

# Prizing Improvement: The Information Literacy Prize for Best Use of Feedback

Ann Cleary, Lorna O'Connor, Jamie Ward (DkIT Library), Brid Delahunt (Health & Science), Moira Maguire & Conor McKeivitt (CELT)

**Discipline:**  
Information literacy

**Feedback Approaches**  
Multistage assignment (Draft and Final),  
Rubric and written feedback

**Technologies**  
Turnitin via Moodle

## Challenge & Aim

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New information literacy practices can be challenging for first-years. It is important that students see information and academic literacy development as an ongoing process of improvement – feedback is central to this. More specifically, our aims were:

- To promote awareness of feedback among first year students,
- To explicitly demonstrate that feedback and effort are valued in DkIT,
- To encourage students to view the development of academic literacy as an ongoing process,
- To give feedback to librarians and SLDC staff,

- To promote collaboration between the library, CELT and lecturers,
- To develop skills in giving feedback that enables and empowers, rather than critiques.

Successful transition to Higher Education (HE) requires '*...developing knowledge, confidence and identity as successful HE learners...*' (Thomas 2012). Libraries play an important role in helping new students evolve academic identities and integrate into academic life (e.g. Haddow 2013). However evidence suggests that instruction in information literacy and academic writing may over-emphasise technical skills and under-emphasise the wider purpose of

## Evidence from the Literature

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the activities (MacGowan 2005). This can generate an overemphasis on avoiding plagiarism that undermines students' efforts to 'find their voices' (Delahunt *et al.* 2012). Indeed, after a decade of teaching IL as a technical skill, the DkIT Library shifted

to a Threshold Concepts (Meyer *et al.* 2010) approach. This arose from a felt sense that we were colluding with a discourse that critiqued rather than enabled and promoted rote practice rather than understanding.

## Evidence from the Literature

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The role of feedback in supporting learning is widely acknowledged (e.g. Nicol & McFarlane Dick 2006, Hattie & Timperley 2007). Academic expectations around use of information and writing are often implicit.

Good quality feedback helps to make these expectations explicit (Delahunt *et al.* 2012) and has been identified by students as an important driver for improving their writing (Everitt-Reynolds *et al.* forthcoming).

### Feedback Approach

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The 2016 Information Literacy Prize invited first-years to submit a piece of writing for formative feedback on the use of information and aspects of writing (not on subject content). They then had the opportunity to draw on the feedback to improve the piece and resubmit to be considered for a prize. Prizes were awarded for the best use of feedback and most improved work, rather than for the most information literate piece.

The team developed a rubric to provide feedback on the identification and use of information, including aspects of academic writing such as paragraph use and structure. A Turnitin assignment was set up on the library Moodle page, accessible to all students via

the Library website. The work was collectively reviewed by a panel comprising librarians, a lecturer and a member of the CELT team. Using the rubric, feedback was provided, along with additional written comments, following principles of effective feedback (Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick 2006). As students resubmitted their work it was possible to see the impact of feedback and what was learned. Students were asked to explain if and how they had used the feedback. A panel reviewed the revised work and accounts of how the feedback had been used (or not). Three prizes were awarded based on evidence of engagement with and learning from feedback.

## Outcomes

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Students completed a brief questionnaire when submitting their revised work. The evaluation draws on these responses and a series of reflective discussions held by the project team.

### Student Response

Responses from students suggest that they found the feedback process helpful, motivating and that it helped them understand issues so that they could make changes and enhance their work. Encouragement also seems to have mattered. Most affirming was the evidence that feedback had been actively engaged with and used to improve (often significantly) work.

*‘The experience of receiving feedback was really good. I received feedback for areas in my essay that I never would have thought I would get helpful notes, like constructive criticism.’*

*‘I found it very helpful to have someone else point out my disjointed sentence structure, sometimes it’s hard to see your own mistakes. It was also encouraging to know that someone took the time to read it and to give positive feedback if it was due, that was very rewarding’*

For those students who engaged, the experience was beneficial, however we were disappointed with the level of uptake: 15 entries and 6 submitted revised work (although the number of original entries is broadly in line with the number of entries to previous IL Prizes). Nonetheless, the publicity surrounding the prize has raised the profile of feedback internally. In retrospect, semester 1 would have a better choice than semester 2.

From the perspective of the team the experience was very positive. In particular, all involved valued the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues from other areas of the institute and some strong working relationships have been developed. For librarians, seeing the similarities between their assessments and those of academic colleagues was affirming.

We realised the common ground we share in caring about scholarly communication and supporting students as they evolve skills and understandings in this process. Developing the rubric was a very useful process that allowed us to clarify and agree our expectations. The use of the rubric provided a clear structure for evaluating the work and providing feedback. Following the principles of effective feedback helped us to create a model for feedback that affirmed the positives in work and this helped us to identify and challenge, often unconscious, assumptions, that feedback is concerned with criticism. From the perspective of the Library the process of feedback in a way created a crack in which it was possible to see IL in a new light, as a scholarly developmental tool rather than as a mechanistic model to apply to avoid plagiarism. In working with colleagues we realised that there are many allies in this and that by working together we strengthen our capacity and voice in challenging mechanistic assumptions and processes. We also formed bonds and found renewed respect for colleague expertise, care and attention that was inspiring and reassuring.

The process was time-consuming, particular in terms of the development and assessment phases, however this was essential in terms of coming to a shared understanding. However, going forward, we will be able to streamline the process. The rubric is currently being revised and simplified.

The Information Literacy Prize will continue to focus on use of feedback. In semester 2 of 2016/17 the prize will focus on 3rd years and in semester 1 of 2017/18 the prize will be launched for first-years again, as part of induction. The revised rubric will be used in Moodle assignment, rather than in Turnitin and this should make uploading more straightforward for students. A simplified review process will allow the team to review more submissions in a more timely manner and we are looking to expand the team.

## Recommendations

- Plan the competition well in advance to allow adequate preparation and maximize publicity and buy-in,
- Allow time for collaborators to meet and develop shared understandings – this is a process,
- Keep the technology as simple as possible.

## References

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### Contact



Ann can be contacted at  
[ann.cleary@dkit.ie](mailto:ann.cleary@dkit.ie)

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