What can we learn from the questions students bring to the Graduate Writing Centre?

UoE
Learning and Teaching Conference
June 2018
ELE Graduate Writing Centre

- Intended for international students (L2)?
- PGT and PGR (IAD UG)
- Pilot last year; trialled this year
- Started as ‘deficit’ approach (worries over numbers of ‘worried well’)
- This year around George Square
Procedure

A student or PT/ supervisor/ identifies an issue

MyEd Booking Channel  (One-to-one academic writing tutorials for international students)

Bring a piece of writing (around 350 words) **and a question**.

25 mins, 1-to-1 tutorial with a member of staff from ELE.
Tutors not graduate students so different to other Writing Centres.

Staff have degrees in linguistics and language teaching; the vast majority have many years EAP teaching experience at unis here and abroad.

We deal with text (main difference to IAD: study skills).

The question tries to ensure that students don’t ask us to proofread.
• Most Frequent Student Comment
• Very helpful. Cleared areas of ambiguity.
• Useful in understanding the structure of blog posts and how to be more specific about expressing my own opinion.
• I like the suggestion of websites, and the feedback on my style of writing.
• It is really useful in helping me improve my structure of writing.
• It was really helpful that it solved my primary confusions in terms of how to be academic and what ‘academic ‘ really means.
• I highly benefitted from the materials I was given in the session. I also appreciate that the particularities of my field were taken into account.
• For us,

• individual points of need,
• at student’s level of development,
• within the context of what students are doing.
• all feedback is relevant, timely, has face value.
• It's hit and hit, not hit and miss.
Watch this space

• I’m trying to find a set location (Main Library?) Working more at other sites, and with Schools.
• Not a fix-all!
• 50 minute sessions for PhD / PGR students.
• Webpages guiding students to appropriate writing support (PTAS)
• Home students?
• ‘Discourse analysis reminds us that comprehension is the ability to speak the pattern, rather than merely copy the model’

(Lemke, 1989, p. 140).
The two most common questions
My supervisor has rewritten my abstract/my paragraphs. I can see it’s really good, but how do I do that?
I got this feedback on my last assignment. What should I do now?
• Non-English rhetorical patterns often put the most important point last.
• Provide evidence
• Link your ideas
• Proofread!
• Solution: Be explicit about which point to deal with first

• And the classic-
• *I would* (stds interpret this as nice, but what should I do?)
‘Threshold concepts’ (Meyer and Land, 2003) in the GWC

• Focus!
• Every sentence has a job to do—too many fillers, and repeating the same info.
• Join the conversation—you have a right to be there! Your Chinese/Chilean/Malaysian knowledge is just as valuable as western knowledge(s) construction(s),
• ARGUE!
• Use your sources to DEVELOP your argument
• Focus on the relationships as much/more than the concepts (voice).
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References
