

Benefits of academic blogging

This presentation will describe a blogging project undertaken with first year undergraduates taking a required English 101 course at an English-medium university in Turkey. Students kept an academic blog for one semester. They were asked to write on it at least once a week, analysing course readings and themes or commenting on aspects of lessons. The choice of content was ultimately theirs, as long as it was related to the course. They were also expected to comment on others' blogs and respond to comments on their own. Their blogs were worth 10% of their Coursework mark, evaluated according to holistic criteria.

Selected blog posts, student feedback comments and interview data will be used to illustrate a number of improvements in students' academic writing skills. For instance, the inclusion of Creative Commons images increased their awareness of digital copyright and proper citation format. Regular engagement with course materials spurred on the development of a critical point of view - students first need to know what they think in order to write - and there was a concurrent development of vocabulary. Ongoing, dialogic feedback provided them with encouragement and constructive criticism, and their growing awareness of audience meant that they worked hard to find their own voices, a crucial stage on the way to becoming an academic writer. Furthermore, students used their blog posts and feedback to help them prepare for essays and written exams, and the blogs overall represent a portfolio of their writing skills over time. Overall, this project has shown that blogs can be effective and easy to use platforms for the development of academic writing skills, and that they have a number of advantages over paper-based media. Participants will be encouraged to consider how this project could be adapted to fit their particular teaching contexts.

Sonja Tack is a freelance instructor of English for Academic Purposes. Her main research interests are e-learning and feedback practices. She is currently working on a Postgraduate Diploma in Online and Distance Education at the Open University Institute of Educational Technology.