

2-1C Using open access peer-reviews and pre-printed submissions to enhance independent learning and accessibility of academic writing in PGT students

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One of the most difficult challenges that novice learners face is to read and assess verbose, complex journal articles, filled with a mix of subject-specific jargon and intricate analyses, challenged with understanding the terminology as well as the general concepts of the work. A recent blog captures this frustration, stating, “Nothing makes you feel stupid quite like reading a scientific journal article” (Ruben, 2016); whilst a follow on looks to alleviate this issue by offering insights from experienced professionals on how best to approach articles (Pain, 2016). Yet while numerous rubrics exist for improving general structuring and writing (Derntl, 2014; Hillier et al., 2016; Kording and Mensh, 2016), few if any exist on how to improve conceptual understanding; a key skill required for students to support their own academic writing with evidence-based literature. We looked to address this issue by creating a mock ‘peer-review’ assessment as part of a portfolio of skills in our Masters-level conversion course; a cohort faced with the stern challenge of having to rapidly, and independently, learn to read and comprehend academic writing from a novel discipline over a relatively short time-span. Our approach involved three stages. First a brief explanation of the peer-review process using freely available online materials from publishers (e.g. Wiley, PLOS). Next an analytical discussion of open access peer-reviews of published articles (via PeerJ, Royal Society Open Science); i.e. a learn-by-example approach. Finally, the student’s own mock peer-review of one of three open access pre-printed journal articles (via PeerJ, PsyArXiv, etc) with specific guidelines to focus on the key aspects of theory, methodology and readability.

Here we present qualitative and quantitative feedback from the students as regards to how this task improved their ability to understand complex academic writing, and how it has altered their approach to reading such articles in future.

References

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