Subject specific online plagiarism tutorials

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This poster describes the development of subject-specific online tutorials to teach students about what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. The tutorials deliver high quality, interactive learning materials to students in a format that allows them to work at their own pace and review and consolidate their learning as often as necessary. The tutorials were created using Microsoft PowerPoint and Adobe Presenter software (Figure 1) and are publicly available at http://tinyurl.com/plagiarismtutorial

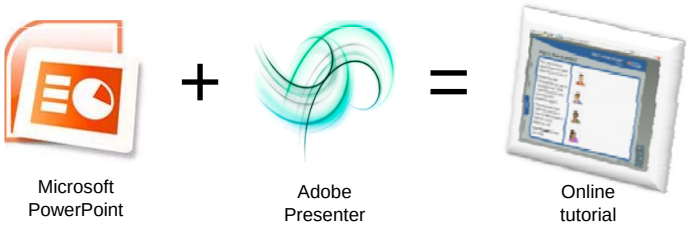

Figure 1: Software used to create the tutorials

Context

There has been a wealth of information targeted at students to tell them that they should not plagiarise, but a gap in students' understanding of how to actually avoid it. The idea behind the development of the original tutorial was that if students could learn the study skills to enable them not to plagiarise, they would not simply be avoiding getting penalised; more positively, they would be developing the academic skills required to help them in their academic work. Generally speaking, plagiarism detection software causes students to be anxious, the idea of the tutorial was that it would increase students' confidence by helping them to understand.

Design

Whilst generic advice on study skills is valuable, it is enriched when subject-specific examples are used. The tutorial was therefore partly based on a subject-specific exercise (Biological Sciences) already developed by Willmott and Harrison (2003). It was structured on a core of generic content which could be re-versioned (Figure 2). The discipline-specific elements were designed as discrete entities so that their adaptation would not interfere with the pedagogical integrity of the rest of the resource (Figure 3).

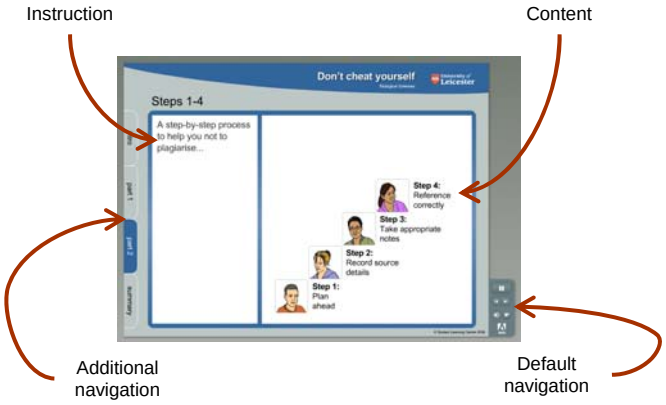

Figure 2: Example of generic content

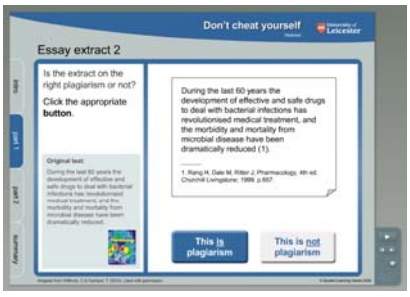

Figure 3: Example of subject specific content

Versions

There are now 16 subject-specific versions of the tutorial.

- Biological Sciences
- Computer Science
- Criminology
- Engineering
- English
- Geography
- Geology
- History
- Labour Market Studies
- Law
- Management
- Medicine
- Museum Studies
- Occupational Psychology
- Politics and International Relations
- Psychology

Feedback

The tutorials have had more than 18,000 viewings between September 2006 and May 2009.

Feedback from staff and students on the tutorial has been overwhelmingly positive (Figure 4). Note that Figure 4 also shows about 10% of respondents strongly disagreeing with statements about the tutorials being interesting, easy to use and informative. However, the accompanying free text feedback suggested many of the respondents simply misinterpreted the rating scale, which read, for instance: I found this tutorial interesting (1 = strongly agree, 4 = strongly disagree). Many respondents who gave this question a 4 then went on to say very positive things in their free text answers.

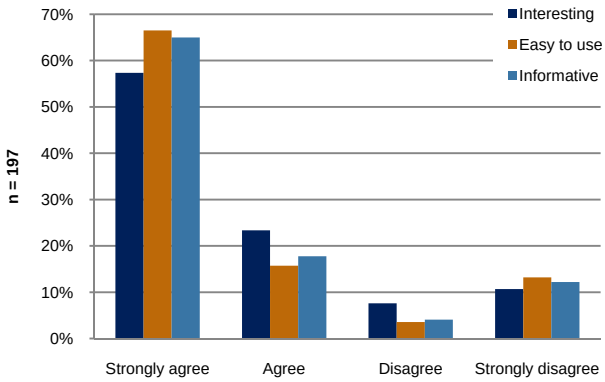

Figure 4: Feedback from students re interest, ease of use and infomrativeness of tutorials

The free text answers to the question: 'The best bit about the tutorial was...' are represented in Figure 5; the larger the font size the more times that word appeared in the free text answer. Clearly the examples were considered by many to be the best bit about the tutorial, also the ease of use and the interactivity were key aspects.

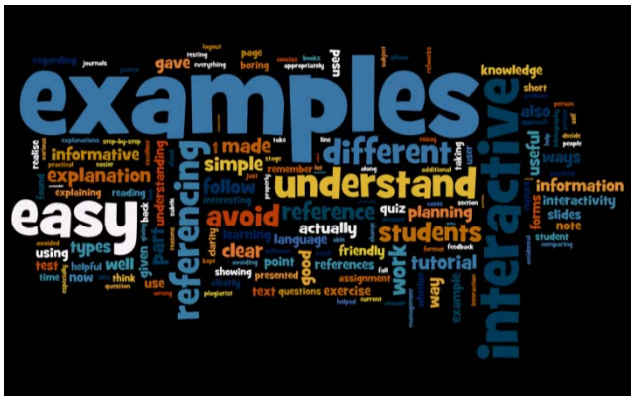

Figure 5: Wordle representing answers to the question 'The best bit about the tutorial was...'

References

Willmott CJR and Harrison TM (2003) An exercise to teach bioscience students about plagiarism. Journal of Biological Education 37:139-140

http://www.wordle.net/gallery/wrdl/909566/Feedback_from_plagiarism_tutorial