



A Needs and Content Analysis for the

BYU English Language Admissions Test

PRESENT SITUATION ANALYSIS

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Brigham Young University

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Story Time



RE: English Proficiency

Summarize



Carl Hernandez <carl_hernandez@byu.edu>

Tuesday, March 14,

To: Renata Forste; Troy Cox; Cc: Matthew Wilcox

Troy and Matthew,

This is helpful and I appreciate your response. I would be very interested in talking with you, especially about comment regarding “how we could leverage some of the proficiency testing that we are currently oversee Pathway and our English Language Center and use some of those assessments as an option for members of church.” I know that VP Hernandez is also interested in this discussion. Is there a time that we could meet further?

Carl, would you be available also to join in the discussion?

What about Monday afternoon March 27th after 1pm, or Tuesday morning March 28th before the forum, if possible?

Let me know,
Renata

From: Troy Cox <troy_cox@byu.edu>

Date: Tuesday, March 14, 2023 at 12:04 PM

To: Renata Forste <Renata_Forste@byu.edu>, troyc@byu.edu # <troyc@byu.edu>

Cc: Dan Dewey <ddewey@byu.edu>, Matthew Wilcox <wilcoxmp@byu.edu>

Subject: Re: English Proficiency

To Renata & Dan (copied to Matthew):

*Whatever you choose to test becomes the de facto learning objectives for a curriculum.
The way you choose to assess it becomes the de facto teaching and learning philosophy.*

I would love to visit with you about this. The admissions test(s) BYU uses communicates (intentional or not) to potential students what we, as an institution value. They will study for it, take practice exams with it, and prepare to pass it through the test without necessarily learning the language.

What's my positionality?

Besides being a pragmatist, I'm typically upside down.

Whatever you choose to test becomes the de facto learning objectives for a curriculum.

The way you choose to assess it becomes the de facto teaching and learning philosophy.



The admissions test(s) BYU uses communicates (intentional or not) to potential students what we, as an institution value.

But we applied for and received two President's Innovation Grants (approx. \$180k) to work on a BYU admissions test

The Case for a BYU-Specific Test

“

I want you to remember that you ought not to teach even the alphabet or the multiplication tables without the Spirit of God.

— Brigham Young to Karl G. Maeser, 1876

1

A singular institutional mission

BYU pairs rigorous academics with religious instruction — REL courses use vocabulary and registers absent from standard EAP corpora.

2

Linguistic demands look different

Mission-aligned admissions wants evidence of academic readiness plus fit for an environment of study and faith.

3

Generic tests miss both

Off-the-shelf tests can't simultaneously assess BYU's academic and contextual demands.

The Broader Project

The BYU English Language Admissions Test — a multi-phase effort to design, validate, and scale a locally developed admissions test. Today's talk presents the qualitative findings from the Present Situation Analysis.

PHASE 1	PHASE 2	PHASE 3	PHASE 4
Test Development Needs & content analysis; build items; integrate into testing platform.	Validation Pilot at the ELC; establish human + AI hybrid rating; produce documentation.	Pilot & Evaluation Field test with real applicants; track first-year performance vs. other tests.	Scaling Harden infrastructure; plan rollout for CES institutions (BYU-I, Pathway).

Today's focus: **PRESENT SITUATION ANALYSIS**

Two Parallel Tracks in Phase 1

While the needs analysis defines what the new test should measure, a parallel pilot uses an existing ELC test to validate the platform itself.

CONTENT TRACK

Needs Analysis

Identify the academic linguistic tasks and language skills first-year BYU students must perform across courses and skill modalities.

**Drives content for the
new test**

TECHNICAL TRACK

Platform Pilot

Field-test the testing platform using an existing ELC test to validate remote proctoring, AI-human hybrid rating, and reporting.

Validates the platform

Both tracks converge in Phase 2: integrated field validation with admissions applicants.

Research Questions

RQ1

What types of academic linguistic tasks are first-year students expected to perform?

RQ2

What language skills are required for successful completion of those tasks?

Mixed-Methods Design

Two complementary needs-analysis lenses, triangulated for a fuller picture of what BYU first-year courses actually demand.

“Needs analyses must be particular to each unique environment.” — Long (2005)

TARGET SITUATION ANALYSIS

What the courses demand

- Course documents: syllabi, readings, textbooks
- Quantitative: readability statistics, weekly load
- ACTFL alignment of required tasks

PRESENT SITUATION ANALYSIS

What participants perceive

- Semi-structured interviews with faculty
- Focus groups with current international students that speak LOTE (Languages Other than English)
- Thematic coding of transcripts

Compared and integrated to surface gaps and overlaps that inform test specifications.

Course Selection: 20 First-Year Courses

Drawn from BYU's 10 most common majors; prerequisite and general-education courses students are likely to take in their first two semesters.

REL A 250	REL A 275	REL C 200	REL C 225	UNIV 101
A HTG 100	WRTG 150	MATH 112	BIO 100	BIO 130
CS 111	PSYCH 111	ECON 110	IS 201	CHEM 105
HLTH 210	ACC 200	CMLIT 202	IHUM 241	STAT 121

Selection criteria

- Overlap across the top 10 majors
- Fulfill prerequisite and GE requirements
- Recommended in first two semesters
- CMLIT 202 and IHUM 241 added for broad GE coverage

Present Situation Analysis

What participants tell us — perceived demands and observed gaps in student readiness.

FACULTY INTERVIEWS

Professors teaching the target courses

- Semi-structured, open-ended
- Skills they consider essential
- Gaps observed in ESL students

STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS

ESL students currently enrolled

- Open-ended, conversational
- Tasks they find most demanding
- Where their prep fell short

ANALYSIS

Transcripts coded thematically; themes compared against TSA findings to identify gaps, overlaps, and priorities for test design.

NEEDS ANALYSIS

14

Data sources

11

Faculty/TA sessions

3

Student focus groups

4

Core skill domains

SOURCE-BY-SOURCE CODING MATRIX

✓ = substantively coded Ok = coded in that context — = not raised | F1–F11 = faculty · FG1–FG3 = student focus groups

Theme	D	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	F9	F10	F11	FG1	FG2	FG3	F	F G	To t
T1: Academic Writing	W	✓	✓	—	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10	3	13
T2: Spoken Interaction	S	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	11	3	14
T3: Lecture Comprehension	L	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	11	3	14
T5: High-Vol. Reading	R	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	11	3	14
↳ Sub-themes under core skill domains																		
T7: Reflective Writing	W	✓	✓	—	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	—	—	✓	✓	✓	6	3	9
T10: Speaking Anxiety	S	—	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	—	✓	—	—	✓	✓	7	3	10
T4: Disc. Vocabulary	R	—	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	9	3	12
T11: Register & Formality	W	✓	✓	—	✓	✓	—	✓	✓	—	—	—	—	✓	✓	6	2	8
T14: Reading Strategies	R	✓	✓	—	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	—	✓	—	—	✓	✓	5	3	8
T13: Religious Texts	R	—	✓	—	—	—	—	—	✓	—	—	—	—	✓	✓	2	3	5
Cross-cutting & contextual themes																		
T6: Hidden Struggles	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	—	10	2	12
T8: Cultural Context	X	—	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	✓	8	3	11
T9: Univ. Expectations	X	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	✓	—	✓	✓	8	3	11
T15: External Resources	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	9	3	12
T12: Language Transfer	X	—	✓	—	✓	✓	—	✓	—	—	✓	—	—	✓	✓	4	3	7
T16: Standardized Test Limits	X	—	✓	✓	✓	—	—	✓	—	—	✓	—	—	✓	✓	4	3	7

W=Writing S=Speaking
L=Listening R=Reading
X=Cross-skill ·
Sub-themes indented
under their core
domain

Qualitative Needs Analysis: Data Sources & Coding Approach

Data Collection

- Semi-structured interviews: 11 faculty/TA sessions across 6 disciplines
- 3 student focus group sessions (currently enrolled NNES students)
- Purposive sampling by NNES enrollment concentration
- Full transcription and transcript review for accuracy

Coding Protocol

- Inductive thematic analysis following Braun & Clarke (2006)
- Frequency coding: theme present/absent per source (n = 14)
- Two-pass systematic transcript review per coder
- Themes organized by language skill domain

Validity Measures

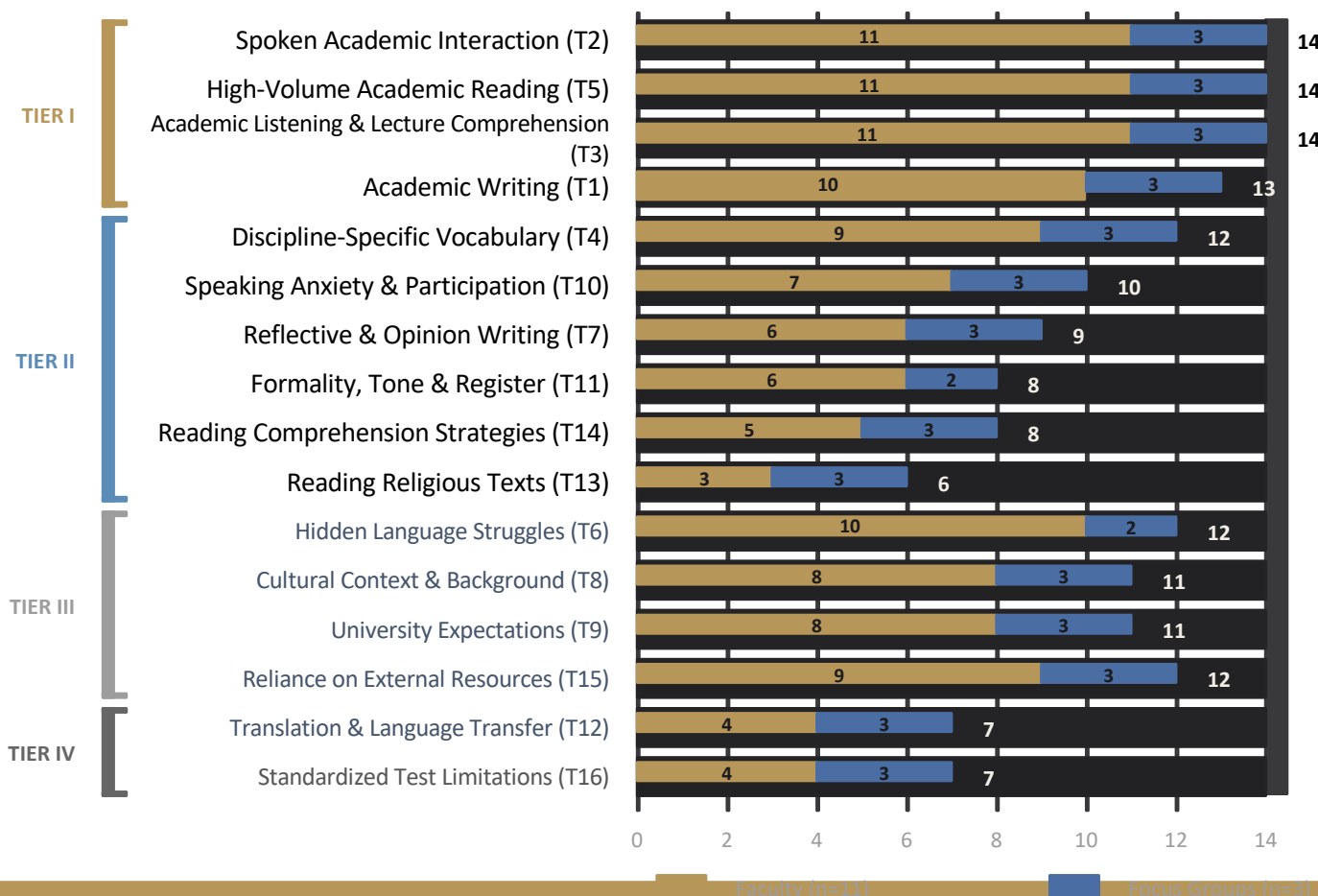
- Attention given to divergent and non-conforming cases
- Themes discussed collaboratively during analysis refinement
- Source-level salience coding (not raw mention count)
- Theme coded present only when meaningfully discussed

Note: Frequency counts reflect substantive thematic presence per source, not raw mention frequency.

FINDINGS

Most Frequently Identified Academic Language Demands

Frequency across 14 data sources (faculty n=11, focus groups n=3) · Themes grouped by tier



TIER CLASSIFICATION

Tier I

Core skill / Universal demands

T1, T2, T3, T5

Tier II

Sub-theme/ Specific demands

T4, T7, T10, T11, T13, T14

Tier III

Contextual / background

T6, T8, T9, T15

Tier IV

Peripheral

T12, T16

FINDINGS

Writing Skills Required for BYU NNES Academic Success

Themes: T1 Academic Writing (13/14) · T7 Reflective & Opinion Writing (9/14) · T11 Formality & Academic Register (8/14)

WRITING

Avg 10.0 / 14

T1: Academic Writing

13 / 14

- Research papers & formal essays
- Reflective writing (journals, response papers)
- Argumentative, analytical, narrative, opinion & process writing
- APA / MLA citation and formatting
- Short writing tasks
- Academic organization and cohesion
- Academic register / tone
- Use of mechanics

T7: Reflective & Opinion Writing

9 / 14

- Expressing personal opinions in writing
- Unfamiliarity with reflective writing genre
- Repetitive sentence structures / limited vocabulary variety
- Difficulty expanding ideas beyond simple statements
- Lack of idiomatic or varied English expression

T11: Formality, Tone & Academic Register

8 / 14

- Confusion between casual and formal register
- Writing like one speaks (informal constructions in academic text)
- Inappropriate pronoun use in academic writing
- Over-complicated or over-simplified academic tone

FINDINGS

Reading & Vocabulary Skills Required for BYU NNES Academic Success

Themes: T5 High-Volume Academic Reading (14/14) · T4 Discipline-Specific Vocabulary (12/14) · T14 Reading Strategies (8/14) · T13 Religious Texts (6/14)

READING / VOCABULARY

Avg 9.8 / 14

T5: High-Volume Academic Reading 14 / 14

- Weekly textbook reading (chapters)
- Reading academic journal articles
- Lecture slides and preparatory reading
- Reading comprehension quizzes
- Reading research sources for papers
- Reading example / mentor texts

T4: Discipline-Specific Vocabulary 12 / 14

- Technical / scientific vocabulary
- Statistical & quantitative language nuances
- Computer science technical terms
- Religious / gospel terminology
- Content-specific English (accounting, biology, etc.)

T14: Reading Comprehension Strategies 8 / 14

- Inferring word meaning from context
- Skimming and scanning for key information
- Strategic dictionary use
- Reading aloud for better comprehension

T13: Reading Religious Texts 6 / 14

- King James / Book of Mormon English comprehension
- Archaic vocabulary and unfamiliar verb forms
- Symbolic and non-literal language
- Scripture reading anxiety (reading aloud in class)

Verbatim Data: Tier I & Tier II Themes by Language Domain

Speaking · T2 ·

“

Non-native English speakers are quiet during class. Everybody else is a riot.

— CS 110 professor

Faculty 11/11 · Focus groups 3/3

Reading · T5 ·

“

Our first mini project requires them to read an academic paper. Academic papers are just hard.

— STAT 121 professor

Faculty 11/11 · Focus groups 3/3

Writing · T1 ·

“

Students will throw really casual words into their academic papers because they don't realize they're casual.

— ELING 150, Writing Center coordinator

Faculty 10/11 · Focus groups 3/3

Listening · T3 ·

“

He's talking super fast. So sometimes I really have to concentrate a lot to catch up.

— Focus Group 2 student

Faculty 11/11 · Focus groups 3/3

Cross-skill · T6 ·

“

I tend not to know there's a problem until we are like into the semester.

— RelC 225 & 200 professor

Faculty 10/11 · Focus groups 2/3

Speaking · T10 ·

“

I can only express like 60 to 70% because I have to switch to English first.

— Focus Group 2 student

Faculty 7/11 · Focus groups 3/3

BYU-Distinctive Demands

Two task types that off-the-shelf tests don't sample — but both groups confirm matter at BYU.

Reflective Writing

FACULTY *“Every week they have a reflection assignment... they're just reflecting on their own experience as it relates to the content in the course.”*

— Faculty, REL C 200

STUDENT *“Most of my writing assignments are reflection... So I think it's hard for me to reflect and put it on words.”*

— Focus Group 2

Religion-Context Oral

FACULTY *“Scripture texts. King James English. That's the first one that I would say.”*

— Faculty, REL C 225

STUDENT *“My professor asked me to say the opening prayer. I was so nervous I could only say 2 or 3 sentences.”*

— Focus Group 2

Asymmetric Visibility

Why triangulation matters: faculty and students barely disagreed — but each side was systematically blind to constructs the other could see.

VISIBLE TO FACULTY · graders

- Cohesive argument & critical thinking through language
- Oral pass-offs in CS and religion — high-stakes interactive speaking
- Application transfer — the discriminator between strong and weak students

VISIBLE TO STUDENTS · performers

- Pragmatic / cultural comprehension — 80s pop, idioms, scriptural register
- Prepared graded presentations — perceived as stressful
- Sheer pre-class reading volume — up to 300 pages per week
- Reading and praying aloud — distinctive oral demands

Neither lens alone produces the full construct picture.

Implications for Test Design

What the BYU admissions test should — and shouldn't — sample.

LISTENING

Lecture-paced, native speed, with topic shifts

READING

Volume and speed under load — not just depth

SPEAKING

Interactive small-group talk plus at least one prepared monologue

WRITING

Register and argument over mechanics; reflective writing as a distinctive genre

VOCABULARY

Domain-specific (including “gospel language”), not general

CONSTRUCT DEFINITION

Name cultural comprehension and self-advocacy even where not directly scored

Questions?

