

## **Evaluating the Written Discourse of Students Using English as a Second Language**

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**Abstract.** This article draws on an earlier paper (Jones, 2000) about task-based learning as a means of helping students to develop their second language use. In that paper I described the task demands and how the programme design made it possible to examine the students' responses to them: the essays they produced, their reactions and their perceptions of how they worked. Here I focus only on the essay texts. A key problem of assessing students' essays is the difficulty of avoiding subjectivity. Here I present the assessment criteria again, reiterating briefly the rationale I used for the design. Then I discuss a systemic functional method for examining the essay texts according to their thematic progression (Danes, 1974), thus focusing on language use rather than on linguistic form: on acceptability rather than on accuracy. The essay texts of two students addressing the same integrated skills task are analysed and compared to investigate how their marks according to the assessment criteria might be explained in more detail.