# English Language and English for Academic Purposes Unit Standards

## Supporting Document – Draft for consultation – August 2025

## Section Three D

Using a unifying topic as the foundation to assess Level 3 English for Academic Purposes (EAP) standards.

Planning a realistic assessment programme

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# Using a unifying topic as the foundation to assess Level 3 EAP standards.

*In this section, an experienced practitioner explores how to minimise workload for learners, by using a unifying topic as the foundation to assess four Level 3 EAP standards. EAP unit standard 30507 is unpacked in detail with guidance on selecting a manageable research question.*

*Guidance is also provided on how to source texts and make them more accessible to learners.*

## Who are the learners?

### Tertiary context

The students are adult migrants, former refugees, and international students from various countries who are aiming for tertiary study in New Zealand. They are enrolled in a New Zealand Certificate in English Language (Academic) Level 3 full-time programme, five hours per day. Some will continue to NZCEL (Academic) Level 4, and some will transition to tertiary study below degree level. Others will enter specific foundation courses at the universities that they are planning to attend.

Learners' backgrounds vary. Some have already completed degrees overseas and have a reasonable grasp of academic requirements. Others have completed high school, including English as a foreign language, and have recently arrived in New Zealand with the specific purpose of undertaking NZCEL to enter mainstream tertiary courses. Others have been in New Zealand for a while and gradually made their way through several levels of NZCEL and have limited academic background.

### Secondary context

The ESOL teacher is working with several Year 12 learners who need to improve their academic reading and writing skills, and also to meet NCEA co-requisite reading and writing standards. This can be achieved through the Level 3 English for Academic Purpose Unit Standards: 30507 and 30511, or the Common Assessment Activities (CAAs). Use of unit standards 30507 and 30511 for the co-requisite is restricted to students with current or recent ESOL funding and international fee-paying students. The students have migrant and former refugee backgrounds and are quite diverse in terms of interests and subject choice. While the ESOL teacher would like to work closely with subject teachers to try to utilise work done in other subjects, this would be time consuming due to the diverse range of learners and the very different schedules they have.

# Planning a realistic assessment programme

## Tertiary

The assessment load on the NZCEL programme is high. A priority for the teacher is to find ways to integrate unit standards to ensure learners do not have an unrealistic workload. Selecting a topic that suits the whole class is also complicated, because of their varied backgrounds. The teacher decides on the overriding topic of "AI in education" which they can link to several unit standards, as in the table below:

| 1. Reading | 2. Listening | 3. Speaking | 4. Writing |
|---|---|---|---|
| 30511 *Read and process information on a familiar topic in English for academic purposes* | 30509 *Listen to and process information about a familiar topic in a short-spoken text in English for an academic purpose* | Internally developed speaking assessment to meet a Learning Outcome for discussing an academic topic | 30507 *Write a short text under test conditions in English for an academic purpose* |
| The first assessment in the module is unit standard 30511, where learners read a text on AI and the development of writing skills. Prior to this, they have had time to become familiar with the overall topic through classroom activities. | The second assessment assesses listening using a spoken text on AI and academic integrity. | Third, learners undertake a recorded and assessed discussion on overall benefits and drawbacks of AI in education. Prior to this, they have undertaken the reading and listening tests and familiarised themselves with the resource documents for 30507. | The last assessment in the module is 30507 where learners write an essay on AI and language learning (see below). |

To meet the needs of the learners, the ESOL teacher decides to focus on a module on "AI in education". This topic works well with both unit standards, 30507 and 30511. The teacher recently introduced learners to rules that support academic integrity and has also stimulated discussion about their own experience with social media.

| 1. Reading | 4. Writing |
|---|---|
| 30511 *Read and process information on a familiar topic in English for academic purposes* | 30507 *Write a short text under test conditions in English for an academic purpose* |
| The first assessment in the module is unit standard 30511, where learners read a text on AI and the development of writing skills.<br><br>Prior to the assessment, they have had time to become familiar with the overall topic through classroom activities and through reading through school policies relating to AI. | The last assessment in the module is 30507 where learners write an essay on AI and language learning (see below).<br><br>Prior to the assessment. Learners have had time to familiarise themselves with the resource documents for 30507; reading them for homework and also discussing them in groups in the classroom. |

# Unpacking an English for Academic Purposes unit standard (30507)

This section shows how to unpack one of the standards used for this integrated unit of work, 30507 (Write a short text under test conditions in English for an academic purpose)  English for Academic Purpose Level 3 US 30507

| Title | Write a short text under test conditions in English for an academic purpose | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Level | 3 | Credits | 5 |

| Purpose | People credited with this unit standard are able to write a short academic text under test conditions in English for an academic purpose. |
|---|---|

| Classification | Languages > English for Academic Purposes |
|---|---|

| Available grade | Achieved |
|---|---|

The title of the assessment reflects the **Outcome** of the assessment, and both indicate what learners will need to be able to do to achieve the standard. This gives an overall idea of what the teacher needs to assess: in short, they need to be assured that their learners can write a short text under test conditions in English for an academic purpose. The level specifies that this is a Level 3 Unit Standard, and the grade information states that there is only one available grade for this assessment: Achieved.

In the **Outcomes and performance criteria** section, there is further information on what the learner needs to achieve to pass this unit standard.

**Outcomes and performance criteria**

**Outcome 1**

Write a short text under test conditions in English for an academic purpose.

**Performance criteria**

1.1      The research question is addressed appropriately.

The **Performance criteria** specify how the learner meets the outcome, and the dimensions the assessor needs to be aware of when assessing the learner.

1.2      Ideas are developed and include material from the resource document(s) to address the research question.

1.3      Writing is structured using paragraphing, and some use of cohesive devices to show overall progression.

1.4      A formal writing style appropriate to the academic context is generally used.

1.5      Source material is integrated and acknowledged within the text.

Range      may include but is not limited to – direct quotation, citation and paraphrasing.

In this case, there are five performance criteria, and <u>each</u> of these <u>must</u> be met. While the performance criteria set out clearly what is required, they are sparsely worded and therefore give limited information. For example, it may not be clear from **PC 1.4** what the expectations for 'a formal writing style' are.

By referring to the **Guidance Information (GI)** in the standard, and particularly to the *Definitions* (see below), this becomes clearer.

In this case, the definitions clarify what is expected of a formal writing style and clarify other aspects of the outcome (e.g. what is meant by 'test conditions') and the performance criteria. Other parts of the **Guidance Information** are also crucial for knowing how to administer the assessment.

12    Definitions
   *Appropriately* refers to writing that addresses the research question in a manner
   suitable for the intended audience and academic purpose.
   *Cohesive devices* refer to how ideas are linked between and within paragraphs using
   conjunctions, connectives, and pronoun reference.
   *Formal writing style* refers to lexical and grammatical features, and range of sentence
   structures common in academic writing.  It does not usually contain slang,
   colloquialisms, or contractions.
   *Ideas are developed* refers to the skills of clarifying and expanding upon ideas.
   *Inaccuracies* refer to lapses in control of text structure, language features,
   vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation.
   *Test conditions* refer to a point in time assessment with a specific duration under
   supervised examination conditions.

## Guidance Information

1   This unit standard is one of a suite of five English for Academic Purposes Level 3 standards. These standards are designed to assess a learner's readiness to pathway to English for Academic Purposes Level 4 standards. They contribute to the New Zealand Certificate in English Language (Academic) (Level 3) [Ref: 4998].

2   This unit standard is at a level informed by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). A structured overview of all CEFR related scales can be found at http://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio/overview-of-cefr-related-scales.

3   The requirements of this standard are consistent with the NZCEL Supporting Document. This document includes guidelines relating to the level as informed by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and promotes consistent assessment practice.

4   It is recommended that assessment against this unit standard is conducted in conjunction with assessment against other Level 3 English for Academic Purposes unit standards. Assessment may occur in conjunction with study and assessment in other learning areas.

5   Competence for this unit standard must be assessed under test conditions in one sitting:
   i     learners must complete one piece of writing of at least 300 words;
   ii    writing, planning and proof-reading must be done in three hours maximum;
   iii   writing may contain errors and inaccuracies which do not significantly impede meaning;
   iv    learners cannot resubmit this piece of writing.


**GI 1 – 4** (see above) provide information to help teachers/assessors understand what level of language is expected of learners undertaking this standard. By referring to the Guiding Document and the descriptors for the New Zealand Certificate in English Language (Academic) Level 3, teachers can map the level to various frameworks (see Supporting Document Section 2, page 4) and, for secondary contexts, to the English Language Learning Progressions ELLP

**GI 5** provides important information about how the assessment is to be undertaken, including minimum word count (300 words), time limit (3 hours), expectations on accuracy and the fact that learners cannot be offered a resubmission, but instead need a new assessment opportunity (for more information on resubmissions and further assessment opportunities see Myth 4 Resubmission - NZQA.

6. Writing must be in response to a research question, based on resource document(s) and may include but is not limited to comparing, contrasting, problem solving, discussing, explaining cause and effect and presenting an argument. The question must not be given to learners prior to assessment. It must refer to resource document(s) given out previously, which learners have been given the opportunity to become familiar with prior to assessment. An unannotated copy of the resource document(s) can be consulted during the assessment.

7. Learners may use a bilingual and/or an English dictionary. It is recommended that electronic devices are not used for summative assessment purposes, except for word processing.

8. The assessor must be satisfied that the learner can independently demonstrate competency against the unit standard.

9. Resource documents for the writing task:
   i   a level of complexity appropriate to the academic context – for example, course text, introductory academic text, non-fiction book, appropriate oral source;
   ii  should use vocabulary which is based on texts of an academic nature;
   iii may be abridged and/or adapted versions designed for this level.

10. Assessment support material for *English for Academic Purposes* unit standards can be found at https://www2.nzqa.govt.nz/qualifications-and-standards/assessment-support-materials/english-for-academic-purposes/.

11. Guidelines for preparing submissions for moderation can be found at https://www2.nzqa.govt.nz/tertiary/assessment-and-moderation-of-standards/external-moderation-application/.

**GI 6, 8 and 9** provide essential information on how to set up the assessment, and what to take into consideration if producing assessment materials. Together they make it clear that learners need to be given a set of resource texts that are appropriate to an academic context. These texts should have some academic vocabulary but may be adapted to the level. As this is not a reading test, teachers are also able to assist learners' work through the texts and understand them.

On the day of the test, learners can have access only to unannotated copies of the texts **GI 6**.

They will be given the research question when the test starts and will then write an essay that addresses this question, using the resource texts to support their argument.

As stated in **GI 7**, they are allowed to use a dictionary.

**GI 8** reminds assessors that learners need to demonstrate independent competence, that is, complete the task without support.

Based on the information from the Outcome statement/title, the Performance Criteria and the Guidance Information, creating an assessment for this standard will involve sourcing suitable texts, selecting a research question, and developing a marking guide and/or assessment schedule that makes it clear what is expected.

## Sourcing texts and selecting a research question (30507)

**Sourcing suitable texts**

In this example, with the topic of *AI and language learning*, the teacher sources two texts from *The Conversation*, an online magazine with academic articles written for the general public. They source a third text from *Inside Higher Rd*, which publishes educational research. The three texts chosen are:

Piller, I. (2023). *'Your United States was normal': has translation tech really made language learning redundant?* The Conversation. https://theconversation.com/your-united-states-was-normal-has-translation-tech-really-made-language-learning-redundant-217665

Bjork, C. (2023). *Don't fret about students using ChatGPT to cheat – AI is a bigger threat to educational equality.* The Conversation. https://theconversation.com/dont-fret-about-students-using-chatgpt-to-cheat-ai-is-a-bigger-threat-to-educational-equality-202842

Coffey, L. (2024). *Lost in Translation? AI Adds Hope and Concern to Language Learning*. Inside Higher Ed. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/tech-innovation/artificial-intelligence/2024/06/06/ai-adds-hope-and-concern-foreign-language

To ensure that the texts are accessible to the learners, the teacher adapts them. Adaptations can include added glossaries, explanations to clarify terminology or the contexts, edits that make the language more accessible, or removal of sections that are not as relevant to

the learners and the task (such as in-depth information about the US language situation in Coffey's article). Below is a sample from Bjork's text, and a suggestion of how this may be adapted.

| Original text | Adapted text |
|---|---|
| But as with the myth of the "American dream", the egalitarian narrative of New Zealand masks more pernicious inequities like structural racism and the housing crisis, both of which have an outsized – and decidedly unfair – influence on today's students.<br><br>These persistent inequities dwarf the threat of cheating with AI. Instead of excessive hand wringing about cheating, educators would benefit from preparing for AI's other inequities, all of which are showcased in OpenAI's latest large language model (LLM): GPT-4. | But as with the myth of the "American dream", the idea of New Zealand as fair and equal hides more harmful inequities like structural racism and the housing crisis, both of which have a significant – and decidedly unfair – influence on today's students.<br><br>These persistent inequities are much greater than the threat of cheating with AI. Instead of worrying too much about cheating, educators would benefit from preparing for AI's other inequities, all of which are showcased in OpenAI's latest large language model (LLM): GPT-4. |

As these texts are not designed for reading assessments, but as supports for a writing assessment, they can be discussed in class to ensure that learners have understood them. However, as learners can only bring unmarked copies into the test, any glossaries and annotations that may be needed to make the texts clearer should be added as part of the assessment writing process.

**Selecting a research question**

The research question must be written with the resource materials in mind, as the learner will need to draw on these when writing the essay. In this case, the following research question is chosen:

*Since AI is now able to provide translations between languages as well as language tuition, some argue that there is no longer any need for formal language learning in traditional classrooms. Write an essay arguing against this idea, describing some of the problems with AI in relation to languages and language learning.*

The question is given to learners at the start of the 3-hour exam.

## Example Assessment Schedule (30507)

This is an example assessment schedule for this task.

<table>
<tr>
<td colspan="4"><b>30507</b> <i>Write a short text under test conditions in English for an academic purpose</i><br><b>AI and language learning</b><br><b>Assessment schedule</b></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<th>Performance criteria</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Judgement</th>
<th>Assessor notes</th>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range. 300 words</td>
<td>The essay is at least 300 words</td>
<td>An essay of at least 300 words has been written</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 The research question is addressed appropriately</td>
<td>The research question is addressed in a thesis statement in the introduction, e.g. <i>This essay will argue that AI cannot replace traditional language learning.</i><br>The essay is structured in a way that is appropriate to the research question, e.g. a body paragraph providing background, and body paragraphs developing the argument.<br>The essay ends with a conclusion that summarises the argument.</td>
<td>The research question is addressed through a thesis statement, through the structure of the essay and in the conclusion.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Ideas are developed and include material from the resource document(s) to address the research question.</td>
<td>Each paragraph contains a topic sentence with an idea that is relevant to the research question and topic. The main idea in the paragraph is expanded on through adding, for example,</td>
<td>Writing develops ideas and uses material from resource documents.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</table>

| | information, examples or clarifications.<br>Ideas from the resource documents are included. | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1.3 Writing is structured using paragraphing, and some use of cohesive devices to show overall progression. | Writing follows an essay structure with an introduction followed by paragraphs that develop ideas logically and ends with a conclusion.<br>Some cohesive devices (e.g. conjunctions, connectives, and pronoun reference) are used to link ideas within paragraphs, e.g. *There are several reasons why we still need human translators.* **Firstly**, **they** *are able to understand the cultural aspects of language* **and** *colloquial expressions…*<br>Some cohesive devices (e.g. conjunctions, connectives, and pronoun reference) are used to link ideas between paragraphs. | Writing has an overall structure with appropriate paragraphing and there is some use of cohesive devices to aid the cohesion and progression of the writing | |
| 1.4 A formal writing style appropriate to the academic context is generally used. | Writing uses formal vocabulary and avoids colloquialisms and slang.<br>Writing uses formal conventions, avoiding informal features, e.g. | Writing has formal language, including formal vocabulary and structures. | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | contractions, sentence fragments. Writing uses a variety of sentence structures, e.g. simple, compound and complex sentences. | | |
| 1.5 Source material is integrated and acknowledged within the text. Range may include but is not limited to – direct quotation, citation and paraphrasing. | Source material is used appropriately in the text. Ideas from the text should be either: <ul><li>Paraphrased in the learner's own words</li><li>Direct quotations, with quotation marks.</li></ul> Sources for paraphrased and quoted text are acknowledged in the text, through in-text citation, e.g. *According to Piller (2023), AI translations...* or *AI has been developed using primarily the English language (Bjork, 2023)* | Source material is integrated into the text appropriately through direct quotation and/or paraphrasing and acknowledged within the text through citation. | |