Managing Academic Reading in the First Year: What are the challenges?

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EFYE Ghent    April 2016
Sheffield Hallam
6th largest in UK
31,500 students
• Academic Reading in the First Year: the Challenges

• Background - my challenge
• Preliminary Research - First year Student Practices & Attainment
• Linguistic audit
• Volume
• Corpus Analysis
  How to...
  Keyness (Activity)
  Concordancing
• Evaluation
  Student
  Staff
  Development
The need to challenge some widely held student and staff beliefs about the first year:

"What are they worrying about - The first year doesn't really matter - it doesn't count"
"Perhaps - for some of them - they should reconsider their choices"
"University is not for everyone"
"They just need to read more - they need to apply themselves"
"But they don't need to read all of it"
Looked around the library and found where my course resources are.

I am managing to do pre-reading before each lecture and seminar.

I have begun to tackle my reading lists.

I am learning a lot from the reading this year.

Referencing. I am confident I can do it properly.

Completely True | Partially True | Untrue | Completely untrue
---|---|---|---
47% | 44% | 7%
27% | 50% | 23%
30% | 51% | 17%
43% | 48% | 10%
11% | 59% | 21%
48% | 40% | 11%

*First Year Student Practices Survey 2014 (Foster 2013)*
Students who read in detail to understand an issue in depth achieve higher grades

These students are also more likely to:

* only read material directly relevant to an assessment
* manage the amount of reading they have to do
* understand what they read
* read broadly to gain an overview of a new topic
* retain the information they read
* include material they read in assignments without plagiarising
* synthesize information from across modules

* Comparing student attainment and student practices (based on self report)
Managing academic reading in the first year is related to higher attainment.

Staff are certain students are not reading enough. However, students are confident "they are working to the best of their ability" (94% student survey Jan 2015). This amounts to less than 7 hours reading a week. Many have not begun to tackle their reading lists (NB surveyed in Jan.).

Confirms the notion students know they are expected to be independent, but not exactly sure what that means in practice (Thomas 2015)

Mismatch expectations concerning academic reading
* "Students who are more clear about challenging ‘goals and standards’ are likely to learn more and to take a deep approach rather than a surface approach, and less likely to be confused and disengaged."

Gibbs, 2014

* How do I engage a staff group in supporting reading development for first year students?

* "The issue is the reading..."
* Why?

* A linguistic component underpins the curriculum and assessment. While tacit and unacknowledged this privileges students from certain backgrounds. We need clarity as to the challenges facing our students (at word, sentence and discourse level) in order to support the whole cohort.

* What I looked at...

Receptive Demands: What do they have to read and understand?

* Volume: How much do they have to read?

* Corpus analysis - word level - discourse features

* Readability

* Linguistic Audit
* 180,000 words of content for 2 modules
* This is a high volume of reading, which is appropriate for a social science course.

Implications Need to develop strategies to manage this
* Ac Reading - Reading for gist, skim reading (get the idea)
* Ac Reading - Scanning high volume of material (yellow pages)
* Deep learning - evolution of 'big picture' "Why am I reading this? How does it add to my understanding?"
* Self regulation - Being able to select material independently-managing this process digitally -constant "Do I read on?"
* Self regulation & Time Management- Manage reading independently - sustaining a work rate through the semester.
created corpus of Forms of Crime readings (97,000) words & newspaper readings (8,000) words (mini corpora)
This represents the material students are required to process
Tribble (98) "quick & dirty" corpora analysis
used simple to use online programmes (Antconc + LIWC + Cohmetrix) to assess keywords, lexis and readability

* Corpus Analysis
  unpacking the linguistic challenge
* Make a wordlist of the target corpus

* Make a word list of a reference corpus
  * I used BAWE (British Academic Written English corpus) as a reference corpus - significantly larger than target corpus

* Compare the frequency of each item in the two wordlists to extract keywords - this is done automatically

* How to...
Why Key words

They reflect the ‘aboutness’ (Scott 1999) of a particular text or corpus
  * Contents analysis, discourse analysis

Also reveal the salient features which are functionally related to a particular genre (Xiao and McEnery 2005)
  * Genre analysis, stylistic analysis

Keywords are those words whose frequency is exceptionally high (positive keywords) in comparison with a reference corpus

Keyness
About domestic violence. "There were times when I actually had to run around the house and get my b—she said we're going somewhere," Aaron recalls. "I just thought we were going home or to do something nice, where she left him with a note which read: 'I don't want him.' At the time I remember just looking at her, and she was actually she was actually just walking away," says Aaron. "I remember calling to her, but she didn't turn round, and I didn't see her for, I think, a couple of years. If she didn't turn round, and I didn't see her for, I think, a couple of years after that." After a year to watch that kind of lifestyle," he says. "So if I had a job, I always try to do stuff and if we're eating big cars an he was behind bars, his thinking began to shift. "I think I saw the effect it had on my family and the behind bars, his thinking began to shift. "I think I saw the effect it had on my family and the people around me, and not being able to see people, I was always talking to people through phones, being work combined with Aaron's own change of heart. "I kind of saw that it's better to work for stuff and finding things to help bring the UK. It was something I always warned my customers about. These are worki—be quiet and mild mannered then just flip. I knew a fair bit about him and when I heard a cab—just flip. I knew a fair bit about him and when I heard a cab—had gone berserk with a gun in the cab—had gone berserk with a gun in the cab—had gone berserk with a gun in the cab—as I stared at the belly. His picture came up and I recognised him instantly. I felt sick." He told h— a picture came up and I recognised him instantly. I felt sick." He told Bird not only sent the yo—down my spine thinking about what he does. I know the girls will all be talking about it too or taxi drivers would go to Thailand. Derrick and I had talked about the tax problem he was quite o—able to handle it. He came to me because he knew I had previously been inside for violence. It was a—been inside for violence. It was a side of Birdy I had never seen before. I was taken aback. I told Birdy I had never seen before. I was taken aback. I told him he wasn't going to ja—Birdy had never seen before. I was taken aback. I told him he wasn't going to jail, but it was sa—wood after turning mess killer. A relative said: "I don't think it's ill health but the stress of the—violence and reclaiming her life. Four years ago, I moved to London, started a new job and met Darren—shower on me and even wash my hair as I got ready for work. It seemed odd but he explained it was because he liked watching me. In hindsight, I realise he did it so he could see what I was wear—height, I realise he did it so he could see what I was wearing. Before long, he started asking why I was wear—height, I realise he did it so he could see what I was wearing. Before long, he started asking why I was wear—height, I realise he did it so he could see what I was wearing. Before long, he started asking why I was wear—height, I realise he did it so he could see what I was wearing. Before long, he started asking why I was wear—height, I realise he did it so he could see what I was wearing. Before long, he started asking why I was wear—height, I realise he did it so he could see what I was wearing. Before long, he started asking why I was wear—height, I realise he did it so he could see what I was wearing. Before long, he started asking why I was wear—height, I realise he did it so he could see what I was wearing. Before long, he started asking why I was wear—height, I realise he did it so he could see what I was wearing. Before long, he started asking why I was wear—height, I realise he did it so he could see what I was wearing. Before long, he started asking why I was wear—height, I realise he did it so he could see what I was wearing. Before long, he started asking why I was wear—height, I realise he did it so he could see what I was wearing. Before long, he started asking why I was wear
Cluster analysis of 'violence' showing compound nouns and how they are layered - feature of academic English
t other person, to be motivated by a hostility or **prejudice** based on a personal characteristic. In recent decades, it has become increasingly clear that prejudice is a significant factor in many aspects of social and political life. The study of prejudice is therefore an important area of research in psychology, sociology, and political science.

Prejudice is often defined as a negative attitude towards a particular group of people, based on their membership in that group. Prejudice can take many forms, including verbal or physical aggression, discrimination in housing or employment, and the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the origins and causes of prejudice. Research has shown that prejudice can be influenced by a variety of factors, including genetic predispositions, socialization processes, and exposure to different cultural and social contexts. Understanding the roots of prejudice is therefore essential for developing effective strategies to reduce prejudice and promote social harmony.

This page is part of a larger concordance of a text that explores the nature and causes of prejudice, as well as the implications of prejudice for social and political life. The concordance includes references to a variety of sources, including academic journals, books, and other research materials.
*Concordance plot prejudice*
These measures are used by teachers to grade texts for their students (by US grade level). Cohmetrix looks at:

- a) narrativity
- b) syntactic simplicity
- c) concreteness
- d) referential cohesion
- e) deep cohesion

Flesch-Kincaid US grade index

*Readability*

What does it tell us about Criminological Academic Reading?
Why might students have difficulty with this?
Where could/should we target support/attention?
Introduction
Most research on the continuity of criminal behavior has been done within individuals. However, few studies looked at the intergenerational continuity of crime. It has long been recognized that crime runs in families. Studies on the genetic nature of crime are old and sometimes controversial (Rafter 1988). For instance, the famous anthropological study of the criminal Kallikak family (Goddard 1912) was very popular when it was published but it appeared, after closer examination, to have been fabricated to some extent (Carlson 1980; Fancher 1987). Today, this specific study

This text is low in narrativity which indicates that it is less story-like and may have less familiar words. Less story-like texts are usually harder to comprehend. It is low in both referential and deep cohesion, suggesting that the reader may have to infer the relationships between sentences and ideas. If the reader has insufficient prior knowledge, these gaps can be challenging.
These two examples help to convey how there are important differences between some of the key definitional positions that have been proposed in the study of terrorism. Any such difficulties have been further compounded by the arguments of a number of more critically oriented scholars who have suggested that the adoption of the kinds of definition outlined above has contributed to the neglect of ‘state-sponsored’ terrorism (Cohen 2001). Those expounding this perspective note that while the security agencies of nation states tend to promote cases where states are the target of terrorist activity, in actuality the

Flesch Kincaid Grade Level 13.6 (College)

This text has low word concreteness, which means there are many abstract words that are hard to visualize. Abstract texts may be more difficult to understand. It is high in both referential and deep cohesion, which may scaffold the reader, particularly if the content is challenging.
* The reading material from Forms of Crime tends to have;
* **low narrativity** - Criminology relies on other discourses such as expository writing. What text types? What discourses? *These, the students must learn to decipher and navigate.*
* Pitched neutrally - little explicit emotion,
  \[ \text{How do we get students to understand the position, the stance of the author?} \]
* a lot of big words (abstract rather than concrete)
  \[ \text{This slows reading speed. How do we support learning of new subject based vocabulary?} \]
* Combined with little **referential cohesion** this becomes particularly challenging.

* If there is little explicit referential cohesion are authors relying on a mutual understanding of field and discourse (text type) to communicate to insider audience?
* What are the implications for first year learning ?
* and teaching?

* **Forms of Crime reading material**
The challenge facing first years is concrete and measurable, and evident at:

* word level - new vocabulary to acquire, familiar lexis used in new combinations - this will slow processing
* paragraph level - tone and structure, cohesion
* text types understanding and navigating new text types

This contradicts the notion that the first year doesn't matter, there is a very definite skill development and language curriculum for the students to master.

Two of the key features in readability refer to discourse (low narrativity and referential cohesion)
* Need to address discourse explicitly

* The First Year Academic Reading Challenge
In terms of altering practices, student self-report of "How their reading habits have changed since starting university?" indicate that reading strategies are on the map for themselves and the staff:

- "skim read"
- "read all more academic pieces"
- "reading more and gained better reading skills"
- "I learnt how to skim read"
- "Can summarise what I've read in each paragraph or section quickly"
- "perspectives and questioning what I read"
- "Don't read anything other than criminology books"
- "reading academic articles"
- "I've learnt how to skim read successfully"
- "tend to read more and make notes"

* Sample comments student survey

**Evaluation student perspective**
* From student comments the development of reading skills and strategies to manage this appear to have become an explicit part of the curriculum.

* "I am much more comfortable with asking students to take part (with reading in class) and getting them to try new ways of reading - even if it's not what they are used to. The reading circles are much better this year - You altered my practice."

* staff feedback - notes from conversation

* Evaluation Staff Perspective
* These tools provide a means to evidence the linguistic challenge facing the first year students.

* Staff are used to evaluating research, this detail involves them in the discussion, specific to their subject.

* It establishes a dialogue from which we can move to collaborative curriculum design.

* Evaluation Development

* Gibbs G. (2014) 53 Powerful Ideas All Teachers Should Know About Idea Number 2 :"Students respond to clear and high expectations" SEDA paper available http://www.seda.ac.uk/resources/files/publications_146_2%20Students%20respond%20to%20clear%20and%20high%20expectations.pdf


* Tribble C. (97) Improvising Corpora for ELT; Quick and dirty ways of developing corpora for Language Teaching in Blewandowska- Tomaszayk + PJ Melia(eds) PALC 99 Practical Applications in Language Corpora p106-17 Lodz Lodz University Press

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Completely agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Completely disagree</th>
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<tr>
<td>I am working to the best of my ability.</td>
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<td>I turning up for all lectures, seminars and tutorials</td>
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<td>I join in the discussion in seminars.</td>
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<td>I can check my timetable on line.</td>
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<td>I check my student email account regularly.</td>
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<td>I know how to find my way round the module sites on blackboard</td>
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<td>I am well organised, both in terms of time management (deadlines and day to day) and organising my workspace, bag etc.</td>
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<td>I have found other students I could set up a study group with.</td>
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<td>I am glad I know senior students on my course who I can approach and ask questions.</td>
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<td>I have had a good look around the library and found where my course resources are.</td>
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<td>I can find journals and articles on line through library Gateway.</td>
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<td>Referencing. I am confident I can do it properly.</td>
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<td>I am taking notes in lectures and seminars.</td>
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<td>I re-read and tidy up my notes after lectures and seminars.</td>
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<td>I am managing to do pre-reading before each lecture and seminar.</td>
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<td>I am learning a lot from the reading this year.</td>
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<td>I have begun to tackle my reading lists.</td>
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<td>I can find my way to and from EIS easily now.</td>
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<td>I have submitted my first assignment.</td>
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<td>I know how and when to contact my academic advisor in case I have a problem.</td>
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Thank you