

# Writing Across the Curriculum: Specificity vs. transferability



SONIA SHARMIN  
Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences,  
University of Tsukuba

## Introduction

### Two theories about teaching English at the graduate level:

- ❖ Teaching should transcend disciplinary boundaries and, thus, be governed by a generic set of principles;
- ❖ Teaching should be linked to the content of a discipline and, therefore, guided by the practical wisdom of “expert” teachers within each field

**Question:** To what extent should writing specialists from outside a discipline defer to the expertise of inside practitioners?

## Research procedure

<b>Subjects:</b> SS- Content specialist with strong command of the English language ES1 - English-language specialist ES2- English-language specialist with science degrees
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**Task:** Correct abstract produced by a graduate Engineering student related to research carried out for undergraduate 4<sup>th</sup> year thesis

Main types of error identified:

- Article and preposition usage
- Spelling
- Punctuation
- More appropriate word (not a serious grammatical error)
- Word order
- Incorrect word
- Space needed
- Subject-verb agreement
- Tense
- Word/Sentence is *technically* incorrect

## Results

**Example sentence:** This result leads us to understand the frictional behavior of <sup>4</sup>He films at low temperature.

### Corrections of SS

Original text	Corrected text	Type of error correction
This results lead	This result leads	Subject-verb agreement
know	understand	More appropriate word
hesitation	frictional behavior	Word is technically incorrect
in the area of low temperature	at low temperature	Prepositional usage; more appropriate phrase

### ES1 corrected sentence:

This result leads us to find the hesitation of <sup>4</sup>He films in an area of low temperature.”

“know” → “find”: more appropriate word  
“the” → “an”: article usage

### ES2 corrected sentence:

This result helps us understand the hesitation of <sup>4</sup>He films in the area of low temperature”

“This results lead” → “ This result helps”: subject-verb agreement, more appropriate word.  
“Know” → “understand”: more appropriate word.

### Main difference: Technical wording

“hesitation” should be changed to “friction”  
SS: Corrected this mistake  
ES1: Did not correct this mistake  
ES2: Suggested this in a comment

**To be noted:** ES1 pointed out that there seemed to be an abruptness in the text, especially between the introduction and research motivation sections.

## Conclusion

- At the graduate level, any form of teaching scientific discourse requires some background knowledge of the subject matter.
- At the undergraduate level, focus on acquisition of disciplinary style desirable needing the contribution of both English department faculty and subject specialists

## References

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