INSITES

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This section highlights useful learning and teaching websites that can help with planning, teaching, and professional development. This time we look at self-access tutorials and a resource for developing writing skills.

Each of the three sections has an introduction that includes student perceptions of common problems and areas of concern. This has the effect of helping users feel more comfortable seeking additional support. Each section also has a drop-down menu with a list of choices, and each separate workshop has an outline of the session aims, which is helpful in deciding how it will be beneficial to the user.

THE LEARNING HUB (UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND)

http://learninghub.une.edu.au/tlc/aso/aso-online/learning-strat-egies/

http://learninghub.une.edu.au/tlc/aso/aso-online/academ-ic-writing/

http://learninghub.une.edu.au/tlc/aso/aso-online/academ-ic-reading/

The University of New England's (UNE) Academic Skills Online Programme of free self-access tutorials builds on core academic skills. There are three areas currently available:
• Learning Strategies
• Academic Writing
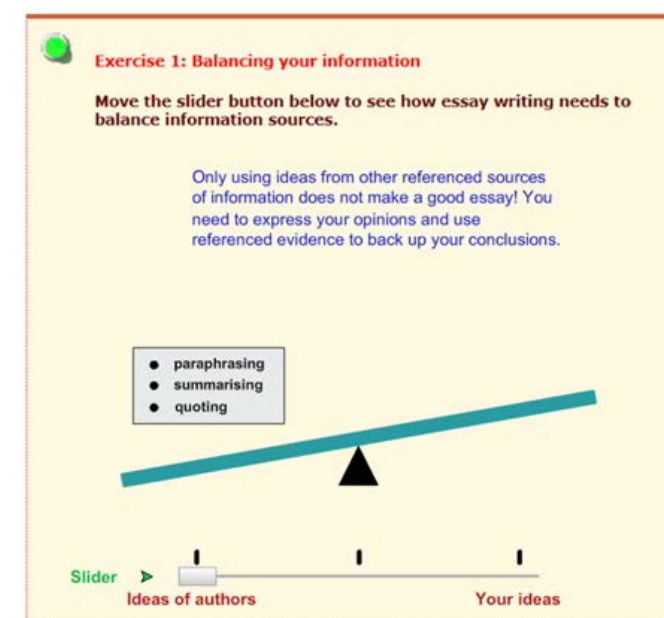• Academic Reading

▲ Figure 1.: Home page of the Academic Reading section

The Learning Strategies section has a specific focus on dealing with workloads and exams. This section also gives an overview of expectations at university and provides a number of exercises and practical tips that are easily implemented. For example, in the time management section, users can complete a time audit exercise to determine how they manage their time. This is followed by a choice of study plans tailored for those who work more effectively either in the day time or evening. The section on lectures provides useful practice for students with limited experience in attending lectures. The interactive activities within the unit - including strategies on listening to podcasts - are engaging. Some of the material

in the Exam section is specific to the UNE, but there are a number of useful resources, particularly planning for assessment and exam strategies.

The Academic Writing and Academic Reading sections (see figs 1 & 2) are more fully populated with materials and include a variety of activities and quizzes. The Academic Reading workshops guide the user through a number of useful strategies and approaches. Some of the exercises have time limits, which help develop speed reading. There is a useful exercise focusing on scanning skills where the text appears for a limited amount of time, after which users have to answer specific questions about the text. Although the number of exercises can be limited, some sections offer links to more resources. One or two of the links for additional materials were broken at the time of this review, but overall there is a wide variety of resources for users to select from.

The Academic Writing section has the most resources, with topics ranging from thesis statements to plagiarism, and it deals with areas that can be challenging for students new to university study. The material on synthesising is particularly useful and deals clearly with a difficult topic. The note taking demonstration and sample paragraphs synthesising a number of sources demonstrates how students can build up their skills in using source texts. ▷

▲ Figure 2.: Sample exercise on synthesising: https://aso-resources.une.edu.au/academic-writing-course/information-basics/synthesising-evidence/

The integrated quizzes that check understanding are accessible, and the suggested answers and advice are clear and succinct. There are well-chosen links to other resources: the vodcasts on paraphrasing from the University of Technology Sydney being a good example.

Students are effectively guided through a good mixture of content and practical activities to consolidate and supplement learning, and the printable checklists included in some sections are useful. However, users need Adobe Flash Player and Acrobat Reader in order to fully exploit the tasks and activities. Some of the materials make reference to UNE workshops, which users may be unable to access, but this does not significantly affect the activity or content. Overall, this is a useful resource for students who would like to consolidate their skills in these specific areas and gain more practice and insight.

WRASSE: WRITING FOR ASSIGNMENTS E-LIBRARY

https://wrasse.plymouth.ac.uk/

Wrasse from Plymouth University is an e-library providing authentic examples of good student writing from a range of disciplines. The collection has been formed to give students and teachers easy access to examples of good student writing in order to improve students' writing skills. Each assignment in the collection features detailed comments by lecturers to give insights into what makes it effective (see fig 3). The resource currently has over 25 sample assignments, but the collection is expected to grow as users are invited to submit their own examples.

The collection can be searched by subject, level, or keyword. The subject areas covered are arts and humanities, health and social care, STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), social sciences and professional (e.g. accounting). The levels of text are categorised

according to the UK's independent Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and range from levels 3 to 8. One weakness, however, is that the Wrasse website does not provide any introduction to this benchmarking system for those unfamiliar with it.

As well as providing a range of essays and reports, assignment types which many students may be unfamiliar with are included. For instance, examples of a literature review, an abstract, and a comment posted to an electronic discussion forum may be useful for students faced with such tasks for the first time.

After an assignment is selected, highlighted sections of the text can be clicked to reveal comments. The comments are clearly colour-labelled by category: function (describe; analyse; evaluate), quality (structure; authority; voice), general, or other. This categorisation appears to have been informed by academic writing research and helps draw attention to those aspects likely to affect grading during assessment. The help page states that the terms used have been based on research into student writing although no specific research is cited on the website.

One key strength is the thoroughness of the comments.

▲ Figure 3.: Sample essay comments: https://wrasse.plymouth.ac.uk/extract/essay-how-fair-is-fair-value

For example, an essay on fair value accounting of 750 words is accompanied by comments of approximately the same total length. Despite a high level of detail, the webpage design prevents the length of the comments from being too overwhelming. The use of colour coding, a comments key on the sidebar and the option to view comments one-by-one in text or categorised on a separate page improve usability. Some assignments are also accompanied with an overall reflection from the marker, which gives a clear overview of the strengths of the writing.
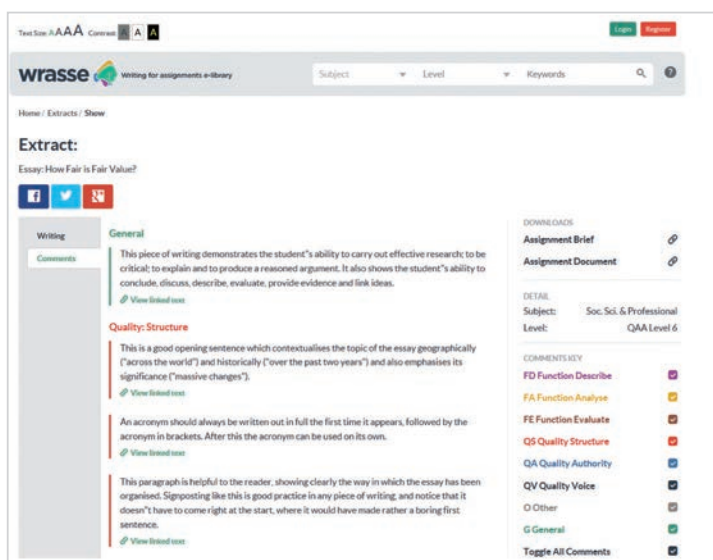
The assignments cover a range of disciplines and all appear to be specific, authentic tasks. This has the effect of illustrating some of the complexities and varieties of academic writing rather than providing a model or one-size fits all template approach. Some longer assignment types such as dissertations are included, but text submissions are limited to 1000 words so that extracts are of a more manageable length. The website's clean, simple design and the search functions make it easy to navigate.

For students, this resource can help build awareness of differences between academic writing genres and the features of good content and organisation for

specific assignment types. Since there is a limit to the amount of individual feedback that a teacher can provide, this site can increase students' exposure to genuine teacher feedback. The search functions mean that it is easy to use and could be used as a self-access resource for students, particularly for higher-level students who have already been introduced to the fundamentals of academic writing.

Teachers may find this resource helpful for presenting authentic examples of successful student writing. Class activities could involve identifying the writing genre, matching comments to the relevant sections of a text, or predicting lecturers' comments. Teachers wishing to use the materials in class may need to be selective in finding those most relevant to their student needs and, where necessary, adapting them according to their own criteria for a successful assignment. Both the student assignment and assignment brief can be downloaded as Word documents, allowing for changes to be easily made. Some texts include features that some teachers may wish to discourage in their students' writing depending on the genre, such as the use of personal pronouns. Teachers may also benefit from seeing examples of other teachers' feedback, particularly from subject-specific lecturers. Furthermore, this e-collection may encourage teachers and institutions to form their own e-libraries as a means of sharing best practices across departments.

The Wrasse E-Library appears to be unique in providing examples of good student writing with authentic feedback from lecturers. Wrasse is a new and currently small collection but the strengths of the site are likely to grow as the resource expands. ○

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