

**The AWADE Newsletter AY2024 Edition: Letter from the Coordinators**

Welcome to the inaugural edition of *The AWADE Newsletter*. We are pleased to share two publications in this edition that highlight some of the cutting-edge EAP instruction that takes place in our program. In the first report, Garin shares a process that can be employed for the teaching of formulaic sequences. What makes Garin's work impactful is its strong alignment with the relevant literature and the clear presentation of a step-by-step process that others can follow. In the second report, Mattson presents a timed writing (TW) activity to develop and promote academic writing fluency in English. Mattson's presentation of TW is highly practical and hands-on, offering specific advice that readers can follow to implement a similar TW experience for their students.

In addition to introducing the edition's articles, the letter from the coordinators also serves to highlight developments from the academic year. AY2024 was a dynamic year for AWADE. With the addition of 15 new instructors and a move towards standardizing courses on Moodle, Waseda's LMS, the program underwent significant change. Our goal is to maintain clear learning outcomes that equip students to meet future challenges with confidence. Likewise, for teachers in our program, FD sessions were offered throughout the year to keep AWADE teachers informed of program developments and to provide opportunities for teachers to share their feedback. Despite these changes and modifications, the program kept its longstanding focus on delivering the best possible EAP production teaching and learning experiences for its students. As we begin our work in AY2025, we continue to consider the best ways to achieve our goal of providing Waseda students with comprehensive and effective academic English instruction.

## **Teaching Formulaic Sequences in EAP Writing**

**By: Alex Garin, Global Education Center, Waseda University**

Formulaic sequences play a significant role in teaching academic writing, particularly to learners of English as a second language. Formulas have a beneficial effect on language acquisition processes, which in turn helps improve linguistic proficiency and native-like production (Durrant, 2019). In an often-quoted definition, Wray (2002) characterizes a formulaic sequence as “a sequence, continuous or discontinuous, of words or other elements, which is, or appears to be, prefabricated: that is, stored and retrieved whole from memory at the time of use, rather than being subject to generation or analysis by the language grammar” (p. 9). Some common types of such sequences are collocations (e.g., *learn a foreign language*), phrasal verbs (e.g., *make up* a story), and lexical bundles (e.g., *as a result of*). When used appropriately, formulaic sequences allow for greater writing fluency, accuracy, and both sentence and paragraph level cohesion.

This paper aims to demonstrate an approach of teaching topical (e.g., *private, public, subsidized – education*) and functional (e.g., *the most notable difference, for instance, in conclusion*) formulaic sequences in EAP writing. The specific timetable of tasks and lessons is flexible. Broadly though, it should begin with awareness raising, and then move to controlled and freer writing practice, as the latter is usually more challenging for learners. The tasks suggested below can be done in pairs or small groups for increased engagement and interaction.

### **Awareness Raising**

The first step in teaching formulaic sequences should be awareness raising in the sentence and paragraph contexts. EAP students are usually unfamiliar with formulaic language, as in many high school classes and course books the vocabulary focus is often on single words and word lists. Bardovi-Harlig (2019) reports that language coursebooks are often lacking in authentic formulaic input. It is important to spend time at the beginning of the semester on

introducing the concept of formulaic sequence/collocation, on how to use a collocation dictionary, and organize a lexical notebook for recording new phrases throughout the course.

To build on the initial awareness raising, noticing tasks can then be introduced. Learners can find and highlight topical or functional phrases in academic and themed texts. de Chazal (2014) argues that contextualized vocabulary learning from academic texts, with the focus on collocations, is a principled and meaningful approach to EAP language teaching. By noticing formulaic language in input, learners can see its accurate and appropriate use and better understand how texts are connected. This in turn could help improve their writing production.

### **Controlled Practice**

Following noticing, learners can practice production tasks of increasing difficulty. First, they can complete the missing parts of formulaic sequences in texts. Here the importance of language choice and flexibility should be stressed, as depending on their strength, many sequences will have multiple possible collocates. Depending on timetable constraints, the phrases can be from previously covered material or collocation dictionaries can be used to aid phrase completion.

Contextualized cloze/gap fill tasks above can help scaffold sentence level practice. A simpler task would be to ask the learners to write an original sentence using and highlighting one of the formulaic sequences previously noticed in input. The sentences can then be written on the board and evaluated by the whole class for accuracy and appropriacy of target language use. A more challenging version of this task involves asking learners to write a sentence with a formulaic sequence and to make the sentence as long as possible, without using a dictionary. This usually produces awkward, inaccurate sections of text that the teacher can improve with more formulaic ones on the board for class feedback.

### **Freer Practice**

At this point learners should move to paragraph level writing. However, it can be difficult to produce well-organized, coherent texts. Formulaic sequences can provide scaffolding to help them do this, giving a set of ready-made meanings and ways to express them (Durrant, 2019). A shorter task would be to give learners a set of 5-10 topical formulaic sequences and ask them to use them in writing an essay paragraph on a given topic. Alternatively, they can work with functional formulaic sequences, focusing on cohesion and organization. Cohesive noun phrases (*during that period, if this trend continues, by using this approach*) can be especially useful for this purpose. Specifically, they establish back/forward referencing in sentences with old-new information structure (de Chazal, 2014).

A longer task would involve exploring the writing topic and related language in several classes and then asking the learners to write an essay draft. More specifically, brainstorming and preparing a set of topical collocations before the writing session could help learners to better explore ideas central to the essay theme. Teacher feedback on appropriate and accurate use of formulaic language is especially important in this type of practice, either in the form of written comments or individual tutorials. Asking the learners to highlight the phrases in their drafts can make it easier and faster for the teacher to give feedback on target language.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, teaching formulaic phrases in EAP classes can help learners notice topical/functional language in context, reduce the number of mistakes and give them a supportive framework for producing longer academic texts. Introducing and teaching this concept does not necessarily require making substantial changes to the existing practices of individual teachers. By raising learners' awareness and broadening the focus in lesson materials from single words to phrases and chunks, this practice can be successfully incorporated into an established curriculum.

### References

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## **Timed Writing for AWADE Students**

**By: Christopher Mattson, Global Education Center, Waseda University**

Paul Nation's (2007) *Four Strands* is a teaching framework that promotes a balanced approach to language learning by integrating four key components: meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development. Its implementation in class, however, may prove to be difficult at times for instructors. This activity focuses on one of the strands, (writing) fluency development, which can be thought of as the progressive improvement of speed and uninterrupted production of academic writing (in English). With timed writing (TW), students write as much as they can on a particular topic (or no topic at all, then called free writing) within a given time period. This article will first briefly explain these benefits and then explain how TW can be used in class for AWADE students.

An analogy for timed writing might be that of an athlete stretching before exercising. Before taking on the considerable task of writing a formal academic text (e.g., a formal academic essay or report), TW can serve as a warm-up exercise that both frees their mind and also instills the writing skills that arise from a high fluency/production rate. Timed writing can build student confidence by showing they can produce meaningful English content quickly. Many Japanese university students have strong passive English knowledge but struggle with active English production (Koizumi et al., 2022). Regular timed practice helps bridge this gap.

In addition, TW ideally reduces student anxiety about writing in English. Because they are not graded on the content of their writing, this gives students a certain freedom of expression that can allow them to activate schema, i.e., their passive knowledge of a subject and vocabulary. Rather than focusing on perfection and overthinking writing assignments, students can instead focus on production without fretting over each word choice and grammar inconsistency.

### **In-class Timed Writing**

TW might be best suited as a warm-up activity for Waseda's AWADE students, as it activates English processing early in the lesson, and students are immediately engaged and focused on writing. However, instructors could also choose to have students complete TW at the end of class, as a way for them to metacognitively review the lesson; they could also practice any new vocabulary or other lesson points.

Whether at the beginning or end of the lesson, another consideration for instructors assigning TW is content. The first option is for students to write about general topics, such as "What's your favorite season?" Easier topics like these could increase writing fluency and enjoyment. Another option is for students to focus on a specific subject, namely the topic they are writing about in their next essay ("What do you think about [your essay topic]?"), the advantage here being the increased focus could help later when writing the full essay. Finally, students could be given no prompt at all, in which case the more appropriate term "free writing" is used (a writing session can simultaneously be free/timed writing). With free writing the instructor gives no prompt at all, and students are free—but also responsible—to write about whatever they like. They can engage in a stream-of-consciousness type of writing, putting down whatever thought comes into their head, even if it's "I don't know what to write about;" that is perfectly valid as long as it's written down. Whether TW comes at the beginning or the end of the lesson, or whether it is about a general topic, specific topic, or no topic is up to each instructor to decide. Having said that, it's probably best to begin the spring semester with general topics, then switch to more focused, academic subjects, with wide open free writing used once students have become comfortable and confident with the practice near the end of the semester/year.

There are some key points for instructors to convey to students. Because there is often little extra time in AWADE classes for separate activities, this activity should be relatively short,

between 5-10 minutes, but this can be increased if there is extra time. Students should generally not worry about spelling, grammar, and formatting. However, they should write grammatically complete sentences and avoid sentence fragments. Students can veer off topic and write about something else; the key point is that they keep writing, right up until the time is up. Even if they make mistakes, they should not spend time on revision, instead the emphasis should be on producing as much text as possible.

### **Procedure for In-class Timed Writing**

First, teachers should have students open a blank Word file on their computer. Students can name it “Timed Writing 1,” “TR1,” or another name that can comprise a series of written texts. They should also create a folder for TW to save each week’s writing. Teachers are to use the video monitor or projector to display a countdown clock so students will know how much time is left. The teacher then begins the timer and when all students are ready, tells students to begin writing. When time is up, the teacher should give a few extra seconds to let students finish their final sentence. Students then find their word count and note that on the file, then save it in the folder (To make things easier for the next step, students can put the word count in the file name, like “TR1\_223”).

As a final aspect of the TW activity, students should open their TW folder, check the word count for each week’s writing, and look for any pattern. They should check whether their writing fluency increased, decreased, or stayed the same. Students might also discuss (or reflect on) whether they found the TW easy or difficult, while providing reasons for their perceptions. They can also share whether they believe the TW activities contributed to improvements in their English writing skills, explaining their views. Lastly, it should be noted that each of these TW activities can also be used as a starting point for pair and group discussions, which can further reinforce and strengthen students’ grasp of key vocabulary and expressions.



### References

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