



## Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

**Title:** University of Aberdeen College of Arts and Social Sciences: Academic Writing

### **Transition(s) the practice supports:**

This course assists with the transition into university at first year level and offers an early opportunity to identify and offer writing development to those students who may not have the necessary level of writing skills to be successful learners in the Higher Education environment.

### **Abstract:**

The University of Aberdeen College of Arts and Social Sciences offers a number of linked Academic Writing Courses to aid students in the transition from prior learning into University. The course is delivered to all first year students in the College and aims to identify those students who do not have the necessary level of writing skills to reach their full potential in the Higher Education environment. The initial stages of the course are delivered on-line via Blackboard and those students who are identified as requiring additional support attend a number of face-to-face writing development workshops with the Student Learning Service. The course aims to offer an early engagement with students in this vital area of their learning.

### **Description:**

Several years ago it became apparent that many of our students were failing to reach their full potential not because of their intellectual capacities but because of their inability to communicate their ideas effectively in grammatical, clear and coherent English. This was a common theme of concern raised not only by staff but also by the students themselves who voiced a desire to improve this aspect of their work. While our students have been supported in this area for a number of years by the Student Learning Service, the College of Arts and Social Sciences sought to find a way to engage with this issue as early as possible, to identify those students who are in need of additional help and to provide this in a supportive environment where students can voice their concerns.

The Academic Writing Course is our response to this issue. Initially piloted in 2011 with the Schools of Education and Law the course was rolled out across the College in 2012 and became compulsory for all first year students with a degree intention based within it.



enhancement  
themes

## **The course follows the following structure:**

### **Teaching Week 1**

All students complete an on-line test. This involves writing a summary of a passage of prose (approx. 600 words) in no more than 150 words. Tests are set by the different Schools within the College and the passages chosen are relevant to the disciplines in the School. The test must be completed in one sitting and within one hour. The summary is marked by academic staff within the School both on how accurately students summarise the text and how correct they are in their use of grammar, punctuation and spelling. Summaries that are longer than 150 words lose marks.

Students who pass the first test have completed the course.

### **Teaching Weeks 2 – 4**

Students who have not passed the first test work through an on-line, interactive resource 'Improving Your Writing'.

### **Teaching Week 5**

Students who have not passed the first test take the second test.

If they pass the second test they have completed the course.

### **Teaching Weeks 8-10**

If they do not pass the second test they are required to attend a series of three writing workshops with the Student Learning Service during Weeks 8-10.

By attending these workshops they have completed the course.

Evaluations of the pilot course suggested that students value the reassurance this course offers and, in those cases where issues are identified, the support which it provides. In addition to helping our students to reach their full potential by enhancing writing skills the course also offers the College an early opportunity for engagement with our students as they enter the University, thus assisting in identifying those who are having wider issues in making the transition into this new learning environment. An occasional but important outcome of the course has been early indication of students with possible specific learning differences, such as dyslexia, with appropriate immediate referral. While evaluating the extent to which the course improves the longer term performance of our students is a more complex task, we are confident that the support offered by it is appreciated by a large section of our first year cohort.

## **Contact details:**

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