Online Personalised Academic Literacy Modules: The OPALMs Project at UTS

Rosalie Goldsmith, ALL team, IML, UTS
Sam Ferguson & Sally Inchbold, FEIT, UTS
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The story of two projects
It starts with: blended learning

Fast uptake at many universities
Can be effective for “time-poor” students – and academics

Delivery of content, support, resources
Face-to-face class time (high-touch experiences) for discussion & exploration of challenging ideas,

So...
The why, what & how of OPALMs

Why:
Highly developed communication capabilities fundamental for engineers, IT professionals and scientists
Students with diverse levels of disciplinary literacy, from high to low
Limited opportunities in class to practise & develop these literacies
Why What & how continued...

What:
online modules to develop students’ disciplinary literacy in large 1st year subjects in FEIT and Science

How:
First project– (FYE grant 2014) for Engineering Communication & Communication for IT Professionals: modules comprising Word docs & external links
  o academic style
  o sentence structure
  o paragraph structure
  o vocabulary development
  o synthesis of ideas
  o paraphrasing & summarising
Paragraphs
This module will discuss paragraphing.

Vocabulary
This module will teach you about vocabulary.

Academic Style
Enabled: Statistics Tracking
This short course introduces you to academic style writing and gives you a chance to practise how to write more academically. You can use this to assist you for your upcoming assignments. If you have trouble, use the version below (Academic Style: Alternate Version).

Academic Style: Alternate Version
Enabled: Statistics Tracking
This version is in FLASH format. The version above may have problems with Google Chrome or Safari. If you have problems, then try this one.
Helped to curate online resources...

Have any particular PROBLEMS with online resources made it difficult for you to use them to improve your writing (Mark as many as apply to you or none):

- can't find online resources to deal directly with assessments I need to do
- huge amount of online resources
- online resources are too specific
- can't find online resources to deal with particular personal writing difficulties
- can't find online resources to deal directly with assessments I need to do
- huge amount of online resources
- online resources do not explain problems you are having
- can't find online resources to deal directly with assessments I need to do
But not very exciting...
So the 2nd project used Captivate software...

We saw the Academic Integrity Module using Captivate software developed for Science students at UTS (Yvonne Davila & Neela Griffiths)

We applied for VC’s T&L and FYE grant:
  team project with FEIT & Science to develop modules applicable to both disciplines:
  Academic style (completed)
  Paraphrasing & summarising (in development)
Not everything went to plan...
What the module contains:

- Information about academic style
- Discipline-specific examples of informal and formal writing
- Interactive exercises with feedback
Developing Academic Style

Here is an example of how English can move from informal speech to formal writing. It uses extracts from comments and reports of a bridge collapse.

Click on each sentence to learn more.

**Informal**
It's terrible! I can't believe it! The bridge caved in and three blokes are gone.

**Formal**
The collapse of the bridge resulted in three fatalities.
How it works: UTSOnline > online resources

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Demonstration...(may or may not connect)

https://online.uts.edu.au/courses/1/48230/content/1239957_1/multiscreen.html
Student Evaluations

So far (evaluations ongoing)...Students value

- 24 hour availability
- “Overall it was good in refining what I already knew, but not as a solo stand-alone model” (focus group 1 Autumn 2015)
- Being able to apply concepts to their own writing
- Tutor guidance and input!
- “They helped reinforce what I already learnt in class. I think class was the biggest help in improving my writing skills” (focus group 1 Autumn 2015)
Project Evaluation

Also ongoing, but...
Overall more time-consuming than expected
It took a LONG time to become familiar with Captivate software
The team was obliged to use Captivate (UTS licence and insufficient funds to purchase licence for different software)
Need to embed the modules more firmly into the subject teaching/learning activities
Alternative software

Articulate Storyline 2 is another option


(on special NOW!)

Or ActivePresenter (heard about it 2 days ago, haven’t evaluated it yet)
Future directions

- Developing paraphrasing/summarising module
- Incorporating the "Avoiding Plagiarism" (HELPS) into the suite of modules [https://avoidingplagiarism.uts.edu.au/](https://avoidingplagiarism.uts.edu.au/)
- Incorporating the paragraph structure module from [iwrite](http://iwrite.sydney.edu.au/ENGINEERING/Writing-Clearly/Paragraph-Structure/Introduction.html) website (University of Sydney) into the suite of modules
OPALMS team members

Isabelle Bennett FEIT
Yvonne Davila Science
Sam Ferguson FEIT
Tom Frengos FEIT
Rosalie Goldsmith ALL team IML
Neela Griffiths ALL team IML
Sally Inchbold FEIT

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Any questions?