The development of all students’ academic and professional communication skills in the English language is recognised as an essential graduate attribute. The ability to communicate knowledge and understandings acquired during degree studies or to communicate in professional settings needs to be developed in disciplinary and interdisciplinary contexts and in combination with other graduate attributes. These guidelines recognise mastery of English language as the medium of communication for success in degree studies and the necessity of supporting all students in achieving this goal. The guidelines in this document incorporate and augment the English Language Standards for Higher Education (ELSHES)1 developed in 2010 by the Federal Government steering committee convened by Australian Universities Quality Agency to establish the Good Practice Principles for English language proficiency for international students in Australian universities (GPP) in 2008/9. These English Language standards1, when approved, will apply to all students in the Australian Higher Education sector and will be used in Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency audits.

This document adopts the definition of ‘English language proficiency’ used in the ELSHE which is ‘the ability of students to use the English language to make and communicate meaning appropriately in spoken and written contexts while completing their higher education studies and after they graduate’. This definition aligns with that of the other commonly used term in this area, namely, academic literacies, which is understood in the context of this document to mean the ability of students to communicate effectively in their specific discipline contexts.

These Good Practice guidelines take the view that the development of students’ knowledge and understandings in their studies is intimately linked with the development of their communication skills. As students acquire new knowledge and understandings through teaching and learning activities, they will also mature in their communication skills.

**COURSE FOCUS**

These guidelines recognise that students’ communication skills are developed over the life of their studies and the integration of these skills into course curricula and learning outcomes needs to take place at strategic points within and across years of all courses. Mastery of communication skills for a range of audiences, purposes and in a variety of modes needs to be introduced, developed and assessed within each course, including Higher Degree by Research (HDR) courses.

**FROM ENTRY TO EXIT**

A whole student lifecycle approach acknowledges the role of pathway providers in ensuring that students on entry have the communicative language ability for the commencement of their university studies and that this provides a solid basis for further developing students’ communication skills within their degree studies. Both undergraduate and postgraduate students need to be made aware of the ways in which the University will support the development of their academic and professional communication skills during their courses and that there will be appropriate emphasis placed on the attainment of these skills. Exit units of study, for example capstone units or other units which address workplace readiness, need to address students’ professional communicative ability for employment. In addition, the need for students to take responsibility for the development of their communication skills through both curricula and extra curricula activities is recognised.

**LEADERSHIP**

Leadership at the highest levels in the University is required to support those responsible for designing, implementing and monitoring the development of students’ academic and professional communication. Course/year and unit co-ordinators, as well as academics specifically involved in the development of students’ communication skills will play a key leadership role in carrying out strategies to embed communication skills in curricula, assessments and higher degree research programs and to evaluate their effectiveness. These activities can take place alongside curriculum renewal and internationalisation of the curriculum.

**GUIDELINE 1: Entry level skills**

The university recognises the importance of students’ entry-level communication skills and has strategies in place to monitor student performance in this area. Strategies to achieve this may include:

- Diagnosis of students’ communication skills is undertaken on entry into undergraduate and postgraduate studies, including Higher Degree by Research students.
- Student performance by pre-entry pathway is monitored, analysed and communicated, where possible, to those involved in preparing students for university entry.

**GUIDELINE 2: Supporting skills development**

Students are informed throughout their degree program about the importance of developing academic and professional communication skills and the nature and level of support provided. Strategies to achieve this may include:

- Orientation and transition programs ensure that students understand the communication skills required for their studies and the importance of further developing these skills.
- The informal curriculum as well as the formal curriculum supports students from all backgrounds in developing their social and intercultural communication skills.
- All unit of study outlines or other course materials provide information about specific resources available for students to develop their academic and professional communication.
- Students are advised of their responsibility in developing their academic and professional communication skills.

**GUIDELINE 3: Course design**

Development of students’ academic and professional communication skills is integrated into curriculum design, assessment practices and course delivery. Strategies to achieve this may include:
GUIDELINE 4: Appropriate graduate skills

The university ensures that students’ academic and professional communication skills provide a solid basis for their future career. Strategies to achieve this may include:

- Course learning outcomes and standards incorporate those relating to academic and professional communication skills.
- Student feedback on the development of specific communication skills is incorporated into relevant evaluation instruments, e.g. USE.
- Exit programs which address the professional communication skills required for employment are offered as part of courses. Such programs can include, for example, capstone units of study, internships or work experience or work related courses.
- Employer feedback and feedback from accreditation boards is sought on students’ work ready communication skills. Employability skills are seen as an integral outcome of a degree at The University of Sydney.

GUIDELINE 5: Resources to support development

Staffing and resourcing for the development of students’ academic and professional communication skills meet students’ needs throughout their studies in a whole course approach and are benchmarked against other Go8 universities. Strategies to achieve this may include:

- Adequate staff levels are maintained of academics with expertise in academic language and learning to support the development of students’ academic and professional communication.
- Professional development is provided for teaching staff by academics specialised in language and learning. In this way, communication skills can be embedded in curricula and assessments as part of the curriculum renewal process.
- Resourcing is provided for e-learning projects involving subject area academics, language and learning academics and e-learning specialists to work collaboratively to develop resources to support students in developing their communication skills.
- Staff are provided with resources and guidelines on cultural sensitivity in teaching and assessment, including the use of varieties of English.

GUIDELINE 6: Monitoring processes

The university ensures that its policies and practices for the development of students’ academic and professional communication skills are continually monitored for improvement and comparison nationally and internationally. Strategies to achieve this may include:

- Curricula and degree courses are reviewed in the light of outcomes for academic and professional communication and action plans developed and monitored to address shortcomings.
- Feedback is collected on how courses have supported the development of graduates’ academic and professional communication skills.
- Student feedback on the development of specific communication skills is incorporated into relevant evaluation instruments.
- Feedback from accreditation boards on students’ communication skills is incorporated into curriculum review and course outcomes.

SUPPORT FOR COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT

The Learning Centre
The Writing Hub
The Centre for English Teaching http://sydney.edu.au/cet/Careers Centre
http://sydney.edu.au/careers/
Written and Oral Communications Skills of Students Policy

FURTHER EXAMPLES
http://degreesofproficiency.aall.org.au/

GOVERNMENT GUIDELINES/PRINCIPLES

Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)
http://www.aqf.edu.au/
The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA)

FOR MORE INFORMATION
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