

## Team Research Projects in Academic Reading and Writing Module

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An important outcome within the framework of Academic Reading and Writing module appear to be research projects, which are guided and assessed in collaboration with subject teachers. These projects can be viewed as student- centered activities that involve learners in extensive practice of communication skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) and focus on the necessity to develop their study skills and use them in authentic speech situations. The format of the project reflects a student's ability to read scientific literature critically, assess the research situation, frame a tentative thesis and construct a preliminary outline, design a research paper and present it, explaining an insight on a topic.

The undergraduates are required to conduct an independent research in the area of their specialism in groups of 3 students and present the results of their investigation. As a follow –up activity the discussion and the analysis of the presented research findings are made by the fellow students. While preparing projects students learn how to generate ideas and select a topic for the research, maintain and follow a research strategy, compile bibliography, avoid plagiarism using different types of paraphrasing, draft the paper, revise and finalize it. In the process of conducting an independent research they acquire basic academic writing skills that are extremely essential for their future research. The above mentioned skills result from students' acquisitions to process scientific data, formulate objectives of the research, apply diverse research methods and techniques, work with statistic data, make use of references and quotations, structure logically the paper, and construct informative introductions as well as persuasive conclusions. The most challenging assignment in accomplishing mini-researches turned out to be the demonstration of certain oratorical skills, while presenting the results of the team investigation in public, and the effective and relevant use of audio-visual aids.

In assessing projects a number of aspects should be taken into consideration. Assessment of projects can be formative (a monitoring instrument throughout the project) and summative (a more formal individual and group assessment at the end of the project).

Formative assessment takes place at different stages of the project and includes group assessment through brainstorming and reporting, self and group assessment through form-filling, external assessment by teacher, etc. The focus is on group dynamics, the quality of group working process and cognitive development. Internal distribution of tasks and responsibilities, effort, attitude, contribution, ability to co-operate, to deal with different opinions and attitudes in a positive way are evaluated. Formative assessment are accomplished through teacher oral and written feedback at all stages of the project work.

Summative assessment is concerned with the quality of the product and its presentation. This kind of assessment covers three aspects of the project:

- the quality of professional work

The product is assessed as to its consistency, originality, relevance to the students' future professional activities and education, achievements of the project tasks, etc.

- the quality of presentation

- Oral and written presentations are assessed as to their appropriateness to the tasks and content of the project, their clarity, coherence, variety, presentation skills demonstrated, participation of the group members in presentation and discussion.

- the linguistic dimension

- The report is written and presented in English and the assessment session is carried out in this language as well. Students are not assessed in the language proficiency as such but in their ability to work with the foreign language in the project and to communicate their results to others.

The analysis of written research papers and presentations of the research results highlighted the most common faults falling into three main categories: paper formatting, the contents of the research and the presentation itself. The weakest point in paper formatting seem to be bibliography which is not referred to in the paper. The contents of the research are predetermined by the meticulousness of investigation. The following potential problems in presentation of the research findings can be identified: the text is too complex and contains many unfamiliar terms, the presenter does not attempt to keep the interest and attention of the audience (no intriguing introduction/convincing conclusion, etc), visuals are not used effectively. To sum up, the analysis of the performed projects highlights the tangible level of the acquired skills as to the students' ability to write and speak academically in the student-centered environment. Conducting research projects helps undergraduates plunge into academic reading and writing, enhances their production and interaction skills, develops intellectual habits and creativity, polishes the techniques of public presentations.

### **References**

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