

## Introduction

- Widening participation advances social justice, but also creates a challenge ensuring all students are prepared for the demands of higher education (Brooke, Monbec & Tilakaratna, 2019). At UoN, concerns about retention and progression have led to increased focus on assessment support.
- Psychology students often struggle with critical thinking, academic writing and developing arguments. However, finding tangible ways to teach this within modules can be challenging for disciplinary lecturers who do not necessarily have a background in academic literacy tuition. EAP, on the other hand, has an established tradition of researching and teaching academic literacies across disciplines (Nesi & Gardner, 2012; Wingate, 2018), and brings a range of useful theories and tools.

## Purpose

- This project explored a research and theory informed interdisciplinary collaboration between practitioners and students in order to support third year UoN Educational Psychology students' critical thinking and writing knowledge.
- Research question:**
  - How does an EAP intervention impact on the understanding and application confidence of critical thinking and academic writing for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year

## Method

- Two online intervention sessions were delivered on a 3<sup>rd</sup> year Psychology module.
- Each intervention comprised a short narrated presentation from an EAP practitioner, an applied activity and discussion board with tutor input (see Figure 1 for an example).
- All enrolled students ( $n=34$ ) had access to these intervention sessions on the module NILE site.
- Intervention 1 (critical thinking) took place before students' coursework assessment.
- Intervention 2 (focused on argument development) took place before students' time-constrained assessment.
- Willing participants completed an online survey i) before each intervention (**pre-intervention**) to assess their current knowledge and confidence (Total completions  $n=14$ ) and ii) after their engagement in each intervention (**post-intervention**) to assess any changes in confidence and knowledge, and seek feedback on the sessions (Total completions  $n=3$ ).

## classes?

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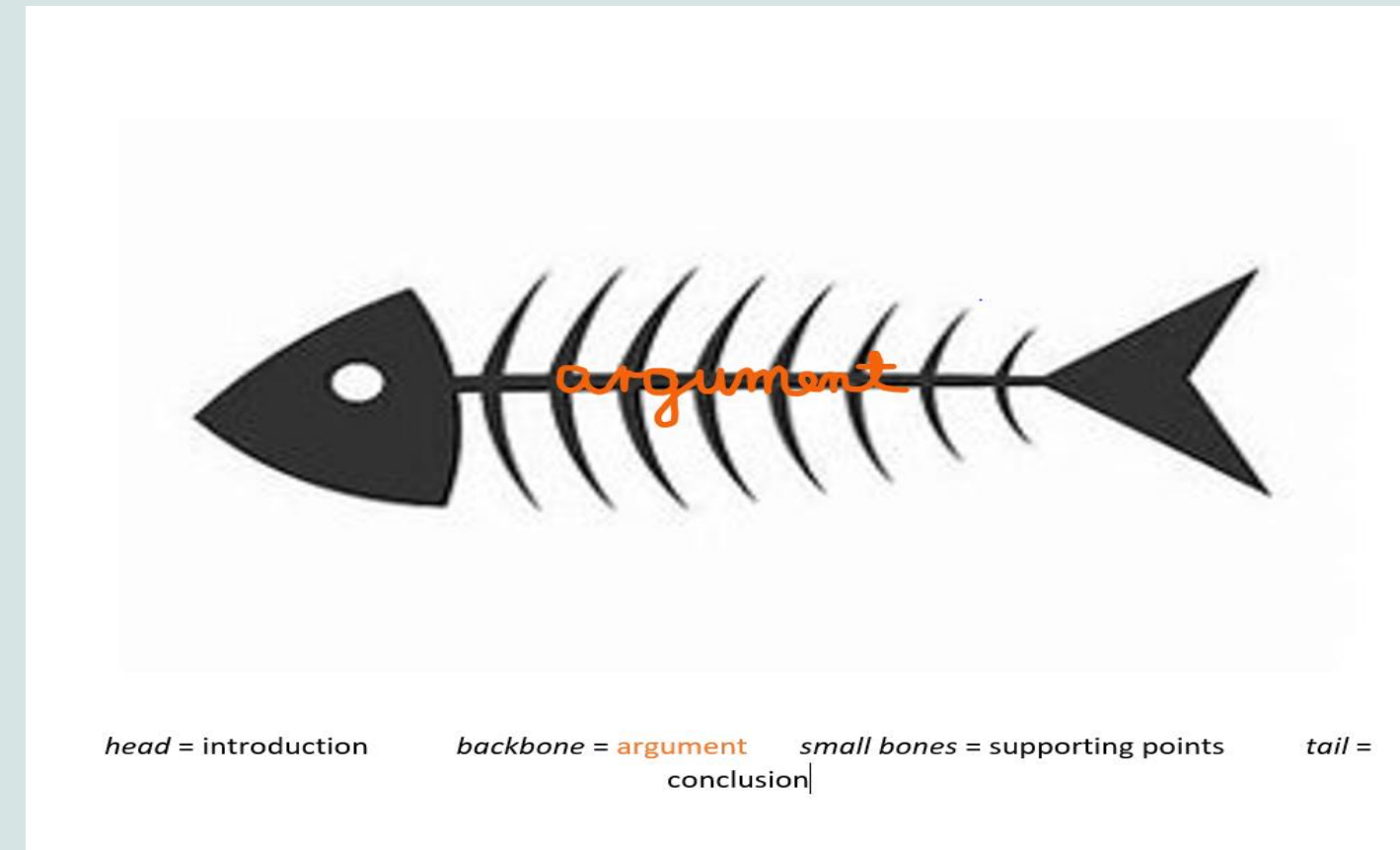


Figure 1. An illustration on argument development. Taken from the Intervention 1 presentation

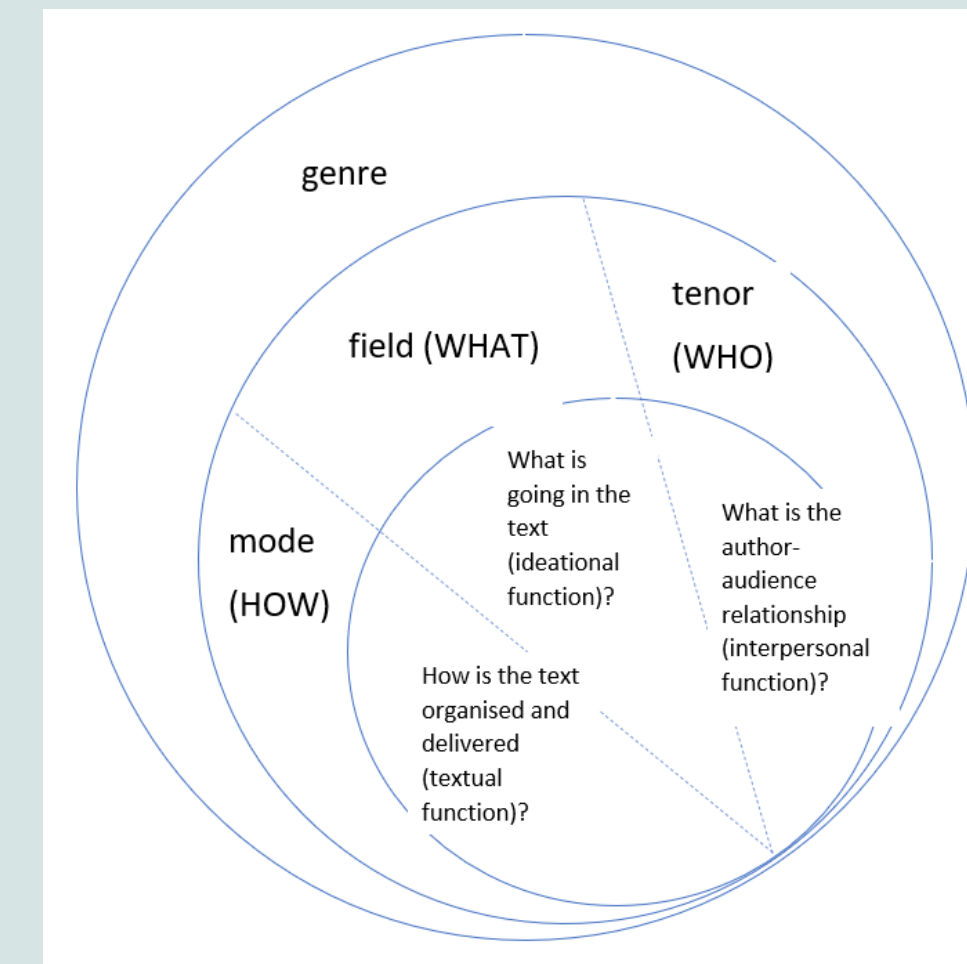


Figure 2. SFL FTM diagram from Intervention 1 materials

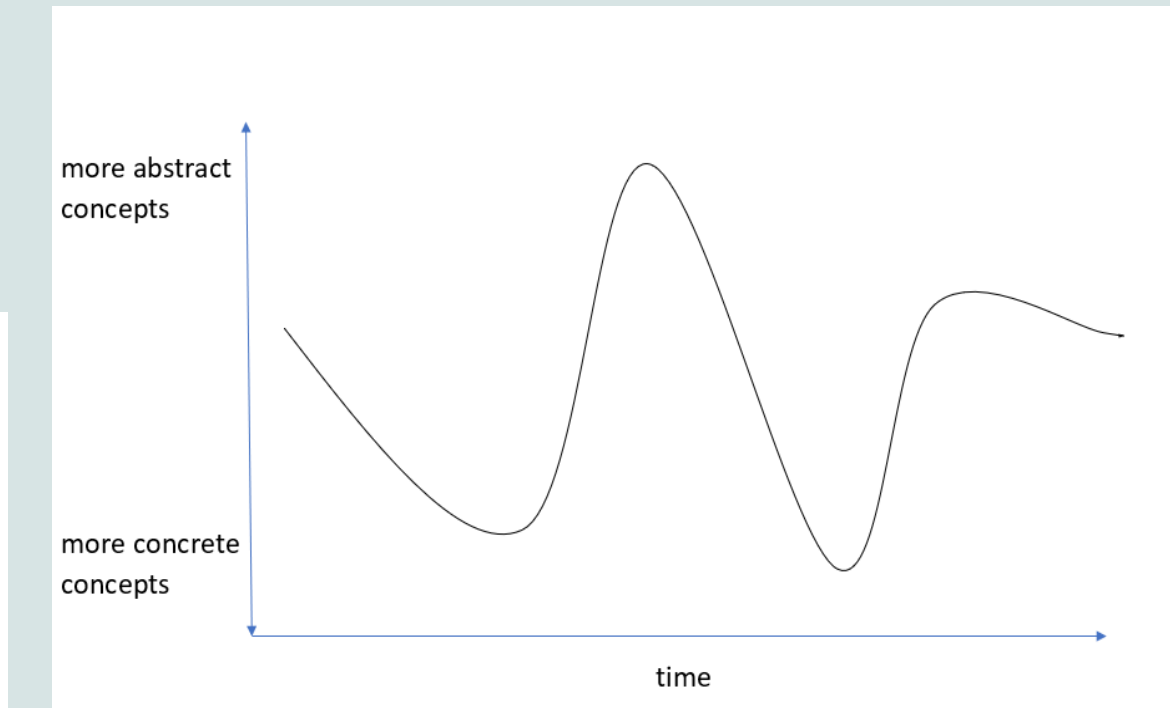


Figure 3. SFL FTM diagram from Intervention 1 materials

## Findings

### 1) Prior to the interventions, students reported that:

- They felt they had developed their academic writing skills during their degree
- They felt a 'gap' between their knowledge of academic writing and their ability to implement it into their own work
- They found it difficult to write concisely and structure their work
- Emotive aspects impacted on their ability to write effectively

### 2) Feedback on the interventions included:

- Students liked having a checklist/summary resource that they could refer to for evaluating papers and checking their work
- They felt they needed this sort of support earlier in their degree
- They wanted the material to be directly applied to their subject area

### 3) Study limitations

- Covid-19 impacted on timing and delivery of interventions
- Low response rate for post-intervention surveys: difficult to evaluate impact
- The students who participated in the interventions were not those who needed it the most

*"We have already been producing academic writing since year 1 with little guidance so maybe there should be more support then"*

*"I feel as though I know what critical thinking is and can recognise it in writing but struggle to implement it into my own work"*

*"Getting stressed and being under pressure which makes it difficult to stay focused and structure my answers"*

*"It helped to reinforce how to write an academic argument effectively".*

*"Having a picture to help remember the key points of the structure was useful as it helped to remember the order of the points"*

## Recommendations & Implications

- There is a place for EAP knowledge and skills within undergraduate degree courses
- This needs to be in place early (from first year) and clearly embedded within the discipline
- Students value take-away resources they can use to check their own work
- Due to the limited data in the study reported here, the researchers decided to duplicate the study in 2020/2021 in order to collect more data

## References

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