

Write Now Mini-Project

Report prepared: September 2010

TITLE OF PROJECT:

Improving computing students' writing for assessment

INSTITUTION:

Liverpool Hope University

PROJECT LEADERS:

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DISCIPLINE/DEPARTMENT:

Computing

MODULE:

Level I module: 3D-Modelling tools

CONTEXT

Students' documentation of their coursework models in the Level I module: 3D-Modelling tools lacked critical analysis.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

To address students' lack of critical analysis skills by developing tailored student workshops.

METHODOLOGY

The module leader initiated an Action Research project to address the issue through development of tailored student workshops designed in close collaboration with a CETL Writing Fellow and involving:

- Formative self and peer assessment using drafts /exemplar documentation.
- Changing student attitudes to writing by promoting documentation as important for professional identity.
- A dialogic approach to feedback.

These approaches are adapted from the work of Alexander, Gibbs, Nichol and Black & William.

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

The workshop format with formative assessment provided effective and sympathetic guidance and the dialogue around exemplar material built confidence whilst promoting engagement and critical analysis.

The collaborative approach provides sustainability through integrated staff development which we hope to extend next year.

ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT OF PROJECT

Effectiveness was evaluated by content analysis of students' documentation in comparison to previous cohort (control group). Results showed significant improvements in writing quality:

- 78% wrote sustained critical evaluation in five or more topic areas (0% in control group).
- The quality of referencing dramatically improved (94% compared to 64% included a good attempt at/or appropriate referencing).
- Structuring/presentation showed consistent improvement.

The student experience was examined through focus groups after the intervention. Students reported that the intervention:

- Changed the way they thought about academic writing.
- Increased their confidence in applying analytic/evaluative thinking to their own written work.
- Gave them a better understanding of assessment criteria.
- Heightened their awareness of the importance of planning and time management.
- Added to their precision when using language to explicate practical work.
- Increased their understanding of the referencing system.
- Gave them more detailed knowledge of the rules governing academic writing.

This project demonstrates that a focussed intervention can significantly improve student performance.

Assessment documentation:

Content analysis form:

http://www.writenow.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/riscsaw_contentanalysisform.pdf

Student evaluation graph:

http://www.writenow.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/riscsaw_studentevaluationgraph.pdf

Student perceptions of the intervention:

http://www.writenow.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/riscsaw_studentperceptions.pdf

DISSEMINATION

The findings will be disseminated at the Learning and Teaching symposium and HEA-ICS conference, sharing good practice within the university and beyond.

AVAILABILITY OF PROJECT OUTCOMES

Paper http://www.writenow.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/riscsaw_paper_2007.pdf

Conference poster http://www.writenow.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/riscsaw_poster.pdf