Academic Writing

‘There is no such thing as “academic writing” but rather students are required to write in a variety of genres and text types.’

Magyar, McAvoy and Forstner (2011)

Introduction

For many disciplines, writing (in various forms) remains the dominant means by which knowledge is communicated and student learning is assessed. As the quotation above reminds us, though, supporting students’ writing requires us to enable them to understand the varieties ‘of genres and text types’ that we ask them to produce. A generalised focus on some mythically over-arching and all-encompassing thing called ‘academic writing’ simply will not do. This focus leads to the production of advice and guidance that is of limited use to students working to make sense of the particular writing practices of their discipline.

What we need to do

Based on a proper understanding of writing as a context-specific social practice, we need to develop ways of supporting students in understanding and experiencing what it means to write effectively within their discipline(s). This involves enabling them to practise how to write within the particular contexts in which they are studying. It also involves ensuring that students are aware not only of how effective writing is recognised within their discipline, but also what effective writing actually looks like. As with the other areas of academic practice covered in this toolkit, our emphasis must be on developing experiential and dialogical approaches to supporting students’ writing.

Reference