40%) and the graduated weightings in Paper Three in particular (15%, 25% and 60%) imply that the assessments are increasingly demanding. The increasing demands on students are also reflected in the increasing word length requirements of the assessments on Papers Two and Three. However, the different weightings given in the latter two papers to the literature review assignments (40% and 15% respectively) suggest different perceptions and expectations of the cognitive and rhetorical demands of this assessment type. They may also reflect to an extent the different number of texts involved – a minimum of eight texts in the case of Paper Two and four to five for Paper Three. In the case of Paper Three, the literature review assignment may also be seen as scaffolding elements of the second essay assignment, although this point was not investigated. Finally, the 60% weighting of Assessment Three in Paper Three, implies that particular significance is attached to students' ability to retrieve information from memory and to the ability to write under timed exam conditions.

The final point relates specifically to differences in cognitive demands and in writing requirements across the papers. With the exception of Assessment Two in Paper Two, all the assessments involved the identification, retrieval and organising of relevant information. This mirrors Horwitz's finding for the "generalized American writing task" (1986, p.455), which emphasised the recognition and (re)organisation of relevant data. In addition, Assignment Two in Paper Two required the analysis of relationships between data, and the literature review and essay assessments implied the additional skills of evaluation or comparison. As noted, the exam essay questions in Paper Three also required the retrieval of relevant information from memory.

In terms of rhetorical tasks, all the assessments in Paper One involved explanation or description. Otherwise, one assignment in Paper Two (Assessment One) and the essay tasks in Paper three required explanation or description. The literature review tasks in papers Two and Three implied the need for students to summarise, analyse, and synthesise information from a number of sources. In addition to explanation and description, the essay tasks in Paper Three required students to synthesise, analyse and in some cases to apply information.

These findings contrast with those of Moore and Morton (2005) where evaluation was the most common rhetorical function (67%), with description featuring in less than half the assessments (49%) and explanation only occurred in 28% of assessments. The most significant point here, perhaps, is the fact that the cognitive and rhetorical demands of Paper One are at a lower level than those implied in the other two papers.

4.6.2 Student difficulties in understanding and interpreting task instructions and marking criteria
It was noted in Section 2.6.3 that earlier studies have identified the need for students to be able to interpret task instructions and to meet the specific requirements of assessment tasks (Gravatt et al., 1997 and Carson, 2001). In the light of this, perhaps the most significant finding of this study is the degree to which students found instructions difficult to understand. With the exception of the gap-fill and brief answer questions in Paper One and the exam essay instructions in Paper Three, a significant proportion of students reported difficulties understanding the instructions on all the assessments investigated. NESB students in particular, appeared to find essay instructions problematic. This suggests that in these assessments students are faced to with the burden of "second-guessing" lecturers when it comes to interpreting instructions.

Some difficulties appear to relate to differences between students' understanding of the meaning of key words or phrases included in instructions (and therefore of what was required), and the perceptions and meanings intended by the lecturers. In two cases the way that instructions were written and structured appeared to be significant. The particular problems with the literature review assignment in Paper Three appear to relate also to a fundamental misunderstanding of the concept and function of this academic genre, on the part of a number of students.

The successful application of criterion-referenced or standards-based assessment is predicated on explicit marking criteria or descriptors of performance standards, which students are expected to meet or achieve (see Rowntree, 1987 and Brown & Knight, 1994 cited in Section 2.3). Brown and Knight (1994) also argue that these need to be developed carefully and explained clearly to students. The findings of this study suggest that

understanding marking criteria is significant for student achievement in assessments. Confusion appears to arise where criteria are not included with assessment instructions, or where students are unclear about marking criteria that are presented. Brown and Knight (1994) have pointed out that teachers' assessment criteria are often poorly articulated. The confusion over interpretation identified in this study illustrates the consequences for students when marking criteria are inadequately articulated in written form. The findings also indicate that an accurate understanding of marking criteria may be particularly significant for NESB students.

In Paper Two, despite the fact there were no written marking criteria, all four NESB students reported that they understood the marking criteria and shared the lecturer's perception of the most important criterion for Assessment One. In contrast only seven ESB students (44%) understood how the assessment would be marked. A similar pattern emerges for the other two assessments in Paper Two, where 75% of NESB students claimed to understand the assessment criteria compared to a minority of ESB students. The NESB students' confidence in their understanding appears to be confirmed by the fact that the mean grades for NESB students were higher than those of ESB students. The reasons for these differences remain unclear. It has already been suggested that this difference may have been connected to NESB students less sophisticated command of English and more limited expectations of what the task involved. It has also been noted that it was largely NESB students who took advantage of the opportunity to submit and receive feedback on drafts for Assessment Three. It may be that NESB students took more opportunities than ESB students to ask questions to clarify marking criteria.

The next chapter discusses implications for the institution in which the study took place and for EAP curriculum design. It also makes suggestions for further research.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

The main impetus for this study is referred to in the Introduction (Section 1.1). This was that NESB students enrolled on EAP courses were having difficulties in interpreting instructions and marking criteria provided for assessments in discipline-specific papers. These instructions appeared to vary, not only in the range of writing task types, but also in terms of apparent cognitive demands, and the nature of instructions and criteria and the level of their provision. The aim of this study therefore was to investigate this apparent diversity. The nature of the study and of its findings highlight a challenge to those involved in this type of EAP research. That is the need for EAP researchers and practitioners to examine their dual role - in relation to specific institutional demands upon students and EAP, as well as in questioning "the educational *realities* which we experience in the detail of our own learning and teaching commitments"(Cadman, 2002, p.87).

This challenge implies that EAP practitioners need to go beyond the ideology of pragmatism referred to in Section 2.2 (Benesch, 1993, 2001). The pragmatic approach seeks merely to accommodate the demands of discipline-specific assessments (Benesch, 2001) and to "provide students with the writing skills and cultural information that will allow them to perform successfully" in response to these demands (Reid, 1989, p.232). In contrast, a *critical* pragmatic approach (Cherryholmes, 1988; Pennycook, 1997) may lead EAP lecturers and researchers to consider and question, with due sensitivity, the "pedagogical or intellectual soundness of the activities observed" (Benesch, 2001, p.41). This suggests the need to "advocate on behalf of (NESB) students with discipline-specific staff" in an to attempt to influence the demands of discipline-specific courses (Turner, Jackson-Potter, & Jenner, 2005, p. 43). It also suggests a responsibility to advocate at the level of institutional policy development (Wilson, 2003). The critical pragmatic approach therefore involves not only the scrutiny of target goals and the grounding of EAP curricula in the realities of discipline-specific objectives, but also recognition of the significant role EAP practitioners can play in changing those realities (Benesch, 2001).

It is in the light of this understanding of the dual role of EAP practitioners that one of the following sections makes recommendations for the institution involved in the study. Other sections summarise the study, identify its limitations, identify implications for EAP course design, summarise the impact of the study so far and make suggestions for further research.

5.2 Summary of the study
This study has investigated the writing requirements of ten assessments in three first year-courses in three different discipline areas in the Faculty of Arts at one university. The study analysed the assessment documents, as well as investigating the rationales, intentions and interpretations of the lecturers who were responsible for producing them, and the experiences and understandings of students who took these assessments.

One of the most significant findings is that the study identifies a range of assessment types, which vary between the disciplines areas investigated. This reflects the findings of earlier studies, for example, Gravatt et al. (1997), Hale et al. (1996), and Moore & Morton, (2005). Among these assessment types is a 'free-standing' literature review assessment, which appears not to have been identified in earlier studies. This is not equivalent to the library research assessment identified by Kroll (1979) and Horowitz (1986). The range of assessment types can be seen as varying on a continuum of complexity which ranges from gap-fill answers to a 2,500 word essay. Assessment choices appear to reflect, among other factors, lecturers' perceptions of the function of assessment as the summative certification of learning. The definitions of learning, however, vary between discipline areas. With the exception of assessments in Paper Three, there is little or no focus on the development of English academic writing literacies and skills in either the assessment instructions or reported criteria.

Furthermore the range of assessment types is paralleled by diversity in levels of apparent cognitive demands and required rhetorical skills. Assessments in Paper One in particular appear to do little to develop the skills of communication and critical analysis highlighted in the University's graduate profile (AUT, 2002). While all but one assessment required the identification, retrieval and organisation of relevant information, those in Papers Two and Three appeared also to require evaluation and comparison , as well as (respectively) analysis of relationships between data, and retrieval of information from memory. As for

rhetorical skills, assessments in Paper One required only description or explanation, whereas those in Papers Two and Three also implied the need for summarising, analysis, and synthesis of information from a number of sources as well as the application of information.

Other significant findings relate to assessment instructions. With the exception of the instructions relating to relatively straightforward gap-fill type questions, short-answer and exam essay questions, a significant proportion of student respondents reported difficulties in understanding assessment instructions. The main reasons for this relate to the apparent lack of clarity in assessment instructions, the structure of instructions, different student interpretations of key wording, and a misunderstanding of the concept and function of an academic literature review.

The findings also suggest that an accurate understanding of marking criteria is particularly important for NESB students. However, the majority of assessment instructions had no marking criteria. Students reported considerable confusion about what was being assessed in cases where there were no criteria or where the criteria were considered unclear.

5.3 Limitations of the study

Although the triangulated approach to this investigation of assessed writing requirements has resulted in a considerable collection of data, limitations in terms of the generalisability of the findings need to be acknowledged. The most obvious of these is the fact that the study is located in a single site and has a limited focus on ten assessments in three discipline areas. Furthermore, the limitations of the postal student surveys need to recognised. The response rates to the two postal surveys were predictably low (Simmons, 2001) at approximately 18%. This low response rate suggests that the responses to these questionnaires may not be representative of the perceptions and understandings of all the students enrolled on the two courses concerned. It is possible that the students who chose to respond to these postal surveys were those who were dissatisfied with the paper in some way. None the less, in addition to other data from document analysis and interviews with lecturers, the fact that a significant proportion of the students who did respond experienced difficulties in interpreting assessment instructions and marking criteria appears to justify

the following suggested implications for the institution itself, for EAP curriculum design in general, and for future research.

5.4 Implications for the institution in which the study took place:
Given the study's findings in terms of lecturers' limited perceptions of the function of assessment, students' confusion about assessment requirements and marking criteria, and the absence of marking criteria on two of the papers, it is suggested that the University should review its policy and guidelines on assessment (Auckland University of Technology, 2002b & 2003). There is in particular the need to ensure adequate recognition of the potential of formative assessment and associated feedback, and the fact that an assessment event may have both formative and summative functions (Brown and Knight, 1994). Policy and guidelines could also refer to other purposes of assessment beyond the present focus on the summative concept of assessment as the certification of learning. In particular there is a need to address the role of assessment as a prompt for learning. Although the current guidelines refer to the fact that best practice in assessment "should encourage deep learning" (AUT, 2003, p.5), there is a need to elaborate the concept of deep learning and perhaps to provide examples of best practice in this area (see for example Wilson, 2003 for an analysis of deep learning strategies for NESB students). The University and individual programmes might also find it beneficial to review the support given to academic staff on the implementation of assessment policy. Such a review may agree on the need for a database of examples of best practice in the areas discussed.

It also appears relevant to suggest a review of the University's Policy on Academic Literacies and Intercultural Capabilities (2005) and its implementation at programme level. One of the aims of this policy is to underpin developments in teaching and learning, which are designed to improve students' academic literacies. It currently refers to "the ability to use language appropriately to achieve particular academic, professional and vocational goals" (ibid. p.1), and in general terms to the abilities to read, write, listen and speak in learning. The policy and guidelines (Auckland University of Technology, 2005b) also identify the need for programmes to develop graduate outcomes and programme outcomes for academic literacies. This study suggests that there is a need to go beyond such generalisations and to identify and elaborate on specifics in terms of programme-level academic literacies and appropriate graduate outcomes. There also appears to be a need for

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guidelines on how programmes and individual papers can implement this policy. These could include examples of best practice in incorporating specific academic literacies in learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

This study also suggests the need to identify and examine - at Faculty and programme levels – the relationship between specific academic literacies and the cognitive and rhetorical demands involved in these. The study found considerable differences between papers in terms of implied written academic literacy requirements as well as cognitive and rhetorical demands. This finding points to the need to examine the level of equivalence in these areas across papers at the same level in particular programmes. Such an examination would also assist in a review of programme-specific outcomes. Finally, the results of this study and the discussion suggest that there is a relationship between assessment policies and policies on the development of academic literacies, which needs to be examined and articulated. It appears logical for the University's policy on assessment to refer to the development of English academic literacies.

Improvements in the writing of assessment instructions and provision of criteria would assist future students in their understanding of what is required. However, a number of issues identified in the study point to the need for all students (both NESB and ESB) to take a compulsory EAP-type paper at first year level. All students need to be able to analyse and understand the wording of assessments and criteria (as identified in detail in this study and also in principle by Gravatt et al., 1997 and Carson, 2001). The second issue is the emergence of the 'free-standing' literature review assessment, and the relatively high level of cognitive and rhetorical demands required by this form of assessment. This genre was new for the majority of students and less than 25% of all students understood the instructions. Some students completed the relevant papers with no clear idea as to the concept and function of an academic literature review. This is illustrated in the comment *"When will I ever write a literature review in my life?"* and another student's reference to the literature review assignment as *"academic buncombe (sic)"*. The third issue is the need for all students to develop relevant English academic literacies and related cognitive and rhetorical demands. It is argued here that EAP courses offer a unique forum for a focus on the development of these academic literacies and cognitive abilities.

5.5 Implications for EAP curriculum design

Although this study has focussed on a limited number of assessments in three discipline areas related to the Arts, there are a number of implications that may apply to EAP course design in general. The considerable range of assessment types, and the variation between discipline areas identified here and in earlier studies strongly suggest the need to identify relevant assessment types for each EAP student cohort, and to adjust course design accordingly. In addition, there appears to be the need for courses to include analysis of authentic assessment instructions and marking criteria. It is suggested that courses should also encourage students to ask questions of discipline-specific lecturers in order to clarify instructions and assessment criteria.

In addition, the findings suggest the need for courses to develop relevant cognitive, rhetorical and generic writing skills. In this study, relevant cognitive skills appear to be the identification, retrieval and logical organisation of discipline-related material, as well as analysis, and evaluation; the latter predominantly in the form of comparison. Relevant rhetorical skills appear to be explanation, summarising, analysis and synthesis of information from multiple texts. Written genres, suggested by this study, should include paragraph writing, extended (text-responsible) essay writing in a form that reflects 'authentic' essay topics, and the academic literature review. In terms of the last of these, the study suggests that course design should include a focus on the concept and purpose of an academic literature review. Finally, writing sub-skills need to include paraphrasing, synthesis, logical organisation as well as citation and referencing of sources.

5.6 Impact of research findings to-date

Changes have been made to the undergraduate EAP curriculum design at this university in response to the findings of this study. The most significant of these are summarised in brief. The paper now includes analysis of current discipline-specific assessment instructions. Secondly, the original first essay assignment (the first of three assessments in total) has been replaced by five short assessment tasks, which are 'text-responsible' (Leki & Carson, 1997 and Carson, 2001). These tasks allow students to have increased and repeated practice in analysing and responding accurately to task instructions and criteria, as well as feedback on their analysis. They also provide a focus for relevant discipline-specific or discipline-related reading skills and writing sub-skills. Thirdly, the second assessment is now an

extended (1,500 word) essay written with reference to one provided text and at least one further text sourced by the student. Fourthly, the paper now includes a discussion of the concept and functions of an academic literature review, an analysis of examples of the genre, as well as a focus on the cognitive and writing skills involved in the production of a literature review. Furthermore, one of the five short tasks involves the production of a short literature review. Fifthly, each of the five tasks is produced as two assessed drafts, thus merging both formative and summative assessment functions. Written feedback on the first draft is supplemented by individual tutorials which allow for "talkback" (Lillis, 2003). This involves a focus on the student's text in process, as well as a dialogue relating to meaning and the linguistic mechanics involved in expressing meaning effectively. More significantly, the requirement to produce a second draft of the text, which responds to feedback, appears to successfully motivate students to engage in a student-teacher dialogue relating to the cognitive, analytical and rhetorical skills involved in the creation of meaning.

In addition, the study has acted as a catalyst for a review of learning outcomes, assessments and criteria on one of the programmes involved. The lecturers concerned acknowledged the fact that they were not adequately meeting students' needs in terms of the development of academic literacies, or adequately addressing the institution's graduate profile. The study has been described as "timely" in highlighting and providing evidence of the need for changes and for a move to standards or criteria-based assessments (Programme Leader, personal communication, 24th June 2005).

5.7 Further research
As this and earlier studies have shown, assessment types vary between disciplines. In addition, the most frequently occurring assessment types appear to vary not only between discipline areas but also over time, as indicated in Table 2.1. These two factors suggest the need for on-going research into relevant discipline-specific assessment types in order to inform EAP curriculum design. Furthermore, the apparent emergence of a new genre of undergraduate written assessment, the academic literature review, and the fact that there appears to be variation in terms of the purpose of this assessment and the related cognitive demands, suggest the need for further research into these issues. It would be useful to investigate the prevalence of the 'free-standing' literature review assessment and the discipline-specific cognitive and rhetorical demands associated with the genre. Finally, as

this study has shown, future research can also have a role to play in EAP practitioners' ability to offer an informed critique of discipline-specific requirements and practices, and their impact on NESB students in particular.

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Appendix One: Request to Participate [Lecturers]

Dear …,

I am writing to ask whether you would agree to participate in the research project I am undertaking for my MA in Applied Language Studies.

The aim of the study is to investigate the writing requirements in assessments for first year BA courses in the Faculty of Arts. The research will focus on three courses and include:

- content analysis of assessments, course descriptors and related documents
- two taped interviews with the relevant lectures,
- and a questionnaire-based survey of EAL students who complete the assessments on your course at the end of Semester One 2003.

It is anticipated that the findings will provide useful feedback for developing English for Academic Purposes curricula, and possibly be of wider interest to lecturers involved in undergraduate assessment.

If you agree to participate and to be interviewed, you will remain anonymous and your course will not be named. I will send you a consent form and details of the proposed timetable.

I would also ask you at that stage to supply me with copies *(in electronic format if possible)* of:
the course descriptor,
last semester's course assignments and assessment documents
marking scedules/criteria
information provided for students such as, supplementary assignment materials and writing style sheets.
examples of marked work if available
I would then be able to work on a content analysis of these, which will assist in framing specific interview questions.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the nature of this proposal please do not hesitate to get in touch. In the meantime I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Elizabeth Turner
Course Co-ordinator English for Academic Purposes Core BA Module
School of Languages
Tel 6121

Appendix Two: Information letter [lecturers]

AUT
AUCKLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
TE WĀNANGA ARONUI O TAMAKI MAKAU RAU

Research Study for MA Thesis in Applied Language Studies

Dear ….,

Thank you for expressing interest in this study. The aim is to investigate the writing requirements in assessments for first year BA courses in the Faculty of Arts. The research will focus on three courses and include **an audio-taped interview** with the relevant lecturers, content analysis of last semester's assessments and a questionnaire-based survey of EAL students who complete the assessments on your course at the end of Semester One 2003.

It is anticipated that the findings will provide useful feedback for developing English for Academic Purposes curricula, and possibly be of wider interest to lecturers involved in undergraduate assessment. The information you provide will assist me in understanding your/your department's philosophy in terms of student assessment, the role of assessment on your course and in particular the critical thinking and writing requirements for students.

If you give your permission to be interviewed I will not use your name in reporting the results of the research, nor will your course be identified by name. The tape-recorded interviews will be transcribed, and you are invited to view the transcripts before they are analysed if you so wish. You may amend any statement at that stage and these will be deleted from the transcript You are also invited to read any draft article for publication and amend the wording of any sections which refer (anonymously) to your course. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time prior to the completion of data collection. There is no risk involved on your part in taking part in the study and no cost other than the time required for you to complete the two interviews.

If you are willing to take part in this study, please complete the attached form and return it to me. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the nature of the research please let me know. Alternatively you may contact my supervisor, Pat Strauss (tel: 6847 email pat.strauss@aut.ac.nz) in the School of Languages.
Yours sincerely,

Elizabeth Turner
Senior Lecturer
School of Languages
Tel 6121
For further information
If you have any concerns about the conduct of the researcher please contact the Executive Secretary AUTEC, Madeline Banda, Ph: 917 9999 ext 8044 email
madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz
Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 28 January 2003
AUTEC reference number 03/07

Appendix Three: Consent Form [Lecturers]

AUT
AUCKLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
TE WĀNANGA ARONUI O TAMAKI MAKAU RAU
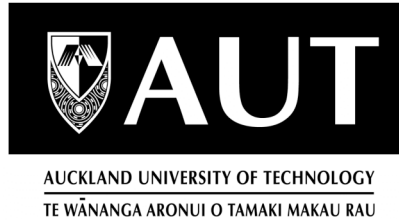
Consent to Participation in Research

Title of Project: Assessed Writing Requirements in Faculty of Arts BA Modules

Project Supervisor: Dr. Pat Strauss, School of Languages

Researcher: Elizabeth Turner

I have read and understood the information provided about this research project.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

I understand that the two interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed.

I understand that, without being disadvantaged in any way, I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project, at any time prior to completion of data collection. If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant tapes and transcripts or parts thereof, will be destroyed.

I agree to take part in this research.

Participant's signature:…………………………………

Participant's name: …………………………………

Project Supervisor Details:

Dr. Pat Strauss
MA in Applied Language Studies Supervisor
School of Languages
Auckland University of Technology
Ph. 917 9910

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 28 January 2003 AUTEC reference number 03/07

Appendix 4A

Interview Questions for Paper One

1. Can you tell me how long you have been teaching this particular course?

2. How would you describe the main *aims* of the paper?

3. Can you explain what you see as the purpose of assessment?

4. Can you explain what you see as the *purpose of assessment* on this course?

5. Can you explain what role you have had in writing the assessments on the course?

6. There are four assessments in total, can you tell me how the topics were chosen ?

7. Can you explain why these forms of assessment were chosen?

gap fill and short answers in assessment one; gap fill, longer answers and short essays in assessment 2; gap fill and longer answers in assessments 3 and 4

Supplementary questions
Are the gap fill questions based on texts the students know?

In Assessment One, can you explain what sort of answers you expect in Section B?
For example, do you want students to write complete sentences?

In Assessment Two, Section B, the spaces for answers are quite large. Can you explain what kind of answers you expect?

Can you tell me how marks are allocated) in Section B(10% for each question) ?

In Section C, can you tell me how marks are allocated for the short essays?

Are these assessments done in the students' own time or as in-class tests?

8. Could we discuss assessment marking criteria?
Can you explain what you prioritise when it comes to marking the assessments?

9. Can your talk about how students perform in these assessments?

10. Can your talk about how EAL students perform in these assessments?

 Supplementary:
Can you explain your approach to the marking of EAL students' work and the work of first language speakers of English?

11. Can you describe any support or guidance you provide for students for the type of writing tasks involved?

12. Do you show students examples o f what you expect a short essay to be like?

13. Could you tell me what sort of feed back you give to students after the assessments?

14. Can you tell me how many students are enrolled for this course this year? How many of those are EAL students?

15. Can you tell me about any plans you have to change the form of assessment next year?

[ask for copies of marking schemes if available]

Appendix 4 B

Interview questions for Paper Two

Background
Can you tell me how long you have been teaching this particular course?

Philosophical & pedagogical approaches
How would you describe the main aims or learning outcomes of the paper?

Background to assessment
Can you explain what you see as the purpose of assessment?

Can you explain what you see as the purpose of assessment *on this course*?

Can you explain what role you have had in writing the assessments on the course?

Rationale for selection of assessment types and topics
There are three assessments in total, can you explain how the topics were chosen?

Supplementary: Rationale for specific assessment types
Can you explain why these *forms* of assessment were chosen?

Can you explain the reasons these were chosen to replace last semester's assessments?
   New form of Library & Internet search *to replace last semester's literature search*
Data presentation task *in place of evaluation of a given article* (choice out of 3)
Literature review *in place of report, which included references to literature and at least one table & graph*

Assessment requirements and criteria
Could we discuss the assessments in more detail, particularly the requirements and assessment criteria?

In Assessment One (Library and Internet Research Task 30%)
Can you explain what you expect in terms of writing skills in the three summaries of the texts found?

Can you explain your criteria for marking these summaries?
"marking guide" referred to in instructions

Can you tell me whether you expect students to paraphrase key points in their summaries of the articles?

To what extent do you accept direct quotations form the texts?

Can you tell me how you mark the students' *evaluations* of the keywords used in the database search?

Is it acceptable for students to use the first person in these evaluations?

In the online database search, can students use more than one keyword?

(ask about 'marking guide')

In Assessment Two (Data Presentation Task 30%)
Can you explain the process used for the data collection for this task?

Can you tell me about the range of topics for the data collection?

What do you expect in terms of the requirement that students "*justify*" their method of data presentation?

Can you explain the criteria used for marking this written justification?

Can you tell me what you expect in terms of the *analysis of data* and the *conclusion*?

Is the instruction to "*describe the relationships in your data*" part of the requirements for the written analysis of data?

Can you explain how you mark the analysis and conclusion?

In Assessment Three (Literature Review 1500 words, 40%)
Can you explain the context for the topic in this assessment – do you cover the debate about quantitative and qualitative research in lectures?

Can you tell me whether you provide any additional guidance for this assignment?

For example, what do you expect from students when you require them to "lay the basis for the review"?

Can you explain any guidance you give to students in identifying "major studies and discoveries"?

Can you explain the criteria used for marking this review?

Perceptions of Student performance
Can your talk about how students perform in these assessments?

Can your talk about how EAL students perform in these assessments?

Supplementary:
Can you explain your approach to the marking of EAL students' work and the work of first language speakers of English?

Scaffolding for assessed writing skills

Could you describe any support or guidance you provide for students for the type of writing tasks involved?

Do you show students examples o f what is expected for each assessment?

Feedback on assessments
Could you tell me what sort of feed back you give to students after the assessments?

Proposed changes to assessments
Can you tell me about any plans you have to change the form of assessment next year?

Appendix 4C
Interview questions for Paper Three
Background
Can you tell me how long you have been teaching this particular course?

Philosophical & pedagogical approaches
How would you describe the main aims of the paper?

Background to assessment
Can you explain what you see as the purpose of assessment?

Can you explain what you see as the purpose of assessment *on this course*?

Can you explain what role you have had in writing the assessments on the course?

Rationale for selection of topic
There are three assessments in total, can you tell me how the topics were chosen?

Supplementary: Rationale for specific assessment types
Can you explain why these *forms* of assessment were chosen?
Literature review
Essay
Exam: four essays selected from 11 topics

Assessment criteria
Could we discuss the assessments in more detail, particularly the requirements and marking criteria?

For example,
In Assessment One (Literature review on the development of media industries in NZ; 1,500 words; 15%)

Can you explain what you expect in terms of thinking and writing skills in the requirement to "*critically evaluate*" the writer's argument?
Actual wording: "critically evaluate the argument by comparing this piece of literature with other pieces on the same subject…"

Supplementary:
Could you explain the criteria you expect students to use when you ask them to "*evaluate this perspective*"?

The assessment criteria refer to *comment/analysis* (C grade) and *more analytical, comparative* for a B grade as well as *substantially analytical, comparative* for an A grade. Could you give some more details of these criteria?

How would you describe the importance of the requirement for '*clarity and fluency'* of writing in assessments one and two?

Not referred to in criteria for C grade

Assessment Two (essay: shaping media messages; 2,500 words; 5 topics; 25%)

Could we discuss your expectations in relation to some of the wording of instructions in the essay topics?
For example, what thinking and writing skills do you expect students to use in response to the instruction to:
Discuss the claim that mass media is in decline.
Critically examine the explanations (for the development of convergences).
AND
Critically examine whether news coverage in New Zealand fulfils this function (of the 'fourth estate').
Evaluate the claim that (news values) have a major effect on the content of media news
Examine the claim that the media generate moral panics through news reports of deviant behaviour.

Could you explain the marking criteria for assessment two?

Supplementary:
Do you use the checklist given to students as the marking criteria?

Supplementary:
Can you tell me whether and how the checklist criteria are prioritised? For example how important are "*clarity and fluency of writing***"?**

In the analysis section of the checklist students are instructed to *evaluate the quality of evidence and argument from (their) sources.* Could you tell me about your expectations here?

The analysis section of the checklist also requires students to *generate own insights* , could you explain this further?

The structure section of the checklist lists *logical development of ideas* as a criterion. Can you describe your expectations for meeting this criterion?

The checklist refers to the student's *own argument,* and the model of essay writing process also refers to *your own argument* and to *demonstrating why you have reached a particular outcome.* Could you talk about your expectations in terms of the student's argument and conclusion?

Assessment Three (4 essay questions chosen from 11 topics; 15 marks each; 3 hours plus 10 minutes reading time; 60%)

Can you tell me whether this is a closed or open book exam?
Can students use dictionaries?

Can you elaborate on the writing skills you expect students to use in response to the verbs used in the instructions asking them to:
<u>comment on</u> *(the Internet's) contemporary use*

x

__consider to what extent__ New Zealand media operate (as 'the fourth estate')

Could you tell me more about how a grade for the exam is allocated?
The instructions & briefing sheet stipulate 15 marks per essay question, however, the briefing sheet criteria are based on grade descriptors.

Perceptions of student performance
Can your talk about how students perform in these assessments?

Can your talk about how EAL students perform in these assessments?

Supplementary:
Can you explain your approach to the marking of EAL students' work and the work of first language speakers of English?

Scaffolding for assessed writing skills
Can you describe any support or guidance you provide for students for the type of writing tasks involved?

Do you show students examples o f what is expected for each assessment?

Feedback on assessments
Could you tell me what sort of feed back you give to students after the assessments?

Proposed changes to assessments
Can you tell me about any plans you have to change the form of assessment next year?

[ask for marking schemes]

Appendix 5:   Questionnaire on Assessment in Paper One

The aim of this questionnaire is to collect feedback from students on the assessments in the *Introduction to Chinese Culture* Paper. The information you provide on this form is confidential. You will not be individually identified and your responses will only be used for research purposes.

A. About you

How old are you?   ………. years

Are you   male ☐   or   female ☐ ?

What is your first language?   …………………………………………

Did you complete your secondary schooling (high school) outside New Zealand?   Yes ☐ No ☐

If you did, in which country did you complete your schooling? …………………………………………………

Did you go to secondary school (high school) in New Zealand?   Yes ☐ No ☐

If you did, how many years' secondary study have you completed in New Zealand? …………

How many years' tertiary study have you completed in New Zealand? …………

Have you studied Academic English since leaving high school?   Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, what course did you study, and where? …………………………………………………………………………

How long was the course and how many hours a week? …………………………   …………………

B Assignment One in the Introduction to Chinese Culture Paper

The instructions for **Section A** of Assignments One read *"Fill in the blanks with missing information (0.5 each 50%)"*

Question A 1, for example, was: *"China's constitution declares that the PRC is a multi-national state. Approximately _____% of its population is the _____ nationality".*

The instructions for **Section B** were *"Answer the following questions briefly (5 for each question 50%)"*

Question B 1, for example, was: *"Why do Chinese people, especially the older ones, eat noodles to celebrate their birthday?"*

Questions about Assignment One

1. Please **tick one box in each line** to show how much you agree with these statements

I understood the instructions easily.   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                                        strongly disagree   strongly agree

I understood the way my answers would be marked   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                                        strongly disagree   strongly agree

it was easy for me to complete assessment one   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                                        strongly disagree   strongly agree

I enjoyed doing this assignment   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                                        strongly disagree   strongly agree

I learned a lot from doing this assignment   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                                        strongly disagree   strongly agree

Students from non-English backgrounds can do as well as students from English speaking
backgrounds in this assessment   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                                        strongly disagree   strongly agree

Any comments on your answers:
………
………
………
……….

2. In Section B, you were asked to "**answer the following questions briefly**"?
Tick one box below to show what you thought these words meant you had to do.

Write incomplete sentences - just the right words   ☐
Write complete sentences   ☐
With a short paragraph   ☐

3. How do you think the brief answers were marked? Please **tick the boxes you agree with**:

For using correct information from your lecture handouts   ☐
For grammatical sentence structure   ☐
For correct use of English grammar and spelling   ☐
For writing well-structured paragraphs   ☐

4. Which of these do you think it is **most important to mark**? Please rank them in order of importance to you. Use number 1 for most important, and so on to number 4 (least important)

using correct information from your lecture handouts   ☐
grammatical sentence structure   ☐
correct use of English grammar and spelling   ☐
writing well-structured paragraphs   ☐

Any comments on your answer:
……
……..

5. Please **tick one box in each line** to show how much you agree with these statements about <u>**Assignment One**</u>:

it motivated me to read the lecture handouts   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                                strongly disagree   strongly agree

it tested my understanding of course content   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                                strongly disagree   strongly agree

it improved my understanding of what I was taught   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                                strongly disagree   strongly agree

it helped me to improve my English writing skills   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                                strongly disagree   strongly agree

I learned new information   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                                strongly disagree   strongly agree

C. Assignment Two in the Introduction to Chinese Culture Paper
Section A had "fill in the blanks" questions and **Section B** had "briefly answer" questions, which were similar to the questions in Assignment One.

Assignment Two also included an additional **Section C**. The instructions for Section C were "Short essays 20%. (10% each)".

1. Please **tick one box in each line** to show how much you agree with these statements about **Questions in Section C.**

before I did this assessment I knew how to structure
and write an academic essay in English   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                                strongly disagree   strongly agree

the teacher taught us how to write essay answers in class   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

it was for easy for me to understand the assessment instructions.   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

I understood the way my answers would be marked   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

it was for easy for me to complete these questions   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

I enjoyed doing this assignment   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

I learned a lot by doing this assignment   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

Students from non English backgrounds can do as well as students from English speaking
backgrounds in this assessment   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

Any comments:

……

……

……

……….

2. **Question C. 1** was: *"Discuss some (at least three) differences between China's academic degree system and that of New Zealand's".*
Which of these definitions describes what **"discuss some differences"** means most accurately? (**Tick one box**).

Writing a list of at least three differences   ☐
Writing about at least three differences and giving your own opinion   ☐
Writing about the details of at least three differences   ☐

3. **Question C.2** was *"Both China and New Zealand have attached great importance to the development of tourism, illustrate the significance of doing so."*
Which of these definitions describes what **"illustrate the significance"** means most accurately? (**Tick one box**).

Writing about the reasons Chinese think it is important to develop tourism   ☐

Writing about at least one example of the importance of developing tourism to China and one example of the importance of developing tourism to New Zealand ☐

Writing about why the Chinese and New Zealanders think it is important to develop tourism, with examples of the effect of successful tourism in each country ☐

Writing about the reasons New Zealanders think it is important to develop tourism ☐

4. How do you think each essay answer was marked? Please **tick the boxes you agree with**:

For using correct information from your lecture handouts ☐
For grammatical sentence structure ☐
For correct use of English grammar and spelling ☐
For writing well-structured paragraphs ☐
For correct academic essay structure ☐

5. Which of these do you think it is **most important to mark?** Please rank them in order of importance to you. Use number 1 for most important, and so on to number 5 (least important)

using correct information from your lecture handouts ☐
grammatical sentence structure ☐
correct use of English grammar and spelling ☐
writing well-structured paragraphs ☐
writing a correctly structured essay ☐

6. Please **tick one box in each line** to show how much you agree with these statements about **Assignment Two**:

it motivated me to read the lecture handouts ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

it tested my understanding of course content ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

it helped me to understand what I was taught ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

it helped me to improve my English writing skills ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

I learned new information ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

D. Assignment Three and Four in the Introduction to Chinese Culture Paper
Assignments Three and Four also included "fill in the blank" questions (1% for each correct answer) and brief written answers to questions (10% each).

E. All four assessments
1. Please **rank the following assessment types to show which you prefer most** (1 to 3).
For example, if you prefer short essay answers most, then rank this as "1" and so on.

Filling in blanks ☐
Short answers ☐
Short essays ☐

2. Please rank the following <u>reasons</u> for preferring assessment types, in order of importance to you.
the assessment is interesting to do ☐
the assessment is easy to complete ☐
you think you will get a good mark ☐
the assessment will improve your knowledge and understanding of Chinese culture ☐
other reason ☐

Can you explain your answer?
……
……
……
……

3. What do you feel about the <u>number of assessments</u> on the Introduction to Chinese Culture paper. Please **tick one box**
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
not enough   just right   too many

Any comments:
……
……

4. Did the lecturer show you any examples of good brief answers before you did the assignments?

Yes ☐   No ☐

Did the lecturer show you any examples of good short essay answers before you did the assignments?

Yes ☐   No ☐

5. Did you receive any feedback from the lecturer after each assessment? Yes ☐   No ☐

If "yes", what form did this feedback take?

written comments   ☐
spoken comments   ☐
corrections to content of your answers   ☐
comments about content   ☐
corrections to writing errors   ☐
comments about your writing   ☐
other   ☐

6. If you did receive feedback, how helpful was this feedback? Please **tick one box in each line** to show how much you agree with these statements about **feedback**

It was helpful for my understanding of course content   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                                                          strongly disagree   strongly agree

It was helpful in improving my paragraph writing   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                                                  strongly disagree   strongly agree

It was helpful in improving my English grammar   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                                                  strongly disagree   strongly agree

It was helpful in improving my essay writing   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                                            strongly disagree   strongly agree

7. Please **tick one box in each line** to show how much you agree with these statements about **the four assessments on this course**

The assessments increased my understanding
of Chinese history and geography   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                                              strongly disagree   strongly agree

The assessments increased my understanding
of Chinese as an international language   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                                              strongly disagree   strongly agree

The assessments improved my ability to interact
with Chinese people with an understanding of
appropriate cultural expectations   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                                              strongly disagree   strongly agree

The assessments developed my ability to discuss
and analyse current economic developments
in Chinese-speaking countries   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

                                                                 strongly disagree   strongly agree

……………………………………………………..

8. I would be grateful if you would answer the following questions as your answers will be very helpful for this research. However, if you do not wish to give this information please feel free to leave these questions out.

If you did study Academic English before enrolling for the BA degree did you pass the course?

                                   Yes ☐ No ☐

What mark or grade did you get for each assessment in the Introduction to Chinese Culture Paper?

Assessment One   ……..   Assessment Two   ……..
Assessment Three   ……..   Assessment Four   ……..

Thank you for completing this questionnaire

Appendix 6:   **Questionnaire on Assessment in Paper Two**

The aim of this questionnaire is to collect feedback from students on the assessments in the *Research and Analysis BA* Paper. The information you provide on this form is confidential. You will not be individually identified and your responses will only be used for research purposes.

A. About you

How old are you?   ………. years

Are you   male ☐   or   female ☐ ?

What is your first language?   ………………………………………………

Did you complete your secondary schooling (high school) outside New Zealand?   Yes ☐ No ☐

If you did, in which country did you complete your schooling? ……………………………………………

Did you go to secondary school (high school) in New Zealand?   Yes ☐ No ☐

If you did, how many years' secondary study have you completed in New Zealand? …………

How many years' tertiary study have you completed in New Zealand? …………

Have you studied Academic English since leaving high school?   Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, what course did you study, and where? ……………………………………………………………………

How long was the course and how many hours a week? ………………………   …………………

B Assignment One in the Research and Analysis Paper

The instructions for Assignment One read:

"Library and Internet Research Task (30% of total grade for the module

Use the following library and Internet resources to research one of the following topics (ageing, migration, family violence, unemployment)"

A) Library Catalogue: use the search to begin finding information on your topic. List the number of articles and/or books found. Use the advanced search on your topic, identifying all the fields used. Select one of the available records reference this book using APA referencing style and write a brief summary of the article or book (200 words).

B) Online Database : Select Index New Zealand (INNZ). Do a keyword search on your selected topic. Evaluate your choice of keyword. Was it an effective keyword? Explain. What would you do to make your selection more manageable? Select one of the articles from one of the journals held at AUT, reference this article using APA referencing style and write a summary of the article (200 words).

C) Internet task: Choose an Internet search engine. State what keywords you used to search for your article. List the number of returns you received for your search. List the URL of the web article you found, reference the article using APA referencing style and write a brief summary of the article (200 words)."

Questions about Assignment One

3. Please **tick one box in each line** to show how much you agree with these statements

I understood the instructions easily.   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                                                strongly disagree   strongly agree

I understood the way my answers would be marked   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                                                strongly disagree   strongly agree

it was easy for me to complete assessment one   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                                                strongly disagree   strongly agree

I enjoyed doing this assignment   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                                                strongly disagree   strongly agree

I learned a lot from doing this assignment   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                                                strongly disagree   strongly agree

students from non-English backgrounds can do as well as students from English speaking
backgrounds in this assessment   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                                                strongly disagree   strongly agree

Any comments on your answers:

………
………
………
…….

4. In **Section B** (Online Database), you were asked to "***Evaluate your choice of keyword***".

Tick one box below to show what you thought "***evaluate your choice***" meant you had to do.
Describe in writing the way you chose your keyword(s)   ☐
Describe the number of results you found with your keyword(s)   ☐
Explain whether and why the keyword was
useful or not in finding relevant results   ☐

Tick one box below to show what you thought these words meant you had to write.
Write incomplete sentences - just the right words   ☐
Write complete sentences   ☐
With a paragraph   ☐

5. The instructions in each section asked you to "**write a brief summary of the article (or book) -(200 words)".** What did you think you had to do?

Please **tick the boxes you agree with**:

Read a book and write an outline of its content ☐
Use the Contents Pages to outline the content of a book ☐
Read the abstract of a journal article and quote sections of it ☐
Read the abstract of a journal article and write the main points in your own words ☐
Write one paragraph ☐

6. Which of these do you think **the teacher** considers **most important when marking your answer?** Please rank them **in order of importance to the teacher**. Use number 1 for most important, and so on to number 7 (least important)

writing an accurate summary of the content of an article or book ☐
grammatical sentence structure and spelling ☐
writing well-structured paragraphs ☐
presenting information in the same order as in the article/book ☐
writing so that you could be clearly understood ☐
showing that you had found the articles or books in your searches ☐
academic writing style ☐

Any comments on your answer:
………
……..

5. Please **tick one box in each line** to show how much you agree with these statements about **Assignment One**:

It motivated me to learn   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                   strongly disagree   strongly agree

It tested my understanding of course content   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                   strongly disagree   strongly agree

It improved my understanding of what I was taught   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                   strongly disagree   strongly agree

It helped me to improve my English writing skills   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                   strongly disagree   strongly agree

I learned new information   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                   strongly disagree   strongly agree

I developed new skills ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

C. Assignment Two in the Research and Analysis Paper

The instructions for Assignment Two read;

"Assignment 2 – Data Presentation Task. Weighting: 30% of total grade for the module

Task:

Appropriately present the data collected during the tutorials using tables, graphs, and charts. Justify the way you have chosen to present the data. For example, why were particular graphs used?

The data collected should be able to allow for the calculation of the central measures of tendency, the standard deviation, as well as for using both nominal and ratio levels of measurement. This may require you to carry out at least two data collection procedures.

Analyse the data as it is presented in the graphs. What conclusions can be drawn?

Use your calculations to assist in your analysis of the data.

Describe the relationships in your data? Use an appropriate program to arrive at a correlation coefficient. Use this in your analysis.

Draw conclusions about your data and the use of the methods used to analyse them."

1. Please **tick one box in each line** to show how much you agree with these statements about **Assignment Two.**

It was for easy for me to understand the assessment instructions.   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

I understood the way my answers would be marked   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

It was for easy for me to complete this assignment   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

I enjoyed doing this assignment   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

I learned a lot by doing this assignment   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

Students from non English backgrounds can do as well as students from English speaking backgrounds in this assessment   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

Any comments:

………

……

………

……….

2. The instructions asked you to **"justify the way you have chosen to present the data"**
Which of these definitions describes what this means most accurately?
(**Tick one box**).

Explain what the graph shows ☐
Explain that the graph/chart/table you chose summarises
your data and informs the reader well ☐
Explain why the graph/chart/table chosen was inappropriate ☐

3. The instructions asked you to **"analyse the data"**
Which of these definitions describes what this means most accurately?
(**Tick one box**).

Writing a description of what the graph/chart/table shows ☐
Organising the information to present it in a graph/chart/table ☐
Producing a scattergraph ☐

4. The instructions asked you to **"draw conclusions about your data and the use of the methods used to analyse them"**.
Which of these definitions describes what this means most accurately? (**Tick one box**).

Summarise the results of your data collection ☐
Write about what you would do next time ☐
Summarise what the graph/chart/table shows and its effectiveness ☐

5. Which of these do you think **the teacher** considers **most important when marking your answer?** Please rank them **in order of importance to the teacher**. Use number 1 for most important, and so on to number 9 (least important)

grammatical sentence structure and spelling ☐
writing well-structured paragraphs ☐
writing so that you could be clearly understood ☐
academic writing style ☐
producing a scattergraph from your data ☐
producing a graph/chart/table showing the relationships between your data ☐
explaining why you chose the graph/chart/table ☐
writing an explanation of what the graph/chart/table shows ☐
writing a summary of what the graphic presentation shows ☐

6. Please **tick one box in each line** to show how much you agree with these statements about **Assignment Two**:

It motivated me to learn ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

It tested my understanding of course content ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

It helped me to understand what I was taught ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

It helped me to improve my English writing skills ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

I learned new information ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

I learned new skills ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

D. Assignment Three in the Research and Analysis Paper

The instructions for Assignment Three read:

"Literature Review: 40%

Task: Review the debate concerning the quantitative and qualitative approach to research in the social sciences (1500 words).

Aim: This assignment aims to ensure that you are able to:
• Demonstrate familiarity with a limited body of research on a particular topic.
• Outline the direction of research on a question.
• Place the review in context.
• Identify flaws in the debate.
• Write a literature review complete with in text references.

Required:
• An introduction which lays the basis for the review.
• An outline of the major studies and discoveries.
• A summary that draws the discoveries and studies together.
• A conclusion that restates the debate and makes suggestions for future research.
• At least 8 references from academic journals or books.
• A bibliography using the APA format (see the back of the module guide)."

1. Please **tick one box in each line** to show how much you agree with these statements about **Assignment Three.**

Before I did this assessment I knew how to structure and write a literature review in English ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

The teacher taught us how to write a literature review ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

It was for easy for me to understand the assessment instructions. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

I understood the way my assignment would be marked ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

It was for easy for me to complete this assignment ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

I enjoyed doing this assignment ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

I learned a lot by doing this assignment ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

Students from non English backgrounds can do as well as students from English speaking
backgrounds in this assessment ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

Any comments:

....

....

....

2. Please **tick one box in each line** to show how much you agree with these statements
about the instructions for **Assignment Three.**

I understand what "*outline direction of research*" means ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

I understand what to "*place a review in context*" means ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

I understand what to "*identify flaws in the debate*" means ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

I understand what to "*lay the basis for the review*" means ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

3. Which of these do you think **the teacher** considers **most important when marking your
answer**? Please rank them **in order of importance to the teacher**. Use number 1 for most
important, and so on to number 6 (least important)

writing all parts of the review listed in the "required" section of the instructions ☐
grammatical sentence structure and spelling ☐
writing well-structured paragraphs ☐

writing so that you could be clearly understood ☐
academic writing style ☐
accuracy in writing the APA reference list ☐

4. Please **tick one box in each line** to show how much you agree with these statements about **Assignment Three**:

It motivated me to learn ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

It tested my understanding of course content ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

It helped me to understand what I was taught ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

It helped me to improve my English writing skills ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

I learned new information ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

I learned new skills ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

E. All Three Assessments

1. Please **rank the following assessment types to show which you prefer most** (1 to 3).
For example, if you prefer the literature review most, then rank this as "1" and so on.

Library & Internet Research task ☐
Data Presentation task ☐
Literature Review ☐

2. **Please rank the following <u>reasons</u> for preferring assessment types (1 to5)**, in order of importance to you.

the assessment is interesting to do ☐
the assessment is easy to complete ☐
you think you will get a good mark ☐
the assessment will improve your knowledge and understanding and skills ☐
other reason ☐

Can you explain your answer?

……

……

....

....

3. What do you feel about the <u>number of assessments</u> on the Research and Analysis paper? Please **tick one box**

<div align="center">☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐</div>
<div align="center">not enough   just right   too many</div>

4. Did the lecturer show you any examples of good answers before you did assignments one and two?

Yes   ☐   No   ☐

Did the lecturer show you any examples of good literature reviews before you did the third assignment?

Yes   ☐   No   ☐

5. Did you receive any feedback from the lecturer after each assessment? Yes ☐   No ☐

If "yes", what form did this feedback take?

written comments	☐	comments about content	☐
spoken comments	☐	corrections to writing errors	☐
corrections to content of your answers	☐	comments about your writing	☐
other	☐		

6. If you did receive feedback, how helpful was this feedback? Please **tick one box in each line** to show how much you agree with these statements about **<u>feedback</u>**

It was helpful for my understanding of course content   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
<div align="right">strongly disagree   strongly agree</div>

It was helpful in improving my paragraph writing   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
<div align="right">strongly disagree   strongly agree</div>

It was helpful in improving my English grammar   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
<div align="right">strongly disagree   strongly agree</div>

It will help improve my ability to write a literature review   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
<div align="right">strongly disagree   strongly agree</div>

7. Please **tick one box in each line** to show how much you agree with these statements about **<u>the three assessments on this course</u>**

The assessments increased my ability to search for
books and articles using the library and Internet   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
<div align="right">strongly disagree   strongly agree</div>

The assessments increased my ability to use databases ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

The assessments increased my ability to search
for research-based material and reports ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

The assessments improved my ability to interpret
statistical reports ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

The assessments developed my ability to present data
in appropriate form e.g. tables, charts, graphs ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

The assessments developed my ability to write a ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
full literature review strongly disagree   strongly agree

The assessments developed my understanding of academic
writing and developed my academic writing ability ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

………………………………………………………………..

8. I would be grateful if you would answer the following questions as your answers will be very helpful for this research. However, if you do not wish to give this information please feel free to leave these questions out.

If you did study Academic English before enrolling for the BA degree did you pass the course?

Yes ☐ No ☐

What mark or grade did you get for each assessment in the Research and Analysis Paper?

Assessment One ……..   Assessment Two ……..
Assessment Three ……..

Thank you for completing this questionnaire

Appendix 7:   Questionnaire on Assessment in Paper 3

The aim of this questionnaire is to collect feedback from students on the assessments in the Mass Communication and Society 1 BA Paper. The information you provide on this form is confidential. You will not be individually identified and your responses will only be used for research purposes.

A. About you

How old are you?   ………. years

Are you   male ☐   or   female ☐ ?

What is your first language?   ………………………………………

Did you complete your secondary schooling (high school) outside New Zealand?   Yes ☐ No ☐

If you did, in which country did you complete your schooling? …………………………………………

Did you go to secondary school (high school) in New Zealand?   Yes ☐ No ☐

If you did, how many years' secondary study have you completed in New Zealand? …………

How many years' tertiary study have you completed in New Zealand? …………

Have you studied Academic English since leaving high school?   Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, what course did you study, and where? ……………………………………………………………………

How long was the course and how many hours a week? …………………………   …………………

B Assignment One in the Mass Communication Paper

The instructions for Assignment One read:

"Literature Review of the media industries; 15%

1,500 words

Write a literature review of a chapter or article.

Choosing your literature

▪ Choose the literature from the topics covered in lectures 3-7 of the course…
▪ Use your booklist as a guide to your choice…
▪ You may use one of the readings discussed in tutorials

Method

▪ What is the writer/s saying? You should summarise the key points to demonstrate your understanding of the argument. Write in your own words.
▪ Critically evaluate the argument by comparing this piece of literature with other pieces of writing on the same subject or theme (refer to four or five pieces of literature altogether).
▪ Identify the particular point of view or perspective taken by the writer/s on the subject. Evaluate this perspective against the perspectives in the other pieces of writing…

You will be assessed on:
- keeping to the word limit
- the clarity and fluency of your writing
- accurate referencing (follow one system consistently)
- your understanding of material
- your understanding of complex material
- your ability to summarise key points
- your evaluation/analysis of material
- your ability to link concepts and integrate different points
- your ability to identify and compare perspectives"

Questions about Assignment One
1. Please **tick one box in each line** to show how much you agree with these statements

Before I did this assessment I knew how to structure
and write a literature review in English   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

The tutor taught us how to write a literature review   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

I understood the instructions easily.   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

I understood the way my answers would be marked   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

It was easy for me to complete assessment one   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

I enjoyed doing this assignment   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

I learned a lot from doing this assignment   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

Students from non-English backgrounds can do as well as students from English speaking
backgrounds in this assessment   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

Any comments on your answers:

……
……
……
……..

2. The instructions asked you to "***Critically evaluate the argument***".
Tick one box below to show what you thought this instruction meant you had to do.

Summarise the key points   ☐
Explain how comprehensive and/or convincing the first writer(s)' ideas are
by comparing these ideas with those of the other writers   ☐
You weren't sure what it meant   ☐

3. The instructions asked you to ***"evaluate this perspective against the perspectives in the other pieces of writing"***.
Please **tick the box you agree with**:

You had to critically evaluate the argument *and* evaluate the perspective   ☐

Critically evaluate the argument and *evaluate the perspective* mean the same   ☐

4. Which of these do you think **the teacher** considers **most important when marking your answer?** Please rank them **in order of importance to the teacher**. Use number 1 for most important, and so on to number 9 (least important)

keeping to the word limit   ☐
the clarity and fluency of your writing   ☐
accurate referencing (follow one system consistently)   ☐
your understanding of material   ☐
your understanding of complex material   ☐
your ability to summarise key points   ☐
your evaluation/analysis of material   ☐
your ability to link concepts and integrate different points   ☐
your ability to identify and compare perspectives"   ☐

Any comments on your answer:
……
………..

5. Please **tick one box in each line** to show how much you agree with these statements about **Assignment One**:
It motivated me to learn   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                                                        strongly disagree   strongly agree

It tested my understanding of course content   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
                                                                        strongly disagree   strongly agree

It improved my understanding of what I was taught   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

It helped me to improve my English writing skills

strongly disagree   strongly agree

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

I learned new information

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

I developed new skills

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

C. Assignment Two in the Mass Communication Paper

The instructions for Assignment Two read:

"Essay; shaping media messages. 25%. 2,500 words

Answer one question.

Where appropriate, use New Zealand examples of media content to illustrate your answers.

1. Discuss the claim that mass media is in decline.
2. Explain convergences and critically examine the explanations for their development.
3. What are "news values"? Examine the claim that news values have a major effect on the content of media news.
4. Describe the functions of the media as the 'fourth estate' and consider to what extent New Zealand media operate in this way.
5. Explain the term 'moral panics' and evaluate whether it is a useful explanation for some media coverage of deviant acts.
6. Explain the notion of 'ideology' as it is seen to be disseminated through the media. Analyse claims that ideology is an important influence on media content."

1. Please **tick one box in each line** to show how much you agree with these statements about **Assignment Two.**

Before I did this assessment I knew how to structure
and write an academic essay in English

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

The tutor taught us how to write an academic essay

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

It was easy for me to understand the assessment instructions.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

I understood the way my answers would be marked

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

It was for easy for me to complete this assignment

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

I enjoyed doing this assignment

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

I learned a lot by doing this assignment ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

Students from non English backgrounds can do as well as students from English speaking backgrounds in this assessment ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

Any comments:

………

………

………

…….

2. The instructions in the six essay topics asked you either to: **discuss the claim…; critically examine the explanations…; examine the claim…; consider to what extent…; evaluate whether…** or **analyse claims…**
Which of the statements below to you agree with?
(**Tick one box**).

These verbs and phrases require *different* thinking and writing skills ☐
These verbs and phrases require *the same* thinking and writing skills ☐
You are not sure whether they mean the same thing or not ☐

3. The following points are from the **Checklist** issued to you with the assignment instructions. Which of these do you think **the teacher** considers **most important when marking your answer?**
Please rank <u>each set</u> **in order of importance to the teacher**.

Research and summary of Research Use number 1 for most important to number 3 (least important)
Locate relevant material ☐
Review material, summarising content accurately in your own words ☐
Demonstrate understanding of material ☐

Analysis Use number 1 for most important, and so on to number 7 (least important)
Distinguish between fact and opinion ☐
Evaluate the quality of evidence and argument from your sources ☐
Acknowledge different perspectives/approaches ☐
Link related points ☐
Generate your own insights ☐
Support your own argument with evidence ☐
Acknowledge any limitation of your argument ☐

Structure Use number 1 for most important, and so on to number 4 (least important)

Answers the question   ☐

Introductory paragraph indicates approach and scope of answer   ☐

Logical development of ideas   ☐

Conclusion encapsulates answer   ☐

Presentation Use number 1 for most important, and so on to number 4 (least important)

Word-processed   ☐

One system of referencing followed correctly   ☐

Clarity and fluency of writing   ☐

Keeps to word length of 2,500   ☐

4. Please **tick one box in each line** to show how much you agree with these statements about **Assignment Two**:

It motivated me to learn   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

It tested my understanding of course content   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

It helped me to understand what I was taught   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

It helped me to improve my English writing skills   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

I learned new information   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

I learned new skills   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

strongly disagree   strongly agree

D. Assessment Three in the Mass Communication Paper

The Exam was worth 60% of total marks. The instructions for the Exam read:

"Each question is worth 15 marks. Do not repeat substantial material across answers. Use New Zealand examples where appropriate."

The briefing sheet for the exam read:

"All lecture topics will be covered as separate questions EXCEPT lecture 1 (although you may find it appropriate to refer to the content of lecture 1 in one of your answers).

Criteria for exam marking

D	Does not meet requirements for C	B	All of C, plus
			Evidence of wider reading
			Analytical
C	Answers the questions asked		
	Demonstrates clear understanding of course material	A	All of B, plus

Substantiates points using relevant New Zealand material   Substantially analytical"
Clearly expressed

1. Please **tick one box in each line** to show how much you agree with these statements about **Assessment Three (exam).**

It was for easy for me to understand the exam instructions.   □ □ □ □ □
                                                                 strongly disagree   strongly agree

I understood the way my exam answers would be marked   □ □ □ □ □
                                                                 strongly disagree   strongly agree

It was for easy for me to complete the exam   □ □ □ □ □
                                                                  strongly disagree   strongly agree

I enjoyed doing this assessment   □ □ □ □ □
                                                                  strongly disagree   strongly agree

I learned a lot by doing this assessment   □ □ □ □ □
                                                                  strongly disagree   strongly agree

Students from non English backgrounds can do as well as students from English speaking
backgrounds in this assessment   □ □ □ □ □
                                                                  strongly disagree   strongly agree

Any comments:
……
……
……
………..

2. Please **tick one box in each line** to show how much you agree with these statements about the criteria for marking for **Assessment Three.**

I understand what "*substantiates points*" means   □ □ □ □ □
                                                                  strongly disagree   strongly agree

I understand what "*analytical*" means   □ □ □ □ □
                                                                  strongly disagree   strongly agree

I understand what to "*substantially analytical*" means   □ □ □ □ □
                                                                  strongly disagree   strongly agree

3. Which of these do you think **the teacher** considers **most important when marking your exam essay answers?**
Please rank them **in order of importance to the teacher.** Use number 1 for most important, and so on to number 6 (least important)

Answers the questions asked   ☐
Demonstrates clear understanding of course material   ☐
Substantiates points using relevant New Zealand material   ☐
Clearly expressed   ☐
Evidence of wider reading   ☐
Analytical   ☐

4. Please **tick one box in each line** to show how much you agree with these statements about **Assessment Three**:

It motivated me to learn

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

It tested my understanding of course content

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

It helped me to understand what I was taught

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

It helped me to improve my English writing skills

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

I learned new information

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

I learned new skills

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

E. All Three Assessments
1. Please **rank the following assessment types to show which you prefer most** (1 to 3).
For example, if you prefer the literature review most, then rank this as "1" and so on.

Literature Review   ☐
Assignment Essay   ☐
Exam (essays)   ☐

2. Please rank the following <u>reasons</u> for preferring assessment types, in order of importance to you.

The assessment is interesting to do	☐
The assessment is easy to complete	☐
You think you will get a good mark	☐
The assessment will improve your knowledge and understanding and skills	☐
Other reason	☐

Can you explain your answer?

……

……

……

……

3. What do you feel about the <u>number of assessments</u> on the Mass Communication paper? Please **tick one box**

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

not enough   just right   too many

Any comments:

……

……

4. Did the lecturer show you any examples of good literature reviews before you did the first assignment?

Yes   ☐   No   ☐

Did the lecturer show you any examples of good essay answers before you did the second assignment?

Yes   ☐   No   ☐

5. Did you receive **any feedback** from the lecturer after the assignments? Yes ☐ No ☐

If "yes", **what form did this feedback take?**

written comments	☐
spoken comments	☐
corrections to content of your answers	☐
comments about content	☐
corrections to writing errors	☐
comments about your writing	☐
other	☐

6. If you did receive feedback, **how helpful was this feedback?** Please **tick one box in each line** to show how much you agree with these statements about **feedback**

It was helpful for my understanding of course content ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

It was helpful in improving my writing ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

It will help improve my ability to write a literature review ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

It was helpful in improving my ability to write an essay ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
strongly disagree   strongly agree

7. What did the assessments help you learn to do? Please **tick the boxes** that apply to you.
To:
Identify and explain the differences between mass communication & interpersonal communication ☐
Explain in broad terms the development of mass communication in Aotearoa/N.Z. ☐
Understand the dynamic of relationships between journalists and their audience ☐
Account for organised pressures on news production ☐
Account for institutional pressures on media organisations ☐
Demonstrate how institutional pressures affect media content ☐
Decode the manifest and latent meanings of media messages ☐

………………………………………………………………..

8. I would be grateful if you would answer the following questions as your answers will be very helpful for this research. However, if you do not wish to give this information please feel free to leave these questions out.

If you did study Academic English before enrolling for the BA degree did you pass the course?

Yes ☐ No ☐

What mark or grade did you get for each assessment in the Mass Communication and Society Paper?
Assessment One   ……..   Assessment Two   ……..
Assessment Three   ……..
Thank you for completing this questionnaire

Appendix 8

AUT
AUCKLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
TE WĀNANGA ARONUI O TAMAKI MAKAU RAU

Title of Research Project: Assessed Writing Requirements in Faculty of Arts BA Modules

5 December 2003

Dear Student

I would be most grateful if could take the time to complete the enclosed questionnaire on *assessments in the Mass Communication and Society 1 Paper*, and return it in the pre-paid envelope as soon as possible. We value your input as it helps us to improve the quality of our courses.

Information about the research project is on the reverse side of this sheet.

This isn't a test – there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers. We are just interested in what you think.

Yours faithfully,

Elizabeth Turner
Senior Lecturer
School of Languages
Auckland University of Technology

Title of Research Project: Assessed Writing Requirements in Faculty of Arts BA Modules

What is this research for? The aim of the research project is to investigate:
1. the writing requirements of assessments in this module
2. the experiences and opinions of students who have completed the assessments on this module.

Why was the Mass Communication and Society 1 paper chosen? This is one of three modules chosen to represent the range of BA modules taken by students who also do the English for Academic Purposes module.

Why were you invited to take part? Because your name was provided as one of the students taking this course

Do you have to take part? No. You are invited to complete the questionnaire, but you do not have to do so.

What happens in the research study? Lecturers on the three courses are interviewed about the choices of assessment types and in particular the types of writing tasks in the assessments; the assessment documents are analysed and students' responses to the questionnaires are also analysed.

Are your answers to the questionnaire private? Yes. The questionnaire does not have your name on it and you do not sign it. Your name will not be used and your answers are anonymous and private.

Is there any risk or cost to you? No, there is no risk to you in taking part and no cost apart from the time needed for you to complete the questionnaire.

If you decide to complete the questionnaire, your name will not be used when the project is reported. You can look at the completed questionnaire and you are free to take it back and change your mind about taking part provided you do so before the information has been analysed.

If you have any concerns about this project you should contact the Project Supervisor, Pat Strauss: pat.strauss@aut.ac.nz, 917 9999 ext. 6847. Concerns about the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTEC. Madeline Banda, madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz, 917 9999 ext. 8044.

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 28 January 2003
Autec Reference Number:03/07