

Concept Building and Discussion: First Steps to Technical Writing and Presentation

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One of the most common requests received by ESP program administrators from specialist subject faculty is to teach students technical writing and presentation skills. Unfortunately, developing these skills (especially at an international level) is a resource-intensive endeavor, requiring small class sizes, plenty of classrooms, and many experienced instructors. Skill development also requires time; we cannot expect students to develop writing and presentation skills and apply them successfully without continued exposure to the target language, and extensive practice. Unfortunately, most institutions face economic pressures that force them to severely limit the resources available for teaching technical writing and presentation. As a result, many of them can only provide a small number of writing and presentation classes that are subsequently given elective or non-credit status. Alternatively, institutions may reduce class numbers by creating strict entry requirements for writing and presentation courses based on previous grades or experience.

In this paper, I will describe a novel approach adopted at the Faculty of Science and Engineering, Waseda University, that has allowed the Faculty to provide all 1800 second-year students with foundation skills in technical writing and presentation, without the need for a huge investment in resources. For this approach to be successful, a new course, *Concept Building and Discussion*, has been developed and carefully integrated into the general ESP program at the Faculty, which is possibly the largest fully-coordinated ESP program in Japan. First, I will provide a brief overview of the full ESP program, which spans the six years of undergraduate and graduate studies that most students will undertake. Next, I will explain the goals of *Concept Building and Discussion*, and show how these are realized through in-class task- and project-based activities. Following this, I will describe how the Faculty has managed to deal with issues such as materials development, course management, assessment, and teacher training, without requiring a huge increase in resources. Finally, I will show some of the student gains achieved in the first year of the course, and discuss plans for improving the course further in the 2009 academic year.

Although the current implementation of *Concept Building and Discussion* is for a large student body, I will emphasize in this paper that a similar course can be adopted at other institutions with much smaller or even larger student bodies. Therefore, I hope this paper will be of use to all administrators and practitioners who are interested in developing technical writing and presentation courses at their respective institutions.