

Attribution, referencing and commencing HE students as novice academic writers: giving them more time to 'get it'

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The requirement for commencing HE students to apply principles of attribution, including accurate citation and referencing, in their early academic writing frequently creates frustrations and tension for both students and academic teaching staff. Inadequate and inaccurate citation and referencing is frequently a factor in student writing being judged as unsatisfactory or of a poor standard. Teachers often provide considerable information on the necessity of attribution, and considerable detail on the mechanics of how to reference, and express frustration at the failure of significant numbers of students to demonstrate this in their written assessment tasks and assignment responses. In turn, a significant number of students appear not to 'get it' in relation to attribution, and appear overwhelmed and confused by the expectations placed on them as early academic writers. While telling students about attribution and providing detailed examples of how to reference is effective for some students, for many others current practices appear to be turning this aspect of academic writing into a 'battleground', where the drive to maintain academic standards and the policing of academic integrity policy takes precedence over student learning and skills development.

This session will explore expectations placed on commencing higher education (HE) students as academic writers. It will question current practices in the assessment of commencing student academic writing, advocating for a longer period of formative learning before students are expected to demonstrate awareness of attribution conventions and apply referencing styles effectively and accurately. Using the threshold concept framework (Meyer & Land, 2005), it will suggest value in viewing attribution as a 'conceptual gateway' through which students must pass in the process of becoming academic writers, and explore the implications of this for learning and assessment.

This topic is highly relevant to teaching and learning and significantly impacts on the first year experience for many students. It has implications in terms of student perceptions of their ability to cope with university study, and impacts on early progress and success. It provides a possible area for the integration of academic and learning support and a basis for collaboration on developing curricula that can better accommodate and reflect the process of becoming a novice academic writer. This session seeks to explore new ways to address student acquisition of academic literacies, and suggests providing students with more input, experience, time and formative feedback before requiring or expecting them to demonstrate competence in attribution and the application of referencing conventions.

Reference

Meyer, J., & Land, R. (2005). Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge (2): Epistemological considerations and a conceptual framework for teaching and learning. *Higher Education*, 49, 373-388. doi: 10.1007/s10734-004-6779-5