



Reviewing our asynchronous resources (the ROAR project): using student voice to inform LD support

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Presentation abstract

Asynchronous digital resources, such as videos, allow students to learn at times and in places that suit them, and are widely used in learning development (LD). Such resources help students reinforce skills as well as learn new ones (Tomaszewski, 2023), with evidence to suggest that appropriate digital learning modes in higher education (HE) also support the development of students' digital literacies (McGuinness and Fulton, 2019). Furthermore, at a time of budget cuts and hiring freezes across higher education in the UK (Lewis and Bolton, 2024), and the resulting increases in the demands on learning developers, it is arguably more important than ever to ensure that these asynchronous resources are meeting the needs of students.

The Academic Skills Team at Edinburgh Napier University (ENU) has a range of these asynchronous online resources. To ensure the team are continuing to support diverse learners in the dynamic landscape of HE post-COVID, a review into the usability and accessibility of these resources was warranted, as research suggests these are factors in students' engagement with online resources (Bringman-Rodenbarger and Hortsch, 2020).

Inspired by discussions during ALDcon24 around the role of using evidence in our practice, after a comprehensive literature review, we created a study into current offerings to assess whether these align with what is recommended from research. As student voice is at the heart of student engagement (Seale et al., 2015), we engaged seven ENU students in scenario-based tasks. Using the Think Aloud Protocol (van Someren et al.,

1994), we captured their thoughts and combined this with screencast videography (Kawaf, 2019) to see how they interacted with the resources.

The presentation discussed our findings and how we used these to redesign the asynchronous offerings and develop new support resources, and shared our experiences of engaging in research within the field of learning development.

Keywords: student voice; asynchronous resources; digital learning.

Community response

The session explored asynchronous resources to support student learning and proved innovative and interesting for participants. The Think Aloud Protocol (van Someren et al., 1994) was appreciated by attendees as a useful model that could be adapted institutionally and praised for its ability to encourage engagement in a range of tasks. Utilising this approach enabled a good representation of the steps students are taking to find the digital resources they need and can be used to inform and shape improvements.

During the session, many of the student perspectives were presented, which resonated with the experiences of others working with learning development asynchronous materials:

Every time I look at the 40-minute-long lecture, **I'm just actually I'm like, I need to prepare myself, like mentally.** But if they're like even four 10-minute ones, it doesn't, you know, **it doesn't feel as awful anymore.** Don't know why. It's something with our brains (Interview 1).

Key student feedback collected as part of the project highlighted the possibility of organising resources by topic (and not format), ensuring that resources communicate content, that they can be accessed via the search bar, and that they come in different formats (text, video, etc.).

Presenters identified six key themes from their project: design/aesthetics, clarity, content, convenience, accessibility, and format, with the session offering a series of insights and recommendations focusing on accessibility and content.

Recommendations reported under the theme of accessibility were:

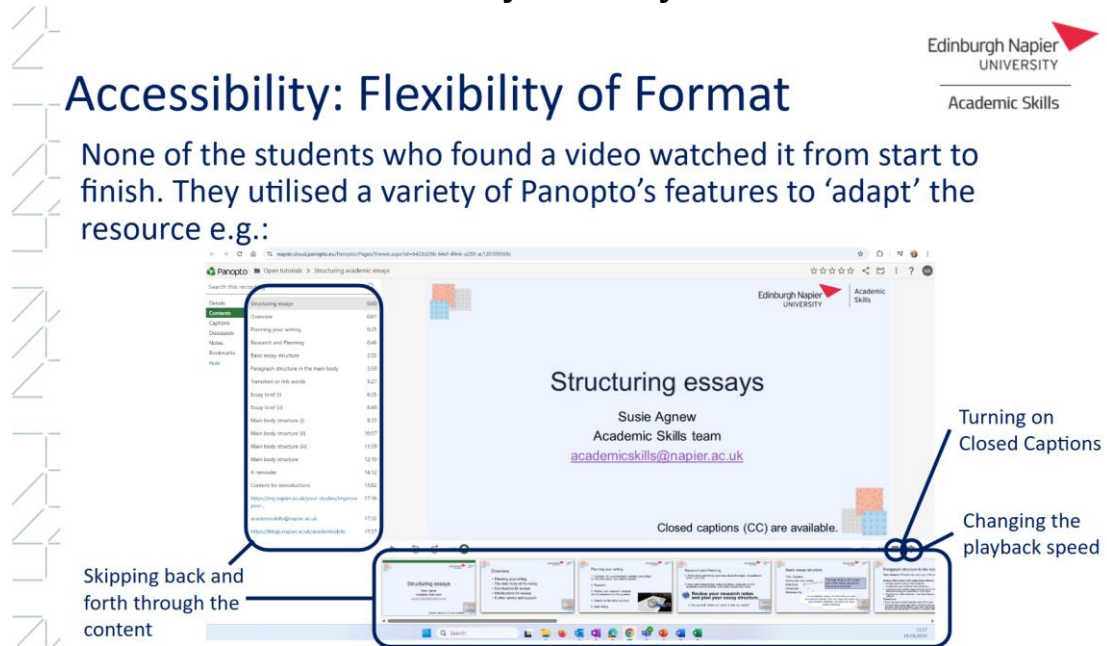
- Organise resources by topic rather than format.
- Names matter: ensure that the name of a resource clearly communicates content.
- Make sure our resources can be found via the search bar.
- Preferences vary: video, text, both, or even diagrams.
- Ensure our resources come in a variety of formats.
- Preferences vary: short for quick overview, longer for explanation.
- Create shorter resources to 'mix and match'.

Recommendations reported under the theme of content were:

- Students want examples, as close to discipline-specific as possible, and potentially with some interactive elements.
- Students want resources that reflect their self-assessed skill level.
- Clarify which 'level' each resource is aimed at and provide an optional structure for guidance.

This session elicited discussion from participants, with some reflecting they would review their own asynchronous LD resources using these approaches. Of particular interest were the options available within Panopto to review and gauge interaction with video materials. It was interesting to discover that students as part of the project did not watch a single video end to end and instead used a variety of features to navigate video content.

Image 1. Presenters' slide: accessibility: flexibility of format.



Participants appreciated a demonstration of the potential to interrogate statistical data within Panopto to ascertain any patterns of video use across student demographics, and whether this would then inform future resource creation: for example, international student vs home students' behaviours.

Next steps and additional questions

Engagement with digital materials is something we strive to encourage as learning development professionals. Such care and consideration go into the creation of resources that it can be disheartening when they aren't accessed as much as anticipated. It was good to see this project take steps to discovering the steps and behaviours to finding these asynchronous resources and what tips we can include to help promote and evaluate their use.

What changes have been made to asynchronous resources since this project? Will the speakers be repeating this project again? And if so, would they consider using a greater number of students in the next study?

Given the recommendations discovered, participants queried whether the ability to see discipline-aligned examples, quizzes, and personalised resources by skill level will be made available as part of a future interaction of this work?

Authors' reflection

We appreciated the opportunity to present our work to engaged and enthusiastic members of our professional community. The feedback we received was both constructive and reassuring that this work is timely. It was clear from both the discussion after the presentation and this feedback that many colleagues at other institutions are asking similar questions about their asynchronous resources as we are, as well as reflecting on the practical limitations of any desired changes.

We are not intending to repeat this research, as our focus now is on applying the lessons which we have learnt. As a result of this research, we have taken down some out-of-date resources and renamed the Academic Skills Blog as the Academic Skills Resource Hub. This provides us with a homepage that students can trust, whilst also retaining the flexibility to edit the page ourselves. We are currently in the process of working with the rest of our team to reorganise our resources according to topic rather than format. Looking forward, we plan to engage in further student partnership work by including Student Consultants in the development of new shorter, more flexible resources. Ideally, we will also work with these students to develop School-specific examples. We are also considering working with academic colleagues to utilise real examples of students' work. These will be different students to the ones who took part in the study so we will be increasing the variety of perspectives involved.

If you would like to discuss this project further, please contact us at

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The authors did not use generative AI technologies in the creation of this manuscript.

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