

Engaging Radiotherapists in Graduate Level Writing

A collaboration to embed support within a module to improve student academic writing

Jo Doughty & Cathy Malone (HWB & SLS)

Aims

- Provide first year students with a range of tasks and activities to help them personally engage with the academic expectations of their course, particularly academic writing.
- Involve students in mapping the gap between student and staff assessment of writing performance.
- Improve student confidence in their own writing & share writing practices

Background

This project combines subject specific, formative writing tasks with self-evaluation tools of generic study skills, drawing on the MASUS project (Bonanno & Jones 2007) and SaPRA (the University of Bradford 2009).

Research

Semester 1, Year 1 in module Principles of Radiation Oncology 50 students varied academic backgrounds.

Blog Entry (40/50 students)

“What was the last lengthy piece of writing you did and how did you go about it?”

Academic Writing Quiz (20/50 students)

Quiz asked students to rate their confidence in understanding and producing aspects of academic writing.

Initial Diagnostic Task (38/50 students)

500 word formative task based on note taking from taught session. Collaboratively graded.

Feedback Workshop (38/50)

Feedback on initial task used to plan next steps including attendance at workshops.

Optional Workshops

- Content (15/50 students)
- Structure & Organisation (4/50 students)
- Referencing (10/50 students)
- Editing (2/50 students)

Online Resources self-access resources (workshop notes & web links to self study material)

Benefits

Overall provided a new approach to assignment support that required greater student engagement

Evidence of raised confidence in understanding academic concepts and applying these to writing

workshops – “ it’s putting them into practice, once you’ve been and you’ve listened it’s like, it is, it’s good information that you are getting and it’s like well yeah I understand that, but then it’s obviously going away and putting that into practice that’s obviously the hardest part”

Some students found the input “extremely useful”

– most attendees would recommend workshops to other students - “fantastic”, “really good”, “ I wish I went to them all”

Formative writing activity reassured students especially those lacking confidence

“It (the draft) really helped & I felt more confident that I was covering the right topics”

Advice on areas for development were reinforced in the final submission feedback illustrating consistency “ I know what to improve on this time”

Opportunity to examine writing developmentally not just remedially for failing students.

Challenges

Timing – extremely busy semester provided little time to absorb core content

Poor workshop attendance optional perceived of as unnecessary

Appropriate IT package for Quiz

Staff time for collaboration

The need to develop their writing or alter their writing practices is not anticipated by many students -“I’m not the greatest fan of academic writing style as I feel it’s restrictive”

New features of text, referencing and critical analysis, become the focus but tend to be perceived in fairly mechanistic and simplistic terms

Future

Identify writing as a key graduate skill for Radiotherapists early in semester 1

Translate self-evaluation tool into a digital format

Integrate formative task into module

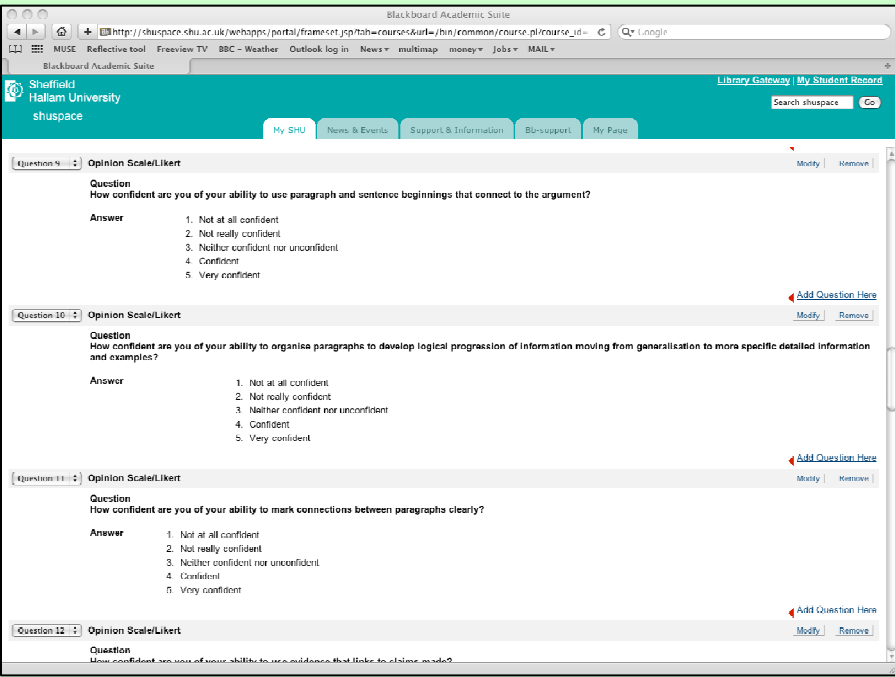
Review timing

Remove in-module retrieval

Distinguish between simpler mechanical aspects of writing & more nuanced sophisticated aspects which will take longer to develop

Academic writing can’t be ‘taught’ in one early module because of the personal and incremental nature of writing development, however we can put it on the agenda. We can also introduce key concepts and language for discussing writing and engage students more actively in managing and directing their own learning.

Team: Jo Doughty (Radiotherapy) J.P.Doughty@shu.ac.uk Cathy Malone c.malone@shu.ac.uk & Janet Smitheman (Learner Support Team)



Academic Skills Writing Checklist;	Editing your work
Content	
Is the content of the essay (physiology, pathology, oncology, radiotherapy and patient management) accurate?	
Is it described in sufficient detail?	
Have you included diagrams and visuals in your writing?	
Are these incorporated into your writing?	
Do these have; Lead in (referred to in the text)	
	Label/ title & source (Ref)
	Lead out (referred to in the text)
Organisation	
Does your essay have you a clear introduction and conclusion?	
Does your introduction address the question?	
Does your introduction provide a map of the essay for the reader?	
Does your conclusion return to the question and sum up major themes?	
Do your paragraphs deal with one main topic or idea at a time?	

Intro	Unpack Question : Thesis Statement define key terms Signpost ahead		
1	Topic +	Topic sentence Support	Topic sentence explanation quote example analysis comment re-statement transition
2	Topic +		Topic sentence explanation quote example analysis comment re-statement transition



Sheffield
Hallam University

SHARPENS YOUR THINKING

Centre For Excellence in Teaching and Learning
Centre For Promoting Learner Autonomy
www.shu.ac.uk/cetl