ONLINE WRITING LAB (OWL)

Tips for Creating Great OWLs

Online Writing Labs (OWLs) should be engaging and more than just a download of information that you can find online or in a self-help book. Here are some tips you can use to create a great online course.

# Select Your Course Topic

Choose a course topic you love and know – this passion and knowledge will then flow through to your OWL. Of course, your topic should also have relevance to your participants.

# Provide Clear Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes identify the knowledge and skills your OWL participant will have gained after your course. Use measurable verbs to describe outcomes. For example, after the first week of an OWL on setting SMART goals, your participants will have achieved the following learning outcomes.

At the end of the first week, participants will be able to:

1. DEFINE the components of a SMART goal (knowledge).
2. WRITE a SMART goal related to writing (skill).

# Create a Logical Structure for the Course

Structure your OWL into a logical sequence. For example, an OWL on *Goal Setting and Challenges to Achieving your Goals for Writing* might have the following sequence:

1. Week 1 – Set SMART goals
2. Week 2 – Challenge barriers to goals – thoughts
3. Week 3 – Challenge barriers to goals – actions
4. Week 4 – Review your goals and the way ahead

# Effectively Structure Each Week

Break your content into parts. A four-week OWL should have at least 4 x 1 hour sessions included with approximately 45-50 minutes of content per week, and 10-15 minutes allowed for interaction and feedback. Depending on your course, you might structure this differently with one larger opportunity for feedback at the end, but each section of the content should generally try to include the following parts:

1. **Point** – What point do you want to make?
2. **Example** – Use an example to illustrate your point.
3. **Application** – Have an activity so participants can apply your point.
4. **Feedback** – Provide feedback so participants know they are on the right track. Note: Peer feedback can be useful, but expert feedback is even better. You should provide feedback at least once during your course – this helps to distinguish you from reading a self-help book or blog.

# Use a Range of Mediums to Engage Your Participants

Member feedback suggests that the more successful OWLs are those where participants are engaged through the use of different mediums as opposed to those where content is presented only in PDF format.

Moodle, the online learning platform RWA utilises for its OWL program, has a variety of different tools that can be used to achieve such engagement. Access will be given to presenters in the month leading up to their scheduled OWL, so allow plenty of time to research the tools available. Consider ways to engage your participants through the use of:

* 1. Reading, visual, video or audio content – to convey content, or to illustrate a point.
  2. Activities – to apply knowledge. E.g. writing prompts, worksheets, visual prompts, etc.
  3. Interaction – to encourage participation and peer discussion and to increase relevance to individuals. E.g. forums, polls.

In summary, when you are creating your OWL, remember you are creating a workshop and keep asking yourself the following questions:

* How am I different from a self-help book or blog?
* What is my unique selling point?
* How am I going to engage my participants?
* What are participants going to walk away with so they feel satisfied with my OWL?