University of Bath

Miranda Armstrong
Tom Reid

Academic & Professional Communication Skills (APCS)

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t.g.reid@bath.ac.uk
Academic & Professional Communication Skills (APCS)

• Series of lectures
• Key skills for academic & professional communication
• Y1 undergraduates
• Discipline specific
Background & setting up

Why?
- Language and skills gap
- 1st year student experience
- Employability
- Widening participation

How?
- University approval
- Meeting the departments (Physics, Mechanical Engineering, Education: Sport & Social Sciences, School of Management: BBA)
- Funded by the English Language Centre (ELC)

Who?
- APCS teaching team
Preparing for input

Identifying students’ needs

- Analysis of marked work
- Analysis of assessment criteria
## Assessment Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality of Writing</th>
<th>Presentation</th>
<th>Abstract and Introduction</th>
<th>Experimental Details</th>
<th>Analysis and Discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Class</strong></td>
<td><strong>80+</strong></td>
<td><strong>75%</strong></td>
<td><strong>72%</strong></td>
<td><strong>Upper Second Class</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negligible spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors</td>
<td>Excellent presentation, layout and formatting; coherent and logical structure</td>
<td>Excellent description of the experiment’s aims &amp; objectives, its context and any applications of the work</td>
<td>Student achieved much more than would normally be expected</td>
<td>Insightful critical assessment, with an excellent discussion of the advantages and limitations of the techniques used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exemplary writing style; lively and articulate writing, showing excellent command of technical terminology and strong arguments</td>
<td>Creative use of well designed and relevant figures and/or tables</td>
<td>Excellent description of the academic relevance of the experiment. Excellent description of physical background to the experiment, at a level exactly appropriate for the audience</td>
<td>Evidence of excellent experimental skills</td>
<td>Excellent analysis of the results, including insightful comparisons with relevant theoretical or experimental results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entirely succinct, clear and precise descriptions and explanations</td>
<td>Perfect formatting of figures and/or tables, equations and references</td>
<td>Excellent linkage of the text with figures, tables and equations</td>
<td>Excellent quality and quantity of results, presented clearly</td>
<td>Errors and uncertainties treated and discussed entirely rigorously and appropriately</td>
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<td>Excellent linkage of the text with figures, tables and equations</td>
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<td>Evidence of creativity, innovation and initiative.</td>
<td>Clear, justifiable and complete conclusions.</td>
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<td><strong>Upper Second Class</strong></td>
<td><strong>69%</strong></td>
<td><strong>65%</strong></td>
<td><strong>62%</strong></td>
<td><strong>Lower Second Class</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Very few spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors</td>
<td>Good presentation, layout and formatting; coherent and logical structure</td>
<td>Good description of the experiment’s aims &amp; objectives, its context and any applications of the work</td>
<td>Student achieved more than would normally be expected</td>
<td>Strong critical assessment, with a very good discussion of the advantages and limitations of the techniques used</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good writing style</td>
<td>Well designed and relevant figures and/or tables</td>
<td>Description – with good reference to the available academic literature in the experiment’s field</td>
<td>Evidence of strong experimental skills</td>
<td>Good analysis of the results, including comparisons with relevant theoretical or experimental results</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nearly all descriptions and explanations are succinct, clear and precise</td>
<td>Good formatting of figures and/or tables, equations and references</td>
<td>Good description of physical background to the experiment</td>
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<td>Text links well with figures, tables and equations</td>
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<td>Evidence of some creativity, innovation and initiative.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lower Second Class</strong></td>
<td><strong>59%</strong></td>
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<td><strong>52%</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>A few spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors</td>
<td>Satisfactory presentation, layout and formatting; coherent and logical structure</td>
<td>Satisfactory description of the experiment’s aims &amp; objectives, its context and any applications of the work</td>
<td>Student achieved as much as would normally be expected</td>
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<td>Adequate analysis of the results, including comparisons with relevant results</td>
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- **First Class**
- **Upper Second Class**
- **Lower Second Class**
## Sample Feedback

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<td>52%</td>
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- **Good description of the experiment’s aims & objectives, its context and any applications of the work**
- **Description – with good reference to the available academic literature in the experiment’s field**
- **Good description of physical background to the experiment**
- **Insightful critical assessment, with an excellent discussion of the advantages and limitations of the techniques used**
- **Excellent analysis of the results, including insightful comparisons with relevant theoretical or experimental results**
- **Clear discussion of the advantages and limitations of the techniques used**
Sample Feedback

<table>
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<tr>
<td>39%</td>
<td>☐ Riddled with spelling, punctuation or grammatical errors</td>
<td>☐ Shoddy layout, presentation and formatting; incoherent structure</td>
<td>☐ Very weak description of the experiment’s aims &amp; objectives, its context and any applications of the work</td>
<td>☐ Student achieved very little throughout experiment</td>
<td>☐ Little or flawed discussion of the advantages and limitations of the techniques used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35%</td>
<td>☐ Totally incoherent writing style</td>
<td>☐ Poor figures and/or tables</td>
<td>☐ Very poor or missing description of the available academic literature in the experiment’s field</td>
<td>☐ Very weak, experimental results.</td>
<td>☐ Very weak analysis of the results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32%</td>
<td>☐ Largely incomprehensible descriptions and explanations</td>
<td>☐ Missing or incorrect formatting of figures and/or tables, equations and references</td>
<td>☐ Very weak description of physical background to the experiment</td>
<td>☐ Very poor quality and quantity of results, or results presented very poorly</td>
<td>☐ Treatment of errors and uncertainties weak or flawed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49%</td>
<td>☑ Numerous misspellings, punctuation or grammatical errors</td>
<td>☑ Passable presentation, layout and formatting; structure sometimes incoherent and confused</td>
<td>☐ Poor description of the experiment’s aims &amp; objectives, its context and any applications of the work</td>
<td>☐ Student has not achieved as much as would normally be expected</td>
<td>☐ Weak experimental skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45%</td>
<td>☑ Clumsy or inappropriate writing style, often lapsing into colloquialisms, inappropriate tense, mixture of writing styles</td>
<td>☑ Adequate figures and/or tables</td>
<td>☐ Description with poor reference to the available academic literature in the experiment’s field</td>
<td>☐ Poor figures and/or tables</td>
<td>☐ Poor quality and quantity of results, or results presented poorly</td>
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<tr>
<td>42%</td>
<td>☑ Sloppy and confusing descriptions and explanations</td>
<td>☑ Formatting of figures and/or tables, equations and references sometimes incorrect or incomplete</td>
<td>☐ Poor description of physical background to the experiment</td>
<td>☐ Formatting of figures and/or tables, equations and references sometimes incorrect or incomplete</td>
<td>☐ Weak, unclear or unjustifiable conclusions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Awarded</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
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Third Class

- 49%  
  - Numerous misspellings, punctuation or grammatical errors  
  - Clumsy or inappropriate writing style, often lapsing into colloquialisms, inappropriate tense, mixture of writing styles  
  - Sloppy and confusing descriptions and explanations  
  - Text links poorly with figures, tables and equations  

- 45%  
  - Passable presentation, layout and formatting; structure sometimes incoherent and confused  
  - Adequate figures and/or tables  
  - Formatting of figures and/or tables, equations and references sometimes incorrect or incomplete  

- 42%  
  - Student has not achieved as much as would normally be expected  
  - Weak experimental skills  

Fail / Unclassified

- 39%  
  - Riddled with spelling, punctuation or grammatical errors  
  - Totally incoherent writing style  
  - Largely incomprehensible descriptions and explanations  
  - Very poor or missing linkage of the text with figures, tables and equations  

- 35%  
  - Shoddy layout, presentation and formatting; incoherent structure  
  - Poor figures and/or tables  
  - Missing or incorrect formatting of figures and/or tables, equations and references  

- 32%  
  - Very weak description of the experiment’s aims & objectives, its context and any applications of the work  
  - Very poor quality and quantity of results, or results presented very poorly  
  - No discussion of the advantages and limitations of the techniques used  
  - Very weak analysis of the results  
  - Treatment of errors and uncertainties weak, flawed or missing  
  - Very weak or missing conclusions
# Assessment Criteria

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<td>49%</td>
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<td><strong>Fail/Unclassified</strong></td>
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Awarded
Tutor Comments

Total report mark out of 100: 57 (lower second class)

Further Comments

• A good report scientifically, somewhat let down by the writing. Your style is too chatty at times and the argument doesn’t flow well through the report with figures dumped into the report without explanation of them in the text. Figs 3 and 4 are inappropriate as these are photographic rather than the form of schematic diagram used in reports (and they are also used without attribution of the source BTW). Also, avoid lists - write text. However, in terms of the experiment you did find the right facts and find them with sensibly quoted errors, as well as referring to your reading of literature in the field.
30% of your mark is for writing and presentation
## Input: delivery & format

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Student numbers</th>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Timetabling</th>
<th>Other points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100-seater lecture theatre</td>
<td>4 x 2 hours, from week 1</td>
<td>• 2 lecturers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>386-seater lecture theatre</td>
<td>7 x 1 hour, from week 3</td>
<td>• 1 lecturer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management: BBA</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>170-seater lecture theatre</td>
<td>7 x 1 hour, from week 3</td>
<td>• 1 lecturer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education: Sport &amp; Social Sciences</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>112-seater lecture theatre</td>
<td>5 x 2 hours, from week 3</td>
<td>• 2 lecturers&lt;br&gt;• DoS attended</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Input: content

• How to organise assignments
  – Lab reports
  – Essays
  – Data Analysis Reports

• How to write accurately, including:
  – Incorporating sources
  – Style
  – Punctuation
  – Easily confused words

• How to write appropriate emails to tutors
Input: materials

- Powerpoint slides
- Fun video clips, visuals, cartoons
- Interactive activities: Audience Response System (ARS), quizzes, tasks, visualiser
- 2 booklets:
  - task booklet
  - reference booklet
- Virtual Learning Environment (Moodle)
Essay Question:

Why is a critical approach to understanding Organisational Behaviour needed? Discuss using examples.

There are various paradoxes in today’s working environment. Managers must have the right balance between priorities including the importance of innovation and elimination of errors, cost saving redundancies versus improved team morale and planning for the future whilst creating short term results that please the shareholders. As a result of these potentially conflicting demands, many turn to the field of Organisational Behaviour for a so called ‘quick-fix’ to their problems. This paper will discuss the need for a critical approach to understanding Organisational Behaviour and how the knowledge gathered from the analysis can be applied to different situations. For a critical approach, assumptions must be questioned in order to truly understand the benefit or negative effects that management decisions can have on both employee behaviour and the organisation itself.
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Abstract. This experiment is about the use of electron spin resonance to determine the characteristics of a passive oscillator circuit and a DPPH sample. This is a method designed to investigate chemical compounds that has one or more unpaired electrons. When placing the sample in a magnetic field its free electrons will align itself either parallel or anti-parallel to the magnetic field. By firing electromagnetic waves at these electrons one can hope to excite these from a negative spin to a positive spin. Through this method one can determine the so-called g-factor of the compound (describes how close the unpaired electron behaves as a free electron). Through this experiment we determined the g-factor of the DPPH sample as 1.85±0.06. This is a bit off the actual value of 2.0036, but taken into account other errors and uncertainties encountered one can say that this is a valid result.
Heya Jane

i was told ur my personal tutor a few weeks ago. cuz at that time I was trapped in the preparation of a series of exams, I couldn’t contact you before now. So today im emailing u to open up our connection. Im really in need of your help with my essays. looking forward to the advise from u or maybe we can have a face to face meet asap?

Hannah x
Dear Hannah

As a student at an illustrious institution such as Bath, where the quality of our degrees is recognised worldwide, you will realise that we have high expectations of our students, particularly in their ability to communicate in an effective and professional manner. I would be grateful if you could resend your message in a standard of English commensurate with your undoubted abilities.

Many thanks.
Evaluation

• English Language Centre:
  – Intensive work
  – Skills development
  – Closer contacts with academic departments
  – Higher profile

• Departments:
  – Very positive

• Students:
  – Very mixed
Student Feedback

1. Fun ‘extras’
2. Friendly lecturers & engaging lecture style
3. Lab report structure
4. Assignment requirements
5. Analysis of student writing

1. “Too slow and too long” (2 hour lectures)
2. Anything perceived as ‘too easy or ‘condescending’
3. Anything perceived as ‘grammar’
4. Anything perceived as not directly relevant
Lessons Learned

• Group size & venue:
  – Maximum 100 students, in small lecture theatres

• Timetabling:
  – 1 hour
  – Fitting with assignment deadlines

• Content:
  – Closely linked to assignment requirements
  – Balancing language and skills

• Delivery:
  – Balancing motivational ‘extras’ with relevant content
  – Importance of pair work and group work
  – Benefit of 2 lecturers
Lessons Learned

• Perceptions
  – ‘Labels’
  – Importance of writing
  – Needs
  – Endorsement by departments
    • Integral part of a study skills unit
    • Assessment