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INSITES

This section highlights some useful learning and teaching websites that can help with planning, teaching and professional development. This time we look at writing skills and study advice resources.

Jackie Hemingway & Sarah Butler

WRITING FOR A PURPOSE

http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/writing-purpose/writing-purpose

Writing for a Purpose on the British Council website focuses on the specific types of writing students may encounter at university, examining the purposes of writing within different disciplines. This allows students from a variety of degree programmes to focus on the genres of writing applicable to their course of study. The site also provides tutors with a resource to help them understand and become familiar with the various genres. The website is research-driven and the development of materials has been informed by the British Academic Written English Corpus (BAWE) of 3000 examples of student work from over 30 disciplines, and has examples of successful assignments providing users with model texts. Research into the BAWE Corpus identified thirteen genre families (Nesi and Gardner, 2012) and these are all represented on the website including essays and research reports, along with more specific genres such as design specifications.

Each of the thirteen genres has an overview which presents the characteristics of that particular genre and this can be further explored through Listening, Structure and Vocabulary components. The Listening section provides an introduction in the form of a discussion giving context for the writing and supporting the subsequent information within the section. There is a transcript for each of the audio recordings. The Structure section analyses the genre in more detail, looking at the structure and particular features of each specific genre of writing. The Vocabulary section analyses authentic language generated from the BAWE Corpus, extracts key language and provides links to concordances from the corpus. Many of the sections have copies of authentic student work which are used in tasks where users can
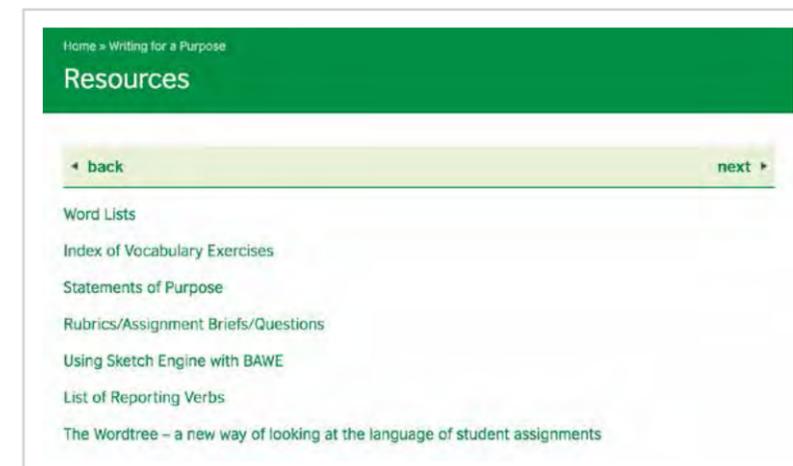
check their comprehension of the material.

One small criticism is that at times the site can be difficult to navigate and, at the time of writing, the drag and drop exercises throughout the site did not work, which meant it did not reach its full capacity. However, overall the material is broken down into accessible and manageable sections and there is the opportunity for users to leave comments or questions in a forum. Students can navigate through the Disciplines section to access the appropriate genre for them. The Resources page has a variety of useful materials; for example, one section focuses on reporting verbs and another on language specific to assignments.

Writing for a Purpose is an extremely useful site for both students and tutors. It provides samples of student work which may be difficult for either tutors or students to source independently and provides a valuable insight into what is expected in written work within various university disciplines. It allows students studying on English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses or university foundation courses to gain further understanding of their subject area and the specific requirements with regard to writing within their field. This resource could be used independently by students, or

could be exploited by tutors within a programme of study. Tutors could benefit greatly from the categorisation and exploration of the genres and exercises included on the site that can inform teaching. Overall, the specialised content and presentation of the website makes it well worth visiting for both students and tutors. ⭘

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REFERENCES

Nesi, H. & Gardner, S. (2012). Genres across the disciplines: student writing in higher education. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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Word Lists
Index of Vocabulary Exercises
Statements of Purpose
Rubrics/Assignment Briefs/Questions
Using Sketch Engine with BAWE
List of Reporting Verbs
The Wordtree – a new way of looking at the language of student assignments

THE UNIVERSITY OF READING'S STUDY ADVICE VIDEO TUTORIALS

http://www.reading.ac.uk/library/study-advice/lib-sa-videos.aspx
Also available via:
http://www.screencast.com/users/UniRdg_Library/folders/Study%20Advice

The University of Reading's library website provides a collection of over 40 screencasts to develop study practices, focusing largely on writing skills (essays, reports, dissertations and referencing), as well as exam preparation. The collection includes both introductory study skills, e.g. 'Reading Academic Texts' and more advanced content, e.g. 'Effective paraphrasing for postgrads'.

A screencast is a video recording of computer screen output, typically with an accompanying voiceover. These are being increasingly used as a way of providing teaching content to students. The key benefits are that they can support self-paced learning, are accessible at the point of need, and available at any time.

Each screencast tutorial in this collection is delivered via PowerPoint slides or Prezi and lasts approximately 5 minutes. The accompanying audio narration is provided in various British accents at a normal pace. The information in each screencast is limited to a small number of key features. This avoids overloading viewers with information while both minimal text on-screen and clear images reinforce the message. Many of the screencasts also demonstrate the skills being focused on by working through an authentic example taken from a student assignment which provides

clear context. Each screencast finishes with a clear summary to recap the main points and in some cases, recommends further resources for developing related skills.

The language used in this collection is generally quite high-level and occasionally idiomatic, which means that some of the tutorials may be challenging for lower level EAP students. Nevertheless, the screencast format provides visual reinforcement and allows pausing and replay, while accompanying transcripts of the narration improve accessibility for students with lower English levels.

These tutorials could be used both in class and out of class. In class, they could be used to introduce a skill before a practice activity. This could be one way to integrate authentic listening tasks into an EAP class with a clear goal for students to then apply the skills learnt.

Such resources are also ideal for a flipped learning approach, with students watching the tutorial before class and then practicing the skills with tutor support in class. They can be a good way of fostering autonomous learning outside of class and can help with consolidation, as the screencasts can be replayed when and as often as the student wishes, allowing flexibility. Research has indicated that such forms of online multimodal learning, involving both on screen animation and narration, are more effective than narration-only or text-only methods (e.g. Atkinson, 2002 and Mayer, 2003).

While the video tutorials have been designed primarily for self-access, many EAP students would benefit from guidance in using them. Tutors could suggest specific screencasts, as their relevance will depend on the student's programme of study and level. Some of the tutorials integrate small tasks (e.g. for the student to compare the effectiveness of two texts on the screen) according to the content of the tutorial. Tutors may wish to adapt and expand such tasks to give students a clear purpose for watching the tutorial. This is also a valuable resource for tutors, particularly those new to the field of EAP, as the screencasts focus on key points and present these in a clear, focused way.

Although EAP tutors may find some of the screencasts inappropriate for the level of their students, the resource creators note that more tutorials will be added, thus a wider range of student needs may be catered to. Furthermore, this collection may inspire teachers to create their own screencasts using a similar format. Advice on how to make screencasts using video capture software such as Camtasia and Jing is available on the following websites: TeacherTrainingVideos.com and MultimediaTrainingVideos.com.○

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Atkinson, R. K. (2002). Optimizing learning from examples using animated pedagogical agents. Journal of Educational Psychology, 94(2), 416–427.

Mayer, R. E. (2003). Elements of a science of e-learning. Journal of Educational Computing Research, 29(3), 297–313.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Jackie Hemingway has taught EAP at XJTLU since September 2011. Prior to joining XJTLU she taught General and Business English in several countries including Austria, Spain, Japan and Oman.

EMAIL
jacqueline.hemingway@xjtlu.edu.cn

Sarah Butler is Associate Director of Pre-sessional English courses at CU Services Coventry University. Her areas of interest include teacher development and learner autonomy.

EMAIL
ab6631@coventry.ac.uk