

# PREPARING FOR UNIVERSITY

## FutureLearn MOOC

Notes for teachers

# Week 6

# PRE UNIVERSITY MOOC

The Preparing for University MOOC was developed to equip students for the challenges of the university learning environment. The lessons focus on specific skills while reinforcing skills learnt in previous lessons throughout the 7-week course.

At university instructions are often not as specific as students would like them to be, so instead, students have to tackle questions and learn through feedback and discussion with their peers to understand how they might improve next time. The course is reflective of this process, and involves students completing specific activities with minimal training, taking time to reflect on their own skills, and discussions with teachers and peers.

The following notes will guide you through the series of weekly steps and activities of the Preparing for University MOOC. The notes will explain the rationale behind some of the steps and suggest questions you might ask to your students to guide them through the learning.



# WEEK 6: ACADEMIC CURRENCY

In this week, we cover 'academic currency', which relates to the importance of acknowledging others' work within pieces of writing and introduces the issue of plagiarism. Students will be prompted to think about their current understanding of key words and will be asked to engage in discussions of ownership in relation to academic study.

## Activity: Introduction to academic currency

### STEP 6.1: This is an introduction to academic currency

After watching the video which introduces the concept of academic currency, you might like to ask your students to explain the relationship between academic currency and plagiarism. Why is it phrased in the idea of theft? The answer to the question is that plagiarism is not so much about referencing (which students can get caught up in), it is about why we should reference things. Academic staff at universities within the United Kingdom are judged on the research they conduct, and which journals their research papers go into. Additionally, what academics write and where they publish can also determine what grants (research money) they can apply for, what promotion they might aspire to, and what money the university may get from the government. As such, acknowledging what academic staff have written is an important part of writing.

## Activity: Introduction to academic currency

### STEP 6.2: Plagiarism and acknowledgement

Below are three questions to prompt students to think about what they already know about this week's topic:

- What do you understand by the word 'plagiarism'?
- Why is it important to acknowledge the work of others?
- What would you expect acknowledgement for?

The third question is very important – they themselves may not be in the academic process of writing and publishing but it is still important for students to have their own efforts acknowledged. We cover this in the beginning of the discussion in the next step.

### STEP 6.3: Seminar about acknowledging the work of others

This video focuses on the concept of ownership. The seminar leader presents a series of scenarios and asks students to think about the point when they would feel frustrated that someone had taken something they owned or created and claimed it as their own. The conversation moves to the situation when students are at university. Students talk about how they put the work of others into their own assignments and how to avoid claiming the material of others as their own. The second part explores the subject of what students might lose if they plagiarise. The students in the seminar suggest that plagiarism denies them the chance to improve, which is an interesting point to raise. In this way, plagiarism can be viewed as denying them the opportunity to present their own ideas and develop their own skills. This is emphasised in the next step.

## Activity: Introduction to academic currency

### STEP 6.4: Depriving yourself of an opportunity

In this step, we discuss the issue of students getting other students to write their assignments for them. It is a growing industry and very worrying to universities. Leading on from the previous section, if students engage in 'contract cheating', or 'ghost writing' as it is called, they deny themselves the chance to learn. At the university stage, students are paying large sums of money to learn and should be taking advantage of the opportunity to study.

### STEP 6.5: Getting someone else to do your assignments

We ask students to think about why students might engage in 'contract cheating'. Often with these sorts of discussions, it brings about conversation highlighting the stress on students, the possibility of a late deadline, that they are not 'good enough' in some way or that they have too many other commitments. In all of these cases, universities provide support to allow students to overcome the issues that might result in them going to ask someone else to write the assignment.

Going to university is about learning, over and above the need to get a degree. We find that students nowadays are focused on the latter with their eyes constantly on their marks and what it means for their final result.

At this stage you could explore the following with your students:

- Why do they want to go to university?
- What would they like to get out of attending university?

It may be helpful to re-frame the final result of a degree course, emphasising that it is the end point of a huge learning process. Academic educators want students to explore the work we set them but also explore themselves, for example, learning by asking questions, and understanding how they learn as a learner. Each student becomes a wealth of their own knowledge and ideas. Their ideas are their own and this in turn comes back to ownership and plagiarism.

## Activity: Thinking about referencing

### STEP 6.6: Thinking about what needs referencing

Understanding that we must acknowledge the work of others is the first part. The next step is how we might do that.

The paragraph in this step refers to the work and ideas of others but does not include any references. When reading any piece of material, students should try to develop a little voice in their head which asks: 'who said that?' or 'how do you know that?'. To develop this further, students can revisit Week 1: asking questions. Wherever we feel the need to ask one of these questions we need to think about referencing that section of writing.

### STEP 6.7: Suggested answer to referencing exercise

The suggested answers (only suggestions, there are no 'right and wrongs', as such here), highlight two types of referencing:

- 1) Acknowledging the work of others, for example, the first two references.
- 2) Letting the reader know where information was found from a source. For example, the middle of the paragraph with (Wilson 1975).

### STEP 6.8: Errors in referencing

In this step, we focus on a problem specific to students as they start at university or higher education. Many first-year undergraduate students will use one source for an entire paragraph. This problem goes away as students' progress through university but it is a very prominent problem at the beginning of their studies. This step provides students with a paragraph with references throughout which is one of the ways students deal with this issue. We ask students to think of better ways of doing this. The wrong answer is to reference once only at the end of the paragraph, which is another way students deal with this. The next step provides a suggested answer.

## Activity: Thinking about referencing

### STEP 6.9: Suggested answer for incorrect referencing

This is where writing style comes in – if the student can improve their writing, they will be able to reduce the number of times a reference needs citing, which will help the whole paragraph flow better. As in step 6.6, the referencing must respond to the reader's questions of 'who said that?' and 'how do you know that?'. When these questions are asked there must be a reference but by improving the writing, using connectives and better punctuation, it is possible to reduce the number of times these questions are asked of the material.

### STEP 6.10: Lecturers' views on referencing

In this video, lecturers talk about their views on referencing. Lecturers appreciate that referencing is something students find hard. The lecturers also highlight different types of referencing. The video discusses the need to reference the right types of material, mainly from primary literature, which is usually of high quality. The lecturers also note the difference between referencing quotes and referencing ideas. The key is for students to understand why they need to reference. Simply following referencing rules is much harder if you don't understand why.

### STEP 6.11: Referencing in the different disciplines

Materials are referenced differently for almost every discipline. It is way beyond the scope of this course to go into the specifics. Each university will have their own referencing guides and each course/module will inform their students as to how they want their students to reference. If students are interested, a good source is 'Cite them Right', a comprehensive guide to referencing.

## Activity: Thinking about referencing

### STEP 6.12: Looking for where references are needed

In this step, we provide students with an exercise to get them thinking about where to reference. You can ask students to use the questions ‘who said that?’ or ‘how do they know that?’ to guide them in this exercise. The next step has a suggested answer.

### STEP 6.13: Suggested answer

This answer is one suggestion but there are other correct answers as well. To provide the answers, we asked the questions ‘who said that?’ and ‘how do we know that?’.

### STEP 6.14: Summary

Like the academics mentioned in the video, referencing is difficult. Reassure your students that they will be given help and support about referencing when they get to university.



# Top tips

## Week 6

1. Plagiarism is where you take someone else's words or ideas and do not acknowledge where they come from.
2. To plagiarise work is not only discrediting another academic, but it is also depriving you as the writer the opportunity to better your skills.
3. To avoid plagiarising others, when you're using images, words, or arguments that originate from somewhere else it is important that the reader knows who said it and when they said it. This forms the basis of referencing.
4. It's important to remember that it is not only the use of a direct quote that needs to be referenced but the ideas that have been expressed by the author.
5. Exactly how a reference is written in a text depends on the discipline you are in. Material is referred to differently, for example, in the humanities compared to sciences. There are also alternative methods of referencing within each discipline. Don't worry, your university will tell you what style of referencing you will need to use.

## Top tips video

This video involves students talking about going to university, sharing top tips on how to cope with the transition and how to make the most of the experience. Students emphasise work and the social side of attending university. Finding a balance is probably one of the hardest lessons to learn.

## Where to go from here?

In addition to the Preparing for University MOOC, we offer a classroom-based course, the Pre-university Skills Course. Continuing Professional Development courses will be available for teachers and school staff once schools and life go back to allowing gatherings of people. Please let us know if you would like to be informed when the next one will run in your area.

## Online resources portal for students

There are so many study resources available, but it can be time-consuming to find the resource students need. To help students, UEA have created a one-stop-shop resource centre, signposting to a selection of resources to help students on their journey to success. [everwondered.uea.ac.uk](http://everwondered.uea.ac.uk)

**We hope this course has helped prepare your students for the transition the university teaching environment and has equipped them with the skills to succeed when they arrive. If you have any feedback on the course or our teaching notes please get in touch with us at [schools@uea.ac.uk](mailto:schools@uea.ac.uk) and, on behalf of UEA, we wish your students the best of luck with their university journey!**