Jisc **Digital Student exemplars**
Enhancing the digital experience of students

Digital support for essay-writing skills

This exemplar is relevant to Digital Student challenge:

Prepare and support students to study successfully with digital technologies

Many university students struggle to write academic essays - particularly those who have been away from study for a while - and do not necessarily receive the support they need to understand what is required. With this in mind, a team based at the Open University and the University of Oxford has developed OpenEssayist, a system that offers automated formative feedback on students' draft essays. Feedback takes the form of an essay summary, a map of key words and their use through the essay, and identification of key structural elements (such as introduction and conclusion). These are communicated via various textual and visual representations. The system is agnostic as to content, so is available to students working in any subject area. Being online, it can be accessed whenever students are ready to engage with their essay task.

The system was developed in conjunction with students at the Open University, Hertfordshire University and Dubai University. Pilot studies found a significant positive correlation between the number of drafts submitted to the system, and the grades awarded for the first assignment. OpenEssayist is offered to academics and students to support the drafting of essays across a variety of subject domains and academic levels.

How does this meet the challenge?
- Unlike systems such as Turnitin, OpenEssayist is designed only for giving formative and developmental feedback.
- Students are in control of when, where and how they access support.
- Students use existing digital access and know-how in the context of learning support.
- While access to professional support staff is at a premium, OpenEssayist can provide additional support for more self-reliant students.

Find out more
- Open Essayist walk-through
- Narration by Denise Whitelock
- Project website

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