

BBC Learning English

Talk about English

*Academic Listening*

*Part 1 - English for Academic Purposes:*

*Introduction*



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*This programme was first broadcast in 2001.*

*This is not an accurate word-for-word transcript of the programme.*

ANNOUNCER:

It's time for **Academic Listening** - a series for students at English-speaking universities.

Imagine: today is the first day of your uni life ... How do you feel? Excited and confident? Or maybe a little anxious? How do you think you'll cope? And how can you make the learning experience easier? For an insight, join Susan Fearn and members of the World Service class of 2001.

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**Susan:** Well, if you think you might have problems, don't worry. You're not alone.

**CLIP: Students**

**Angelica:** Entering into the English speaking educational system for me was quite a change - the main problem was understanding lectures - academic English is quite high level of speaking therefore the first was to become familiar with the listening understanding.

**Constant:** I think the pronunciation of English people is not the same as I learned at school - I come from Ivory Coast, it's in West Africa - the teacher in my country had a French accent -

the teacher of English - and it's not the same accent here, so I think the pronunciation, the accent is quite different .

**Emma:** You know how to express yourself in your own language - you know what you want to say but it's difficult to put it in the exact words.

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**Susan:** In this series we'll enter the world of further education and focus particularly on some of the linguistic problems experienced by students like you. And we'll try to identify strategies for coping with study in another language. Students and teachers will share their tips on effective learning, and give advice on some of the pitfalls to avoid. There'll be a mix of theory, practice and personal experience.

In this first programme, we focus on a special kind of English course, designed to prepare students for their studies. It's called EAP.

**CLIP: Christine Reeves**

EAP is actually studying English for Academic Purposes.

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**Susan:** Christine Reeves teaches at Bell Norwich, a language school in the East of England.

**CLIP: Christine Reeves**

That means studying English - the kind of English that you're likely to need to cope with life and studying at a British University or any other English speaking university - it could be the United States it could be Australia - and it prepares them and gives them necessary skills which enable them to manage their studies.

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**Susan:** English for Academic purposes is a particular kind of English – used by a particular group of people. If you *speak* Academic English, you’ll know a special vocabulary associated with your subject, and you’ll be used to writing or speaking in a particular way. You’ll know how to structure an essay or a report, for example; and you’ll be familiar with the language used in lectures, seminars and tutorials.

If you *study* EAP, you’ll practise special language skills for studying at a high level, and you’ll gain a number of useful strategies to make your learning more effective. Christine Reeves again.

### **CLIP: Christine Reeves**

Most EAP courses would cover various components - for example here at Bell the components we would always cover would be study skills, the students would also do quite a heavy component of writing, there would be a lecture, a weekly lecture, and there would normally be a component of social English to help them manage at the bank, for example, that sort of thing.

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**Susan:** An EAP course introduces you to the special language associated with the academic world – common words, expressions, particular structures. It provides a range of advanced study skills.

A good EAP course will give you training in general English as well. During your university course, you’ll lead a double life. On duty: as a student - grappling with academic ideas in academic English... and off-duty, in everyday situations, using less formal English. It’s not unusual to have problems in both areas.

### **CLIP: Students**

**Constanza:** I would like to be more fluent with my speaking because I've got ideas in my mind but I don't have enough language to transmit my ideas - that's my problem.

**Jose Arturo:** In the case of English language, there are many different accents, and when you learn the English in your country, you only learn the English prepared for learning English - that is a more careful accent, that is not very fast. And when you come here - honestly, sometimes I can't understand anything. Some people speak fast, some people speak with not care of stressing the words that they say, so sometimes it's very difficult to follow them.

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### **CLIP: Christine Reeves**

Initially the problems they face are probably of an academic nature, for example they go to lectures and they find that they can't understand, or they can't take notes very quickly. They have quite a lot of reading to do and don't know how to cope with it. On top of that it could be their first experience of living in another country, so they're unfamiliar with some of the systems that we have here, like registering with a doctor, and then just basically making friends - they could feel incredibly lonely and isolated. These are the problems they'll face when starting university.

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**Susan:** Simon Williams teaches EAP in the Language Centre at University College, London. He believes that difficulties experienced by language learners in lectures and other academic situations occur chiefly because they just don't have enough mental energy.

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### **CLIP: Simon Williams**

The sort of problems that non-native speakers might have are summed up in one word, and that's "overload". The listener is paying so much attention to decoding words that they recognise and phrases that they recognise – it's almost like trying to do a word-by-word translation. You can't translate in that way. You have to get a global picture, as well as looking at individual items. The student pays so much attention to the language that they miss out on the content. They're looking at the vehicle, rather than what the vehicle contains.

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**Susan:** As well as coping with new vocabulary and lecturers who speak quickly and with unfamiliar accents, you may find it very difficult to listen out for the main points of a lecture and take notes at the same time. So what can you do?

### **CLIP: Simon Williams**

Get hold of some texts, perhaps over the internet, or through a library, or through journals or magazines that might be available in newsagents, or through friends, and then study recurring specialist words in those texts; but also look at the kind of structures the kinds of organisation used, because different subjects typically use different organisation or genres to put things together.

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**Susan:** Preparation is the key. Be prepared! According to Simon Williams, students can make their academic life much easier by getting to know specialist vocabulary in advance. And Simon Williams advises students to obtain an English-English dictionary, and maybe a subject dictionary - of Medicine, of Law, of Linguistics. Listening to the radio, watching TV - these are all methods of improving both general *and* specialist English – as members of our World Service class will tell you.

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### **CLIP: Students**

**Constant:** I'm a computer engineer and so I always use internet and most of the websites are in English so I think internet is a very good way to improve your English. I think especially the reading - reading and vocabulary.

**Constanza:** I usually watch TV programmes in English so it helped me with listening and sometimes when I watch TV I prefer to use subtitles in English too - so you can practise together listening and reading.

**Jose Arturo:** Try to read books related with your subject. Even material you already know in your language because some people can say 'oh that book, I know it, I've already read it in Spanish three times'. You have to read it in English to see if you notice substantial differences.

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**Susan:** During this series we'll focus on some of the strategies you can use to improve your listening ability and your performance in other academic situations. We've said already that preparation is important. Simple things like looking up specialist vocabulary, reading the course outline, looking at the title of a lecture, for example, they can all help you predict its language and content. Here's an example of this from some research carried out by R. Anderson and colleagues. It illustrates that "prior information about a text" can help you to make predictions about its content and influence your interpretation. Here, "prior information" comes in the form of the title.

### **CLIP: Actor's voice**

#### **A Prisoner Plans His Escape**

Rocky slowly got up from the mat, planning his escape. He hesitated a moment and thought. Things were not going well. What bothered him most was being held, especially since the

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charge against him had been weak. He considered his present situation. The lock that held him was strong, but he thought he could break it.

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**Susan:** Now here's that story again – same words – and same actor! - only the title has changed. Notice how this new “prior information” changes your interpretation of individual words and overall content.

**CLIP: Actor's voice**

**A Wrestler in a Tight Corner**

Rocky slowly got up from the mat, planning his escape. He hesitated a moment and thought. Things were not going well. What bothered him most was being held, especially since the charge against him had been weak. He considered his present situation. The lock that held him was strong, but he thought he could break it.

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**ANNOUNCER:**

That was your introduction to English for Academic Purposes presented by Susan Fearn. At the beginning of the programme, Susan invited you to reflect on some of the problems that EAP students experience - and asked you to think about how they might cope. I wonder how accurate your predictions were. Next time you listen to some English - whether it's a radio programme or a university lecture - listen out for clues about what's coming next... and see if it helps.