

Wednesday, 29 January 2020

International Postgraduate Students' and Mature First-Time-at-University Students' Views about Academic English Writing Support after a Post-entry Assessment

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**THE UNIVERSITY OF
AUCKLAND**
Te Whare Wānanga o Tamaki Makaurau
NEW ZEALAND

**EDUCATION AND
SOCIAL WORK**

Outline

- DELNA
- DELNA process for students at UoA
 - One diagnostic process, diverse pathways
- Academic Language Advisor
- Academic writing support
- Students' views/voices

DELNA

(Diagnostic English Language Needs Assessment)

- A diagnostic procedure designed to identify a student's strengths and weaknesses in academic English so that appropriate language enrichment can be recommended and/or required.
- Post-admission assessment
- Free
- Required of all first-year students, including doctoral candidates

- Changing demographics in Auckland (and New Zealand) is the main reason for the conception and development of DELNA, according to Read and von Randow (2013).
 - increasing numbers of international students of non-English-dominant backgrounds
 - increasingly multilingual student population as a result of vigorous efforts to recruit international students as well as young people from recently established immigrant communities in Auckland
 - mature adults eligible for special admission, and students from the Maori and Pasifika ethnic communities recruited on equity grounds

DELNA

- **Two** assessments:
 - **Screening** (computer-based) and
 - **Diagnosis** (pen-and-paper)
 - Listening
 - Reading
 - Writing (2 tasks, 2.50mins)
- **All students**, regardless of language backgrounds, are required to complete the DELNA **Screening**.
- Some need to go on to sit the **Diagnosis**.



Welcome to DELNA

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- ▶ [Academic English Language Requirement \(AELR\)](#)
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[Book a 30-minute screening](#)

[Book a 2-hour diagnosis](#)

[Do a practice screening](#)

[Contact us](#)

Diagnostic English Language Needs Assessment

- All first-year students and doctoral candidates are required to do DELNA
- DELNA is free
- Your results will not appear on your official academic record



DELNA for students

Learn about the Screening and Diagnosis, book a session, and see where to access language support at the University.



Academic English Language Requirement (AELR)

If you are enrolling in a bachelor's degree programme (including conjoint degrees) at the University of Auckland, you may need to meet the Academic English Language Requirement (AELR).



License DELNA

License DELNA assessments for your institution through the DELNA Office.



DELNA Bibliography

A listing of DELNA related research, including journal articles and publications.



Contact the DELNA Office

Find out how you can contact the DELNA Office.

DELNA Diagnosis Bands for Listening, Reading and Writing

Bands 9 and 8	Expected to acquire academic literacy independently
Band 7	Use of language enrichment opportunities recommended
Band 6	Further language instruction recommended
Bands 5 and 4	At risk of failure: enrolment in an English language course strongly recommended

Academic English Language Adviser

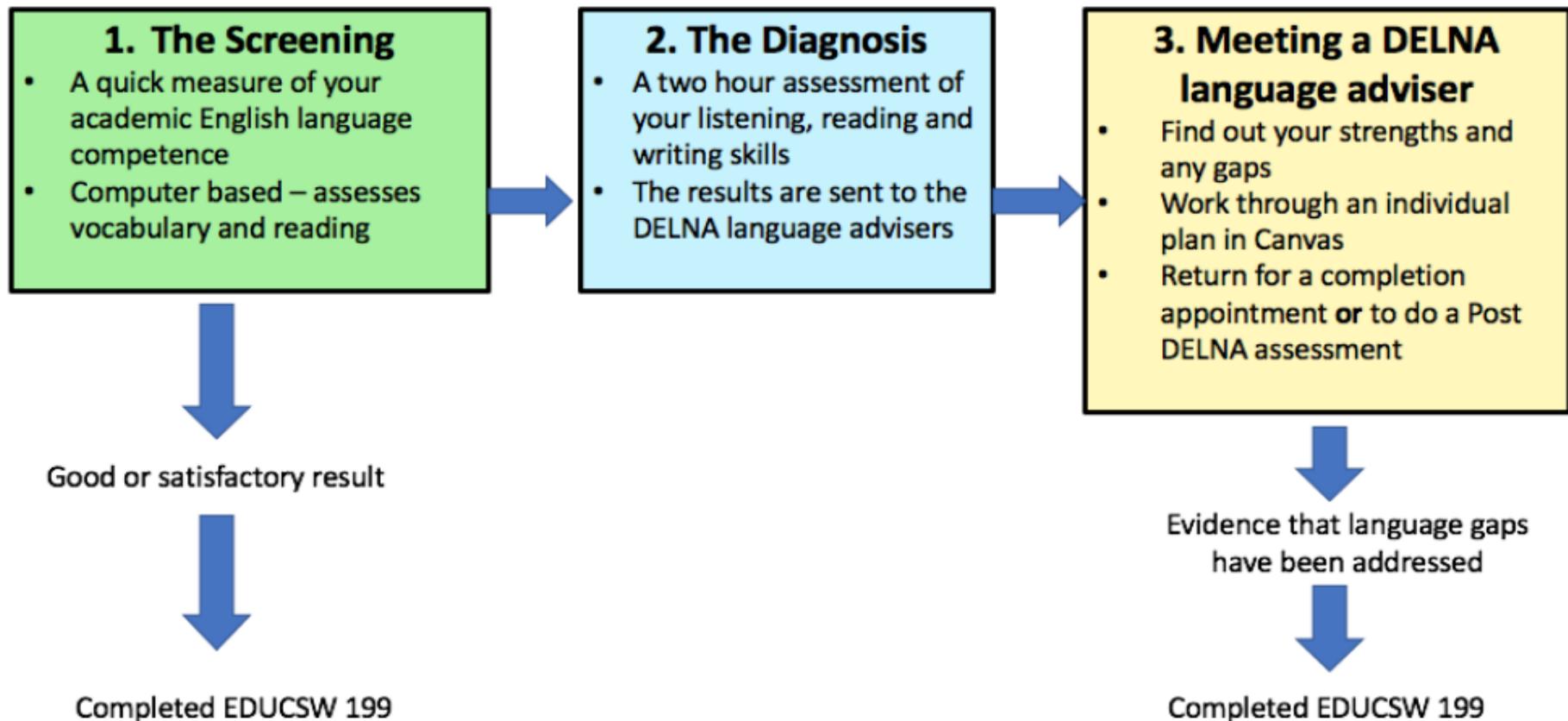
- Meet with individual students to develop an individual learning pathway for them to improve academic English language skills
 - Students need to make an appointment to discuss DELNA profile and appropriate enrichment work

One diagnostic process, diverse pathways

- Process for Bachelor Programmes at EDSW
- Process for Doctoral Candidates

DELNA process for Bachelor Programmes

English Language Competency (EDUCSW 199) is met through DELNA (Diagnostic English Language Needs Assessment).



After the Diagnosis:

- Appointment to discuss potential support
- Individual Plan constructed from raters' comments
- Online Academic English Language Enrichment programme
<https://canvas.auckland.ac.nz/courses/33924>
- Listening, Reading, Writing, Speaking and Grammar modules
- Writing submitted online for review and potential sign-off
- Students helped to critique their own writing
- Post DELNA reading/writing assessment for students with lowest grades
- Compulsory English Language Competency 0 credit paper

Non-traditional students (one or more facts may apply)

- adults over the age of 25 who left school with few or no qualifications
- have been out of the education system for a long time
- have no previous post-secondary experience
- could be First in Family or First in Generation
- come from a disadvantaged group such as women, minority ethnic groups or have a disability

Adult students have different characteristics and learning needs

- **Issues and barriers**

- time management: struggle to balance family and financial obligations while still performing well in school (Ross-Gordon, 2011)
- responsibilities: child care, health issues, and transport (Erisman & Steele, 2012)
- transitioning back into the classroom: problems with skills like notetaking, test taking, reading textbooks, time management, and teacher expectations (Higgins, 2010); Ross-Gordon, 2011)
- fear of essay writing and in some cases, technology

- Anxieties
- Needs
- Becoming a student was intentional, a positive choice
- Qualities and what these students bring

Student Voice

How did you feel about coming to university?

- Considering university at my age was a daunting prospect
- I thought I would be the only mature student
- Very nervous as I had been out of study for 30 years
- Nervous and overwhelmed leaving my job to start university

Student Voice

What were the challenges that you faced?

- Being disciplined in self-directed study
- Being overwhelmed with academic readings and language
- Essay writing. It was 25 years since I wrote an essay
- Exams. The fear of failing exams at my age was sickening
- Technology and getting used to Canvas
- Fitting study in with family life and children

Student Voice

How did you feel about the DELNA diagnosis of your academic English skills?

- Worried. It put me under pressure on my first day.
- Defeated before I had even begun my degree
- Scared because English was not my strongest area but I knew I would get support I needed
- Happy because it highlighted immediately where I needed support

Student Voice

Comment on face to face support

- Professional, approachable and supportive. I felt able to ask any questions
- It improved the likelihood of getting better grades
- It helped to have someone explain and guide me through my academic writing
- Without it, I would not have got through my degree

Student Voice

Comment on support offered in workshops

- A great way to scaffold learning
- Opportunities were given to work collaboratively and do exercises or activities which further enhanced our learning
- Explained aspects that lecturers missed out on
- Students were able to have input

Student Voice

Comment on the support offered in the online programme to you as a student

- I found it useful, but I preferred working with staff members face to face
- Excellent. The information for my own learning definitely made a difference
- As a fulltime student and fulltime mum, being able to access it in my own time was ideal
- Helped me to understand and strengthen my own writing in my own time

Student Voice

Comment on the online support offered to you as a teacher trainee

- Provided a wealth of information that I will be able to use in the future
- I learnt a lot from the programme and intend to use it in my own teaching to help explain concepts and terms in paragraph writing and grammar
- Gave me support and assistance not only in my studies but on Practicum as well

To sum up: All respondents were non-traditional students

- 83% had to do the DELNA diagnosis (2 hour pen and paper test)
- Some have been top scholar in a subject across all 3 University of Auckland campuses
- A significant number have gained scholarships
- By the time they completed DELNA requirements, they could self-correct writing

Doctoral candidates

Process for meeting DELNA Provisional Goal

1. Attend “Language enrichment for doctoral candidates following DELNA” workshop
2. Complete all recommended language enrichment work (e.g. workshops, online resources, credit course, face-to-face)
3. Record all work and progress in a reporting form
4. Attend a language provisional goal exit interview

Enrichment (in writing)

- Online resources
- Workshops
- Credit courses (min. B grade)
- Face-to-face support
- Peer review/feedback

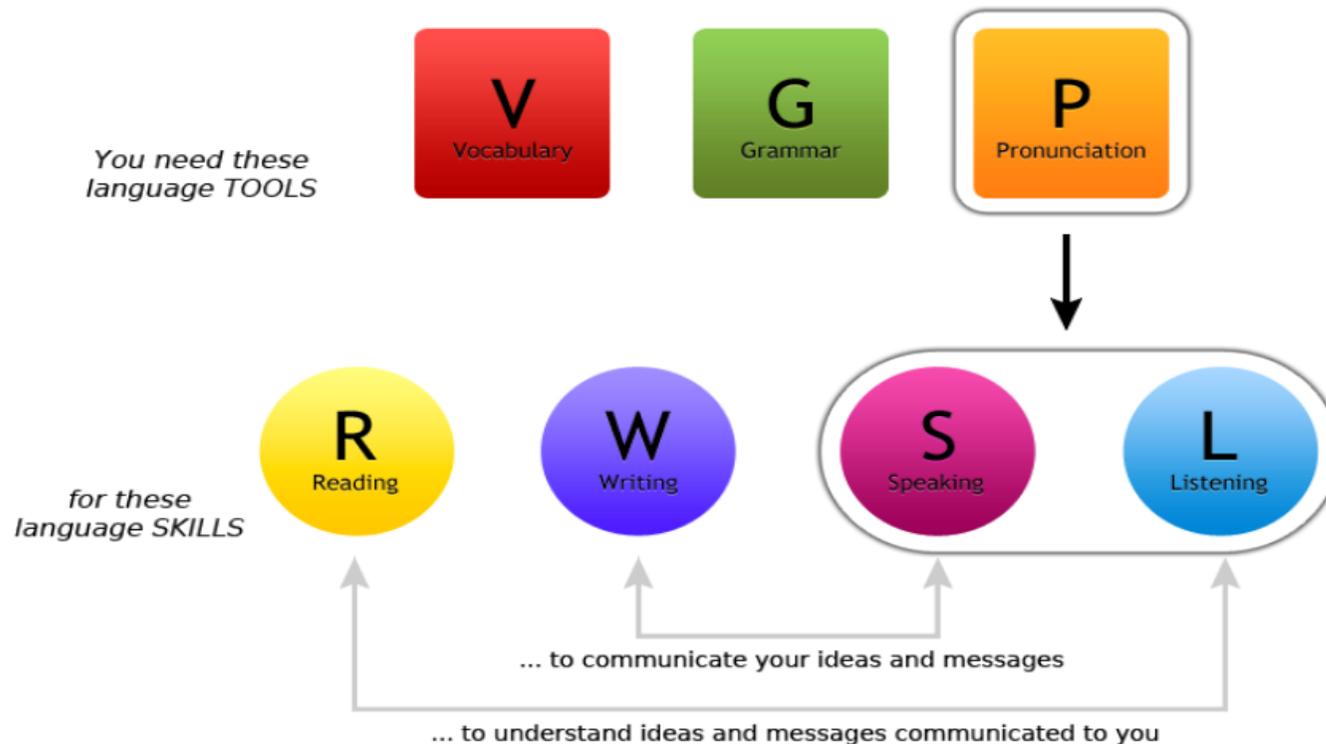
• Online Resources

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English Language Enrichment - ELE Online

Welcome back Donglan

Select a language tool or skill, or browse the **LANGUAGE FEATURES** at the lower left.



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Doctoral workshops

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Your selections

Nothing selected.

Your search matched 29 upcoming workshops. Showing results 1 - 10

Literature review: Targeting your research and staying current (Faculty of Education & Social Work)

This workshop is open to doctoral candidates only.

This workshop is designed for doctoral candidates from the Faculty of Education and Social Work and will introduce discipline-related databases and effective strategies for retrieving specific sets of results, literature and data.

If you are new to the University of Auckland, it is strongly recommended that you attend the **Literature review: Getting started** workshop first as a prerequisite.

Academic writing: Thesis structure

This workshop is open to doctoral students only.

Thesis structure, academic writing, thesis writing

Creating a logical thesis structure helps your thesis examiners and future employers understand your research and subsequent contribution to knowledge. This workshop covers how to structure a doctoral thesis and its essential sections. You will have the chance to start mapping out your thesis chapter titles in the workshop.

Face-to-face support

- One-on-one
- Small group
- Peer review/feedback

- Students can bring a sample of their written work to discuss for feedback.
 - No proofreading or editing for written work such as assignments, proposals or theses

An on-going study

- Students (band 6 or 5 in writing) identified as needing enrichment
- Questions for reflection:
 1. What was your initial reaction to the DELNA requirements and process?
 2. Has the initial feeling/attitude changed over time? If yes, in what ways?
 3. Has the DELNA process and support helped develop your proficiency in academic writing? If yes, in what ways?
 4. How did you feel about the peer review/feedback sessions you have had?

An on-going study

- Reporting forms
- Meetings and appointment logs
- Emails

Student voice

- **Initially, mixed feelings about DELNA**

- *"I thought why should I do another test since I have done IELTS and been admitted (as a doctoral student)."*
- *"I completed my Masters in a UK university. I don't know why I needed to go through this assessment?"*
- *"I've always been weak in writing. I thought I just do it and perhaps after the assessment, you will help me."*
- *"I believe my writing is at a good standard. I would be really upset if you are telling me to do the DELNA test just because I have a Korean name ..."*
- *"What if I do not get signed off?"*

Student voice

- **Over time, attitudes change, acknowledging the benefits of going through the DELNA process**
- **Even during the initial meeting, some students come to realise the value of taking the assessment.**
 - Some admit challenges in academic English
 - Others appreciate their scripts being marked with detailed comments and become aware...

- *"Coming from a country whose mother tongue is not English, I know I have some problems in academic writing, vocabulary and grammar... This fact is proven after I took both DELNA screening and diagnosis."*

"I was a bit worried about the idea of assessment but soon my feeling about DELNA changed because the programme is well developed for students like myself. DELNA team has diagnosed my English skills in different areas such as writing and grammar initially. Then they provided the tailored resources for me to go and practice. They also monitor my progress, which gives a positive pressure on my participation and improvement. I will visit DELNA regularly. Thank you for your support and I appreciate that."

- *"Before I came to see you, I was very nervous and thought now I have to take a course to improve my academic English. Obviously I do need to take a credit course and achieve at least a B, but I am now also happy to know I do have some strong areas! You showed me that I do not have many grammar errors in my writing but I do need to improve the way of expressing my ideas and academic writing does not means long sentences."*

- *"I ignored this DELNA because I thought that I was OK since I have been accepted by the University to do my studies until my supervisor asked me to come to see you for some support as she finds it difficult to read my work! The meeting was good and after I read the comments about my writing and had a look at all those markings on my writing, oh gosh! So many errors. Clearly I need to improve."*

- *"The online materials also provided a good chance for me to learn certain vocabulary in accordance with academic matters."*
- *"Furthermore, the 210 academic English course I took in semester 1 opened my eyes and broadened my horizon that writing academically requires much preparation and qualified skill."*

"I started to book an appointment once a week and I wrote some articles and email them to the DELNA staff for comments. I clearly see the improvement and the progress in my writing in each week."



"The DELNA support makes me more aware of academic writing do's and don'ts, verbs, vocabulary, etc. I know I have good ideas so I usually just put them down. When I'm editing nowadays, I make sure verb tenses, sentence structures are alright. And I change vocabulary."

"Initially, DELNA gave me a lot of stress. I have my research proposal to finish and many other writings and readings to do. I really do not have time but after I visited the support site, I found it very useful, especially grammar and what to look at when editing. I am now more aware of my mistakes and I read through my work more carefully. Also, the academic writing style part is very useful too. I now know I need to hedge my sentences, and avoid using abbreviations."

"Summarizing and paraphrasing were my biggest problems. The workshops are beneficial for proposal writing to avoid plagiarism. However, I still need to practice more to improve this skill."

"The academic phrase bank you recommended to me was so useful. I can draw on some ideas and phrases (sentence starters) to write my research proposal and literature review."

"The course LANGTCHG 715 extended my knowledge of academic writing. Before I took this course, This course enabled me to gain a more systematic concept of what an academic book review looks like... In addition, I gained two new insights regarding literature review. One is being critical; a literature review is not just to list relevant studies, but more importantly to critically analyse them by adding your own voice or stance. The other concerns verb tenses. I used to adopt the past simple tense throughout reviewing. Now I know when and where I can take advantage of the three types of meta-discourse: future orientation, presentation orientation and recapitulation."

So overall...

- More aware of grammar and able to self-correct/edit
- More confident in paraphrasing and in-text citation
- More aware of academic conventions
- More aware of the need to be critical in literature review and how to sound critical in writing
- More confident in developing arguments

Dialogic peer review/feedback

Why dialogic approach to feedback

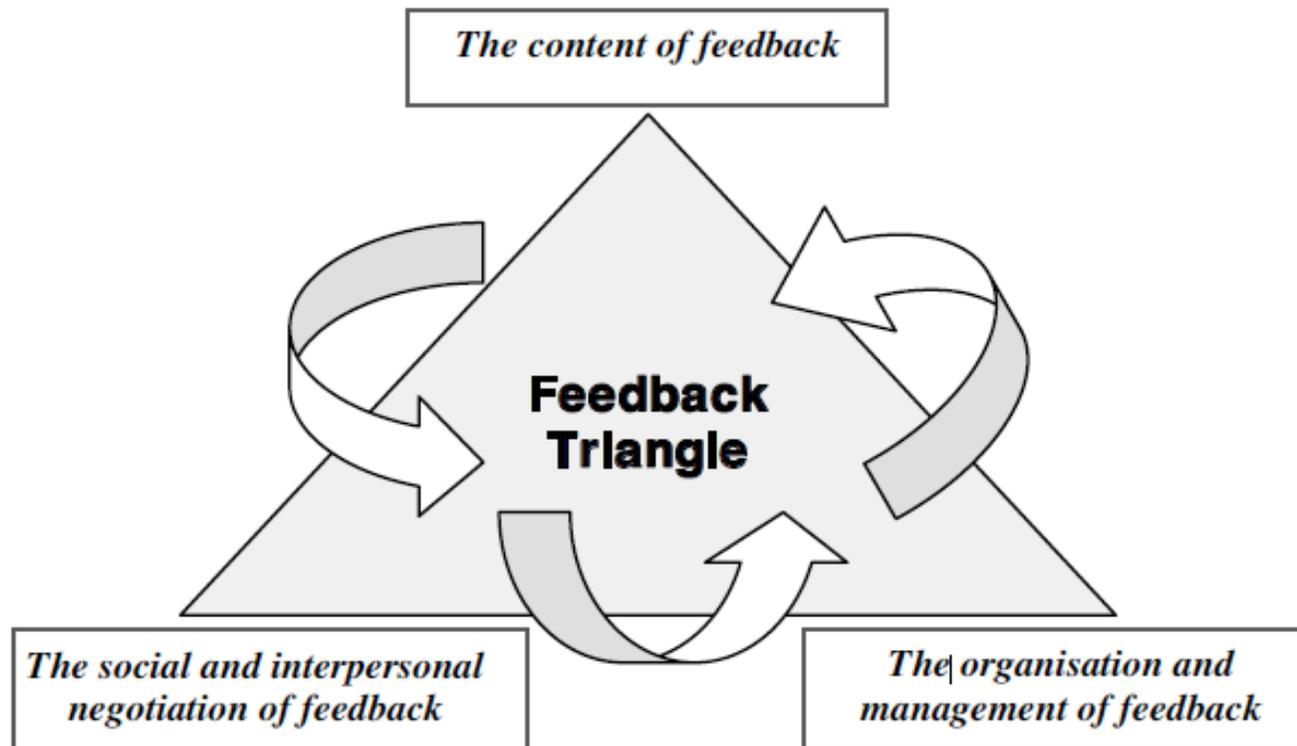
- Dialogic feedback circumvents the limitations of one-way transmission of feedback in the form of written comments on student work.
- It gives students an opportunity to voice their intentions for a word choice, and construction of a sentence or a paragraph.
- Dialogue involves relationships in which participants think and reason together (Gravett & Petersen 2002); it is more than conversation or exchange of ideas.
- Dialogue is a useful tool for reconciling the different perceptions of teachers and students of the feedback process (e.g. Adcroft 2011).
- It is also useful in building trust (Carless, 2013)

Carless (2013, p. 91) points out:

- “Trust is an important but underexplored factor impacting on teaching, learning and assessment. Trust is of great relevance to feedback processes because of the relational, affective and emotional sides of feedback. Assessment and feedback experiences can arouse negative (e.g. anxiety or anger) or positive (e.g. pride or satisfaction) reactions. Trusting virtues such as empathy, tact and a genuine willingness to listen are ways in which positive feedback messages can flourish and more critical ones be softened. Trust needs to be accounted for because when it is absent, the prospects for learners’ uptake of feedback are seriously constrained.”

The feedback triangle

(Yang & Carless, 2013)



The feedback triangle.

Comment on peer review...

"In the peer review study group you organized for me with another social work doctoral student, I received advice from more perspectives, which is very useful for my study. In addition, both you and W suggested I could use a table to compare and analyse information from different articles to find out themes for literature review. That has worked very well."

Comment on peer review...

- *"One of the benefits was it enhanced a learning point when I identified any errors in my peers' work."*

Comment on peer review...

"I am very grateful for your organization of the peer review for us. I have learnt a lot. Firstly, I pay more attention to some minor linguistic points in order to avoid some minor linguistic errors. In addition, I emphasize the clarity of meaning. I usually remind me of how to convey the meaning more clearly, avoiding the ambiguity. Finally, I achieve a lot in cohesion and coherence in writing. Now, I consider the logical relationships between sentences and paragraphs and use some cohesive devices to connect them."

Comment on peer review...

*"**Dialogical feedback** is a wonderful practice because it provides us with an opportunity for student-teacher conference where we can clarify our intentions in writing so that more accurate and valuable feedback can be obtained."*

Comment on peer review...

"Thanks for organizing the peer review sessions. It helps me a lot!! I learned to write my thesis in a more logic way. When I am writing my thesis, I will think about the structure of a section, a paragraph, and the cohesion between sentences. I also pay more attention to the content of the paragraph. I believe that we three have learned a lot from each other in many ways.

I think for future peer review sessions, three students will be enough. If too many students are involved, it is hard to get detailed feedback from each other. And if it is designed to have a long-time effect on students, I think two or three months are needed. And for phd students like us, if we prepare a similar piece of writing each time (for example, methodology, or literature review), I think we can learn better from each other."

Hello Donglan

I would love to share my thoughts. In fact, it was a very good memory of having those sessions with you at the beginning of my PhD journey. What I benefited was for sure academic writing improvement because of all the advice and resources you offered. Whenever I had questions about English writing, I knew you were there that I could turn to for help, which enhanced my confidence along the journey. You also gave emotional support, whether or not you were aware of that, who understood my struggle and knew how to deal with it. Really appreciate all the work you did for me.

I think you have done an excellent job. What I am still working on regarding my writing is how to express simply and clearly. Guess it takes a long time to do as well as native speakers. :)

Thanks Donglan. Yes, finally I got my PhD. You also contributed to my big achievement. Lucky me and other students to have you on campus.:):)

All the best

XXX

Overall, for both cohorts...

- Students agree that DELNA is valuable in helping them become aware of their strengths and weaknesses in academic writing.
- They feel that the DELNA process is a way of socialising them into academic conventions and discourse.
- While the online resources and workshops are useful, students feel they also benefit from individual consultation with the language adviser and peer review sessions.

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Thank you!

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