

To Support Student Learning by Embedding Writing and Speaking Skills

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Overview

The aims of the project are to enhance students' learning through writing and speaking opportunities, to support their transition into Higher Education, to develop learner autonomy and to improve retention.

Tutors are working collaboratively with Student and Learning Services (SLS) to introduce informal and formal writing and speaking activities with supportive feedback. These activities are designed to support students' learning while developing these skills and learner autonomy. The project is focussing on foundation year engineering students in ACES and foundation year Biosciences students in HWB, and aims to compare the experiences of these students. The 2007-08 report on the Usage of Learner Support Team Services shows that ACES students (20% of the student population) are only 8% of the student users of the Drop-in Study Practice [1] compared to 38% for HWB students (22% of the students population)

Engaging students in writing and speaking about the content of their discipline is one of the best ways to get them to learn about the discipline [2]. This will develop the learners' autonomy through students reflecting on their learning whilst developing graduate writing and speaking skills.

Project Aims to:	How
Increase student engagement in their subject	Weekly individual and group blogs
Increase student understanding of subject content	Groups compile glossary of terms
Increase understanding of academic expectations	Discussion of need for skills development
Develop student writing (accuracy and fluency)	Weekly individual and group blogs (fluency)
Develop student self-awareness as learners	Recording, reflecting, planning, reviewing
Improve retention	Regular feedback between students and tutors



What's going well

- Constructive input from SLS
- The weekly blogs give rich feedback on students' reflection on their learning and engagement.
- Blog as a development from paper

Areas for development

- Tutor blogs on the project.
- Need to identify where and how writing skills are being used in other modules.
- Staff struggle to find time to read blogs regularly.

Future Plans

- One group of students now have an essay to complete in January that will require accuracy and fluency in their writing.
- Feedback will feed forward to influence and improve written work in other modules.
- The academic expectations and different text types will be discussed with students.
- Questionnaire to be circulated to students to find out about their use of writing skills, and their confidence with writing skills at transition to H.E. and at the end of semester one.

Support Needed

- Guidance and strategies to develop the accuracy of students' writing skills.
- Evaluation of the development of students' writing skills.
- Development of resources for staff to use in a range of modules.
- Making the links between the development of students' thinking, speaking and writing skills.



[1] Academic Support for Learning, Highlights 2007-08, SHU, p5, 3184-01/09

[2] C.M.Anson, D.P. Dannels, Using Informal Writing and Speaking to Enhance Learning: Fifteen Strategies, last accessed at <http://www.chass.ncsu.edu/CWSP/docs/tips/informal15.pdf> (10/03/09)

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