

Chat Transcript for Session Topic: Writing for scientists

Discussion of

Hamer "Laboratory Reports, Reflective Essays, and the Contributing Student Approach" Taylor "Integrating feedforward on academic writing into an undergraduate science course"

Facilitated by
Colin Milligan
University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, United Kingdom

Moderated by
Carol Higgison
University of Bradford, Bradford, United Kingdom

Date/Time	Author	Comment
31/05/2007	Carol Higgison	Ok, well my clock says it is now 8am BST so I think we should
08:00:20	(Carol (Moderator))	get started
31/05/2007	Carol Higgison	Hello and welcome to the First Session on Day 3 of the REAP
08:00:27	(Carol (Moderator))	Conference. I'm delighted to welcome you to this chat session on Writing for Scientists. My name is Carol Higgison and I will be moderating this session.
31/05/2007	Carol Higgison	I'm very happy to be joined by our expert facilitator Dr Colin
08:00:33	(Carol (Moderator))	Milligan from Strathclyde University and by case study authors Dr John Hamer from the University of Aukland and Charlotte Taylor from the University of Sydney.
31/05/2007	Carol Higgison	Colin - if you are ready ?
08:00:48	(Carol (Moderator))	
31/05/2007	Colin Milligan	Yes Carol
08:00:56	(Colin Milligan)	
31/05/2007	Carol Higgison	Hello and welcome to the First Session on Day 3 of the REAP
08:00:58	(Carol (Moderator))	Conference. I'm delighted to welcome you to this chat session on Writing for Scientists. My name is Carol Higgison and I will be moderating this session.
31/05/2007	Carol Higgison	Carol (Moderator): Hello and welcome to the First Session on
08:01:14	(Carol (Moderator))	Day 3 of the REAP Conference. I'm delighted to welcome you to this chat session on Writing for Scientists. My name is Carol Higgison and I will be moderating this session.
31/05/2007	David Nicol	hello carol
08:01:28	(DavidNicol)	
31/05/2007	Colin Milligan	Well, first of all, I'd like to say thanks to the authors for
08:01:50	(Colin Milligan)	providing such interesting papers. I was really pleased to see
		such good evidence of inovation.
31/05/2007	Carol Higgison	I agree - really excellent work
08:02:15	(Carol (Moderator))	
31/05/2007	Colin Milligan	Here we have two papers on improving learners writing skills -
08:02:31	(Colin Milligan)	but different approaches
31/05/2007	Colin Milligan	Can we start by asking each of you to summarise the essence
08:02:40	(Colin Milligan)	of the approach adopted. Charlotte first:
31/05/2007	Charlotte Taylor	OK we had to work around large class sizes so everything had
08:03:08	(CharlotteTaylor)	to be structured
31/05/2007	Charlotte Taylor	we also wanted to impresss upon students that writingwas
08:03:53	(CharlotteTaylor)	fundamental to science and their professional lives



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08:15:04 (John Hamer) their hypertexttextbook, so they have an immediate purpose			
there.	08:15:04	(John Hamer)	
			there.



31/05/2007	Carol Higgison	Welcome back Kiran
08:15:07	(Carol (Moderator))	
31/05/2007	Colin Milligan	Yes, I had a similar thought - what is the value of the second
08:15:23	(Colin Milligan)	round of reflection -
31/05/2007	K.P. Jaikiran	technical problems, i was out
08:15:25	(jaitvm)	
31/05/2007	Carol Higgison	Quintin asked John if the student reports benefited the
08:15:57	(Carol (Moderator))	students or tutors more
31/05/2007	John Hamer	The short reflection after the lab was intended to get students
08:16:02	(John Hamer)	reading other essays. These are quick, and largely useless
31/05/2007	Quintin Cutts	I was thinking that this summary might be of immense value to
08:16:04	(QuintinCutts)	the lecturer, in enabling him/her to be more contingent with
		the following sessions
31/05/2007	John Hamer	I read all the reflective essays after each lab, and was in a
08:16:57	(John Hamer)	good position to adjust the pace of teh course
31/05/2007	Quintin Cutts	Wow, a lot of reading!
08:17:08	(QuintinCutts)	
31/05/2007	Charlotte Taylor	i wondered if students followed up onthings they thought were
08:17:38	(CharlotteTaylor)	a problem , or only you inthe teaching
31/05/2007	John Hamer	Not so much the class had 35 students, and I only need to
08:17:40	(John Hamer)	skim most
31/05/2007	David Nicol	charlotte, did you see the baxter case study and if so did it
08:18:06	(DavidNicol)	suggest any ways of keeping the best of what you have but
24 /05 /2007		reducing teacher workload?
31/05/2007	John Hamer	The students were mostly reassured that it wasn't just "them"
08:18:08	(John Hamer)	finding it difficult
31/05/2007 08:18:37	Charlotte Taylor	but they didn't take the initiative to go and find out?
31/05/2007	(CharlotteTaylor) Charlotte Taylor	my students also loved the online discussion because they
08:20:23	(CharlotteTaylor)	could see that everyone had similar problems - they weren't
00.20.23	(Chartotte raytor)	alone - also they could lurk while others admitted it
31/05/2007	Colin Milligan	We've been thinking about the process of myong the students
08:20:34	(Colin Milligan)	along - taking others' input into their work etc. I think this ties
	(,	in with providing 'Opportunities to close the gap' which is one
		of David Nicol's key principles of good practice in formative
		assessment, and Charlotte's task structure provides this:
		CHARLOTTE, can you comment on how the students see this
		(I'm thinking specifically of the fact that some students don't
		change their report between draft and final submission, and
		your work with the 'copyfind' software).
31/05/2007	Carol Higgison	John - picking up on Charlotte's point, I thought from your
08:21:25	(Carol (Moderator))	paper that the students used these 'problem' areas as triggers
24 (05 (000	6	for resource development?
31/05/2007	Carol Higgison	Hellow Karadu and welcome
08:22:31	(Carol (Moderator))	Van Abarrala Afranta attitus af the construction to
31/05/2007	John Hamer	Yes, they do. A focal activity of the course is collectively
08:22:32	(John Hamer)	writing a hypertext-textbook, and the lab reports provide a lot of material for this.
31/05/2007	Charlotte Taylor	the analysis has shown that we get allpossible levls of change
08:22:33	(CharlotteTaylor)	and all possible final grades and no correlation between
55.22.55	(Shartotto raytor)	amount of change and improved grade - rather disconcerting.
		Now I'm interviewing students about exactly what they
		understood from feed
31/05/2007	radu catalin	Hi all
08:22:47	(karadu)	
31/05/2007	Carol Higgison	Karadu - we are just discussing the use students make of
08:23:05	(Carol (Moderator))	identified common problems as triggers for further action



radu catalin	10X
(karadu)	
Colin Milligan (Colin Milligan)	It would be interesting to look for correlation between what was changed, and how the grade changed - for instance, are there things that are typically weak in the first draft (conclusions) perhaps an evolution of the process would be to have specific chats after the drafts were received to discuss what can we conclude
Colin Milligan (Colin Milligan)	Well, looking at your paper's dfiagram you might already do that
Quintin Cutts (QuintinCutts)	Charlotte, how confident were you in general that students understood what you were telling them in the face to face feedback sessions?
Charlotte Taylor (CharlotteTaylor)	we're starting to get a feel for this - we feed back common problems to staff before the feedback session and discuss inthe writing lecture for all students - but there are a number of reasons why and what they change. They may not have time - all effort wnet into a draft or (the big question) did they understand the feedback? I hope my interviews will draw this out. Also interviewing staff about what they said and thought as they gave feedback - many find it very difficult and confronting!
Quintin Cutts	I wondered this - some students ***really*** don't seem to
,	accept feedback well or were you talking about the staff?
(QuintinCutts)	of were you takking about the starr.
Charlotte Taylor (CharlotteTaylor)	an interesting anecdotla point is that most students don't take notes while they talk about their report - how can they remember afterwards all the detail?
Carol (Moderator))	Charlotte: I think a lot of staff find it difficult to give constructive feedback. Is this your experience? John what about you and your colleagues?
Quintin Cutts (QuintinCutts)	Arrgh- yes, I'm amazed by this lack of note taking
David Nicol (DavidNicol)	hello charlotte, what guidelines were given about the type of feedback given that can serve many purposes?
John Hamer (John Hamer)	Carol, I agree. Often we latch on to minor writing issues
Colin Milligan (Colin Milligan)	(Charlottes paper refers to the importance of consistency because of the large class sizes and the need for marking by multiple tutors)
(CharlotteTaylor)	we talked to staff about being positive and trying to learve technical' nitpicking' things to the stduents to self appraise. Staff should focus on cohesion of arguments and sentence and larger scale - often we spend a lot of time working with basic English - very depressing!
John Hamer	The trouble is there is a lot involved in writing well. It's more
,	than just putting a coherent argument together John, what about your students - were they better at receiving
_	feedback because of the 'contributing student approach'?
David Nicol	For example, feedback to justify mark, correct the work, point out strengths and weaknesses, reader response approach?
Carol Higgison	Charlotte: students' lack of basic writing skills is also an issue
(Carol (Moderator))	here at Bradford. Is this an issue for anyone else (English language or not?)
John Hamer (John Hamer)	There are parallels with programming students struggle with design, logic and syntax issues all at the same time
	Colin Milligan (Colin Milligan) Colin Milligan (Colin Milligan) Quintin Cutts (QuintinCutts) Charlotte Taylor (CharlotteTaylor) Charlotte Taylor (CharlotteTaylor) Carol Higgison (Carol (Moderator)) Quintin Cutts (QuintinCutts) David Nicol (DavidNicol) John Hamer (John Hamer) Colin Milligan (Colin Milligan) Charlotte Taylor (CharlotteTaylor) Charlotte Taylor (CharlotteTaylor) Charlotte Taylor (CharlotteTaylor) Colin Milligan (Colin Milligan) Charlotte Taylor (CharlotteTaylor)



31/05/2007 08:32:00	Quintin Cutts (QuintinCutts)	Yes, definitely - both with home and overseas students (Carol)
31/05/2007 08:32:01	Charlotte Taylor (CharlotteTaylor)	consistency is an ongoing problem - students pick up on it and it gets blown out of all proportion in evaluations. Most accept differences. Staff are difficult to train - we can practice marking etc but in the end everyone still has their own areas to f
31/05/2007 08:32:34	John Hamer (John Hamer)	David - I believe so. The more experience they have giving and receiving feedback, the better they get
31/05/2007 08:33:46	Colin Milligan (Colin Milligan)	So following on The skills developed here are 'transferable' has there been a longitudinal study done to see whether the skills developed in these classes prepare students better for their study in later years?
31/05/2007 08:34:04	Colin Milligan (Colin Milligan)	(that question is for either of the presenters)
31/05/2007 08:35:10	John Hamer (John Hamer)	They do seem to be. I now see our final year students doing many of the things we did in my earlier course for their final year projects
31/05/2007 08:35:14	Charlotte Taylor (CharlotteTaylor)	Ah the big question - does it all make a difference. I have anecdotal evidence from staff in higher years who call me every year and say 3rd year essays are getting better - must be the firstyear program kicking in. Also this eyar 1st year stafffsaid th
31/05/2007 08:35:27	radu catalin (karadu)	Usualy students involvement is greater in first years of study?
31/05/2007 08:36:01	John Hamer (John Hamer)	These skills definitely take time to develop
31/05/2007 08:36:11	Charlotte Taylor (CharlotteTaylor)	somthing we als ohave to acknowledge is that our expectations are rising all the time
31/05/2007 08:36:29	Colin Milligan (Colin Milligan)	What about student perceptions - do they value the approaches used? do they demand similar teaching practice in other courses?
31/05/2007 08:36:42	Carol Higgison (Carol (Moderator))	Charlotte and Quintin: going back to the point about (Student lack of) notetaking during verbal feedback - perhaps that is why the particpants in Charlottes online seminar value the recording aspect of online discussion. Do what extent to you think the public aspect of the online interactions contributes to group capacity?
31/05/2007 08:37:08	Charlotte Taylor (CharlotteTaylor)	what do you mean group capacity
31/05/2007 08:37:34	Carol Higgison (Carol (Moderator))	the general student group understanding of what is required and some sort of consensus
31/05/2007 08:37:39	John Hamer (John Hamer)	Colin, the reflective essays surprised me by their popularity. They are disappointed when other courses don't ask for them.
31/05/2007 08:37:49	Carol Higgison (Carol (Moderator))	Hello Poppy - welcome to the chat
31/05/2007 08:37:58	Charlotte Taylor (CharlotteTaylor)	I think its an enormous influence - that's why I worry that we've lost this recently
31/05/2007 08:38:32	Carol (Moderator))	we are discussing the long term benefits of these approaches and the extent to which the students continue these practices in their later years of study
31/05/2007 08:38:50	Quintin Cutts (QuintinCutts)	Interesting connection - record of on-line chat with e.g. recorded lectures, face to face discussions etc. Hadn't thought of that
31/05/2007 08:39:05	Poppy Pickard (Poppy)	Popped in by accident, need to read the papers first!!
31/05/2007 08:39:31	John Hamer (John Hamer)	Carol, I don't have any data on the reflective essays this is the first year I have asked for them.



2 / /2 - /2 2 2	- 1	
31/05/2007	Colin Milligan	Does this bring up a question of institutional buy in - is the
08:39:39	(Colin Milligan)	contributing studetn approach adopted widely inU of
		Auckland, or is it just your course?
31/05/2007	radu catalin	Carol do you think that reflective essays are fit for first year
08:40:17	(karadu)	assessment?
31/05/2007	John Hamer	My course is the only immersion CSA course. Other colleagues
08:40:28	(John Hamer)	have included elements (such as one student-contributed
	(0011111111111111)	session each week) with varying success
31/05/2007	Colin Milligan	'varying success' - any lessons to be learned
08:41:22	(Colin Milligan)	varying success— any tessons to be tearned
31/05/2007	Carol Higgison	Karadu: I think I'll pass that question onto the Charlotte, John
08:41:51	(Carol (Moderator))	and Colin. I don't actually teach first year undergraduates, but
00.41.31	(Carot (Moderator))	
		my personal view is that it may help student feel less isolated;
		more part of a community; help them self-assess where they
24 (05 (2007		are in relation to their peer; and improve their skills
31/05/2007	John Hamer	Students will resist contributing if they think the "normal
08:41:53	(John Hamer)	transmission will be resumed" some time soon
31/05/2007	Carol Higgison	Hi Andy welcome to the chat
08:42:01	(Carol (Moderator))	
31/05/2007	Charlotte Taylor	That's a great quote - normal transmission!!
08:42:28	(CharlotteTaylor)	
31/05/2007	Andy Sharp	Hi Carol just catching up
08:42:31	(AndySharp)	
31/05/2007	John Hamer	Karadu, I found reflective essays an easy sell to students. They
08:42:51	(John Hamer)	enjoy writing them and find a lot of benefits
31/05/2007	Carol Higgison	We are talking about the role of reflective writing, giving
08:43:26	(Carol (Moderator))	control to students and instutional buy-in.
31/05/2007	Charlotte Taylor	I'm definitely going to use them with my other units
		This definitely going to use them with my other units
08:43:33	(CharlotteTaylor)	
31/05/2007	Colin Milligan	Good for improving confidence, motivational - anyone have
08:43:59	(Colin Milligan)	any downsides to report?
31/05/2007	David Nicol	do they need support in developing reflection rather than just
08:44:03	(DavidNicol)	describing what they did?
31/05/2007	John Hamer	Some specific benefits: in labs, they are much more willing to
08:44:16	(John Hamer)	describe unexpected observations. In the past they would tend
		to think "it must be my mistake", but now they are happy to
		report odd things happening. These often lead to interesti
31/05/2007	Charlotte Taylor	Institutions move very slowly on thes things - change is viewed
08:44:25	(CharlotteTaylor)	with suspicion
31/05/2007	John Hamer	I left the essays very open they could write pretty much
08:44:56	(John Hamer)	anything the wanted.
31/05/2007	Charlotte Taylor	I like that thinking about strange results - it's key to research
08:44:57	(CharlotteTaylor)	and enquiry
31/05/2007	radu catalin	agree (Charlote)
08:45:08	(karadu)	
31/05/2007	K.P. Jaikiran	Hi John the self assessment component in the reflective essays
08:45:39	(jaitvm)	is quite good. But do all the students elevate themselves to
00.75.57	(Jaictill)	that level
31/05/2007	Colin Milligan	Charlotte - this might be getting off topic - but is there any
08:46:03	(Colin Milligan)	parallel attempt to teach scientific enquiry at Sydney - I'm
00.40.03	(Cottii Mittigati)	
		thinking of things like experiemtnal design - asa former
24 /05 /2007	Charlette Te 1	bioloigy student often we just followed recipes
31/05/2007	Charlotte Taylor	exptl design is big here particularly in biology and is increasing
08:47:00	(CharlotteTaylor)	as we talk to student more about being in a research intensive
24 (07 :005		university
31/05/2007	John Hamer	Kiran, perhaps because they were encouraged to read other
08:47:20	(John Hamer)	student reports, the reflection was really quite open



31/05/2007	Colin Milligan	(charlotte) thats encouraging too - i wnet to a research led
08:48:30	(Colin Milligan)	university, but our contact with research didn't come until
		much later -good that it is introduced early.
31/05/2007	Charlotte Taylor	come to ISSOTL - I'm talking about a novel research project we
08:49:18	(CharlotteTaylor)	run with firstyears - it's their main report and feeds into a 'real'
		research project over in America
31/05/2007	John Hamer	Experimentation has become a theme of my course, so
08:49:54	(John Hamer)	students are expected to design experiments in their labs
00.47.54	(Soffir Harrier)	rather than follow a script
24 /0E /2007	Charlette Taylor	•
31/05/2007	Charlotte Taylor	the main problem with getting students involved in all
08:50:31	(CharlotteTaylor)	thisearly is that they have to dela with primray literature- I've
24 /05 /0005	1 . 1	had to create an online module on' how to read the literature'
31/05/2007	radu catalin	:) from the distance learning point of view I know that is
08:51:28	(karadu)	necessary
31/05/2007	Charlotte Taylor	we tend to forget what they've already been exposed to in
08:52:20	(CharlotteTaylor)	school - everything moves forward so fast
31/05/2007	John Hamer	In SE we have a different issue, with the mass of "literature"
08:52:24	(John Hamer)	available on the web and students needing to filter it
31/05/2007	Charlotte Taylor	ah yes - the other big problem
08:52:49	(CharlotteTaylor)	, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,
31/05/2007	K.P. Jaikiran	Charlotte, your online module is really enterprising. What's the
08:53:02	(jaitvm)	student feedback on that? That should be really assisting the
00.00.0E	()3.(0,111)	peripheral groups.
31/05/2007	Charlotte Taylor	so far it's in trial phase will have to get back to you on that -
08:53:41	(CharlotteTaylor)	lectures I've given on reading have been very popular
31/05/2007		
	Carol (Madagatagy)	Charlotte and John: plagiarism is seen as a growing issue here
08:53:52	(Carol (Moderator))	(I am guessing that is what you are alluding to in the
		comments about hte Internet). Do your approaches help
		reduce the opportunities, actual instances or is it not a
		problem?
31/05/2007	John Hamer	Carol, it's not an issue with my course, partly because numbers
08:54:55	(John Hamer)	are small and partly because the course environment is so
		open. Everyone can see what each other is working on.
31/05/2007	Charlotte Taylor	it's definitely an issue - copyfind acts as a deterrent- and we
08:55:07	(CharlotteTaylor)	focus first on cheating then inappropraite use of the literature
		- again they don't seem to have taken that in at school
31/05/2007	Colin Milligan	as john says, course design can make plagiarism less of an
08:56:05	(Colin Milligan)	issue.
31/05/2007	Charlotte Taylor	cheating is a small group who persist - not knowing how to
08:56:08	(CharlotteTaylor)	acknowledge others' work is something that takes a while to
22.20.00	(=:::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::	come to terms with - not sure why?
31/05/2007	Colin Milligan	We're coming towards the end of the session now. I wonder
08:56:21	(Colin Milligan)	whether either of you might wish to reflect on your experience
00.30.21	(Cottii Mittigaii)	in introducing these interventions - are you going to continue
		to innovate in the future?
21 /05 /2007	John Usmar	
31/05/2007	John Hamer	Carol, my comment on the Internet was the amount of noise
08:56:25	(John Hamer)	students encounter they need to be able to decide for
24 /05 /222	C1 1 1	themselves what material is good and what is rot
31/05/2007	Charlotte Taylor	definitley
08:56:43	(CharlotteTaylor)	
31/05/2007	John Hamer	I can't see myself going back to conventional lecturing.
08:57:08	(John Hamer)	
31/05/2007	David Nicol	charlotte, would some kind of visible record using technology
08:57:32	(DavidNicol)	(e.g wiki) help deal with a few of your issues - tracking
- · · · -		change, researching this, plagiarism etc?
31/05/2007	Charlotte Taylor	I can't stop changing things and trying to improve - I'm
08:57:38	(CharlotteTaylor)	
U8:5/:38	(Cnarlotte Laylor)	addicted!! Not sure what my colleagues would say!



31/05/2007	Colin Milligan	And hopefully spread the word to your colleagues.
08:57:51	(Colin Milligan)	
31/05/2007	John Hamer	The social dimension is going to expand, from course, to
08:58:00	(John Hamer)	programme, eventually include industry practitioners
31/05/2007	Carol Higgison	John: thanks for the clarification. I agree, getting students to
08:58:06	(Carol (Moderator))	differntiate between quality and questionable sources is
		difficult (for me as well ;-))
31/05/2007	Charlotte Taylor	David , not sure waht you mean?
08:58:26	(CharlotteTaylor)	
31/05/2007	Carol Higgison	Charlotte and John: it seems to me that for both of you this is
08:58:51	(Carol (Moderator))	actually more than an idividual effort and that you need to
		and have managed to bring your colleagues along
31/05/2007	David Nicol	by having more of the work online you would see how the
08:59:06	(DavidNicol)	feedback helped students improve their work, for example
31/05/2007	John Hamer	Most are waiting to see how it turns out
08:59:22	(John Hamer)	
31/05/2007	Charlotte Taylor	all reports drafts etc are submitted through WebCT so we do
08:59:33	(CharlotteTaylor)	have that data set
31/05/2007	David Nicol	ok
08:59:54	(DavidNicol)	
31/05/2007	Charlotte Taylor	Carol - I think my colleagues indulge my strange ideas
09:00:14	(CharlotteTaylor)	
31/05/2007	Carol Higgison	I'm now going to bring this session to an end. Thank you very
09:00:25	(Carol (Moderator))	much to John, Charlotte and Colin and to all of you who took
		part. Any final comments before the chat closes?
31/05/2007	John Hamer	I'd love to hear from anyone who might be willing to try using
09:00:59	(John Hamer)	reflective essays in a more traditional course
31/05/2007	Charlotte Taylor	Thanks to you all for the comments ideas and encouragement!
09:01:04	(CharlotteTaylor)	Will be in touch for more ideas!!

- TRANSCRIPT ENDS -

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