

university preparation

A note about the transcripts.

This is a transcript of exactly what the speaker has said. It is important to realise that spoken language is different to written language. When we speak we often make grammatical errors. We also tend to repeat ourselves, and to use short words or sounds like "um", "er" or "ah". These sounds are called 'fillers' because they are used to fill in the gaps while we're thinking of what to say next. These sounds are perfectly normal in spoken English. You probably use similar fillers in your first language; however they may be different sounds. In this transcript you'll notice that the speaker has used some fillers and that in some places the sentences are not always grammatical. This is often because the speaker is thinking about what to say next, or changes her/his mind in the middle of a sentence.

Transcript - Rob

My role at La Trobe is really twofold. Like most people here, I'm engaged in teaching and that ranges from teaching quite theoretical subjects, through to very hands-on, ah, vocational type subjects. Um. That means I'll personally take tutorials, and give the lectures and be involved in setting assessments and making sure that students are marked fairly, and so on. Of course, there's always admin duties and they're an important part of making sure that all students get the best out of the subjects here.

How do you help students who are having difficulties with their writing?

I don't now how, um, other departments around the university deal with that sort of question but, in Media Studies one of the key things that we work with is the idea of an audience. So, it can simplify for students a lot, that the process of writing an essay, if they know who the audience is, and they understand what that audience expects. So, when they say to me I'm writing an academic essay, um, maybe, it could, it could even be for history or politics, um, I say to them, well let's look at the conventions of writing in your discipline, ah, let's look at what they expect from you, and that's what you're going to write to. Of course, when we're teaching vocational, um, media skills such as, as journalism, we are talking about different audiences from the academic community, and we want them to, to actually pick up a newspaper and start reading the styles of communication that they find there. So, it de., it depends on the assessment task, but we, um, we try and link them more directly with their audience, make them understand, just what the audience wants.

I think that, er, one of the problems that students have with writing is they overcomplicate the task, um. To an outsider, University writing, academic writing is dense and jargon-filled and they try to emulate that, that style of writing. Um. Well it's true that some academic writing is over laden with jargon, and is overly dense. Ah, it's also true that some very dense, very jargon-filled writing cannot be any other way, um, so they need to learn to differentiate

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between those two. Not all academics are writing in a complicated way, um, just to make themselves look clever. Ah, likewise, a student trying to express a simple idea, should be doing it in simple language, with a simple structure, and, by over complicating it, by mimicking other academic writers, they often get into big trouble, um, producing something that's incomprehensible, that took them all night to write, and they don't really know what it means. So we try and simplify, bring it down, down, down to the bare bones of what they're expected to do, and if they do that well then that's going to be an A for them.

What other difficulties to students face?

There is no question that students have trouble managing their workload. Um, it **is** difficult at the end of semester when you have maybe for major assignments due all at once, to schedule your time so you have got time to work on all of them. We know that that's a learning process and,, we try not to be too hard on first years but, the fact is that by the time you leave the university, you'll need to know how to manage your own, um, workload and when you get into any line of work after university you'll find that the imperatives are much stronger, that you really have to manage workload.

Communication between students and lecturers

Students, um, really need to talk, to their academic staff and to use them, um, for advice, use them for, um, just keeping a line of communication open allows the academic to know that the student is committed and that they're working hard, and that they may be facing problems, but that they can help them get over those problems. Um, in journalism specifically, I would say "treat me like your editor". No journalists will, um,... stop communicating with their editor. If they miss a deadline, or if they're going to miss a deadline, they'd tell the editor two days earlier, and the editor is fine with that. They can move things around, so it's very much the same with academics, who, academics don't owe you, um, any kind of grades when you sign up to their subject. You need to do the work to get the grades. So if a student comes to me on the last day of semester and says "I haven't started my assignment", the, the standard answer, until I've heard if they have any kind of severe problem that's, um, hindering them is, "You're going to lose marks every day that this paper is late until it's handed in" without question. And as tough as that sounds, it's because they haven't taken the time to communicate with the academic. Other students have, and it would be disrespectful to those other students to, to not apply penalties.

Who is responsible for resolving problems?

The responsibility for helping students with their problems, um, ultimately does lie with the student. However, there's a very important role academics can play in that process. When a student comes to an academic and says "I have personal problems", sometimes these personal problems are quite extreme, and we hear stories that are, really, um, are quite appalling. Well, in that sort of situation, all an academic can do, is to try and, um, get that person in touch with the help that they need to, to get them to the next step, to either take some time off from, from the semester, or to, find a way of working through their problems so that they can complete their semester, ah, on, on time. But, ah, it really is a case of helping people to solve their own problems. We can't solve their problems for them.