

Undergraduate Research
Form A: Case studies for Courses
See some brief case studies in Appendix 1

1. Title of case study *(such that it conveys to others the central aspects)*

Research for beginners: assessment design to foster research skills

Helping undergraduate students with 'becoming researchers': crossing epistemological and ontological research thresholds with module *Dissertation Methods and Approaches* at Coventry University.

2. Contact details

Name and address: Marina Orsini-Jones Department of English and Languages Faculty of Business, Environment and Society, George Eliot Building Coventry University CV1 5FB	Tel: 024 76 888237 Email: m.orsini@coventry.ac.uk
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3. Context

- Programme: (e.g. major / degree programme) BA Honours Degree in English (Single and Joint)
Course/unit/module title: Module: 289ENL Dissertation Methods and Approaches
Level: (e.g. first year): Second year

4. Brief Description c50 words *(such that it conveys to others the central ways in which this is an example of 'undergraduate research' and how the student engages in or is exposed to research processes, activities, methods or culture)*

This case study illustrates how second year students on the BA Honours Degree in English at Coventry University are encouraged to engage with 'research literacy' and practise research planning for their dissertation with the support of the e-portfolio *PebblePAD*. It documents the students' research journey on module *Dissertation Methods and Approaches*.

5. What does the student and the teacher / instructor do? *(e.g. content, teaching and learning methods, and assessment). Please ensure this section is written such that staff / faculty elsewhere can take the central elements from your practice. Write it like a 'good' cook book! Focus particularly on how the student learns and is assessed in 'research mode'. There is no word limit to this section. But to qualify for the reward, this section needs to be a **minimum of 500 words**.*

The creation of the new degree course in English that was launched in academic year 2006-2007 offered staff in the English Language Unit at Coventry University the opportunity to design an inquiry-based course that had the following generic aims (Programme Specification Document 2005):

- to enable students to develop a range of skills which will help them to develop their future careers;
- to provide students with a range of related skills which they can transfer to other contexts;
- to equip students with the scholarly skills needed to undertake undergraduate study and to progress to postgraduate study on completion of the course;
- to encourage students to develop confidence and an independent mind which questions and develops a critical awareness;
- to enable students to conduct their own independent research.

The curriculum design was therefore underpinned by modules that aimed to encourage students to engage with scholarship and experience research at first hand. It must be stressed that in this case study ‘undergraduate research’ is not intended as the production of original knowledge. In the words of Jenkins and Healey (2009) the focus:

is on student learning and on being assessed in ways that mimic how research is conducted in the discipline...what is produced and learned is not to be new knowledge per se; but it is new to the student and, perhaps more significantly, transforms their understanding of knowledge and research.

The second year mandatory module *Dissertation Methods and Approaches*, worth 10 CATS credits (5 ECTS) out of 120 on the students’ second year programme, is part of a ‘suite’ of three inquiry-oriented modules – the other two being *Academic and Professional Methods and Approaches* (10 CATS credits) in the first year and *Dissertation* (30 CATS credits) in the final year. *Dissertation Methods and Approaches* ran for the first time in the second term of year 2 in academic year 2007-2008.

The module aims to develop independent research management skills in undergraduates and encourages students – all students - to engage in inquiry-based learning in an academic and professional way. The module also provides practical experience of applying research methods and approaches in actual case studies, relevant to each student’s programme, with particular emphasis on developing a viable research design plan in preparation for the third-year dissertation. This practical experience includes specific attention to information gathering, to research methodologies in linguistics and literature, ethics issues and advanced literature searches in paper and electronic forms.

Research planning is underpinned by formative engagement with metacognitive processes and students are asked to document their research journey in formative action plans that they can either post privately to the tutor or share with everybody in the shared gateway in the e-portfolio *PebblePAD* (for further details on the rationale behind the integration of metacognition into the module and on the use of the e-portfolio *PebblePAD* to encourage metacognitive research processes see Orsini-Jones forthcoming). The choice of using the e-portfolio was dictated by previous successful experiences of integrating it into the Languages and English curriculum at Coventry University (Orsini-Jones and Sinclair 2008; Orsini-Jones, Adley, Lamari, Maund and Paruk 2008).

Students attend a 1.5 hour research lecture/workshop for seven weeks. Three weeks are then spent presenting individual draft research plans to tutors and peers and obtaining feedback on them. The last two weeks consist of guided workshops where students work on

the final version of their dissertation plan in class in collaboration with the tutor. Students also have one-to-one tutorials with both the module leader and their prospective dissertation supervisors.

The module learning outcomes are that on its completion students should be able to:

- Construct a viable research design plan for a dissertation;
- Apply their understanding of qualitative and quantitative methods in the research design;
- Retrieve, analyse and evaluate materials from a number of different sources for both academic and professional purposes; and
- Present their research plan to tutor/peers both orally and as a PebblePAD webfolio, reflect upon the feedback received and comment on their peers' plans. (Module Information Directory 2008).

The module is assessed via coursework only. The first piece of summative assessment is an individual presentation of a dissertation research plan (40% of the module mark) created as a set of linked web pages as a webfolio in *PebblePad* (see Figure 1 and further details on the task in the assessment methods section of this case study). The second piece (60% of the module mark) consists in a draft research dissertation plan/proposal that builds on the feedback obtained by peers and tutors on the first piece of coursework, is submitted in Word and checked for plagiarism via the software tool *Turnitin*. Students have access to the anti-plagiarism software before their final submission where they can check their drafts (further details on the task in the assessment section of this case study).

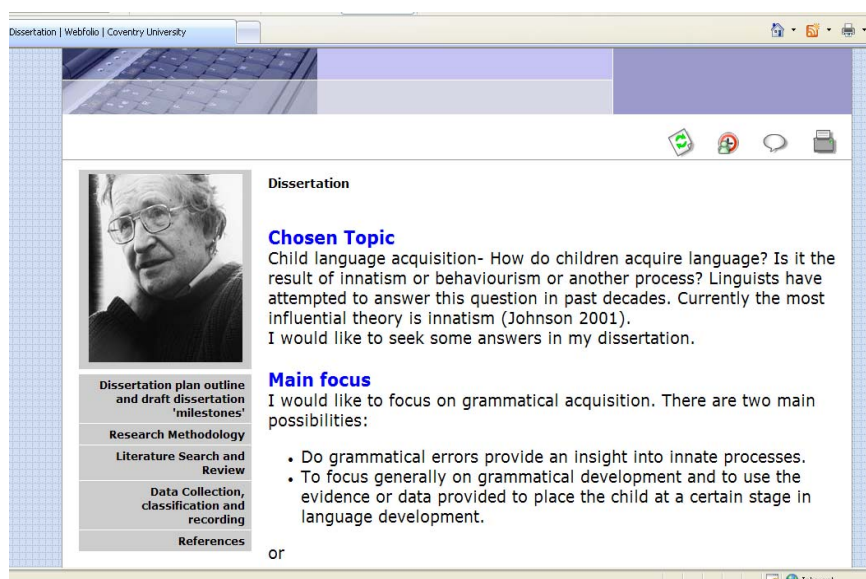


Figure 1 Sample Plan Screen Shot (extract): The shared world of research to be peer reviewed – the Dissertation Plan Proposal Webfolio in the PebblePad gateway (Topic: Language Acquisition).

Students submit formative action plans before the summative tasks are carried out.

Sample webfolios and dissertation plans from previous years are provided to students (who are instructed not to cover the same subject as the one covered in the sample). Further details on assessment are provided below.

The weekly plan is as follows:

1	<p>Introduction to the module and its assessment</p> <p>Provisional choice of dissertation topic</p> <p>Introduction to research methods and approaches</p>	<p>Lecture/Workshop 1: Introduction to the module, to its assessment and its links to the final year module ‘dissertation’</p> <p>Initial and provisional choice of dissertation plan topic</p> <p>Work for next week:</p> <p>Read Ch. 9 in last year’s textbook: <i>The Study Skills Handbook</i> by Cottrell, pages 216-217 in particular, study the model dissertation plan given to you and start planning for your dissertation draft plan.</p>
2.	<p>The literature review and the annotated bibliography</p>	<p>Lecture/Workshop 2: The literature review (What? How? When?). What is an annotated bibliography? How does it differ from a literature review?</p> <p>Primary data in linguistics and in literature. Secondary data in linguistics and in literature. Scholarly sources</p> <p>PebblePAD formative action plan 1: becoming a researcher: steps to take/the literature review: issues</p> <p>Work for next week: read handout on literature review writing, start searching for literature about your chosen provisional topic. Read the article by Jones and Orsini-Jones and be prepared to discuss its research methodology next week.</p>
3.	<p>Research methodology</p> <p>Primary sources</p>	<p>Lecture/Workshop 3: Research methodology</p> <p>Identifying a suitable methodology for linguistics Identifying a suitable methodology for literature</p> <p>Qualitative/Quantitative approaches</p> <p>Ethical issues to take into consideration</p> <p>Writing aims and objectives for your plan.</p>

		<p>Workshop with examples</p> <p>PebblePAD formative action plan 2: Research Methodology. Steps to take</p> <p>Work for next week: Read handout on <i>Corpus Linguistics</i> from the Wray and Bloomer textbook and the articles on corpus analysis provided to you</p>
4.	Data analysis: Corpus Linguistics and other methods of analysing primary data	<p>Lecture/Workshop 4: Corpus Linguistics and its applications to your research and other data collection and analysis methodologies</p> <p>PebblePAD formative action plan 3: Data identification/collection. Steps to take.</p> <p>Work for next week: Read relevant literature on data collection and analysis (Bell and Wray and Bloomer). Please decide what specific topic/s you would like to explore on databases with the librarian next week in preparation for your presentation and the writing of your dissertation plan and come prepared to the session. It will be a unique opportunity to find out more about your topic of interest.</p>
5.	Library searches for secondary sources	<p>Lecture/Workshop 5: Finding relevant secondary sources, carrying out a literature review 2/keeping records.</p> <p>Guest lecture by the Subject Librarian for English, on databases, academic journals for linguistics and literature, and e-books.</p> <p>Work for next week: Start working on your literature review and on the individual assessed presentation/webfolio of your dissertation plan (individual) in PebblePAD. Include at least one action plan. You can edit and attach the ones completed in class for this purpose. Come prepared to continue writing up your webfolio for your individual presentation in class next week. Bring the relevant literature.</p>
6.	Finalising the presentation in relation to the dissertation plan: structure/ method/ approach/ questions	<p>Lecture/Workshop 6: The presentation and the dissertation plan – further details.</p> <p>PebblePAD revision</p> <p>Question and Answer session.</p> <p>PebblePAD action plan 4: Finalising the individual presentation: steps to take</p>

7.	Study Week	<p>Read for your literature review and finalise your assessed presentation. Come to session 7 prepared to discuss your aims/objectives and overall draft plan. Revise Chapter 5 in Cottrell on presentation skills.</p> <p>Post your webfolio research plans to the gateway by the set deadlines</p>
8.	Assessed individual presentations 1	<p>Assessed individual presentations and peer-evaluation</p> <p>Please refer to instructions below for marking scheme.</p> <p>Study the feedback received and post your revised research action plan to the gateway within two weeks of the delivery of your presentation</p>
9.	Assessed individual presentations 2	<p>Assessed individual presentations and peer-evaluation</p> <p>Please refer to instructions below for marking scheme.</p> <p>Study the feedback received and post your revised research action plan to the gateway within two weeks of the delivery of your presentation</p>
10.	Assessed individual presentations 3	<p>Assessed individual presentations and peer-evaluation</p> <p>Please refer to instructions below for marking scheme.</p> <p>Study the feedback received and post your revised research action plan to the gateway within two weeks of the delivery of your presentation</p>
11.	The dissertation plan Lecture/ Workshop and writing workshop	<p>Lecture/Workshop 7 Structuring your dissertation plan</p> <p>The session will be dedicated to further analysing what is required for CW2 and to the writing up of the dissertation plan with the help of the tutor.</p>
12	As above	As above

MODULE RESOURCES

The essential textbook recommended for purchase is:

Bell, J. (1999) *Doing Your Research Project*. 3rd Edition Maidenhead: Open University Press.

If your dissertation plan is in language/linguistics you must also purchase:

Wray, A. & Bloomer A. (2006) *Projects in Linguistics: a Practical Guide to Researching Language*. 2nd Edition London: Hodder Arnold.

If your dissertation plan is a literary one you must also purchase:

Barry, P. (2002) *Beginning Theory: an Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. 2nd Edition Manchester: Manchester University Press.

3.1 Book/Journal References

(EXTRACTS FROM) Palmer, R. (2002) *Write in style: a guide to good English*. 2nd Edition. London: Routledge.

(EXTRACTS FROM) Dörnyei, Z. (2007) *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics*. Oxford: OUP.

Ch. 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 from Cottrell, S. (2003) *The Study Skills Handbook*. 2nd Edition Basingstoke: Palgrave/Macmillan.

Orsini-Jones, M. and Jones, D.E. (2007) 'Supporting Collaborative Grammar Learning via a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE): a case study from Coventry University'. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education: an international journal of theory, research and practice*. 6, (1) 90-106. Available online at: <http://ahh.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/6/1/90>

6. Hot tips and things to look out for: (*What is the key advice you would give someone who has decided to adapt this method?*)

Encourage undergraduate students to engage with individual research projects within a socio-collaborative framework.

Encourage students to engage with metacognition and use it to underpin the research process as it helps them with increasing their confidence in their research skills and planning for their final year dissertation.

Beware of the fact that students need to be taught how the 'discourse' of reflection differs from that of writing up research findings in their dissertation.

Beware of the fact that undergraduate students can be quite 'literal' and need to be taught the 'epistemological armoury' (Perkins) necessary to engage in research. For this purpose provide students with relevant glossaries and examples of some 'research' words in context. For example, some students were not clear about the meaning of the following terms and

expressions: 'literature', 'literature review', 'literacy', 'literal'. 'Criticism' also proved to be a challenging concept.

Beware of the fact that some students feel intimidated by the concept of research and think that they are not 'up to it'. A research scaffolding strategy needs to be put in place to support them in their ontological journey of 'becoming a researcher'. Research action plans with a tailor-made tool like the e-portfolio *PebblePad* can help with this as well as face-to-face socio-collaborative research planning activities followed up by online discussions. However some students might resent the e-tool and 'blame' the piece of software for their inability to engage with difficult concepts (Orsini-Jones forthcoming).

Beware of the fact that engaging some of the less independent students in research planning and inquiry-led learning can prove to be very challenging. They will not avail themselves to the help offered to them and will fail to produce a research plan. Further support will be needed for them, preferably with the help of student mentors.

Set clear ground rules referring to what research means at undergraduate level, so that students do not feel that they must produce an original piece of research, however, it should also be stressed to students that original research might be a possible outcome of their project proposal.

Provide examples of what is expected from students and encourage them to discuss and evaluate them.

Encourage the teams of staff involved to engage in a dialogue about research and scholarship. As this was a 'collegial' module, all colleagues in English had to become involved in it as they would have to supervise the students' dissertations in the following year. Some colleagues were used to engage in scholarship and research, while others were relatively new to research and expressed the wish to learn more about research processes. This resulted in the setting up of staff development session for staff on research methodology, referencing, dissertation planning and marking organised by the module leader who was also at the time the Teaching Development Fellow for the Faculty of Business, Environment and Society.

Be prepared to provide one-to-one tutorials and regular feedback to students. At least one individual meeting with each student will be required.

7. Does it work? (*Student, employer, peer review response. What does evaluation and /or research reveal as to its impact?*)

The evaluation of this curricular intervention is based upon both qualitative and quantitative data:

- the questions that students asked in class;
- the queries that they posted in the VLE (both in module mail and in discussions);
- the observation of the assessed individual presentations and the marks obtained for the presentation *webfolios* and project plans;

- the reflective action plans that students wrote and posted in *PebblePAD* before and after their presentations;
- the written comments posted by students on their peers' *webfolios*;
- the informal conversations carried out with students throughout the year;
- the formal supervisions carried out with each student in preparation for the submission of the final version of their research plan;
- the semi-structured interviews carried out with a self-selected group of final-year students in November 2008 – after the module had finished and at the beginning of their 'dissertation journey';
- the feedback provided by students in the anonymous online module evaluation questionnaires created using the assessment/survey tool in the VLE and standard for all modules at Coventry University (14 returns out of 42 students);
- the feedback provided to me by the colleagues who moderated the task;
- the feedback provided at Course Consultative Committees, a forum for students to comment on their course to their lecturers;
- the external examiner's report for 2007-2008;
- an initial comparison of the results in academic years 2007-2008 with the results in academic year 2008-2009.

The external examiner commented positively on the module and praised its innovative approach to research planning in 2007-2008.

Many students produced outstanding research plans that developed into outstanding dissertations in their final year.

The analysis of the feedback in the online module evaluation questionnaires showed that the students who had responded had found the module interesting and stimulating and particularly valued the opportunity to learn how to plan for their dissertation before the final year, e.g.: "I believe this module gave us the chance to think and prepare notes and express our thoughts for next year's final project. It was also helpful to do the action plan, the oral presentation and also the tutors' feedback".

During the semi-structured interviews (that were carried out in adherence with British Educational Research Association guidelines in academic year 2008-2009 after the students had completed the module), the four self-selected female students (out of a cohort of 40 students) who agreed to discuss their learning experience stated that they had found the action-plan tool in *PebblePAD* particularly useful for the purpose of outlining their research proposal.

Encouraging remarks were also made by students on the written comments received on their research plans in the shared *gateway* in *PebblePAD*:

Interviewer: And then, after you received the oral feedback, did you have a look at the written comments? Was there anything useful?

Students 1, 2 and 3 (together): Very useful.

Student 1: Mine especially, people said it was too vast and it was going to take up my whole life. So I reduced my data collection to 6 months.

Student 2: Me too. Comments said that I was not being very realistic and that made me re-think my plan. Some also commented that my plan did not make clear sense in places, so I revisited it and made changes.

During the semi-structured interviews students were furthermore asked if they felt that using *PebblePAD* had helped them to 'become researchers' and to structure their work. They stated that they had valued the way in which the tools in *PebblePAD* had indeed helped them to structure their research project:

Interviewer: Did it help at all to use the *PebblePAD webfolio* to structure your draft dissertation presentation?

Chorus of 'yes'

Q. Why and How?

Student 1: Because the structure is already there, isn't it really, it's easy to follow. It's just so user-friendly, I think. That helps with structuring the sections.

Student 2 (interjecting): It was useful to be forced into specific headings.

Interviewer: So you found that it forced you into structuring what you were doing?

Students 1 and 2: Yes.

Interviewer (addressing the third student): You found that as well?

Student 3: Yes. In my own head I found it extremely difficult to decide what should go first and second and after. You were forced to produce an introduction. And for me that's very, very helpful because I need to have help with structuring and I struggle with this. It was not that easy to begin with, but then I found it user-friendly too and I like the fact that I can personalise the interface.

On the whole students commented positively on having acquired research planning skills and feeling that the module had enhanced their confidence levels in their ability to carry out research.

8. What problems / issues have arisen? (And how have you dealt with them?)

One issue of concern was the relatively low average mark obtained by the students for their individual *webfolio* presentation task for this second year module in the first year of the module's running – 2007-2008 - (50%, see the instructions for the task below). These results did not tie in with the initial expectations of the module leader that derived from the previous case studies of integration of *PebblePAD* in other modules. In the other case-studies, all based upon the intergration of the e-portfolio *PebblePad* into first year modules, there had been evidence that the targeted use of certain *PebblePAD* tools had enhanced the students' learning experience (Orsini-Jones *et. al.*, 2008; Orsini-Jones & Sinclair, 2008) and that it had contributed to the students' overall good results in terms of marks. Although it was somewhat reassuring that students obtained a higher average mark in their second assessed task for module *Dissertation Methods and Approaches* in 2007-2008 – the dissertation project plan (58%) –, it was necessary to investigate further the problematic issues that had arisen from the presentation task.

One of the major issues was that some students found the subject matter – engaging in research – obscure. This was also reflected in the pass rate for the module: over 20% of the students failed at their first attempt. Although the students who failed this module also failed many of their other modules, it was still of concern to the module leader that the pass rate for a second year module was so low, which is why it was decided to identify the main areas of difficulties in discussions with students in order to action-research changes for future academic years.

Some students were finding the assessed individual *webfolio* task 'troublesome' for both epistemological reasons (e.g. alien subject-related terminology and concepts) and ontological ones (e.g. fear of the solitary aspects of the research journey paired with unease about the assessed task format that took them out of their 'comfort zone' and undermined their confidence).

What had started as an evaluation of the module became therefore a wider investigation into 'troublesome knowledge' positioning the study in the relatively new field of transactional curriculum inquiry (Cousin, 2009, pp. 201-212) known as 'threshold concepts' and developed by Erik Meyer and Ray Land (Meyer & Land, 2003; Meyer, Land & Smith, 2008).

A threshold concept is:

- troublesome: the learners will find it problematic;
- transformative: once understood, its potential effect on student learning and behaviour is to occasion a significant shift in the perception of a subject;
- integrative: it exposes the previously hidden interrelatedness of concepts that were not previously seen as linked;
- irreversible: the change of perspective occasioned by acquisition of a threshold concept is unlikely to be forgotten; and
- bounded: any conceptual space will have frontiers, bordering with thresholds into new conceptual areas (Meyer and Land, 2003, p. 412).

Thus the analysis of the data brought about an unexpected outcome: the attempt to identify which 'threshold concepts' undergraduate students need to cross to see the link between the 'epistemic tools' necessary to carry out research in English Studies and the 'cognitive and

identity shift' (Cousin, 2009, p.201) needed at the ontological and personal level to start 'thinking like a researcher of English Studies'.

The research into the curricular intervention is currently ongoing, but the changes carried out following the feedback obtained by students in 2007-2008 have already had a positive impact on the pass rate, that has increased by 10% between 2007-2008 and 2007-2009.

The inquiry-based nature of the tasks set in module *Dissertation Methods and Approaches* was also explored with the students interviewed in November 2008. Both from the data collected and from the interview transcripts it emerged that the troublesome knowledge appeared to be mainly linked to difficulties to do with (Orsini-Jones forthcoming):

- the 'epistemic game', the linguistic tools (Perkins, 2006) required to engage with the 'discourse' of research in English Studies; and
- the 'ontological shift' of identity required to 'being/becoming' a researcher.

At the level of the 'ontological shift', the students interviewed ascribed their difficulties to the following factors (Semi-structured interviews November 2008):

- lack of confidence in carrying out independent research;
- fear of criticism because it is a personal project ("it's personal, it's very close to you") and difficulties in handling criticism (possibly also to do with the 'literal' understanding of the term, as illustrated above); and
- a feeling of loneliness, inability to compare their own work with that of their peers ("carrying out your own research project is not like having to write the same essay that we all have to do").

With reference to the lessons learnt for 2008-2009, the module leader tried to put less stress in her teaching on 'what is research?', and more on encouraging students to ask themselves 'how can I think like a researcher?'/ 'how can I become a researcher'.

As stressed above, it was also realised that it is important to set clearer ground rules referring to what research means at undergraduate level, so that students do not feel that they must produce an original piece of research; however, it should also be highlighted to students that original research might be a possible outcome of their project proposal. Providing examples from the best dissertation plans produced in *PebblePAD* by the students who managed to cross the threshold concept (see for example Figure 4: *Sample Plan Screen Shot (extract): The shared world of research to be peer reviewed – the Dissertation Plan Proposal (Language Acquisition)*) should also help. This was, of course, not possible in academic year 2007-2008, as the module was running for the first time.

To sum up, the second occurrence of the module, January-April of academic year 2008-2009, offered the module leader an opportunity to implement action-research-led curricular change (McNiff 1988; McKernan 1992). The identification of troublesome research knowledge carried out at the end of academic year 2007-2008 enabled staff to make changes to the delivery of the module that appeared to help students with crossing the epistemological and ontological threshold identified. This resulted in a higher pass rate for the module in the summer examination board period (87% compared with 77% in 2007-2008).

9. Details of support material / course work / assessment methods (*Please attach as separate files any details that you think would help others considering adopting this approach; e.g. the detailed instructions you give students or the course handbook*)

Assesement methods

Assessed Coursework 1

Individual Presentation of the Dissertation Research Plan

You will have to deliver a 5-minute individual presentation to illustrate to the rest of the class and your tutor(s) your proposed dissertation plan. You will use the *PebblePAD webfolio* tool to do this and include in it the headings indicated in the marking scheme. You can use all the other tools available in *PebblePAD* (the action planning one will be particular useful).

At the end of the session there will be a 5-minute feedback/discussion session and you will receive feedback on your plan from your tutor and your peers. After the session is finished and no later than one week from the date of the delivery of your presentation, you will have to write up an action plan in which you address the issues raised and compare these with issues raised in the research action plan you wrote before the presentation.

This piece of assessment counts for 40% of the module mark and reflects the Module Information Directory learning outcomes 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Marking scheme

<p>1. Dissertation plan outline and draft dissertation 'milestones' (10 marks)</p> <p><i>Presentation of the topic chosen - illustration of overall aims and objectives and of the draft planned timeline for dissertation writing</i></p> <p>What have you chosen? Why? What focus? Have you thought of a hypothesis to test? (If applicable)</p>
<p>2. Research methodology (10 marks)</p> <p><i>Illustration and discussion of the research method to be adopted. Tools to be used. Ethical considerations.</i></p> <p>Rationale for the research method. Reflection on your choice and on how/why it was reached. Ethical forms.</p>
<p>3. Draft literature search and review (10 marks).</p> <p><i>Critical review of chosen literature and illustration of how/why/where from it was retrieved. Plans for future searches in view of current findings.</i></p> <p>How was the relevant literature found? What tools were used? Why were these texts/article selected? Were others 'discarded'? Why? How? Who did you ask for help?</p>
<p>4. Data collection, classification and recording (5 marks).</p> <p><i>Outline of how the relevant data/literature is going to be identified/collected/classified/recorded. Tools to be used.</i></p> <p>Methods/tools used for recording data. Where? How? When?</p>
<p>5. Personal reflection and action planning for the dissertation (5 marks).</p> <p>Written reflection in PebblePAD in view of the feedback received after the presentation. You must use the action plan tool. What actions will your take now? Are you giving some consideration to the comments received? Are you considering changing anything?</p>

CW 2 Dissertation Plan

Your Dissertation Plan will count for 60% of the module mark and reflect the following Module Information Directory learning outcomes:

1. Construct a viable research design plan for a dissertation.
2. Apply his/her understanding of qualitative and quantitative methods in the research design (and/or of literary criticism theories).
3. Retrieve, analyse and evaluate materials from a number of different sources for both academic and professional purposes

You will elaborate further on the material presented for CW 1 and write a dissertation proposal addressing the headings in the marking scheme below. You can change your topic if you feel that the topic covered in CW 1 does not reflect any longer your research interests. If you decide to change your topic you need to discuss it with the module leader.

<p>Proposed research question (try and choose a realistic and manageable topic, refer to the example provided below)</p> <p>5</p>
<p>Proposed aim(s) and objectives of the dissertation (normally one main aim and then objectives that illustrate how you are going to carry out your analysis)</p> <p>5</p>
<p>Background/Context (including interest in the subject and contextualisation of the subject – referenced)</p> <p>15</p>
<p>Methodology and data collection (e.g. primary data collection, sampling, qual/quant; <u>if literature chosen</u>: critical theory selected, critical review of approach chosen)</p> <p>15</p>
<p>Annotated bibliography (a minimum of <u>6-8</u> scholarly secondary sources of which at least 4 must be scholarly journal articles/chapters in books and 2 published books; the relevant textbooks used for your relevant modules can be included if relevant to your research)</p> <p>12</p>
<p>Proposed structure (proposed chapter titles)</p> <p>3</p>
<p>Research milestones (timeline with dates of the milestones that you have set for yourself)</p> <p>2</p>

Ethics

(forms to fill in, also applies you are not intending to use human beings)
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3

9. What leadership issues have arisen? *(In persuading colleagues / students / validation panels to introduce the course; in developing the course; is it seen as primarily a teaching or a research initiative?)*

The syllabus of the module had to be discussed with the management of the faculty (Associate Dean in charge of Undergraduate Studies). This was because the module is meant to be part of the employability skills suite of mandatory modules offered within each department at each level of studies in the faculty.

The syllabus had to be discussed because the majority of the other departments have adopted a generic approach to the integration of employability skills into their curricula. The English team had to justify their choice of integrating employability within a subject specific module on research planning. They had to defend the concept that action planning for research and the development of critical analytical skills for research planning were a better way of preparing English graduates for the world of work than a generic portfolio based upon generic employability competencies.

The need for a different, more subject specific, approach to the development of professional skills in the humanities is highlighted in the literature (see for example Edwards 2005). Following a consultation with the module leader, the management agreed to let the English team proceed as they wished. It must be stressed that the module leader works in collaboration with staff in careers to ensure that students on the English degree courses cover generic professional skills (e.g. CV writing) as well as subject specific ones in their second year, as she also is the employability tutor for English.

Another issue arose with colleagues in English about the amount of reading required for project planning. The main discussion related to the need to agree on the level of scholarship expected of undergraduate second year students because of the different perceptions of what constitutes undergraduate research amongst staff. As the module was new, it was necessary to discuss it with colleagues during staff meetings.

Finally, it became apparent that students needed to be taught two different ways of carrying out research as the degree includes both linguistics and literature. Students can choose a topic in either area and many swap their choice half-way through the module. This presented the module leader with a problematic issue as the module only runs for 10 weeks. She did her best to cover both aspects, but some students in literature fed back that they would have liked to cover more material on literary criticism. This is currently being discussed with the relevant staff in the literature section of the department and various solutions for the problem are being considered – including having more research sessions in literature-specific modules.

10. Are there significant resource issues / implications? (e.g in terms of course materials, fieldwork)

Due to the type of tasks set, that require high levels of feedback at regular intervals, the module was very labour-intensive for the module leader who ran it on her own, particularly in academic year 2008-2009, with a cohort of 67 students. However, the only real resource issue was the lack of relevant databases for literary and linguistics studies that was highlighted by the first cohort of students and is being currently addressed with the acquisition of new resources in the library in collaboration with the Subject Librarian.

12. Relevant references and Web sites (To articles / web sites by you or others that describe this method or approach)

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