

WRITING IN A 'POPULAR SCIENCE' STYLE: A PARADIGM SHIFT

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ABSTRACT

The ability to write professionally and communicate effectively to a range of audiences is considered a fundamental attribute for scientists. To address this, the major assignment in a large second-year university microbiology subject is a written popular science article. Students critically review literature before synthesising and integrating it into a creative, informative narrative for a non-specialised audience. Students find adjusting their writing style and reporting scientific research to suit broader audiences challenging. Previously their articles incorporated too much scientific jargon and lacked creative, accessible narratives. Despite receiving writing instruction in first-year, many students paraphrased, summarised and synthesised the literature inappropriately.

Building on the first-year instruction, we designed and embedded targeted scientific writing practices into subject content. Our online interactive tutorials introduce and compare popular and academic science writing conventions. Students also actively practise paraphrasing, summarising and synthesising the literature in an aligned face-to-face workshop.

Our evaluation shows an overall improvement in students' ability to paraphrase, synthesise and adapt the scientific literature to suit the audience. Student engagement with the non-compulsory online tutorials is high and they report increased understanding and confidence in their writing. These results highlight the importance of continuing to teach academic writing in second year and beyond.

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