

Title: **Breaking the code: An academic literacies approach to building students' reading and writing capability**

Presenter: **Claire Saunders, Ben Powis**
Solent University, Southampton

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

1. Identify some of the difficulties that students encounter with academic reading and writing, and suggest some reasons for these.
2. Use data from a research project with Football Studies' students to evaluate the advantages and challenges of embedding academic literacy.
3. Adapt academic literacy strategies in new and applied disciplines within contexts where students may be less confident about academic reading and writing.

Session Outline (no more than 300 words)

This session addresses two key questions:

1. What are students' main areas of difficulty in relation to academic literacy?
2. How does an embedded approach support students' academic literacy development?

One of the key barriers to student learning in 21st century higher education is academic reading and writing (Arum and Roksa, 2012). The problem is accentuated on highly applied and practical courses and in new universities with diverse intakes of students. Football Studies at Solent has 297 students, 90% male, with low entry grades. This proposal directly addresses the problem using an embedded approach to academic and critical literacies, situating these skills in meaningful contexts so that students not only better understand their subject but can read, write and talk about it with confidence (Wingate, 2006; Lea, 2004).

Using a theoretical framework of critical literacy (Luke, 2000; Wilson, 2004), we identify four roles of readers in relation to texts – code-breaker; text participant; text user and text analyst - and use these to explore how an embedded approach can help to develop students as critical readers and writers. Using our experience of embedding academic literacy in module design, we will show how using in-class active reading tasks and low-stakes writing activities have helped students not just to 'code-break' academic texts, but to grapple with their meaning, ask critical questions and begin to develop their own academic writing voice.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

The session is designed to showcase the embedded approach. Participants will undertake a series of reading and writing tasks that will enable them to meet the session outcomes, and then reflect on the value of this approach in their own contexts.

10 minutes Introduction and discussion activities:

Question: Reading and writing – what is it that students can't or won't do? Snowball discussion and feedback.

Question: Why are reading and writing difficult for students? Write for three minutes on this subject. Feedback.

Student perspective: data from our project – what do students say they find difficult?

25 minutes Jigsaw task: participants will undertake a scaffolded active reading task in which they will work collaboratively with some relevant articles on academic literacy to build a shared understanding of an embedded approach. We will reflect on the value of this kind of activity for teaching complex content.

15 minutes Overview of the Football Studies project: participants will work with focus group and field note data to explore the key findings from the project.

25 minutes Activity stations: participants will be able experience some of the activities we used with students, and see some of the work that students produced. They will reflect on the potential benefits of these activities for developing students' academic literacy. During this time, participants will be able to pose questions and add comments to a post-it wall.

15 minutes Summing up: We will use the questions and comments on the post-it wall as a springboard for summing up the key issues raised in the session. We will end with some student feedback on the project along with our own personal reflections.

References

Arum, R., & Roksa, J. (2010). *Academically adrift: Limited learning on college campuses*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lea, M. (2004). Academic literacies: a pedagogy for course design. *Studies in Higher Education*, 29(6), 739–756.

Luke, A. (2000). Critical literacy in Australia: A matter of context and standpoint, 43(February), 448–461.

Wilson, K. (2004). Reading readings: How students learn to (dis) engage with critical reading. *Proceedings of the 2004 Annual International Conference of the Higher Education Research*

Wingate, U., Andon, N., & Cogo, A. (2011). Embedding academic writing instruction into subject teaching: A case study. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 12(1), 69–81. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1469787410387814>

