

## Conceptualising the English language needs of first year university students

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### Abstract

*Australian universities are currently re-evaluating how they address the English language needs of their students of non-English speaking backgrounds. This is, in part, a response to ten 'Good Practice Principles' that constitute the main thrust of a government-commissioned document released in 2009 and designed to ensure that standards of good practice are established and maintained throughout the sector in respect of English language provision. This paper argues that any attempt to uphold these principles and implement provision that is coherent, relevant and rigorous, requires clarification of the concept of 'proficiency'. To this end, a distinction is proposed between proficiency, academic literacy and professional communication skills, and consideration is given to the implications of this distinction in terms of (a) responding to the language needs of both native speaker and non-native speaker students, and (b) the post-enrolment language assessment of newly-enrolled students with a view to identifying those at risk.*