

LAS advisers as virtual tutors: A report on an interactive online writing course for undergraduate students

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This year the Language and Learning Skills Unit at the University of Melbourne launched its first tutor-moderated interactive online writing course for undergraduate students. This was developed and facilitated by the Unit's Language and Academic Skills Advisers (LAS) advisers and was part of the University's Academic Interactive Resources portal (AIRport). The course ran over four weeks and consisted of seven modules aimed at helping undergraduate students understand the conventions and processes of academic writing. Each module provided information, examples and interactive exercises on features of academic writing, and gave students the opportunity to submit written tasks to a 'virtual tutor'. The evaluation process involved analysing student submissions, administering an end-of-course questionnaire and obtaining detailed feedback from LAS advisers. This paper explores the issues and difficulties faced by the LAS advisers in developing and conducting the interactive writing course. These issues include: developing accessible materials and activities with a high level of interactivity to promote active learning; meeting the needs of students from a range of disciplines; and providing useful and timely feedback. The paper discusses strategies used by the LAS advisers in attempting to address these issues and it outlines the lessons learned. The key implication is the need to engage in continued professional development in the areas of online materials design and effective online communication. The paper concludes by describing the evaluation process and presenting a summary of the student feedback on the first course.

Key words: online learning, interactivity, academic writing, feedback,

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