Instructional practices for digital literacies in ESP: A process-oriented, genre-based approach

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The use of digital media in specialised communication practices in the academy and beyond poses a challenge to practitioners of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), who must consider how to account for the new collaborative, multimodal forms of expression that such digital media afford. In this presentation, I begin by examining the concept of ‘digital literacies’ and drawing attention to the importance, for language learners, of understanding the affordances of digital tools, especially their affordances for making new kinds of multimodal meanings, and relating to others in the process of constructing texts. I identify and explain pedagogical approaches that integrate digital tools in ESP and suggest that two main kinds of approaches can be identified: those that involve using technology to learn and those that involve learning to use technology. Based on this analysis, I propose a process-oriented, genre-based approach to digital literacies in ESP, in which practitioners re-examine ESP course goals – the texts, processes and practices that learners are expected to master – and ask what role digital tools play in them. The approach can be applied to a wide range of ESP courses in order to foster competence in specialized digital communications.

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