

Improving students' writing skills

Dr Nephtali Marina-Gonzalez and Professor Jennifer Rohn from the Division of Medicine introduced writing coaching activities and formative feedback into coursework to develop scientific writing and teamwork skills.

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JENNY: Writing skills are incredibly important for university as well future careers, but many students struggle to write well. So how did we tackle this?

NEPH: We implemented dedicated writing coaching activities and two-phase formative feedback into coursework assignments to allow year 1 students to acquire both scientific writing skills and teamwork skills.

JENNY: First, we teach the principles of scientific writing in a workshop. The students then work collaboratively in small groups and submit a 75 word draft that will eventually be incorporated into the final piece of writing.

NEPH: Next, the feedback!

JENNY: The first round is delivered during a synchronous session, to assess the writing structure of a random selection of anonymised submissions. All students then submit a revised version with tracked changes incorporating the lessons learned from the generic feedback session. This means that they can use the feedback to improve the final text.

NEPH: The second round of formative feedback is provided in writing to each Turnitin submission by two independent instructors, one assessing the writing style and the other assessing the scientific content. Three weeks later, the students complete and hand in the final version for summative assessment.

JENNY: But does it work?....

NEPH: Yes, we see definite improvement in student writing as a result of this intervention! It takes a bit of extra work on our side, but it's really worthwhile.