



## Cracking the reading code

An audio-visual resource for students on how to read  
academic texts

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## Introduction

Many tertiary students avoid academic reading, although they realise it is crucial to successful study. Even students who are keen readers of fiction and general texts can find reading a textbook a huge challenge. While there is plenty of published good advice around on how to read academic texts well, a student who is already feeling stressed about reading is unlikely to want to read about how to read. Students with reading difficulties, when canvassed, stated that they were more likely to access an audio-visual resource than a text to help them learn to unpack academic texts. As one student said “Duh...reading is the problem, and you expect me to read to sort it out?!”

This resource aims to reach two distinct user groups – students and tutors. It consists of:

- Eight concise video-clips demonstrating effective reading strategies
- Downloadable key points beside each video-clip
- Downloadable reading booklet which systematically outlines all of the reading strategies in the video-clips
- Downloadable tutor points to ponder beside each video-clip
- Downloadable tutor handbook which shows how to connect students with the resource and links to information on inclusive practice which demonstrates effective reading strategies

## Identification of the need

*Clare Hazledine developed a booklet incorporating a range of academic reading strategies as a result of many consultations with tertiary students with reading difficulties. She showed this to one of these students and asked for feedback. The honest reaction was “Sure, it’s a good booklet and I’m sure people will learn from it – but not those of us who don’t do reading. Why would I go first to something written about reading?” This sparked an inquiry into whether any audio-visual resources existed which covered academic reading strategies in a comprehensive and systematic way, and as a result we decided there was a gap that needed to be filled in order to promote successful academic reading to reading averse students.*

## Evidence

Instruction in academic reading does not receive the same degree of overt attention as academic writing. Many tertiary institutions produce excellent self-access written resources on academic reading (Massey University Online Writing and Learning Link, 2011; University of Sussex, 2011; Hazledine, 2012). However, given that the best initial medium of instruction for the reluctant academic reader is not reading how to read, teaching staff also need a resource which not only demonstrates to students what good academic reading strategies look like, but highlights what tutors can embed into their classroom practice to model and establish good academic reading strategies and scaffold students to handle academic texts well. Currently there appears to be very little of this material available in an audio-visual form, and we were unable to find anything in the New Zealand context which actually demonstrates what good practice in the area looks like.

At Whitireia New Zealand, we work with many students for whom education has not been a success story. New Zealand studies such as Bishop, Berryman, Powell and Teddy (2007) and Bishop,

O’Sullivan and Berryman (2010) showed that effective teaching included working from a strengths-based rather than a deficit model, building relationships with students, use of baseline data and formative assessments, context-based learning and scaffolding of new learning. Many of these effective teaching strategies are demonstrated in the videos and highlighted in the tutor notes.

Australian research by Scott, Shah, Grebennikov and Singh (2008) highlighted the importance of ‘just-in-time’ and ‘just-for-me’ resources, including self-teaching and orientation materials utilising the experiences of other students as motivators for student learning and optimising student retention. These videos and associated downloadable resources are both ‘just-in-time’ and ‘just-for-me’. Wray and Lewis (1995) observed that readers who could confidently negotiate texts used a recursive set of complex skills. These skills informed the Effective Literacy Strategies programme which was implemented throughout New Zealand primary and secondary schools and then into the tertiary sector through the Ministry of Education Learning for Living exploratory project and continued professional development for literacy tutors (Ministry of Education, 2003). Specific strategies that were found to be particularly effective are outlined in Hay and Smith (2004) and include:

- Activating students’ prior understandings and linking these to new information and concepts
- Expecting success in learning
- Establishing a purpose for reading
- Locating information
- Adopting appropriate literacy strategies
- Recording information
- Interacting with the text
- Monitoring understanding
- Critical evaluation of ideas

Hazledine (2012) believes that preparing the reading space and developing a clear mental picture of the target text are precursors to these strategies, and has developed a 7-step model which shows students how to implement effective reading strategies. Explicit academic reading strategies can and should be taught (Ministry of Education, 2003). Students who “don’t do reading” can become competent academic readers when they know these strategies. The videos in this project demonstrate all of these strategies in operation.

## **Design parameters**

We wanted to produce a set of video-clips which were authentic, attractive, concise and accessible to students, and which clearly demonstrated the strategies for successful academic reading. To this end we worked with CWA, with whom we had previously created two excellent quality collections of video-clips which captured aspects of working with Māori learners, Pacific learners and embedding literacy and numeracy in context. The architecture of the front page had to clearly indicate the length of each video-clip and what it contained. Related information for students had to be clear, concise and easy to find without excessive reading.

## **Target student market**

The project was designed specifically to meet the needs of the reluctant academic reader. The message had to be clearly demonstrated in the audio-visual resource. The associated texts for

download were to complement this, with the audio-visual resource able to stand alone. The reading strategies had to be valid and overt.

## **Target tutor market**

The entire suite of video-clips is useful for tutors to understand what it's like for a student who "doesn't do reading" to face the challenge and unlock the strategies to read academic texts. One clip in particular "What tutors can do" was designed to show a tutor using effective tutor strategies to teach academic reading in context. Further information for tutors was intended to provoke reflection on teaching practice, either alone or in a workshop setting, and to link to useful resources. The tutor handbook was to enable tutors to firstly link students directly to the resource, and secondly to incorporate good reading strategies into classroom practice.

## **Complementary audio-visual and text components**

The downloadable text components – booklet and key points - for the student resource complement the audio-visual resource, which can stand alone. The audio-visual clips communicate the strategies and the affective factors around reading aversion to tutors as well. However the tutor downloadable text components also contain reflective questions and links to resources to model effective academic reading strategies.

## **Using the resource**

### **Students**

We intend students to browse the clips using the tags to select an interesting place to start, and then navigate through clips much as one navigates YouTube. Key points are downloadable, as is the booklet which covers all of the strategies.

### **Tutors**

Tutors can use the audio-visual resource in a class context. The booklet covers all of the strategies. We envisage that a tutor could provide students with a direct link to the resource and that once students have the link, they will be able to use it immediately.

There are links to useful tips and resources for understanding the affective factors relative to reading aversion, and on modelling good reading strategies in context.

## **Testing**

The video-clips were shown to several small groups before the final edit of each clip was completed, and the content of each clip and the number of clips were modified as a result of feedback from students, academic advisors, educational film-makers and tutors. The resulting edited clips have now been shown in some small groups and classes at Whitireia, and at a regional hui of the Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors of Aotearoa New Zealand (ATLAANZ). All audiences have been fully engaged by the clips.

## Evaluation of audio-visual resource

- Student feedback: “encouraged and inspired”, “the overview is that we are not alone”, “We’ve got no excuses now”, “I connected, I’m in the same boat”, “It makes me feel confident that I can do this”, “I can now believe in myself”, “I know there’s support”, “ I have seen it with my own eyes”, “it’s real coming from him”, “I felt relaxed and connected with him the way he says it”, “it’s not overpowering” and “I can see someone else doing it”.
- Tutor feedback: “inspiring”, “natural”, “authentic”, “funny”, “real”, “gives hope”, “co-ordinates well with the booklet”, “it complements the hand-out” and “It’s a relevant medium like youTube”.
- Educational film-maker feedback: “Stunning”, “moving”.
- Educational researcher feedback: “Brilliant”, “Excellent”, “Easy to follow”, “Easy to gain an understanding of how students can learn”, “Very Impressed”.
- Academic advisor feedback from ATLAANZ regional hui: [on presentation] “Lively presentation” [on reading booklet] “excellent reading resource”, “very good and we should like our students to benefit from it”

## Evaluation of text resources for students

The reading booklet has been used with many classes over the last couple of years, and found to be a systematic and accessible collection of effective strategies. It has been revised several times, and adapted to generate a series of one page hand-outs which are available in hard copy at Poutama Academic Learning Services, and on line through our Moodle page. There has been steady uptake of these resources for those who have not already been exposed to the booklet in a class context.

## Evaluation of tutor resource

The tutor resource has not been evaluated yet, as it complements the video-clips. It should enable tutors to easily direct students to the resource as well as informing tutors. Once the site is live, its efficacy will be able to be evaluated.

## Dissemination

The reading booklet was presented to the 2011 ATLAANZ conference. Video-clips were presented at the ATLAANZ Central Region hui and were well received. Our hope is that the architecture of the resource on the Ako Aotearoa website will create an accessible resource platform and that many students and tutors will be able to access this resource and benefit from it.

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CWA Learning Media

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