

DEVELOPING STUDENTS' ACADEMIC SKILLS

Definition of academic skills

Academic skills are those skills that students need to succeed at university. For example, students generally need to be able to write a good paragraph or critically analyse a journal paper. They are also referred to as academic literacy and academic numeracy skills [see Learning and Teaching website for a more detailed list of academic skills].

On enrolment at university, students' levels of academic skill acquisition can sit anywhere on a long continuum and some students need support to develop the skills required in assignments. The good news is that these skills can be developed both through additional generic or discipline specific workshops and through purpose-designed course materials.

Academic skills and information literacy

Information literacy skills can be seen as a subset of academic skills in a university setting. Broadly speaking, information literacy skills involve knowing where and how to search for quality information relevant to the task at hand, and how to utilize and manage it once it has been found. Academic skills then come into play and begin to interface with information literacy skills, beginning with the note-taking stage.

Generally, LTSU staff provide assistance with academic skills and the Library staff provide information literacy support [See library website link below].

Why should I develop academic skills in my course?

While generic workshops can assist some students, current research suggests that embedding academic skill development into course activities and support materials benefits a greater number of students. The advantage of embedding activities into your course is that the course content is the focus, rather than generic material. Therefore students gain an understanding of the specific discipline concepts and processes in your course as they develop hand-in-hand with their academic skills.

Providing support for students' academic skill development has also been shown to reduce student anxiety and student questions about assessment, thereby saving the lecturer valuable time.

How to embed academic skills in your course

Designing activities to develop academic skills involves you analysing the steps a student must take to produce a quality final piece of assessment. Each step can be broken into a separate activity starting with simple skills early in the course and building to more complex skills as the course continues. You can also use the following strategies.

- LTSU *templates* can be used to develop specific skills within your course [see the Learning and Teaching website address below].
- *Self-testing and self-reflective activities* are useful ways for students to test and develop their knowledge and skills before they are required in a piece of assessment. Self-testing also requires no additional marking by the lecturer.
- Provide *examples and model answer* that encourage your students to engage with the concepts in the course and facilitate the development of relevant academic skills.

Example

Assessment task	Supporting activities	Delivery mode(s)	Academic skills developed
Academic essay	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Analysing essay question examples.2. Critical reading exercise using one chapter or journal article.3. Draft essay plan	<p>In lecture, course materials, class activity, discussion board</p> <p>In lecture, course materials, class activity, discussion board, assessment component.</p> <p>In lecture, class activity, course materials, discussion board, assessment component.</p>	<p>Analysing questions</p> <p>Critical reading skills</p> <p>Planning for and writing in specific forms.</p>
Mathematics assignment	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Applying formulae to different cases2. Peer-marked mathematic calculation exercises, using solutions and detailed marking rubric.	<p>Class and online activity</p> <p>Class and online activity</p>	<p>Situate mathematics in different contexts</p> <p>Using and interpreting mathematics</p> <p>Using feedback</p>

Contact

For further information about how to develop or embed academic skills in your course, see the Learning and Teaching website: <http://www.usq.edu.au/learnteach/>

For more about information literacy, see <http://www.usq.edu.au/library/Infoabout/aboutlib/infoliteracy/strategy.htm>

Learning & Teaching Support
T: +61 7 4631 1685
E: academicdev@usq.edu.au
W: www.usq.edu.au/ltsu/develop/

USQ UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND
fulfilling lives