

Writing skills module

Proposal

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This document contains the proposal for a writing skills module within the FHICT curriculum. The document covers motivation and basic design concepts. The appendix gives an example of lesson based on the design.

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Motivation

Among many professional skills an ICT graduate should develop and manage, soft skills have increased in demand within the IT sector recently. These include, but are not limited to, communication, teamwork, decision-making, time management and verbal and written skills. With the redesign of the FHICT curriculum architecture, the level of a unit of study is expressed in terms of the HBO-i framework which links professional tasks and duties with professional skills. However, there is little to no focus on the written skills.

Regardless of the chosen profile, a FHICT undergraduate student faces a variety of writing tasks throughout the profile program. These tasks become progressively complex, from writing project documentation (e.i. a project plan or user requirements specification in early internal projects), to writing process reports that describe the applied research methodology (e.i. internship and graduation process reports with partners in education). Thus, it is important to guide students in exploring writing styles to become better writers.

Therefore, writing skills module development is first and foremost needed to align with the entrance level and an exit level of the FHICT study units that have considerable writing tasks. While only Semester 3 has already been developed, this work also serves as proposal for new curriculum development for Semester 6, which is due to start in September 2021.

Analyse

Personal experience with Partners in Education (PiE) through student internships is one of the primary motivations to develop a writing skills module. Generally, PiE's feedback on written tasks boils down to informality in style and difficulty to provide a smooth flow of ideas. Furthermore, many alumni indicate struggles in the writing tasks, especially during the graduation. As a FHICT alumna, I recognize similar lack of information during my preparation for graduation.

The module would target Semester 3 and Semester 6 students, respectively.

Both semesters are in fact prior to the two internships semesters, which are the two study units heavily dependent on writing tasks. The students already acquire prior knowledge about the content of the writing tasks during internal projects in Semester 2, tasks which are repeated in Semester 3, during similar projects which usually involve PiE. Subsequently, with Semester 6 the focus on research would increase, thus, so would the complexity of the writing tasks.

The writing module can be integrated as supportive workshop. While the development of Semester 6 is not yet started, similar context is assumed.

Design

Learning outcomes

For the writing skill module, an additional learning outcome in each semester is formulated, namely communication in a written format. Both learning outcomes are shown together with a corresponding skills tree.

The relation to the professional product depends on each profile (e.i. project plan, process report, portfolio).

Learning outcome Semester 3: Basic communication writing skills

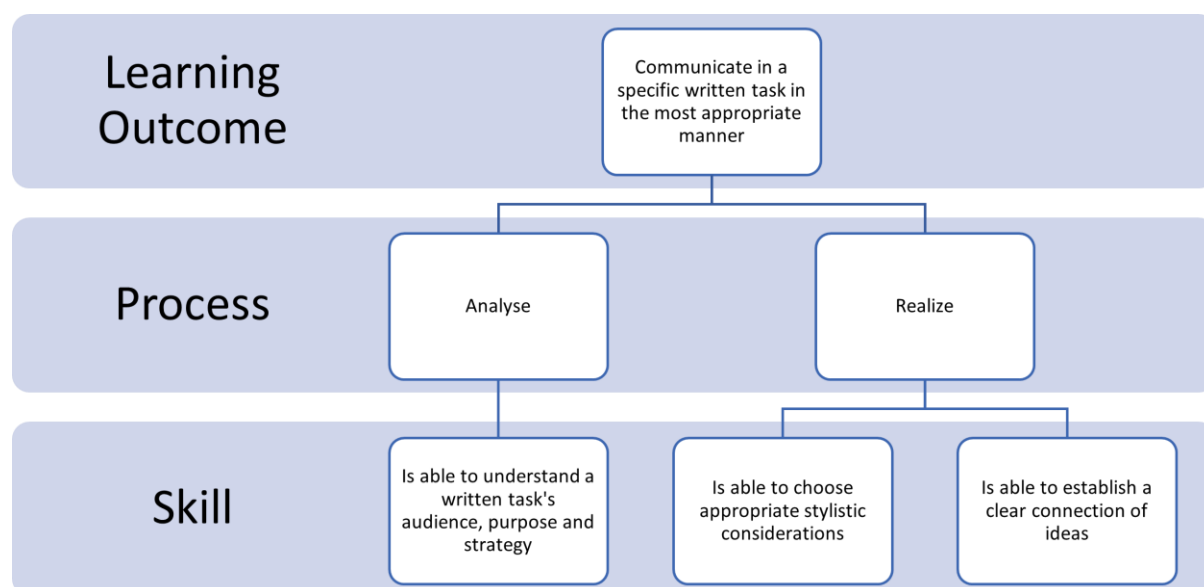
Communicate in a specific written task in the most appropriate manner.

Explanation

You can understand and position yourself as a writer from the point of your target audience, the purpose of your writing task and the strategy (or strategies).

You use basic stylistic considerations, and you are aware of your stylistic choices.

You communicate information smoothly, using logical connections between ideas.

**Learning outcome Semester 6: Advanced communication writing skills**

Communicate in a specific written task in the most appropriate manner.

Explanation

You use an appropriate/predictable format/pattern for a particular type of text (e.g. summary, introduction, data commentary).

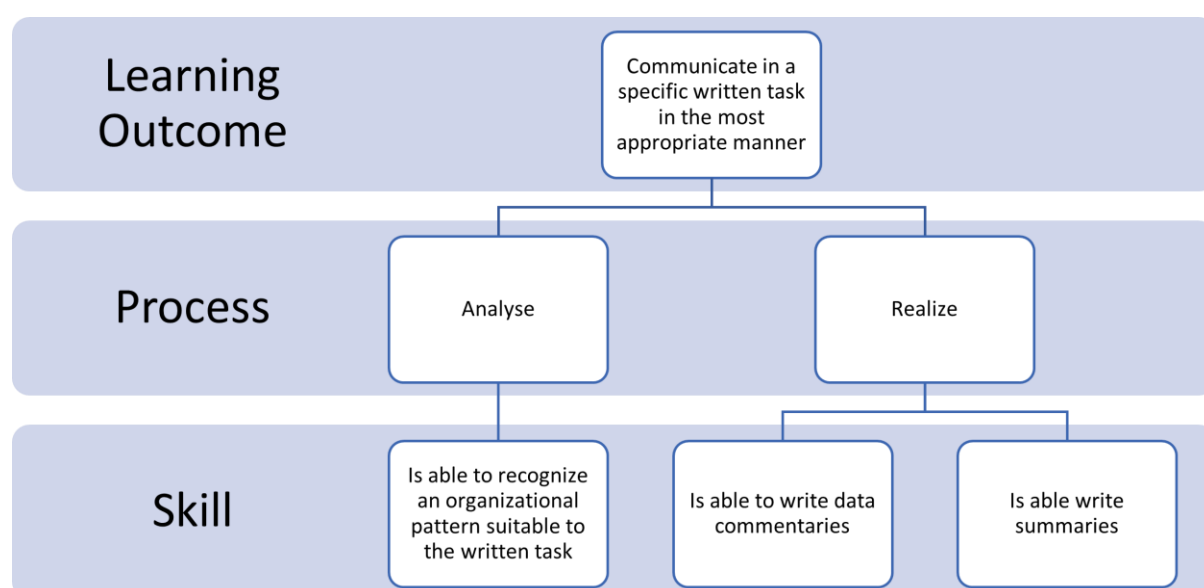


Figure 1 Learning outcomes and skill trees

Syllabus

Unlike Semester 6, in Semester 3 the focus is less on a particular type of text and more about reflecting upon a variety of aspects of writing. In Semester 6, the focus will be more about how to compose a particular type of text (e.g. an introduction to a report/portfolio, data commentary, summary or paraphrasing another piece of information). Also, Semester 6 succeeds the first internship (Semester 5) and is closer to the graduation internship (Semester 8), semesters where the writing tasks represent a major part of the assessment. Thus, having prior experience regarding the writing tasks expected in an internship, students can reflect on how to better organize a particular type of text.

The module's content is based on John M. Swales and Christine B. Feak's Academic writing for graduate students: Essential tasks and skills (3rd edition) (Swales & Feak, 2014).

Assessment

The learning outcomes defined in the design form the basis of the assessment. An individual assessment is often required to establish the individual proficiency, especially since in earlier semesters students usually perform writing tasks in groups. Hence, a combination of individual assignments and group assignment together with teacher's feedback would be used as the *formative indications*. This fits into the current curriculum architecture.

For Semester 3, writing tasks (e.g. project plan, URS, portfolio) are already part of the formative assessment. Furthermore, these tasks are usually group assignments. Thus, an individual assignment to test also individual proficiency is considered, custom to each ICT profile. This assignment is described in the table below for each ICT profile. The proposal was made based on the profile's current Semester 3 context.

Table 1 Assignment proposal for each profile

Software	Technology	Media	Business
Individual proficiency can be shown in the already existing individual track project which requires a writing task (e.i. report/portfolio). The individual assignment for the writing skill workshop can be then composing the <i>Introduction</i> chapter of this writing task.	Individual proficiency can be shown in the already existing assignment which requires a writing task, like the final portfolio. The individual assignment for the writing skill workshop can be then composing the <i>Introduction</i> chapter of this writing task.	Individual proficiency can be shown in an already existing writing task. The individual assignment for the writing skill workshop can be then composing the <i>Introduction</i> chapter of this writing task.	Individual proficiency can be shown in an already existing writing task. The individual assignment for the writing skill workshop can be then composing the <i>Introduction</i> chapter of this writing task.

Learning activities

The employed teaching method closely follows the 4C/ID model. This model describes four basic components fitted to the module as follows:

- learning tasks (theory and practical lessons)
- supportive information (course notes and worked out examples, explanation of basics, handouts)
- practice tasks (individual tasks that aid to better understanding of topic)
- procedural information (feedback and feedforward)

Develop

As module content was based on John M. Swales and Christine B. Feak's book (Swales & Feak, 2014) for each module topic examples suitable to the FHICT writing tasks chosen. Examples were developed or excerpted from other student's writing tasks.

For Semester 3 the writing skills workshop could be divided into two lessons but can also be combined. As shown in the learning outcomes, there are three main topics that constitute basic writing skills. Initially students are advised to reflect for whom, why they are writing and plan how to write (audience, purpose, and strategy), after which stylistic considerations and successful communication follows.

An example

A lesson plan is shown in Appendix A Lesson plan. Lesson materials are cross-referenced in the appendix.

References

Swales, J. M., & Feak, C. B. (2014). *Academic writing for graduate students: Essential tasks and skills* (3rd edition).

Appendix A Lesson plan - an example

Learning objectives

- Reflect on a writing task's audience, purpose, and strategy
- Choose appropriate stylistic conventions for a particular writing task

Topic	Description	Activity	Materials
Writing skills – an introduction	Give an introduction on the importance of writing skills	Discuss various types of writing tasks encountered throughout the study so far (e.g. project plan, user requirements, process report) Discuss writing strategy (strategies) students adopt when dealing with a particular writing task	<u>Slides</u>
Audience, purpose, and strategy	Analyse audience, purpose, and strategy for a writing task	Read and discuss excerpts of texts and try to identify author's audience, purpose, and strategy Discuss audience, purpose, and strategy for a writing task within the study (can use	<u>Practice Task 1</u> <u>Slides</u>
Stylistic conventions	Introduce various stylistic conventions	Discuss difference between phrasal (or prepositional) verbs and single verbs in writing tasks; practice several examples Discuss suitable vocabulary; practice several examples Discuss other stylistic conventions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – First-person pronouns – Addressing the reader/writer 	<u>Slides, Practice Task 2, Handout 1</u> <u>Slides, Practice Task 3, Handout 2, Handout 3</u> <u>Slides, Practice Task 4</u>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Active instead of passive voice – Contractions – Concise phrases 	
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Some slide examples:

Writing skills – an introduction

- What writing strategy did you use?
 - Translating , if English is an international language?
 - Referring to one or more example documents?
 - Relaying on mentor feedback?
 - Relaying on friends to proof read?
 - Developing a sense of target **audience**, with regards to what it should or should not be said?
 - Recognizing the need for some **writing conventions** and researching resources to achieve this?

Phrasal/prepositional vs. single verbs

An example:

Stakeholders and the customer representative **goes over** the progress and re-evaluate priorities at the end of each sprint.

Stakeholders and the customer representative **reviews** the progress and re-evaluate priorities at the end of each sprint.

A practice task example:

Practice Task 1

Read the excerpts from two texts that discuss the necessity of the virtual reality (VR) real-world immersion improvements. Try to answer the follow up question. Sentence numbers have been added for ease of reference.

- A. ① The possibility of transporting oneself to a different world has always been a dream of many. In the past, the best way to do this was to read a book and let your mind do the rest. ② Nowadays, with the help of virtual reality (VR), this dream has come even closer to reality, where not only your mind, but your vision is transported as well. ③ In the quest of making this experience even more authentic to the user many different methods have emerged, as for example haptics and 3D sound. ④ Haptics is the simulation of touch through the usage of vibration or other methods. ⑤ 3D sound is sound with a direction and origin, which behaves as real-world sound would with its intensity, being dependent on distance. ⑥ These techniques are aimed towards the improvement of the user's own physical feeling, but what happens when multiplayer is introduced to VR? ⑦ How does one express their virtual self to others? ⑧ Currently it is possible to find a 3D model from the web that can be used for this purpose, but as fun as it may sound for one to look like a game or movie character it is hardly professional in a business-oriented environment. ⑨ For this reason, a way to convey one's own real physical self must be introduced.
- B. ① Recent advancements of virtual reality (VR) technology include haptics and 3D sound. ② These techniques improve user's immersion into the VR's simulated environment, providing an elevated real-world experience. ③ However, the VR community lacks solutions for a fully immersion of a user's physique in the simulated environment. ④ This is a current problem in the multiplayer VR environment. ⑤ The VR community offers pre-rendered 3D models of various game or movie character but does not have an integrated solution to render custom 3D models. ⑥ Many VR client businesses have expressed their demands for availability of custom 3D model rendering for professional use. ⑦ Therefore, transferring a user's physique into the VR environment requires further investigation.

1. For whom where these texts written?
2. What aspect of each text helped you decide the audience?
3. In what kind of written task would you expect to find these texts?
4. How do the texts differ in terms of detail? What about in terms of vocabulary?
5. Do the texts appear to be well written?
6. What is the writer strategy in each text?

Teacher's guide:

1. Both texts are in fact examples of a final report introduction. Text B has been modified, while text A is an excerpt of a FHICT student's report introduction from the internship project. Text A reaches a broader audience, potentially non-experts. Text B was modified to fit a more specific audience, in this case VR researchers and experts. Audience of both texts are primarily university tutors, however, text B targets also VR experts or researchers, while text A assumes a more board audience, generally ICT-savvy readers.
2. In text A, the writer assumes the reader is probably not familiar with VR technologies, thus provides a fair amount of background information. In text B, the writer assumes reader's familiarity with the topic, specifically with terms such as haptics and 3D sound that require expert knowledge.
3. See 1.
4. Clearly, there is more detail in text A, while the vocabulary of text B is more formal.
5. Both texts have positive and negative aspects:
 - Text A introduces the reader better into the topic through better description of specific terminology and technology
 - Text A could improve on the communication and vocabulary; for instance, more concise sentences, avoid informal expressions 'to look like a' or 'in the quest of'
 - Text B uses better vocabulary, has short and concise sentences, it better establishes a niche and the need for the research, the text is written in passive voice (a preferred stylistic convention)
 - Text B could improve on the definitions of specific terms such as haptics, 3D sound and 3D rendering
6. In both texts, the writers remind the audience of the importance of physical immersion in VR.