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Assignment title: Reflective Essay

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23:59PM

1. Description

A significant academic and digital challenge I faced was during my first attempt at writing my first reflective and time management essays using Google Docs. The task was to analyse time management in a report format and produce a self reflective essay, standard academic exercises. However, I found myself struggling to articulate my thoughts clearly in English and had difficulty conducting efficient research. My limited academic writing skills and vocabulary made it challenging to transform my ideas into coherent arguments. Additionally, while Google Docs was accessible and offered basic tools, I was not familiar with some of its academic features, such as suggesting mode, comments, citation tools, and version history, which could have improved the writing and feedback process.

This challenge became evident when I began writing the introduction and realised I was unsure how to structure my argument or link ideas coherently. The language barrier further restricted my ability to express complex thoughts clearly. As a result, my initial drafts were disorganised, overly simplistic, and lacked academic tone and referencing. I became frustrated and uncertain about how to begin improving my writing while keeping up with the deadlines.

2. Feelings

At the time, I was feeling overwhelmed and frustrated. Writing essays in English has always been a challenge for me, particularly when it comes to articulating my ideas clearly and confidently. I often found myself struggling to convert my thoughts into formal academic language, and this made me anxious. When faced with using Google Docs to begin my first academic essay, I felt even more uncertain — not only did I lack confidence in my written skills, but I was also unsure how to properly use many of the platform's features, such as formatting tools, comment sections, and referencing add-ons. This unfamiliarity added another layer of stress.

I remember feeling isolated, as I thought my struggles were unique to me. Seeing others work quickly and confidently made me doubt my own abilities even more. I worried that my weak grammar and limited vocabulary would make my arguments

unclear and my points difficult to understand. This fear held me back from starting and often led me to procrastinate. However, I also felt a strong desire to improve. I wanted to communicate my ideas effectively, and I knew that with the right tools and strategies, it was possible — I just didn't know where to begin.

3. Evaluation

The negative aspects of the experience were the initial confusion, lack of confidence, and the time lost trying to make progress without guidance. My limited understanding of how to research effectively also led to poor quality sources, and I struggled with paraphrasing and summarising information — key academic writing skills. The writing process was long and inefficient, and I often revised the same paragraph multiple times without making meaningful improvements.

On the positive side, the challenge forced me to become more self-aware of my weaknesses. Recognising the limitations in my English and academic writing gave me a clearer idea of the specific skills I needed to improve. Eventually, I explored learning resources on academic writing and Google Docs. I discovered features such as voice typing, which helped me get ideas down more easily, and explored templates for academic formatting. These tools, once unfamiliar, became valuable supports.

I also found Grammarly, which helped me see where my sentences were too complex or grammatically incorrect. After using these tools, I began to better understand how to simplify and structure my writing. I received useful feedback from a peer, who introduced me to the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL), which greatly improved my understanding of essay structure and referencing conventions.

4. Analysis

There were several underlying causes for the difficulties I encountered. Primarily, my challenges stemmed from a lack of prior exposure to academic writing in English. According to Wingate (2012), academic writing is not a generic skill but a social practice that must be explicitly taught and contextualised within subject-specific learning. I had not yet developed the skills necessary to write in an analytical, structured, and formal academic tone, which made the process more difficult.

Additionally, my digital skills were not advanced enough to fully utilise Google Docs as a collaborative and academic tool. While I could type and edit documents, I had not been introduced to its full potential for academic purposes, such as using the citation generator, inserting comments, and collaborating in real time. According to the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC, 2014), digital literacy includes the capacity to communicate and create using digital platforms for academic and professional contexts. My lack of digital literacy limited how effectively I could plan, write, and revise my essay.

Another reason for my struggle was poor research technique. I relied heavily on general Google searches, which often led to weak or unreliable sources. As recommended by Hart (1998), effective academic research should be planned, targeted, and critically evaluated using peer-reviewed journals, library databases, and reputable sources skills I had yet to develop. My unfamiliarity with Boolean searches and citation databases such as JSTOR or Google Scholar made my research less efficient and my references weaker.

In addition, my vocabulary and grammar limited my ability to articulate ideas. Nation and Beglar (2007) suggest that academic writing demands a wide range of vocabulary and grammatical structures to convey meaning precisely. Since I lacked this, my writing was repetitive and unclear. Tools like Grammarly offered some support, but they could not fully compensate for the foundational need to expand my academic vocabulary and grammatical range.

My hesitance to ask for help also contributed to the problem. Had I shared a draft with a tutor or sought feedback earlier, I might have resolved many of these issues sooner. This meant I didn't recognise what I was struggling with until much later in the writing process, when I felt overwhelmed.

Finally, the emotional factors, particularly my anxiety and fear of failure, influenced my mental performance. As MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) explain in their work on second language learning, anxiety can negatively affect cognitive processing, limiting both working memory and verbal output. My fear of writing badly likely compounded the linguistic difficulties I was already experiencing.

5. Conclusion

Looking back, there were several steps I could have taken to improve the situation earlier. I could have participated in or even created group study sessions on academic writing formed by peers and students. These sessions could cover and share essay structure, research skills, and critical analysis, all areas where I struggled. Attending such a session before beginning the assignment could have provided both practical guidance and confidence.

I also could have made better use of university library resources, particularly the subject guides and referencing tutorials, to locate academic sources and learn how to cite them properly. Sharing drafts with classmates might have helped identify areas for improvement and reduce anxiety.

Lastly, seeking support from an academic writing mentor or English language tutor earlier in the term would have helped me build a foundation before being expected to produce complex written work. According to Hyland (2003), explicit support in second-language academic writing environments can accelerate learners' confidence and skills development.

6. Action Plan

In the future, I plan to adopt a structured and proactive approach to developing my academic writing and research skills. I will begin by attending online academic writing workshops in the coming weeks, which will help me understand essay structure, argument development, and critical thinking. Additionally, I intend to book one-to-one support sessions with a writing tutor over the next three weeks, allowing me to receive personalised feedback on my work and identify areas of improvement. To strengthen my digital research skills, I will learn how to effectively use platforms like Google Scholar, JSTOR, and the university's library database to find credible academic sources. I also aim to explore the academic features available on Google Docs, such as "Suggesting Mode" and referencing add-ons like EasyBib, which can support my writing and citation accuracy. I will set aside three hours each week to practise writing responses to real essay questions and reflect on tutor feedback. Alongside this, I will maintain a reflective journal to track my progress, set new weekly goals, and ensure continuous improvement. This action plan will not only improve the quality of my academic writing but also build my confidence and independence as a learner.

7. SMART Plan

Specific- I aim to improve my academic writing and research skills by learning how to structure essays more effectively and use Google Docs' tools for planning, drafting, and referencing.

Measurable- I will attend 2 online academic writing workshops to improve my writing skills.

Achievable- These activities are accessible through the internet and can be scheduled around my current workload. I will dedicate 2 hours per week to this goal.

Relevant- Improving my writing and research skills is directly relevant to my academic success and will help me produce higher-quality essays with clearer structure and stronger arguments.

Time bound- Weekly progress of the online academic course at 2 hours per week will allow me to finish the 2 courses within 6 weeks.

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