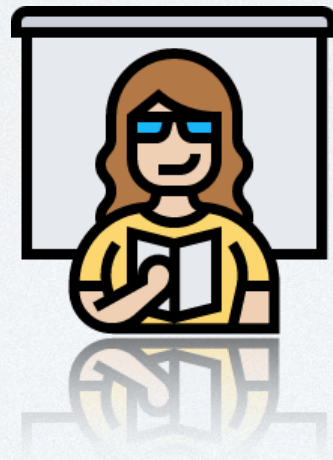


Assessment Case Study

# A Tutor's Journey



**Jennifer Francis** - A tutor's journey of  
designing online assessment.

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# Overview

In this JCU snapshot, we explore Jennifer's journey as a casual academic and tutor who was contracted to develop an online mode of a longstanding on-campus subject.

The concept of an online version was initiated after a survey of online students showed they wanted more writing support.

This elective subject (CU1010 Effective Writing) is available to most Bachelor and Diploma students who are worried about their writing, or perhaps have not studied for a while. It is also part of several Bachelor of Arts majors.

In Jennifer's case, she first had to educate herself about the digital tools available at JCU and about designing for active online learning. As a sessional tutor, she proactively crafted her own professional learning journey.

This snapshot describes how she built her own capabilities to develop an online iteration of the subject with assessment that promotes and supports active, engaged learning.

**Valid. Fair. Authentic. Continuous. Transparent. Varied Methods.**

# About this subject

## **CU1010 Effective Writing**

Internal & External Study Mode

Townsville & Cairns Campus

Co-ordinators Dr Marie Oelgemoeller  
and Assoc. Prof. Amy Forbes

Tutor Jennifer Francis

Journalism & Creative Writing  
(Academic Literacy)

This subject was intended to provide practical training on effective writing as a key generic skill for JCU students. It was designed to set students up for success in both their academic study and their future professional life.

CU1010 supports students to become effective professionals and scholars by equipping them with skills to develop and communicate logical arguments and express concepts clearly and concisely. An emphasis was placed on basic grammar, syntax, punctuation, analysis, planning, developing and editing writing for a practical application in academic essays.

Consequently, information transfer, communication and persuasion are key elements.



# Learning outcomes

Students who successfully complete this subject will be able to:

- ◆ Demonstrate knowledge of correct grammar, syntax and punctuation.
- ◆ Employ effective writing skills and techniques to different styles of writing.
- ◆ Practice an audience-centred, reader-oriented approach to writing.
- ◆ Construct an awareness of interdependence between analytical skills and clear expression.
- ◆ Integrate key stages (planning, writing, editing) in the writing process.

# Assessment tasks

## Task 1 (30%) – Tutorial Prep, writing exercises and participation

- ◆ This ongoing assessment task is designed to ensure students are prepared for tutorials so that they can gain the most from tutorial discussion.
- ◆ The associated activities are also designed to ensure effort is trackable and confirmable when undertaking marking and assessment moderation.
- ◆ **Preparation:** Students need to complete tutorial activities ahead of time (e.g. by viewing videos and completing quizzes afterwards).

- ◆ **Attendance:** Students need to attend the online tutorials (synchronously or asynchronously).
- ◆ **Participation:** Students need to participate in tutorials

## Task 2 (30%) – Grammar Test

- ◆ Students respond to the multiple-choice questions based on the intensive grammar materials received in tutorials, via a *handbook* and through online videos and quizzes.
- ◆ The grammar test is a quiz that involves completing 60 questions in 45 minutes.
- ◆ The time is sufficient for students to complete but not sufficient to look up answers.

- ◆ The purpose of this grammar test is to check how much the students can apply the grammar rules that have been part of the learning and to give students instantaneous feedback.
- ◆ Students complete practice tests to help them learn how to complete these kinds of quizzes quickly.

## Task 3 (40%) – Final essay

- ◆ Students need to analyse an essay question, apply their knowledge of essay structure.
- ◆ Demonstrate their ability to incorporate research material into an academic argument.
- ◆ Use research material provided to address the topic.

# Challenges

To transform CU1010 Effective Writing subject to an equivalent, quality, online iteration; challenges included:

- ◆ Developing the capabilities (as a teacher/ tutor) to exemplify good practice in designing for active online learning and assessment and in the use of available digital tools.
- ◆ Meeting students' need for flexibility and more regular feedback (from survey findings).
- ◆ Converting a workshop and workbook-based discussion classes to online activities.

# Approach - Developing capabilities

First, Jennifer needed to conceptualise the constraints of her role. As a tutor, she wasn't able to change the nature or timing of the main assessment tasks and her contract was time-bound. She also had to work out the constraints and possibilities of the LearnJCU Platform. Additionally, Jennifer needed to develop her own capabilities in order to both design and teach an active, engaging online subject.

Jennifer's transformation project was initially a pilot for the new LearnJCU environment. She developed her digital capabilities through spending time on the [Blackboard Help site](#). She watched short 'how to' videos and found good practice examples for designing quizzes and active online learning.

With little prior knowledge of what was possible in an online environment, Jennifer's interest piqued when she considered how to design for active learning as an online engagement strategy. She pursued her learning through reading academic blogs, articles and library books on how to teach actively online and the educational theories that underpin active learning. She also asked lots of questions of educational design and development experts at JCU. She then had meetings with the disciplinary team to discuss her ideas for the online design and gain their insights and input.



# Approach - Transforming the subject to an online mode

## From active learning to active participation in assessment and assessment preparation.

Taking onboard what she had learnt, Jennifer transformed the subject and **assessment tasks to an online mode** that encouraged active learning. In Assessment Task 1 (Tutorial Prep, Writing Exercises and Participation), the active assessment activities prepare students for Assessment Tasks 2 and 3. One of these activities requires students to actively participate in an online tutorial discussion (synchronously or asynchronously). In these sessions, students unpack the main concepts for the week and contribute examples (on a weekly discussion board) to promote discussion and gain further clarity around these concepts.

There are also short weekly quizzes on a specific aspect of content with instant feedback. In the first six weeks, the multi-choice quizzes allow learners to gain familiarity with the format of the grammar test (Assessment Task 2) and evolve their writing skills through automated formative feedback. From week 8, the type of quiz questions are changed to short answer question types to prepare students for the longer form writing tasks required for the essay (Assessment Task 3).

These types of short answer quiz questions require more input and monitoring by the tutor as feedback is not automated. However, Jennifer felt it is an effective way of keeping in touch with students and their progress in a relatively small class (approximately 30 students).

Additionally, Jennifer believes that asking students to reflect on their own writing and how they are progressing (using the quiz format) was more revealing (in a positive way) than direct conversations with students.

# Approach - Meeting students' need for flexibility and feedback

## Meeting students' need for flexibility and more regular feedback

The philosophy of this subject was that students are ultimately responsible for achieving their own success, and that the role of the teaching staff was to support students in attaining their goals. Students had some flexibility in how they completed the subject so they could juggle family and other commitments. While there were weekly deadlines, students could work at their own pace by working ahead of schedule or catching up when needed.

Regular feedback was provided in a number of formats. For online students, the automated online quizzes provided instant feedback. Additionally, students were given feedback on the clarity of their argument and writing style so that they could identify where they needed to focus their efforts.

Feedback was provided using a conversational style, being non-judgmental or harsh – Feedback was constructive and positive, designed to build their confidence in themselves and in the teaching team.

# Technologies

- ◆ Safe Assign
- ◆ LearnJCU Tests and Discussion Boards
- ◆ Collaborate
- ◆ Online videos (YouTube)
- ◆ Recorded lectures (Mediasite)

# Tips

- ◆ Think about how to redesign for the online medium, as what works face-to-face may not work online.
- ◆ Think about how to create flexibility to accommodate students' busy lives (e.g., asynchronous options, flexible timelines).
- ◆ Invest some time in finding out what the technologies can help you.
- ◆ Think about how the technologies can help save you time and also benefit your students (e.g. automated feedback).
- ◆ You don't need to use all the technology 'bells and whistles' to achieve quality online learning and teaching. Instead, use one or two strategic and pedagogically appropriate tools to ensure learning is engaging.
- ◆ Don't reinvent the wheel - research evidence-based good practice examples and apply your own context.
- ◆ Don't be afraid to 'crowdsource' your ideas - make use of your network to test and extend your ideas.