

## **Using a Reflexive, Discipline-Embedded and Scaffolded Academic Literacies Intervention to Facilitate Research Proposal Writing**

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### **Abstract**

The objective of this preliminary study was to ascertain the effectiveness of a reflexive, discipline-specific and scaffolded approach to postgraduate academic literacies development in order to inform future module design and pedagogy. Academic literacies development has historically been aimed primarily at undergraduate students and it has often been assumed that postgraduate students bring with them the necessary reading and writing skills to ensure success at postgraduate level. However, it is our experience that postgraduate students are not confident about academic reading and writing and that supervisors frequently comment that students' writing skills are not sufficient for masters and Ph.D. level. Bearing this in mind, academic literacy support was built into a masters in public administration research methodology course which, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, was conducted fully online in a block release format. The students enrolled in this course come from diverse disciplinary and institutional backgrounds and have varying understanding and experience of academic literacies. Synchronous and asynchronous interaction and activities were included in the module design with the aim of guiding students, from both a content and academic literacies point of view, to write a research proposal in order to fulfil the requirements for the master's mini dissertation. Academic literacies support was embedded in the module and a scaffolded pedagogical approach was used for both the discipline-specific and academic writing components. A reflexive approach was used as part of the design and delivery of the online module which was held over a five-day period and facilitated by the discipline-specific lecturer and supported by the academic literacy specialist. The preliminary study uses a qualitative review of the Research Methodology module in the Master's in Public Administration degree. Using a random sample from the 34 students registered for this module in 2021, a thematic analysis was conducted, taking into consideration the feedback students received after each of the assessments. Some of the academic literacy difficulties that the analysis highlighted were paraphrasing, synthesising, structuring, and grouping discussions logically and providing transitions to create cohesion in the research proposal. The results of this analysis were used to inform the design of additional academic literacies interventions. The preliminary findings indicate that the average mark for the module assessments increased significantly from the first to the second assessment. However, the average for the final assessment showed no further improvement.

This preliminary qualitative review of the Research Methodology module in the Master's in Public Administration degree raises the following questions:

What factors influence the efficacy of reflexive, discipline-specific and embedded academic literacies interventions?

How can the results of this study inform the design of academic literacies development interventions for postgraduate students?

**Keywords:** postgraduate writing, academic development, academic literacies, discipline embedded, scaffolded, reflexive pedagogy