

Academic Practice and Academic Development

Update report for DVC (February 2013)

ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT (For International Students)

The SCLS Academic Development and Study Skills Support team offers a range of workshops, tutorials and training sessions in:

- Academic Practice, including study skills and plagiarism awareness
- Academic Language, including accuracy and style
- Academic Culture, including cultural awareness and integration issues

The workshop subjects covered during the academic year are:

- Critical reading and note-taking
- The process of essay-writing
- Seminars and presentations
- Punctuation: the comma, colon, semi-colon and full-stop
- Referencing and avoiding plagiarism and collusion
- Developing academic style and vocabulary
- Using cautious language to create a stronger argument
- Improving listening skills for lectures and seminars
- Frequent grammar errors in students' academic writing I
- Frequent grammar errors in students' academic writing II: Tenses
- Looking at outlines and titles
- Making the most of academic tutorials and understanding feedback
- How to structure longer papers
- How to approach a literature review
- Criticism revisited
- Final stages: introductions, conclusions, abstracts
- Effective literature searching (in conjunction with the Library)

The workshops run throughout the year and some are repeated to meet the demand from students who join the waiting lists.

Academic Practice Workshops for plagiarism awareness (APW) 2011 -2012:

Students: These workshops are open to all students (UG and PGT) who have been referred following a first time plagiarism case in either contributory or non-contributory work.

The data below shows APW referrals, attendees and completed assessments from Autumn 2011 to Autumn 2012 (8.11.12)

No. of referrals: 101

No. of attendees: 59

No. of students who have completed assignments: 36

In terms of nationality: 17/101 referred students were home students and 8 of those did not attend a workshop.

To fit into the timetable of the new academic year, workshops will run two weeks after each assessment period and additional workshops will be organised to meet demand at other times. The next workshop is on February 27th and 20 students (including three home students) have been referred to attend this workshop. Throughout this academic year we will monitor demand, and when we have had to provide 'on-demand' workshops. We will use this information to plan for 2013/2014.

Some Students who are referred in the last term of their degree do not complete the assessments. Some indicate they are too focussed on finishing their dissertations and see these additional assessments as a hindrance. The assessments are not intended to 'test' the students, more to demonstrate to the students how they can apply the workshop content to their own discipline.

When the APW referral system was implemented, it was designed to encourage students to take responsibility for improving their skills, so no mechanism for reporting students who do not attend/complete the assessments was included. However, the SPA office is informed of any students who have attended a workshop and/or completed the assessments to the required standard.

Different student groups at the workshops

- For some students who attend the workshops, the whole process of adapting to study at Sussex and /or in a UK academic culture has been difficult, and therefore for many a two-hour workshop does not provide sufficient time to develop good academic practice skills.
- For others, time management and the ability to pay attention to detail and follow instructions can be problematic: this may well have contributed to their misconduct allegation in the first place. This group are often receiving additional support from the SSU.
- The final group of students are those who are keen to 'get things right' and see the importance of accuracy in their work – for these students the two hours is sufficient.

Assessment process:

After the workshop, the students are required to complete two assessments and demonstrate the following 'Can Do' statements:

	Can Do	Assessment Activity	Yes	No
1.	Can paraphrase effectively, using own language to express the ideas from a text	Summary		
2.	Can use any named referencing system to acknowledge sources when paraphrasing	Summary		
3	Can use any named referencing system to acknowledge sources when quoting verbatim (either short or a long quote)	Summary		
4	Can use any named referencing system to construct a bibliography/references correctly	Summary		
5.	Can recognise both 'language based' and 'ideas based' plagiarism. From the Plagiarism Awareness Quiz. 10 questions, of which student must achieve 7/10		7/10 needed	

The assessments comprise:

- a plagiarism awareness quiz which is completed online and assesses the students' ability to recognise language- based or ideas- based plagiarism. Students are required to achieve 7/10.
- (main assessment) to answer a question by writing a synthesised summary based on a reading pack containing three texts. This is submitted through 'grade mark', a Turnitin based system. This allows easy identification of any language based plagiarism.

Should any assessment not make the required standard, extensive feedback on the issues is provided and the student can then re-submit their amended work. If the work still significantly fails to meet the required standard, the student is offered a one-to-one tutorial.

For the students with time management/attention to detail issues who do not make the required standard, tutorials are rarely arranged. However, in these cases issues are clearly highlighted and checklists provided.

The main issues with the assessments not meeting the required standard are:

- issues with accuracy of secondary citations, both in-text and in the bibliography.
- issues with the detail of in-text references: first names rather than surnames, initials included, dates missing, etc.
- some language-based plagiarism

When the APW system was established, time was allocated to run 15 x 2-hour workshops per year and to mark the assessments -(see note above about 2012/13 and 2012/14). But, owing to the background of the students attending the workshops, and the need for some to resubmit assessments and attend tutorials, more than the allocated time has proved to be required per workshop run/assessment completed. Some workshops have very few attendees, but as it is essential to offer the workshops before these students are required to submit further work, with current referral numbers, low numbers for some workshops cannot be avoided.

There will always be students who find developing a good standard of academic practice a challenge, and therefore support in the form of APWs and tutorials should always be available. However, with continuing internationalization and widening participation there may be a need for more skills teaching to be embedded into all academic courses to ensure students are given every opportunity to reach their full potential.

APW Feedback:

Students are asked to complete a feedback form at the end of the first few workshops, but this generated little useful information. As workshop time in is limited, the decision was taken to change this approach, and a more 'focus group' style feedback system was adopted. At the beginning of the workshop the students are asked about their expectations. At the end they are asked whether they feel their questions have been answered and whether they found the workshop beneficial.

Most of the students express surprise that their work contained instances of plagiarism. For some, the concepts of referencing sources used and extensive paraphrasing (rather than changing one or two words) are new and can be difficult to fully appreciate. Others, who are aware of the need for good practice, often say they thought their work was of the required standard, but could see after discussion with their tutor that it was not. Only a few students attending the workshops said they knew before submission that their work was not of the appropriate standard.

Many students comment that they feel there should be more skills/writing development input in their Schools /on their courses – not just on 'how to reference/not plagiarise' but on the whole process of writing an assignment and trying to understand how the use of literature builds and supports an argument. One ex-ISC student on a workshop, who is

typical of this group, commented that all through his foundation year he had been told not to plagiarise, how to paraphrase, etc. He had received penalties as he found this difficult, but claimed he was not taught *why* evidence is used to support argument and how key this is to academic study.

The APW workshop starts by involving students in discussions to help them understand this concept. Some students have said they find it difficult to make the link between the information given in a referencing handbook/guide (which is usually limited to the technicalities, with any examples showing just very short sections of writing) and how a whole essay/written assignment should use literature, and how to clearly present and acknowledge that usage. The concepts underlying good academic practice can be particularly difficult for some international students to grasp if they come from an academic culture where discussion, comparison of ideas, and developing an argument are not such key aspects of their studies and assessments.

Many students have commented that their Schools do not inform them of which referencing system to use, or that they are told it is their choice. In some cases, however, this claim has proved to be unfounded: indeed, some Schools (e.g. Law) provide very extensive and clear writing guidelines, but, for reasons discussed above, these students are not accessing the information, or do not appreciate its importance.

Some students in the APW workshops have said that they are confused when trying to change referencing systems under time pressure; this is especially true if they have been requested to use different systems for different modules. Once the principle of good academic practice has been established, it is easier for students to learn different systems.

Most of the referred students are in their first year (either UG or PGT), but concerns have been raised by 2nd and 3rd year students as to why the issues with their writing had not been raised more formally in years 1 and 2. Now the workshops are in place, tutors may be more willing to refer students than under the previous system, but it is possible that awareness of the APW system in some schools is limited. The majority of as students will inevitably develop good academic practice through producing written assignments with targeted feedback.

Students also comment that if there is input on academic practice and referencing, this usually only takes place once, and this is often during induction/ at the start of term. At this time students have a great deal of new information to absorb and their main concerns lie elsewhere. In addition, late arriving students miss this essential input.

In terms of the APW workshops, students recognise that a standard general referencing system has to be used for to demonstration purposes (Harvard for the Humanities/Social Science students and the Numeric system for Sciences). Although the students who use MLA,

London, or another footnoting system would prefer their required system to be used, this is not possible since in any one workshop there is always a mix of subject areas.

Student feedback indicates that the following areas are found most helpful:

- Establishing the link between good referencing and developing a strong argument.
- That 'better' academic writing is (in a discursive essay) argument-led and supported, and uses more than one source - i.e. that the student needs to make links and identify differences in the arguments presented and place their own voice within this.
- The fact that the meaning can change depending on where the reference details are placed – e.g. attributing information directly/indirectly to the author, etc.
- That there is a difference between how long and short quotes should be presented.
- That there is a difference between primary and secondary sources and that these should be referenced differently.

Sample feedback comments sent by email:

Email comments from students who attended the and APW 2011 -2012:

- I also re-wrote the summary according to your feedback, it is really very clear and the remarks are helpful; you must spent a lot of time in writing the comments for me.
- Thank you very much. I have used everything you taught us in the workshop in my dissertation and resit essay.
- Your class is very helpful for my dissertation.
- I've attached the corrected summary. I hope everything is ok now and I'm really sorry it took me such a long time but I was really busy with assignments lately. A million thanks for your patience and everything you've done.
- Your session really helped me a lot. If it's alright for me to make a suggestion, I would like to request that you make some provisions to incorporate your workshops on plagiarism at the beginning of the academic year. A lot of us do not understand rules of writing as well as we should, because we are not taught these in our country. Several of my friends were surprised to know that there were different types of plagiarism such as language based and ideas based.
- Thank you for your feedback. I feel much better about referencing now thanks to the workshop.
- Thank you very much for everything, the workshops have been very helpful.
- I was just wondering how I could access that page with all the different referencing systems (MLA, Harvard etc) on the Sussex website that you showed us in the plagiarism workshop because I found it really useful and want to make sure I reference correctly for the essays I need to hand in next week.

Changes implemented for 2012/13:

To try to facilitate swifter completion of assessments and to ensure that students get additional support as soon as possible, a supervised assessment session is held immediately after each workshop. The supervising tutor is also available for questions and to clarify and outstanding concerns. It is hoped that this will reduce the number of students who have to re-submit their assessments.

In order to gather additional feedback, a feedback form is now available on the Academic Practice Study Direct site. Students are asked to complete this when their assessments have met the required standard.

Further comments and suggestions:

It is unclear how initial attendance might be improved. Reporting absent students seems unlikely to be a constructive option. However, a system might be considered whereby the I/O, academic advisor or tutor who brought the plagiarism case is required to follow each case up to confirm within the school whether the student has attended.

In some cases the teaching of good academic practice in Schools could be reviewed and further embedded within the subject teaching alongside, for instance, a mid-term assignment.

If possible, more should be done to ensure this information is made easily accessible to all student groups. Most Schools provide referencing and writing information and in some Schools it is easy to find on the webpages, but in other Schools some students/students groups are still unaware that these guides are available. Some suggestions would be:

- a web link could be provided for each assignment set
- for UG students the academic advisors could discuss this regularly at meetings
- a writing guide (as already provided in some school) could be placed in a prominent position on the School Webpages, and linked to Study Direct rather than the guide being embedded in a the School/course handbook
- links to all School writing guides could be in one place on the S3 and SCLS Academic Development Study Direct sites
- it would be beneficial to students (and to SCLS who run the APWs and Pre-sessional courses) if all schools were required to name and provide a guide for the referencing system(s) their students are required to use

If this information is made more readily available, it would also be of benefit to new tutors and ATs who may not be aware of the systems used in their School.

Using foreign language sources and online translators.

Although not often raised in the APWs, this is a concern which is becoming more of an issue when working with students in Academic Practice tutorials.

Many international students rely increasingly on web pages written in their first language for information which is also readily available from an English medium source. Although it is useful for some students to read about new concepts in their first language, these students should then be encouraged to use English medium sources when providing evidence/ referring to literature in any written work submitted for assessment. Pedagogically, this will help student improve their language skills, help embed any new vocabulary, etc. More importantly, however, there is a tendency for students to try to translate what they read, rather than paraphrase the ideas in English. Few students have the language skills to translate well. In addition, there is the added complexity concerning the reliability of these sources and then of students trying to reference these sources accurately.

As translation is difficult for many students, many increasing rely on online translators (e.g. Google Translate, Bing) for large sections of text. In the last few years, the quality of these online translation engines has improved and as a result more students are taking this option. There seems to be two uses of these translators:

- Students write whole essay in their first language, and then translate it.
- More commonly, students translate sentences/paragraphs automatically, then copy and paste these sections into their work – in some cases, building most of the essay block by block. In discussion with students, it seems that students often consider this the same as using an electronic dictionary to check the meaning of a word or short phrase. Although the quality of the final work is rarely of an adequate standard, this is an issue on which greater clarification needs to be provided for both students and staff. It may be that there is a need to establish assessment rules detailing when foreign language sources can be cited, and when it is permissible to submit translated work for assessment.

Academic Development Workshops (ADW) Review 2010 -2012:

These workshops are not connected to the APW workshops reviewed above. They are open to all international/overseas students (UG, PGT and PGR) who are completing their full degree at Sussex and for whom English is a second language. Students are not referred to these workshops, but tutors can advise students that they may find them beneficial. The RLF fellows also refer students when the main concerns with their writing stem from language or academic culture issues.

With increasing numbers of international students at Sussex, demand for workshops has steadily increased. The detailed figures are available in a separate spread sheet, but the figures below provide background data:

Term	No. of workshops	No. of Attendees	Average No. of attendees per workshop
Spring 2013	42	To be confirmed at end of Spring schedule	To be confirmed at end of Spring schedule
Autumn 2012	62	728	12
Summer 2012	24	329	14
Spring 2012	30	292	10
Autumn 2011	51	613	12
Summer 2011	28	255	9
Spring 2011	39	255	7
Autumn 2010	39	430	11

In addition to the programme scheduled for each of the two teaching blocks, we will offer workshops during the assessment and dissertation-writing period.

The total number of students on the workshop waiting list in December 2012 was 145. The most popular workshops are being repeated during the Spring Term 2013. Owing to timetabling issues, it is impossible to ensure that all students can attend all workshops .

Each workshop has a maximum of 20 places. This term the majority of workshops have been fully booked and average final attendance is 12 students per workshop. When there are fewer than 5 students booked, a workshop is cancelled or the subject changed to one for which there is a long waiting list - we have managed to substantially reduce waiting lists in this way. Students who do not attend and who have not emailed to cancel are emailed: they cannot attend further workshops until they have replied. It is recognised that there will always be a number of no-shows for valid reasons: last minute academic appointments, illness, completing assessments, etc.

Workshop attendance is carefully monitored, and any workshops which consistently prove not to be popular are removed and replaced. It has been noticeable this year that the workshops which focus on Academic Language and Culture have been more popular than those which focus on Academic Practice. This may be due to an increase in the amount of information and training provided by Schools on the need for good academic practice.

How staff and students are informed about Academic Development support.

- Heads of Department and School Administrators are emailed at the start of each term about the tutorials and workshops scheduled. We suggest that Academic Development support is added to the Departmental meeting agendas.
- We offer posters and bookmarks to staff throughout all the Schools, to the Student Life Centre, the Careers and Employability Centre, the library, SSU, and marketing material is also made available at various exhibitions and open days.
- There are links to the Study Direct Academic Development webpage (<https://studydirect.sussex.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=1397>) from the S3 website, the Doctoral School and the RLF in TLDU.
- All Pre-sessional students (approximately 550) are emailed at the end of their course to inform them about the study skills support on offer.
- ISC/Study Group inform all progressing students and also ISO send information to all relevant groups about our support services.

2013/2014

With current staffing levels there are no immediate plans to expand the Academic Development workshop and tutorial service. We will, however, review attendance and feedback on the workshops, and amend as needed for the next academic year.

Tutorials:

Tutorials (maximum 2 per student) are also provided (in certain circumstances, students may be offered more at the discretion of the tutor) These are mainly used to discuss students' writing, but can also be used to work on reading, presentation or listening skills, or any other needs a particular student may have. If a student has not written to explain what they wish to discuss 24 hours in advance, the tutorial is cancelled and the student is asked to re-book. This ensures that when students attend a tutorial both they and the tutor are well prepared, and therefore the tutorial can give maximum benefit. There is also a 'last-minute' booking facility.

Tutorial numbers:

Academic year 2011/2012 (including vacations): 378 x 30 -minute tutorials

Autumn Term 2012 to 30/11/2012: 112 x 30-minute tutorials

The number of tutorials provided in the first 10 weeks of this academic year (tutorials are offered from week 2 of term), would seem to indicate that demand will be higher than last

academic year. By the end of the preceding week tutorials are always fully booked; therefore more are sometimes added if resources allow. The ideal would be to offer more initially, to ensure demand is met.

Cultural Awareness Workshops:

During the Summer Term (2012) 8 training sessions on Cultural Awareness for UG students who were planning to spend the academic year 2012-2013 abroad were run. The impetus for these sessions came from the International Study Abroad Office. Approximately 120 students attended in all.

In conjunction with TLDU, for the first time, a workshop for teaching staff on 'Teaching International Students' was delivered.

Requests have been received to run all of these again in 2013. A one-day workshop on Cultural Awareness was also delivered on behalf of the Staff Development Unit; this session has been run for a number of years.

Recommendations

It is proposed that a full review of this provision is undertaken at the end of this academic year to inform the development and delivery of future workshops and to consider School interventions as appropriate.

Alison Chisholm, Rachel Cole, SCLS December 2012/
updated February 2013