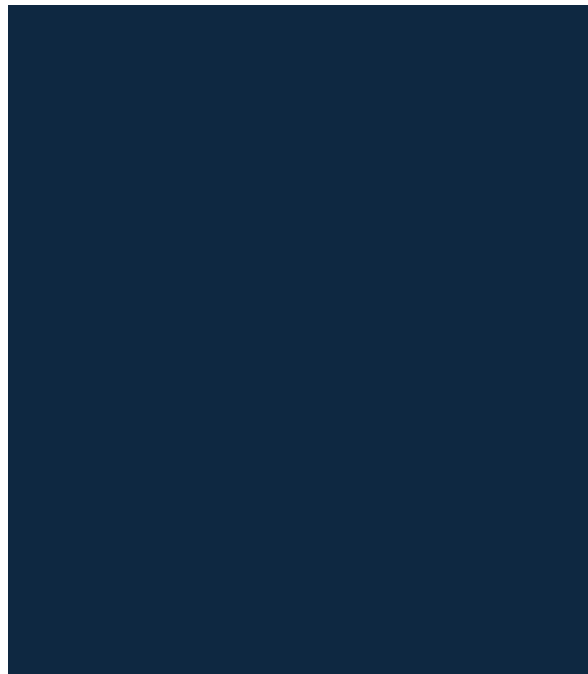




Academic Skills

Reflective Report

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Introduction

Okay, let's get real. When I signed up for this Academic Skills module, I convinced myself it was going to be a piece of cake. I mean, I've been slogging away at fire safety reports for over a decade, so surely academic writing couldn't be all that different from my day-to-day work, right? I was so sure that all I needed was a little time management wizardry to carry me through. But, boy, was I in for a surprise. The first few weeks hit me like a ton of bricks: while my scheduling skills were on point, grappling with academic referencing and note-taking felt like being thrown into the deep end without a life jacket. This report is my chance to sit back, breathe, and honestly reflect on what parts of the course helped me grow and which parts left me fumbling for the exit.

The Reality Check

When Sam kicked off the module with a talk on time management, I felt right at home. I'm all about deadlines in my line of work, so that bit was no problem. But then came the world of notetaking. I decided to give mind maps a try, only for my page to look like a mad, ink-blotted spider web a total mess that barely resembled anything useful. The Cornell method? It felt too boxy and rigid not my style. In the end, I clung to my familiar, haphazard bullet-point lists, even if not even I could decipher them later!

Week 5 really took the wind out of my sails. I walked into the referencing quiz thinking it would be a minor hurdle. At work, it's as simple as scribbling "See SD 9999, section 5.2" and moving on. But Harvard referencing? Suddenly, I was drowning in author names, publication years, and brackets everywhere. I tried to wing it, and yep I paid dearly in marks. That was my eureka moment: I had to seriously master this academic maze or keep getting tripped up.

What Actually Helped

I've always been a do-it-and-then-fix-it kind of person. After that referencing debacle, I spent countless evenings locked in with citation guides until the rules finally started to stick. It was frustrating, but seeing even a small improvement (and getting a nod from Sam) made all those late nights worth it.

Paraphrasing was another beast altogether. I'd either end up copying text in a panic or my attempts would twist the meaning so much that I wasn't sure I was even talking about the same idea anymore. I eventually discovered that it wasn't about swapping out

words arbitrarily the trick was to really digest the material first and then explain it in my own way. I remember reading a piece from Cottrell that hit me: it's all about understanding the content, not just playing with synonyms. And those linking words "however," "furthermore" that I used to dismiss as fluff? Turns out, they're like tiny signposts that help guide your reader through your argument. I've even started sprinkling them into work emails now, much to the amusement (or confusion) of my colleagues.

Work vs. Study: The Culture Shock

If you know anything about fire engineering, you know there's no room for ambiguity. There's a right way to install smoke alarms, and there's no debate about it; you follow the regulations, plain and simple. But academic writing... that's a whole different ballgame. Suddenly, I found myself not only required to present facts but also to acknowledge other viewpoints and carefully build an argument. It was like learning to speak a different language entirely one that demanded a balance between dry technical precision and a more creative, flowing expression of ideas.

I also had to unlearn some deeply ingrained habits from my work life. Back at the job, if I didn't know something, I'd simply roll up my sleeves and figure it out on my own. In academia, however, I quickly learned that asking for help isn't a sign of weakness it's an essential part of the process. My first peer feedback session was brutally honest: a partner told me that my writing sounded like "a list of facts" instead of a smooth, engaging argument. It stung, but it was exactly what I needed to push me into making some serious changes.

The Work-In-Progress

I'm not going to lie: I'm still figuring this whole thing out. Some days, my writing feels caught between two extremes: one moment it's as clinical as a fire safety manual, and the next it's too casual, like I'm chatting with a buddy at the pub. I still find myself half-guessing the right referencing format instead of double-checking the guidelines, and my note-taking remains an unsolvable puzzle.

But despite these hiccups, I can honestly say I'm making progress. My time management skills from the workplace are proving incredibly useful, and I'm starting to take a more nuanced approach to reading technical documents. Even though academic writing feels like trying on an unfamiliar suit at times, bit by bit, it's starting to feel more

like my own. Every awkward sentence, every piece of corrective feedback, has nudged me forward, even if the journey is far from over.

Conclusion

Looking back, I never imagined that this Academic Skills module would turn into such an intense ride of frustration, enlightenment, and unexpected wins. If someone had told me at the start that I'd be grappling with citations, wrestling with paraphrasing, and overhauling my entire note-taking system, I might have laughed it off. And yet, here I am feeling both humbled and strangely empowered by the lessons learned.

The biggest takeaway isn't just landing decent marks on assignments; it's about developing a toolkit that sharpens both my thinking and my communication skills. Whether I'm drafting a dissertation or preparing a fire risk assessment, I'm now equipped with strategies that help me build coherent arguments and express ideas more clearly.

I'm still far from perfect I'm still wrestling with finding that perfect balance in tone and battling my messy notes but every step, every misstep, has been a part of a genuine learning process. This module forced me out of my comfort zone and taught me that sometimes, stumbling and asking for help is the only way to truly grow. And maybe, just maybe, by next semester, I'll have finally cracked the secret to neat note-taking, and my academic voice will sound just as natural as my work reports.

References

Bailey, S. (2018) *Academic Writing: A Handbook for International Students*. 5th edn. London: Routledge. Cottrell, S. (2019) *The Study Skills Handbook*. 5th edn. London: Red Globe Press.