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A systematic approach to designing English for very specific academic purposes materials tailored to a specific course in the main subject of a higher degree

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Abstract

This research looks at an area of materials design where little research has previously been conducted: English for very specific academic purposes (EVSAP). The research looks at related literature in EAP, ESP and ESAP, conducts a multi-stakeholder needs analysis, and incorporates the students into the materials design process itself. An analysis of the assignment brief and an interview with the unit lead of the chosen course in Digital Marketing were conducted, to identify aspects of academic writing and individual teaching activities that were beneficial to the course. The data gained from the interview were then used to create a questionnaire, which was distributed to students for completion. The data from the questionnaire were then processed into units of time; these units were then used to create the material's structure. Discussion of how to construct a framework for EVSAP materials design is included, as well as the completed framework itself and a rationale for its format. Finally, the conclusion discusses the scope and limitation of the model, such as its application in other contexts or with different cohort sizes.

Keywords: English for very specific academic purposes; materials design; embedded learning development; needs analysis.

Introduction

Context

There is often little provision for English language input for specific assignments at higher education (HE) institutions in the UK. There is arguably a gap in the teaching input, which can leave students without the academic English needed to achieve certain assignment

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objectives. This research aims to design a framework, which can be utilised to conduct a multi-stakeholder needs analysis and collect and analyse data to inform Learner Development (LD) materials design, to provide embedded sessions in a subject course to ensure the students have the English language input they need to complete very specific assignment objectives in HE. This aims to be a targeted, specific approach to materials design and has been called English for very specific academic purposes (EVSAP).

The university this research took place in is a HE institute based in the North-West of England. It offers LD sessions with the aim of improving students' academic writing skills and integrating these skills into their assignments. These sessions are available to all students, home and international, from foundation to PhD levels. Another facet of the LD provision is to deliver bespoke 'embedded' sessions into courses across all faculties. These sessions are developed when a faculty unit lead (UL) requests embedded sessions for a cohort of students, targeted to develop students' skills to succeed in a particular assessment. The UL will usually have highlighted areas for development in a cohort's academic writing capabilities, which may limit their success in the assessment. This research aims to develop a framework that can be used to design materials for these embedded sessions.

Background

The unit chosen as the site for this research was from an MSc in Digital Marketing. The unit mainly comprises of research methods and is focused on digital marketing strategies. The UL responsible for the design and delivery of the unit requested ten hours of LD sessions, broken into five two-hour sessions. These were delivered on Tuesday afternoons for five consecutive weeks. The research took place in June and July 2019, with delivery taking place in October and November 2019. The cohort numbered 32 students and the lessons were delivered to the entire group simultaneously. At the time of conducting the research, the ratio of native to non-native speakers of English in the cohort was not known. The unit's assignment brief (AB) (see Appendix 1) tasks students with writing a nine-page strategic digital marketing communications report for an organisation of their choice. It contains several specific objectives and requires a concise and logical structure. The UL identified that some focused academic writing input would benefit the entire cohort, so requested the embedded LD sessions.

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Guiding questions

1) How can a multi-stakeholder needs analysis be conducted systematically to ascertain the needs, lacks, wants and preferences of the cohort?

2) How can data gained from the cohort be utilised to inform the content and structure of the embedded sessions?

3) What is the best process to produce a broadly applicable framework for EVSAP session design?

Literature review

Exploration of ESP

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) provision is often utilised to allow learners to achieve specific language goals, usually within a defined professional field. ESP has been defined by the following three characteristics:

1) Meeting the specific needs of the learners.
2) Making use of the underlying methodology and activities of the field.
3) Being centred on language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis and register (Strevens, 1988, cited Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998).

ESP provision is designed for learners who are learning to communicate in a specific professional field (Anderson, 2014), such as engineers, doctors or diplomats. It is important to analyse the main differences in content, delivery and outcome that ESP offers, as this will help develop understanding of how EVSAP might be different to ESP. Task-based Learning (TBL) could be used as an example. In Duncker's candle, learners are given a candle, some drawing pins and a box of matches. They are then tasked with lighting the candle and allowing it to burn without wax dripping onto the floor or table. In an ESP course the teacher should carefully consider what language aspects of this task are the most relevant to the class. Construction engineers, for example, might consider the verbs, the language to discuss order and sequence or the skill of rebutting a suggestion. When discussing ESP courses two aspects of the learner are axiomatic: the purpose and the disciplinary subject (Harding, 2007). It is this sense of immediately equipping the ESP

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learner to deal with these two aspects of their situation that differentiates ESP from General English courses, where the subjects focused on might differ from activity to activity. This element of ESP, a focus on the subject language, is reflected in the design of the EVSAP sessions, where the focus is digital marketing.

Exploration of EAP

Hyland (2018) argues that the role of EAP is to familiarise the student with the relevant communicative conventions needed by apprentice members of the target community. However, EAP teaching is not always specifically correlated to the curricula, pedagogy or assessments students may encounter at an institution. Its role is assumed to be general skills preparation. Anthony (1997, p.9) defined EAP as 'the portion of the curriculum which prepares students for gainful involvement in study situations'. In this definition, the phrase 'study situations' is key. This implies a focus on the educational aspect, rather than the 'workplace' skills ESP emphasises. This focus on the educational aspect is also a defining feature of EVSAP.

There have been criticisms of the effectiveness of EAP. Benesch (2001, p.115) labelled EAP a service course to the official academic course, and Turner (2004, p.96 cited in Anderson, 2014) criticises EAP for leading to a 'short-cut mentality', with students assuming EAP will allow them to succeed in their course of study without considering the investment of time and effort it takes to succeed in the field itself. Consequently, Carkin (2005) identified a sub-division of EAP entitled 'English for Specific Academic Purposes' (ESAP).

Exploration of ESAP

ESAP focuses on developing language skills specific to a particular field of study. Detailing some of the key aspects of ESAP, Enongene (2013, p.59) states 'ESAP emphasises higher order skills, student development, and authentic text and features while working within specific epistemological traditions associated with different disciplines'. One key differentiation from EAP in this explanation is the use of authentic text. Text that relates to the field of study would not be used in the more general EAP. Conversely, in ESAP this aspect of specificity is a determining factor in course design and content (Hyland, 2006).

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The above provides a definition of ESAP, but it is important to consider what function it serves in a HE context to decide what elements of it are useful for EVSAP course design.

Anderson (2014) argues that an ESAP course should run parallel to the subject course but maintain its own integrity as a course. ESAP materials must serve the dual purpose of improving students' English skills, whilst still developing their subject knowledge. This bears similarities to this study's EVSAP context: the course will be delivered in tandem to subject delivery. This shows some clear similarities between ESAP and EVSAP; however, EVSAP materials must be more targeted: to improve a student's ability to complete a specific assignment to a high level.

Ensuring ESAP materials meet these criteria will provide learners with exposure to real language and its use in context. For example, a group of nurses presented with material containing an authentic interaction between a nurse and a patient, will gain far more from studying the discourse patterns here than from material not related to nursing. Another persuasive factor for using authentic materials in ESAP is student motivation. Guariento and Morley (2001) posit that extracting information from authentic texts in the target language can provide motivation: as learners are interested in the area, they will engage more with the material. Consequently, using authentic materials to scaffold learning in ESAP is vital, and this aspect of materials design should be incorporated into EVSAP.

The rationale for EVSAP

As previously stated, the LD team deliver central workshops and short courses sessions, which are voluntary, but Wingate (2006) argues central provision can separate study skills from the content of the course and reduce its effectiveness. Many researchers (Wingate, Andon and Cogo, 2011; Cottrell, 2001) cite the importance of subject lecturers and learning developers collaborating to design LD materials. This embedded approach means the sessions are compulsory to all students from a specific cohort and are targeted to their needs. Consequently, the whole cohort is exposed to targeted learning development opportunities (Minogue, Murphy and Salmons, 2018). This research utilises the embedded approach, as the UL is part of the needs analysis. As the sessions this research focuses on are embedded, there are similarities to ESP, and the focus being on academic language development bears similarities to EAP. The fact that these sessions aim to

develop the students' skills to succeed in a specific assignment creates the need for an EVSAP focus. This research aims to develop a framework for the creation of these EVSAP materials.

Methodology

Multi-stakeholder Needs Analysis

A needs analysis examines what the learners already know and what they are required to know (Macalister and Nation, 2011). To inform the design of the materials, a multi-stakeholder needs analysis was undertaken. The stakeholders were the UL and the students. Several steps were taken, and the order these are completed in was critical, as the results of each stage provided content and focus for the next:

1) Analysis of the assignment brief. This ascertained the assignment objectives, which allowed the EVSAP materials contents to be decided on. This was done first to inform the questions and areas of discussion for stage two.
2) Interview with the UL. The UL was a key stakeholder, as they knew the skills the students needed to develop. The information collected in this stage was used to break the core material contents down into individual teaching activities.
3) Questionnaire distributed to students. In this context the questionnaire was distributed to the previous year's cohort, who had undertaken the same assignment.

Analysis of Assignment Brief

Units of progression, or units of analysis, are recommended for curriculum design (Crookes and Long, 1993; Coxhead, 2000). The embedded sessions will be delivered in five, two-hour slots with multiple topics covered, so breaking the contents into units is a logical step. The first stage of deciding on these units was to analyse the assignment brief (AB). The Learning Outcomes, the instructions, and elements such as a sample assignment structure were looked at to decide on the materials' content. Due to the brevity of this article, a full analysis of the AB is not included. However, an example of the approach taken to an extract of the AB (Figure 1) is below.

Figure 1. Excerpt from the assignment brief.

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There is a strict and mandatory 9 x A4 page limit or equivalent as per details below. Any work beyond the end of 9 pages <u>will not</u> be marked.
(There is no 10% allowance.)

Written Report (Professional Format)

- Title page with your name, student ID number and the name of the business being used in this study.
- "Challenges and Objectives" Section
- "Techniques and Requirements" Section

An important element of an academic assignment is structure. Figure 1 illustrates that two clear sections are required. Reports are often highly structured and Read (2019) recommends utilising headings and numbered sections to ensure clarity. With two distinct sections, and multiple aspects in each, using clear headings and numbers will be essential. In summary, the analysis of the assignment brief allowed the aspects of academic writing needed to be identified. These were then used in the following tick-box activity and interview with the UL, to ascertain how to break the aspects down into individual teaching activities.

Interview with unit lead

The aim of the interview was to ascertain the aspects of academic writing the UL thought the students needed to develop, and to begin to break down aspects of academic writing into individual teaching activities. Firstly, a tick-box was created. Some core aspects of academic writing were put into the grid. These core aspects were decided by analysis of the assignment brief, and the researcher's own teaching experience. Each aspect was in a row, and the row had selection options. Selecting zero meant that the UL did not think the students needed any development in that aspect of academic writing and selecting five meant they needed extensive development. The UL was then informed that they had ten 'points' to allocate across the whole table, with a tick in the '0' column using zero points, and a tick in the '5' column using five points. The UL was then asked to complete the tick-box activity. The results are below in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Tick-box activity completed by UL.

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	0	1	2	3	4	5
Assignment structure				✓		
Using evidence				✓		
Writing Critically				✓		
Using appropriate register		✓				
Grammar E.g. tenses, syntax	✓					
Punctuation	✓					

The purpose of the tick-box activity was to use the UL's opinions to inform decisions on how much teaching time to allocate to each aspect of academic writing. The results of the tick-box activity were cross-referenced against the results of question one of the questionnaire for a final decision to be made on how much time to allocate to each aspect of writing. The aims of the interview were to go through the tick-box activity, and ask questions about each of the core aspects, to try to identify how these could be broken down into individual teaching activities. An example breakdown of one of the core aspects is shown below.

The UL was asked what development they thought the students needed on writing critically. They replied:

> The first aspect is actually criticality in terms of being able to select the right type of evidence for the recommendations you are making. Secondly, when you're writing a report, you have to be strategically critical of the information you provide to the client.

Based on this answer, two teaching activities were chosen to be placed in the questionnaire: identify techniques used to be critical, and practise critically analysing an

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organisation. These were chosen based on the researcher's previous teaching experience. This method of discussion with the UL was used to choose all the individual teaching activities to place within the questionnaire.

Questionnaire Design and Distribution

Following the analysis of the AB and the interview with the UL, a questionnaire was distributed to ascertain students' perceptions of the assignment and the aspects of writing they found challenging. A quantitative questionnaire was chosen to increase response rate, as Dornyei and Taguchi (2010) advise against aiming to gather qualitative data with a questionnaire, claiming open ended questions innately involve a superficial and relatively brief engagement with the topic. Using a close-ended questionnaire decreased the completion time, therefore eliciting a higher response rate. An 'other (please specify below)' was included in questions two to eight (Figure 4 and 8). This allowed respondents to include qualitative data to allow them to express views they could not otherwise include in closed questions. The entire questionnaire can be seen in Appendix 3.

A simple questionnaire, taking five to ten minutes to complete was chosen, to maximise the number of responses. The questionnaire was completed in a tutorial with the UL present, who was available to explain any language or elements in the questionnaire the respondents were unsure of. A Likert scale was chosen as the response option, as it allows each response to carry equal likelihood of being selected (Skehan,1989). An image of the constructed Likert scale is below in Figure 3. The first question aimed to ascertain how challenging respondents found each of the core aspects of academic writing identified previously.

Figure 3. Questionnaire Q1 showing Likert scale format.

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Page 2: Aspects of academic writing

This part of the survey uses a table of questions, view as separate questions instead?

1. Consider the following aspects of academic writing, and select how challenging you found each aspect when writing the strategic report.

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	Not challenging at all	Quite challenging	Very Challenging	Extremely challenging
Assignment structure	☐	☐	☐	☐
Using evidence	☐	☐	☐	☐
Using critical thinking and analysis with a business report	☐	☐	☐	☐
Writing critically	☐	☐	☐	☐
Using appropriate register. E.g. avoiding using 'I' repeatedly, and using suitably formal language.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Grammar E.g. tenses, syntax	☐	☐	☐	☐
Punctuation	☐	☐	☐	☐

Each of the subsequent questions took one aspect, for example 'writing critically', and aimed to find out how helpful respondents would have found the selection of activities designed to develop their ability to complete that aspect of academic writing in the report to a high standard. These teaching activities came from analysis of the assignment brief and interview with the UL. An image of the example Likert scale question on writing critically is below in Figure 4. The same format was applied to questions two to eight.

Figure 4. Questionnaire Q5 showing Likert scale format.

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5. Reflecting on your response to question 1, how helpful would you have found the below teaching activities on **writing critically**?

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	Not at all helpful	Quite helpful	Very helpful	Extremely helpful
Looking at models of criticality	☐	☐	☐	☐
Identifying techniques used to be critical	☐	☐	☐	☐
Identifying the language used to be critical	☐	☐	☐	☐
Practise critically analysing an organisation	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other (please specify below)	☐	☐	☐	☐

a. If other is selected above, please give details here.

Results of the questionnaire

To code the data, numerical values had to be applied to each response option. In this research, these values were assigned to the responses prior to distribution, and the value hidden from respondents. They are labelled 'rank value'. As all questions have the same number of response options, the same values were assigned for each question. For Q1, 'Not challenging at all' received a value of '1' and 'Extremely challenging' a value of '4'. For Q2 to Q8 'Not at all helpful' received a value of '1' and 'Extremely helpful' received a value of '4'. See Figures 5 and 6 below.

Figure 5. Rank value of response options.

1.1 Assignment structure

Rank value	Option	Count
1	Not challenging at all	2
2	Quite challenging	8
3	Very Challenging	3
4	Extremely challenging	2

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Figure 6. Rank value of response options.

2.2 Writing a paragraph using a set structure

Rank value	Option	Count
1	Not at all helpful	3
2	Quite helpful	9
3	Very helpful	3
4	Extremely helpful	0

When statistically analysing the results of the questionnaire, the mean rank was the crucial element to consider, because the mean rank (MR) would indicate how challenging or helpful respondents would have found each option. For example, if all the respondents selected 'extremely challenging' for Q1.1 (Figure 5 above) the MR would be 4. As there were 15 respondents to the questionnaire, if 10 selected 'extremely challenging' and 5 selected 'very challenging', the MR would be 3.666. This data was vital because this would allow clear conclusions to be drawn regarding what aspects of the assignment the respondents found challenging, and what input activities they would have found helpful. A high MR for Q1.1 means that the respondents found that aspect of the assignment challenging. For analysis purposes, statistical values have been assigned to the Likert scale responses as indicated in Figures 7 and 8 below. The standard deviation was also considered; however, due to a lack of variance in the standard deviation, this was not included in this write up. The statistical values assigned are indicated in red.

Figure 7. Statistical values assigned to answer options for Q1.

1. Consider the following aspects of academic writing, and select how challenging you found each aspect when writing the strategic report.

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	1 Not challenging at all	2 Quite challenging	3 Very Challenging	4 Extremely challenging
Assignment structure	☐	☐	☐	☐
Using evidence	☐	☐	☐	☐
Using critical thinking and analysis with a business report	☐	☐	☐	☐
Writing critically	☐	☐	☐	☐
Using appropriate register. E.g. avoiding using 'I' repeatedly, and using suitably formal language.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Grammar E.g. tenses, syntax	☐	☐	☐	☐
Punctuation	☐	☐	☐	☐

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Figure 8. Statistical values assigned to answer options for Q2.


Analysing the data

The questionnaire was distributed to twenty-eight students in total. 15 completed the questionnaire, which represented a 53.5% response rate. Figure 9 below shows each question, which is broken down into question categories. The column on the right-hand side shows the MR for all question categories.

Figure 9. Responses to Q1 showing mean rank of responses.

1) Consider the following aspects of academic writing, and select how challenging you found each aspect of academic writing.	
Question Category	**Mean Rank**
1.1) Assignment structure	2.33
1.2) Using evidence	2.6
1.3) Using critical thinking and analysis of a business report	2.73
1.4) Writing critically	2.6
1.5) Using appropriate register	1.73
1.6) Grammar	1.87
1.7) Punctuation	1.33

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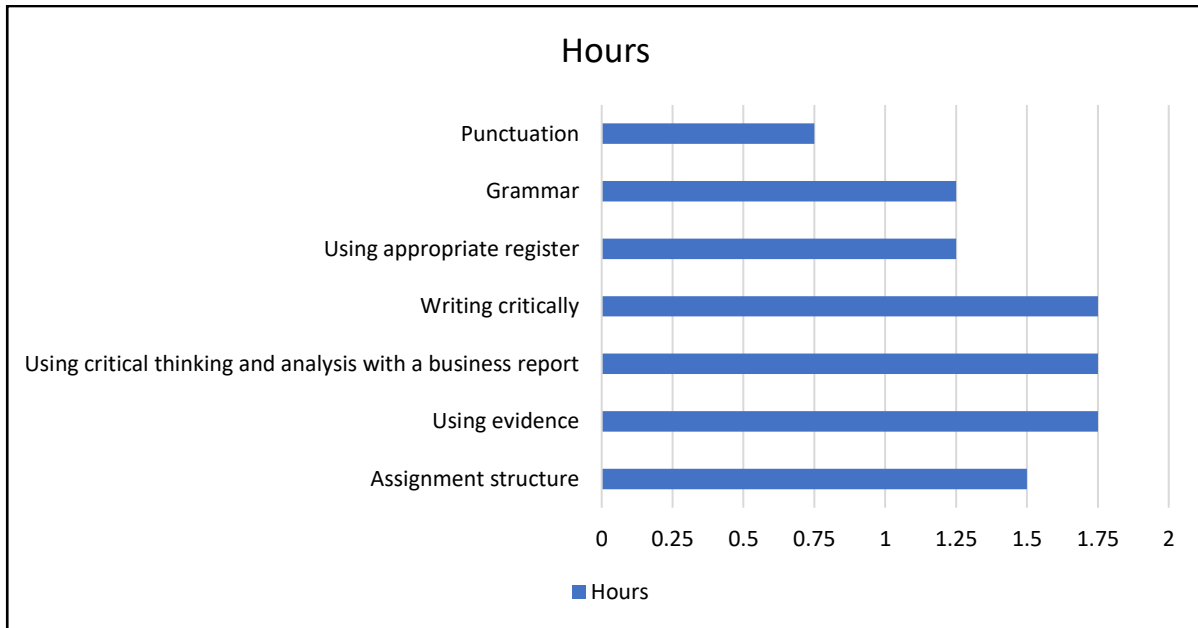
As can be seen from Figure 9, 'using critical thinking and analysis of a business report' (1.3) had the highest MR. This means respondents found this aspect of the assignment the most challenging. 1.3 is followed closely by 'using evidence' and 'writing critically'. Then there is a slight drop to 'assignment structure'. Beneath these aspects of academic writing, there is a steep drop-off to 'using appropriate register' and 'grammar', with 'punctuation' having the lowest MR. The mean rank results are illustrated in a pie chart in Figure 10 below as a percentage of the total mean rank value selected by respondents.

Figure 10. Percentage of the total mean rank each aspect earned.
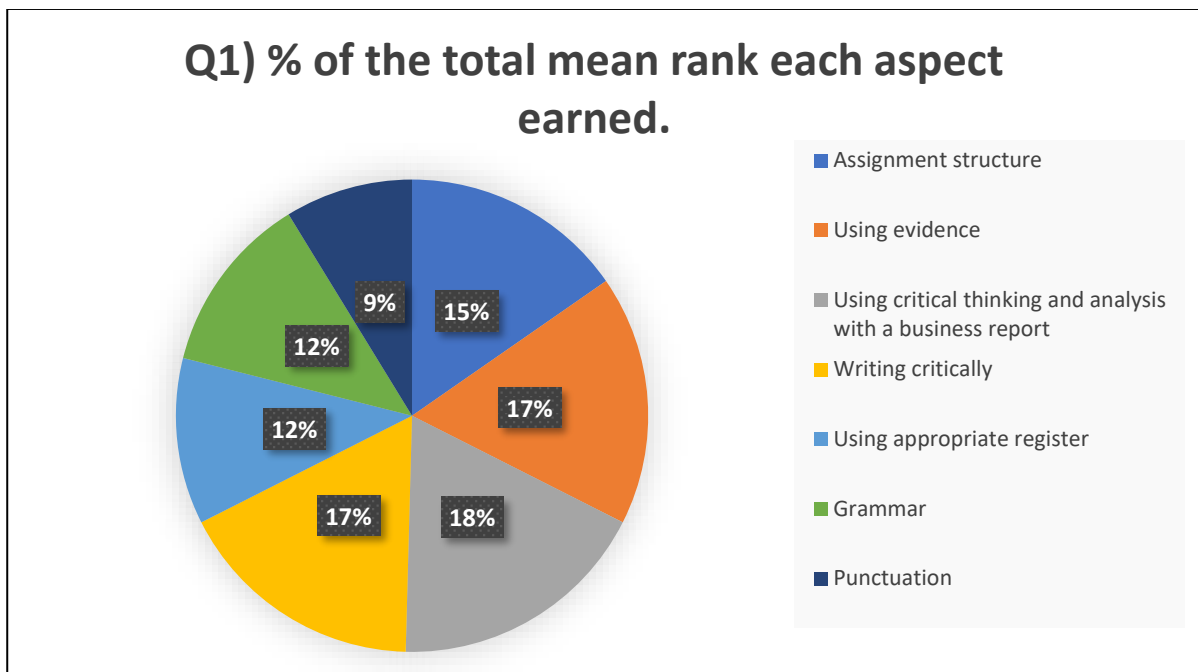
The mean rank for each aspect of writing will be calculated against the total time on the course. As it is a ten-hour course, the amount of teaching time, that will be dedicated to each aspect of academic writing is illustrated in the bar chart below (Figure 11). The percentages are rounded to the nearest 0.25 hour as this was considered a workable unit of time in the lesson.

Figure 11. Bar chart showing percentage of mean rank in minutes of total time.

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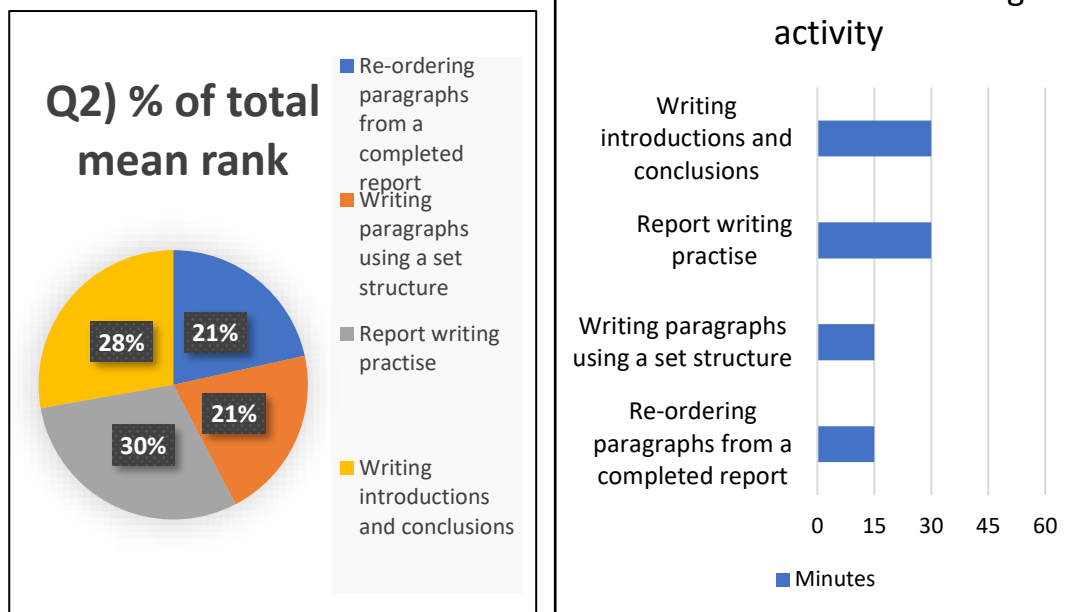

Q2-8) Data presentation

The same process used for Q1 was used to code Q2-8. The pie chart for Q2 is shown below in Figure 12, and Q3-8 are in Appendix 4 as they follow the same procedure. As no respondents made use of the 'other-please specify below' option, there is no qualitative data to analyse, so this answer option can be ignored. This leaves four teaching activities for each aspect of academic writing. The bar charts and each pie chart show the amount of time that will be spent on each teaching activity. Any teaching activities that came out with less than fifteen minutes were discarded, as they were not considered useful enough teaching activities by the respondents.

Q2) Reflecting on your response to question one, how helpful would you have found the below teaching activities on assignment structure?

Figure 12. Pie chart and bar chart showing coding of mean rank to minutes.

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Q2) % of total mean rank

- Re-ordering paragraphs from a completed report
- Writing paragraphs using a set structure
- Report writing practise
- Writing introductions and conclusions

21%, 21%, 28%, 30%

Minutes on each teaching activity

Summary of the Analysis

The table in appendix 5 summarises how long will be spent on each teaching activity, based on results. As can be seen in Appendix 5, there is a 0.75 hour disparity between the 10-hour course total, and the 9.25-hour total of the activities. This is due to the activity times being rounded to the nearest 0.25 hours. Therefore, an 8-to 10-minute plenary will be built into the end of each of the five sessions. The slight time cushion will also assist with absorbing any activities which run slightly over time.

Discussion

Collecting quantitative data from the students, on what teaching activities they would have found helpful to complete the assignment, was a valuable activity. It allowed the data to be processed as numerical values. These numerical values could then be converted into units of time, which were used to build the embedded sessions. Based on the data collected, a plan for the sessions was developed, and can be seen in Appendix 6. As can be seen from the course plan in appendix 6, there are a small number of activities from Appendix 5 omitted, as they can be covered in combination with other activities. For example, the two proofreading activities specified within 'register' and 'grammar' in the questionnaire have been combined.

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Framework design

Figure 13 shows the first two steps taken in EVSAP materials design, both of which involve an intrinsic choice by the materials designer. For the purposes of this framework, an intrinsic choice is defined as any decision that can be made solely by the researcher applying the framework and requires no third-party participation. Literature can be consulted, but the decision must be made solely by the materials designer. In the framework, these tasks will be presented inside figure 13.

Figure 13. Decisions made by the materials designer.

- Analyse assignment brief
- Analyse relevant literature

The stages represented in figure 14 are extrinsic tasks which need to be completed by the materials designer in collaboration with key stakeholders, such as the students or UL. In the framework, these tasks will be presented inside figure 14.

Figure 14. Extrinsic action to be completed by the materials designer.

- Semi-structured interview
- Tick-box activity
- Questionnaire to distribute to students

Figure 15 shows the complete framework for EVSAP materials design. Due to the systematic nature of the framework, where steps are applied in sequence, a flow chart format has been chosen. This format allows the practitioner applying the framework to follow the steps.

Figure 15. Framework for EVSAP materials design.

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A framework for EVSAP materials design

Key:

Extrinsic action to be taken.	Intrinsic decision to be made.

- Analyse assignment brief
- Analyse relevant literature

↓

- Create questions for unit lead (UL) interview
- Decide on core aspects of academic English for tick-box activity
- Decide on format and presentation
- Decide course goals

↓

- Conduct tick-box activity and interview with UL
- Analyse interview with UL
- Break the core aspects of academic writing into teaching activities

↓

- Populate the questionnaire with questions focused on the usefulness of the teaching activities
- Distribute the questionnaire to students

↓

- Analyse questionnaire results
- Finalise course contents from questionnaire data

↓

- Design course materials

↓

- Deliver course lessons

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Conclusions

Evaluation of findings

In evaluating the findings of this research, one element of EVSAP materials design stands out as being arguably the most crucial: needs analysis. Almost certainly, this is linked to the specificity of the goals for EVSAP materials, as EVSAP materials are designed to help students perform well in a specific objective. As the objectives are so specific, the needs analysis of EVSAP materials design should be extremely detailed, to best develop the skills the individual students need to achieve their common goals. This research collected data from two key stakeholders: the UL and the students. The order the data was collected in was vital. This data led to the creation of an informed data collection instrument, the questionnaire. The questionnaire content drew on the researcher's own experience, analysis of the assignment brief and an interview with a key stakeholder, the UL. When the questionnaire data was analysed, a clear picture of the students' needs was produced. This level of detail in the data collection and the order in which it was completed, was crucial to complete a needs analysis that matched the specificity of EVSAP materials design. The importance placed on the order of the data collection also informed the design of the framework. A flowchart was chosen, to help highlight the need for tasks to be completed sequentially.

Scope and limitations

As the framework was designed with the intention of being applicable to other materials design contexts, it is necessary to evaluate any limitations the framework may have. There are a wide variety of contexts in which the framework can be used. To apply the framework, and design EVSAP materials, the following conditions need to be present:

- An assignment brief, to ascertain goals and objectives.
- A member of staff, such as an academic who teaches the cohort, or the UL, to collect data and make broad preliminary decisions about needs and course content.
- A relevant student cohort. This could be a cohort who have previously sat the assessment, or the cohort who will sit the assessment. This is to identify detailed needs, which are necessary to inform course content and teaching activities.

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If the above conditions are present, the framework can be applied. Other variables, such as student numbers and assignment format may alter the way the framework is applied, but they should not fundamentally affect its effectiveness. For example, larger student numbers would simply mean there would be more data to analyse. If multiple ULs are involved with the project, it might also be necessary to conduct an interview with all of them to gain a more reliable picture of the assessment. If the assignment contains spoken elements, such as a presentation, then the core aspects contained in the questionnaire and the teaching activities would change, but the framework could still be applied.

The framework is designed to allow a practitioner to follow a set process and achieve data that will allow them to design materials suitable for an EVSAP context. This research focused on a post-graduate programme. This could have been a factor as to why the 'simpler' aspects of academic writing, such as utilising punctuation correctly and varying sentence structures, scored low levels of importance with the students. However, if the chosen subject course was a level three foundation course, then the framework would still be applicable. Analysis of the assignment brief and the interview with the UL might lead to different questionnaire contents, but ultimately the students can still self-select the aspects they identify needing development in.

The framework arguably has limitations. If the embedded sessions had limited length, it would be hard to justify the time spent on the data collection and analysis. These embedded sessions totalled ten hours, but a recommended minimum length could be six hours, to justify the time spent on data collection and analysis. The framework could still be partially applied; perhaps analysis of the assignment brief and an interview with the UL would give sufficient detail to construct a course which would be beneficial to the cohort.

Recommendations for further research

Ultimately, further research needs to be done to evaluate the framework. Long (1984) distinguishes between process/product evaluations. A process evaluation can focus on the process of learning and teaching, and a product evaluation looks at the product or result of learning and teaching. In this context, a product evaluation focusing on the results of the assignment may not be suitable, as there are variables such as the subject content which would mean it would be hard to judge the impact of the embedded sessions. A process

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evaluation focusing on the students' response to the learning and teaching would be suitable, as data on what aspects of the sessions they found valuable could be gained. This kind of evaluation will be undertaken in a future application of the framework.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the shift to remote learning, the framework was not applied in the academic year 2020-21. The next step in the research will be to apply the framework to other courses in the academic year 2021-22. The long-term goal would be to request other academics at universities around the world to apply the framework in relevant contexts. Once these results are analysed, the impact of the framework could be assessed, and necessary developments made. Then, a strategy for a wider application, both nationally and internationally could be created.

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Author details

Joe Greenwood currently works in the Learner Development team at Manchester Metropolitan University, where his main responsibility is designing and delivering short courses designed to develop students' academic writing skills. After several years teaching English as a foreign language in various countries, Joe returned to the UK and began working in HE in 2019. Holder of an MA TESOL and Applied Linguistics and a PG Dip TESOL, Joe is currently working towards his PhD by published works. His research centres around needs analyses, their creation and application.

Appendices

1. Extract from assignment brief.

Unit Title: MMC Route 'Strategy for Integrated Communications' & FT Man Met Route 'Strategy for Digital'		
Unit Code: 5U7Z0003	Core: Y	Level: 7

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Assignment Title: MMC Route Strategy for Integrated Communications & FT Man Met Route Strategy for Digital Assignment
Unit Leader: Jeff McCarthy
Contact Details: 0161 247 6751 jeff.mccarthy@mmu.ac.uk Room 6.31

Submission Date: FT MMU Route: 11.01.19 MMC Learning Route: 17.06.19	Feedback Return Date: 08.02.19 Feedback Return Date: 15.07.19

Submission Instructions: Electronic upload for MMC & Man Met FT
Feedback Return Information: Sent to student electronically
Assignment Task: See brief for details

Unit Learning Outcomes Assessed.   1. Create an integrated digital communications strategy for an organisation   2. Review current marketplace and digital communications capabilities of the organisation   3. Set a vision and goals for how the organisation communicates digitally
Early Career/ World Class Professional Skills (PLOs) being assessed or developed/assessed.   Assessed: • PLO 1: Our postgraduates will apply critical thinking to the analysis of situations, draw appropriate conclusions and make recommendations for action.   • PLO 2: Our postgraduates will be effective communicators   Developed: • PLO 3: Our postgraduates will apply a critical and reflective awareness of sustainability and ethical issues.   [Discussed in workshops and lectures, e.g. GDPR, Critical Success Factors)

2. Tick-box activity used with unit lead.

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MMC Route Strategy for Integrated Communications & FT Man Met Route Strategy for Digital Assignment

Identifying areas of development in academic writing

You have 10 points to allocate. Please place values in the boxes to indicate how much development you think the students need in each area of academic writing, in order to complete the assignment to a high standard.

0= no development needed   5= extensive development needed

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Assignment structure						
Using evidence						
Writing Critically						
Using appropriate register						
Grammar E.g. tenses, syntax						
Punctuation						

Participant signature: _____   Date: _____

Researcher signature: _____   Date: _____

3. Questionnaire distributed to students.

Assignment Support: Strategy for Integrated Communications Report Writing

33% complete

Page 2: Aspects of academic writing

This part of the survey uses a table of questions, view as separate questions instead?

1. Consider the following aspects of academic writing, and select how challenging you found each aspect when writing the strategic report.

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	Not challenging at all	Quite challenging	Very Challenging	Extremely challenging
Assignment structure	☐	☐	☐	☐
Using evidence	☐	☐	☐	☐
Using critical thinking and analysis with a business report	☐	☐	☐	☐
Writing critically	☐	☐	☐	☐
Using appropriate register. E.g. avoiding using 'I' repeatedly, and using suitably formal language.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Grammar E.g. tenses, syntax	☐	☐	☐	☐
Punctuation	☐	☐	☐	☐

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Page 3: Aspects of teaching input

In question one, you were asked how challenging you found certain aspects of academic writing during completing the report assignment.

Please consider your response to question one, and select how helpful you feel the different activities would have been to prepare you to write the report.

This part of the survey uses a table of questions, view as separate questions instead?

2. Reflecting on your response to question 1, how helpful would you have found the below teaching activities on **structure**?

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	Not at all helpful	Quite helpful	Very helpful	Extremely helpful
Re-ordering paragraphs from a completed report	☐	☐	☐	☐
Writing a paragraph using a set structure	☐	☐	☐	☐
Report writing practise	☐	☐	☐	☐
Writing introductions and conclusions	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other (please specify below)	☐	☐	☐	☐

a. If other is selected above, please give details here.

This part of the survey uses a table of questions, view as separate questions instead?

3. Reflecting on your response to question 1, how helpful would you have found the below teaching activities on **using evidence**?

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	Not at all helpful	Quite helpful	Very helpful	Extremely helpful
When and how to directly quote or paraphrase	☐	☐	☐	☐
When and how to summarise evidence	☐	☐	☐	☐
When and how to synthesise evidence (use multiple sources to explore one issue)	☐	☐	☐	☐
How to extract useful evidence from a text	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other (please specify below)	☐	☐	☐	☐

a. If other is selected above, please give details here.

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4. Reflecting on your response to question 1, how helpful would you have found the below teaching activities on **using critical thinking and analysis with a business report**?

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	Not at all helpful	Quite helpful	Very helpful	Extremely helpful
Practise analysing communication challenges for an organisation.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Techniques to identify new communication techniques for an organisation.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Practise creating critical success factors for an organisations marketing communications.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Supporting an argument with appropriate academic or industry evidence.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other (please specify below)	☐	☐	☐	☐

a. If other is selected above, please give details here.

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5. Reflecting on your response to question 1, how helpful would you have found the below teaching activities on **writing critically**?

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	Not at all helpful	Quite helpful	Very helpful	Extremely helpful
Looking at models of criticality	☐	☐	☐	☐
Identifying techniques used to be critical	☐	☐	☐	☐
Identifying the language used to be critical	☐	☐	☐	☐
Practise critically analysing an organisation	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other (please specify below)	☐	☐	☐	☐

a. If other is selected above, please give details here.

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6. Reflecting on your response to question 1, how helpful would you have found the below teaching activities on **using appropriate register**?

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	Not at all helpful	Quite helpful	Very helpful	Extremely helpful
Techniques to avoid using the first person 'I' and third person 'we'	☐	☐	☐	☐
Expanding suitable academic expression	☐	☐	☐	☐
Practising effective descriptive writing to analyse a case study	☐	☐	☐	☐
Practise proofreading work to identify and fix issues with register	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other (please specify below)	☐	☐	☐	☐

a. If other is selected above, please give details here.

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7. Reflecting on your response to question 1, how helpful would you have found the below teaching activities on **grammar**?

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	Not at all helpful	Quite helpful	Very helpful	Extremely helpful
Looking at issues with syntax (word order) and how to avoid these	☐	☐	☐	☐
Working on accurate and consistent tense usage in reports	☐	☐	☐	☐
Practising constructing different sentence types (simple, complex etc.) in a report writing format	☐	☐	☐	☐
Practise proofreading e.g. identifying and correcting spelling errors	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other (please specify below)	☐	☐	☐	☐

a. If other is selected above, please give details here.

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8. Reflecting on your response to question 1, how helpful would you have found the below teaching activities on **punctuation**? Please select **only** one response from each row.

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	Not at all helpful	Quite helpful	Very helpful	Extremely helpful
Apostrophe usage activities	☐	☐	☐	☐
Practising using commas correctly	☐	☐	☐	☐
Report specific punctuation e.g. using bullet points	☐	☐	☐	☐
Reviewing other forms of punctuation e.g. hyphens, ellipsis, square brackets, use of capital letters etc.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other (please specify below)	☐	☐	☐	☐

a. If other is selected above, please give details here.

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4. Pie charts showing student responses and activity time.

Q3) Reflecting on your response to question one, how helpful would you have found the below teaching activities on using evidence?
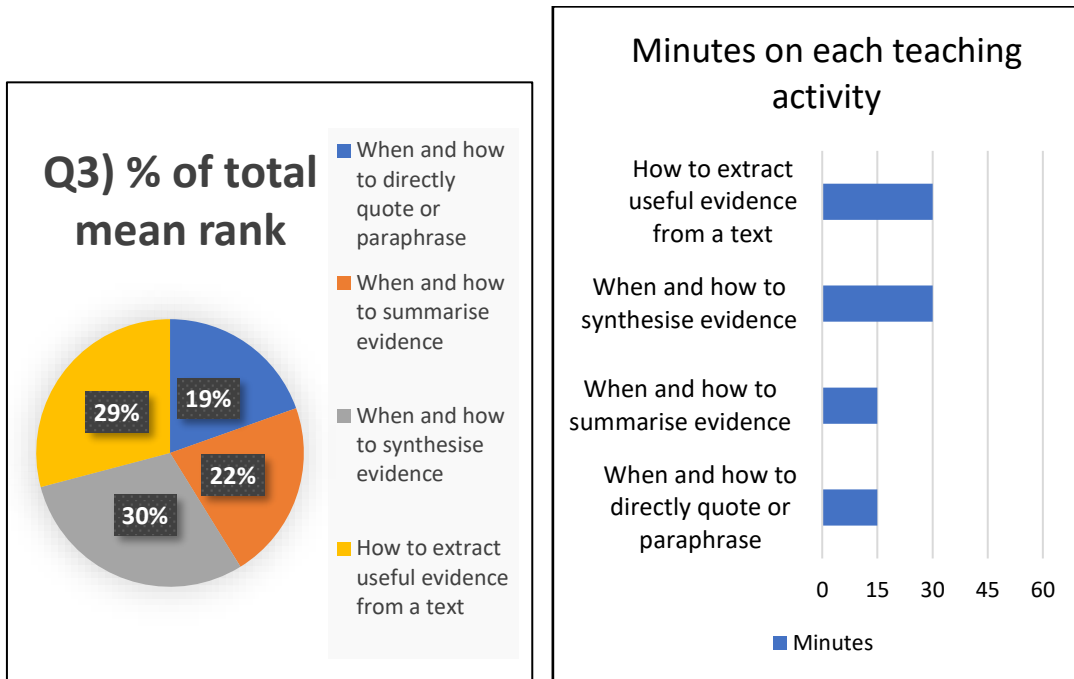
Q4) Reflecting on your response to question one, how helpful would you have found the below teaching activities on using critical thinking and analysis with a business report?

Q5) Reflecting on your response to question one, how helpful would you have found the below teaching activities on writing critically?

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Q5) % of total mean rank

Minutes on each teaching activity

Q6) Reflecting on your response to question one, how helpful would you have found the below teaching activities on using appropriate register?
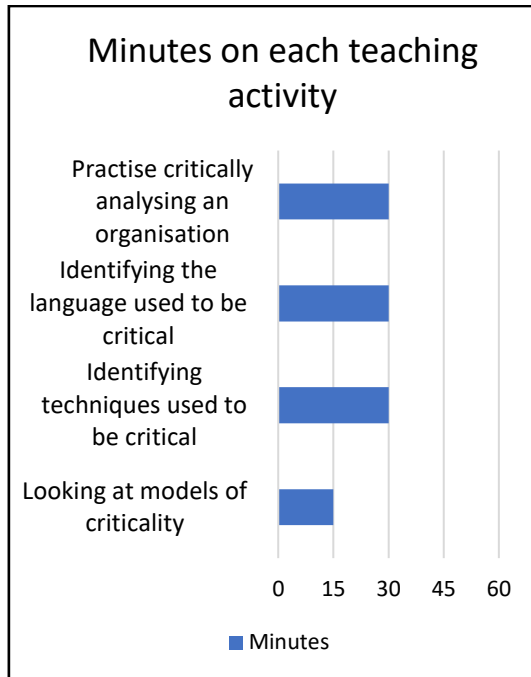
Q6) % of total mean rank

Minutes on each teaching activity
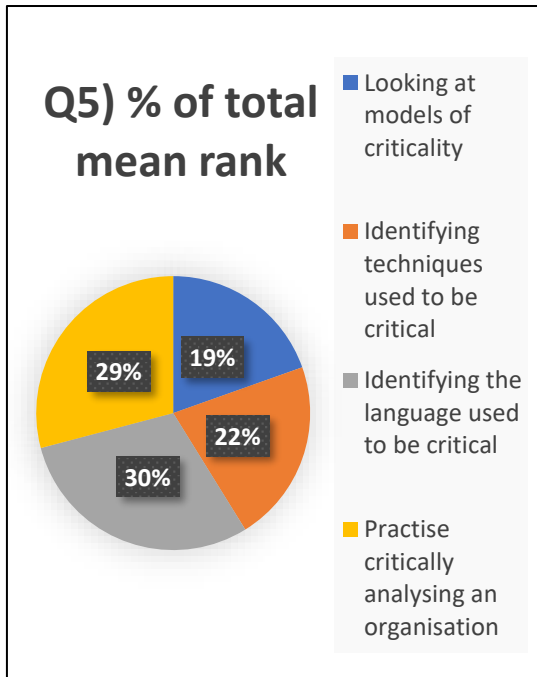

Q7) Reflecting on your response to question one, how helpful would you have found the below teaching activities on grammar?

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Q7) % of total mean rank

- Looking at issues with syntax (word order) and how to avoid these
- Working on accurate and consistent tense usage in reports
- Practise constructing different sentence types
- Practise proofreading

Minutes on each teaching activity

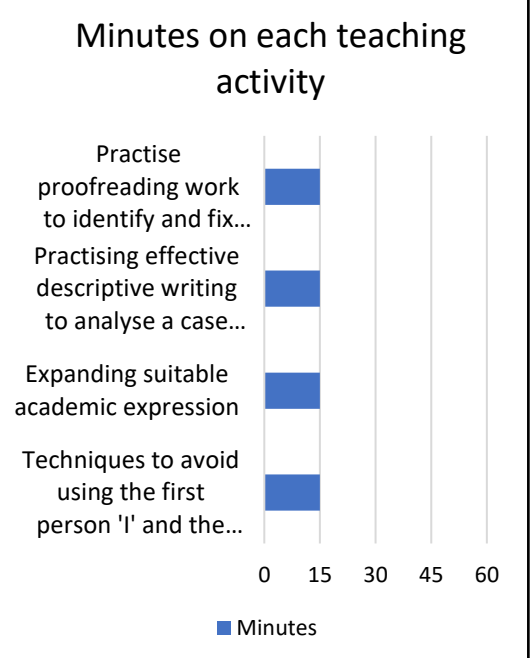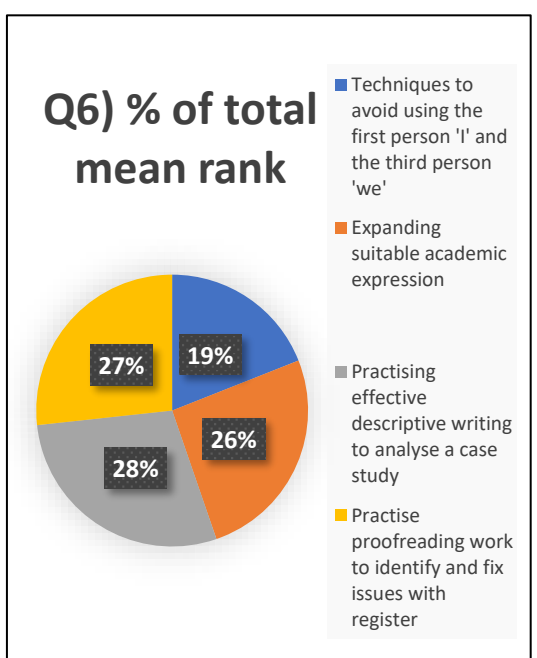Q8) Reflecting on your response to question one, how helpful would you have found the below teaching activities on punctuation?

Q8) % of total mean rank

- Apostrophe usage activities
- Practise using commas correctly
- Report specific punctuation e.g. bullet points
- Reviewing other forms of punctuation e.g. hyphens, elipsis etc.

Minutes on each teaching activity

5. Breakdown of activity timings.

Activity	Time (minutes)

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Assignment structure	
Re-ordering paragraphs from a completed report.	15
Writing paragraphs using a set structure.	15
Report writing practise.	30
Writing introductions and conclusions.	30
Total Time:	90
Using evidence	
When and how to directly quote or paraphrase.	15
When and how to summarise evidence.	15
When and how to synthesise evidence.	30
How to extract useful evidence from a text.	30
Total Time:	90
Using critical thinking and analysis with a business report	
Practise analysing communication challenges for an organisation.	30
Techniques to identify new communication techniques for an organisation.	30
Practise creating critical success factors for an organisation's marketing communications.	30
Supporting an argument with appropriate academic or industry evidence	15
Total Time:	105
Writing critically	
Looking at models of criticality.	15
Identifying techniques used to be critical.	30
Identifying the language used to be critical.	30
Practise critically analysing an organisation.	30
Total Time:	105
Using appropriate register	
Techniques to avoid using the first person 'I' and the third person 'we'.	15
Expanding suitable academic expression.	15

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Practising effective descriptive writing to analyse a case study.	15
Practise proofreading work to identify and fix issues with register.	15
Total Time:	60
Grammar	
Looking at issues with syntax (word order) and how to avoid these.	15
Working on accurate and consistent tense usage in reports.	15
Practise constructing different sentence types.	15
Practise proofreading.	15
Total Time:	60
Punctuation	
Apostrophe usage activities.	0
Practise using commas correctly.	15
Report specific punctuation e.g. bullet points.	15
Reviewing other forms of punctuation e.g. hyphens, ellipsis etc.	15
Total Time:	45
Total time of whole course in minutes/hours	555 minutes/9.25 hours

6. Possible course structure.

Activity	Time (minutes)
Lesson 1: report structure, introductions and conclusions.	
Analysing your question.	20
Writing introductions.	15
Writing paragraphs using a set structure.	30
Re-ordering paragraphs from a completed report.	30
Writing conclusions.	15
Closing and recap.	10

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Total Time:	120
Lesson 2: using evidence.	
How to extract useful evidence from a text.	30
When and how to summarise evidence.	15
When and how to directly quote or paraphrase.	15
When and how to synthesise evidence.	30
Supporting an argument with appropriate academic or industry evidence.	20
Closing and recap.	10
Total Time:	120
Lesson 3: Critical analysis of business report and looking at case studies.	
Phrases for identifying new communication techniques for an organisation.	30
Practise analysing communication challenges for an organisation.	30
Practise creating critical success factors for an organisation's marketing communications.	30
Working on accurate and consistent tense usage in reports.	20
Closing and recap.	10
Total Time:	120
Lesson 4: writing critically.	
Looking at models of criticality.	20
Identifying techniques used to be critical.	30
Identifying the language used to be critical.	30
Practise critically analysing an organisation.	30
Closing and recap.	10
Total Time:	120
Lesson 5: writing concisely, proofreading and punctuation.	
Looking at issues with syntax (word order) and how to avoid these.	15
Practise constructing different sentence types.	15
Report specific punctuation e.g. bullet points.	15
Reviewing other forms of punctuation e.g. hyphens, ellipsis etc.	15

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Techniques to avoid using the first person 'I' and the third person 'we'.	15
Expanding suitable academic expression.	15
Practising effective descriptive writing to analyse a case study.	15
Practise proofreading work to identify and fix issues with register.	15
Total Time:	120
Total time of whole course in minutes/hours	555 minutes/9.25 hours