

Academic English for First-Year POLIS

Instructor

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Course Description

This course is designed to equip first-year POLIS students with the necessary academic English skills to succeed in their second year abroad. The focus is on improving writing, reading, listening, and speaking skills in an academic context. There are two hours of class per week.

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Write academic works following structured formats.
- Read and analyse academic texts critically, using effective note-taking methods.
- Give clear and well-structured presentations, using appropriate rhetorical strategies.
- Engage in academic discussions and debates, responding to arguments logically and persuasively.
- Develop listening comprehension strategies for lectures and discussions.
- Apply academic integrity practices, including correct referencing and avoiding plagiarism.

Content

Academic Writing

- Formal vs. informal English.
- Sentence structure, clarity, and coherence.
- Paragraph structuring.

- Essay writing (thesis statements, introductions, body paragraphs, conclusions).
- Summarising and paraphrasing.
- Writing reports and case studies.
- Proofreading and self-editing techniques.

Reading & Research Skills

- Skimming and scanning techniques.
- Identifying arguments and key points in academic texts.
- Note-taking strategies (Cornell method, mind mapping).
- Finding credible sources and referencing.
- Avoiding plagiarism.

Listening & Comprehension

- Understanding academic lectures.
- Recognising signposting language.
- Taking structured notes while listening.
- Strategies for understanding different accents.

Speaking & Presentations

- Structuring an academic presentation.
- Effective use of visuals (PowerPoint, handouts).
- Persuasive speaking techniques.
- Handling Q&A sessions.
- Seminar discussions and debates.

Assessment

Assessment Component	Weight (%)
Attendance & Participation	20%
Oral Exam (End of Semester 1)	10%
Continuous Assessment (Assignments & In-Class Work)	70%

Attendance & Participation (20%)

Evaluation Grid for Participation Grade

Criteria	Excellent (Full Points)	Good	Satisfactory	Needs Improve	Point
Active Participation in Discussions (8 points) – Engaging in class conversations, contributing ideas, responding to peers.	Regularly contributes thoughtful, relevant comments and engages meaningfully with classmates' ideas.	Participates often with relevant comments but may not always engage deeply with others' ideas.	Occasionally participates but contributions are minimal, vague, or off-topic.	Rarely participates or only speaks when called upon.	/8
Attentiveness & Engagement (6 points) – Listening actively, staying focused, showing interest in class discussions.	Always attentive, actively listens, makes eye contact, and stays engaged throughout class.	Mostly attentive, with occasional lapses in focus (e.g., minor distractions).	Sometimes disengaged, distracted, or passive in discussions.	Frequently inattentive, disengaged, or visibly uninterested.	/6
Respect for Class Environment (6 points) – Not using devices inappropriately, being respectful to peers, arriving on time, not disrupting class.	Always respectful, avoids distractions (e.g., no unnecessary device use), arrives on time, and contributes positively to the classroom environment.	Generally respectful with only minor lapses (e.g., occasional device use, rare tardiness).	Sometimes disrespectful, distracted, or disruptive (e.g., using a laptop/phone, whispering, arriving late).	Frequently disrespectful, disruptive, or inattentive (e.g., consistently using a device, interrupting, arriving late).	/6
Total Score: /20					/20

Oral Exam (10%)

- A 10-minute debate (5-minute preparation time) carried out with another student from Sciences Po

	Pronunciation & intonation	Vocabulary	Grammar	Content Manner & interaction
6	Sounds completely authentic.			
5	Generally authentic. Occasional problems with stress and sounds.	Is used idiomatically/colloquially with creative variety. Consistently uses appropriate vocabulary from area of debate.	Uses complex structures correctly and with ease.	
4	Is easily comprehensible despite some sound and stress inaccuracy.	Mostly accurate. Has a very good range of vocabulary and varies formulation.	Uses structures accurately most of the time with no missing verb endings	Defends the position convincingly, many good ideas. Highly dynamic and interactive. Good at asking and answering questions, and countering arguments.
3	Mostly authentic, despite problems with H, TH and occasional vowels. Intonation and stress mostly ok..	Has a fair range of B2 vocabulary and can vary formulation	Despite mistakes which occasionally impede comprehension, shows reasonable command of correct structures.	Defends the position quite well; several good ideas. Reacts to partner's arguments and keeps the discussion going.
2	Mispronounces many words and has problems with basic sounds and stress, forgets finals (-S, -ED). Often difficult to understand for a non-French speaker.	A lack of appropriate vocabulary prevents them expressing themselves clearly.	Some basic structures ok; but errors often impede comprehension.	Defends the position moderately. Shows some ability to interact.
1	Mispronounces many words and has not mastered word and sentence stress. Occasionally incomprehensible. Manages a few authentic sounds.	Quite a few basic mistakes. and /or used French words rather than bypass phrases in English	Even elementary structures are not grasped (modals, interrogatives) which very often impedes comprehension	Attempts to defend the position. Has difficulty interacting, does not always respond to questions etc.
0	Incomprehensible for a non-French speaker.	Is limited; mostly incorrect.	Shows many errors in use of structures, hindering comprehension.	Has misunderstood the position completely. No attempt to defend it. Refuses to debate.

Continuous Assessment (70%)

- Weekly assignments, in-class writing tasks, reading and written comprehension exercises, and group discussions.