

Case study: Implementing Active Self-Feedback

Jenni Rose, Accounting (essay writing for Y1 undergraduates)

Course information

First-year undergraduate students on the BMAN10501 Financial Reporting module at AMBS were introduced to essay writing as a core academic and professional skill. The course aimed to develop students' ability to critically reflect on the role of accounting in society, while also building their assessment literacy and intellectual independence. The formative essay task was scaffolded with structured support, including an essay planner, exemplar analysis, and self-feedback reflective worksheets. These activities were designed to help students move beyond rote learning and begin developing the critical thinking skills expected of accounting professionals.

The task

Students were set a task to write a formative essay to practice for their final summative handwritten essay in a closed book exam. The title for their essay was "The role of accounting", and they were given the quote:

"Accounting is a technical, social and moral practice concerned with the sustainable utilisation of resources and proper accountability to stakeholders to enable the flourishing of organisations, people and nature"

(Carnegie, Parker, Tsahuridu 2021 p.69)

They were required to:

"Write an essay reflecting on the extent to which you agree with this statement. Your essay should also cover the following discussion points:

- If you think accountants are able to influence the sustainable use of resources in the organisations which they work.
- What else needs to be included in a financial report to ensure organisations are held accountable to stakeholders, including nature.
- They were required to reflect on the extent to which they agreed with this statement and consider the role of accountants in promoting sustainability and accountability."

The task was broken into five stages:

1. Essay Plan – Students completed a structured planner (Appendix 1) to unpack the question and outline their argument.

2. Exemplar Analysis – In class, students compared two anonymised essays on a different topic to identify features of good writing. (Appendix 2)
3. Essay Draft – Students submitted their first version of the essay.
4. Self-Feedback – Using a guided template (Appendix 3), students reviewed three anonymised peer essays and wrote feedback for themselves.
5. Essay Redraft – Students revised their essays based on their self-feedback.

Copies of the briefings share with students can be found on the [National Teaching Repository](#).

This staged approach was designed to make students' inner feedback processes explicit (Nicol, 2021) and to support their intellectual development through dialogic learning.

Reflections from students

Students responded positively to the self-feedback process, noting how it helped them reflect more deeply on their own work and develop their critical thinking. Some representative comments include:

“I learnt that my essay was quite like other people's so I know I'm on the right tracks, but I've seen how I can improve it with a stronger introduction, more in-depth researching and better academic language.”

“It's nerve-wracking having to write an essay without knowing clearly what 'good' looks like... but fascinating to see the different paths you can take when writing.”

“I think I learned that each essay is different... students could find their own different perspectives and opinions, shown and explained in our own essay.”

These reflections show how students began to appreciate the multiplicity of valid approaches to academic writing and started to develop autonomy in evaluating their own work.

Reflections from the teacher

This task was designed to support students' intellectual development from the outset of their university studies. By integrating self-feedback into the essay writing process, students were encouraged to move beyond dualistic thinking and begin to engage with multiple perspectives. The structured nature of the task helped students feel supported while also fostering independence. It was particularly rewarding to see students who initially struggled with the concept of critical thinking begin to articulate their own

viewpoints and support them with evidence. The self-feedback process also provided valuable insights into students' thinking, which informed future teaching strategies.

Pedagogical research on this task

This task formed the basis of a pedagogical research study titled *“Measuring and enabling engaged first year students’ intellectual development towards critical thinking”*. The study used a new tool—Measure of Intellectual Development in Written Work (MID-WW)—to assess students’ intellectual development based on Perry’s Scheme of Intellectual and Ethical Development.

Key findings from the study include:

- 86% of engaged students progressed by at least one position on the Perry scale.
- 55% showed a higher level of intellectual development in their self-feedback than in their academic essays.
- 74% demonstrated at least glimpses of the critical thinking position (pure relativism) in their self-feedback.

These results suggest that self-feedback is a powerful tool for promoting intellectual development and critical thinking, particularly when introduced early in students’ academic journeys.

Student quotes from the research paper

“More confident in own knowledge, excited... focus on detail, learn more terminology, have to provide reference list.”

“More reading may lead to more informed discussion in certain areas.”

“I think this process can help me organize the information quickly and help me learn how to evaluate the good or bad clearly.”

“I learnt that each essay is different... I also find different ways to prove my idea and how deep understanding to some knowledge really looks like in an essay.”

These quotes illustrate how students began to internalise the principles of critical thinking and self-evaluation through the structured self-feedback process.

Reference

Rose, J. & Stoner, G. (2025). *Measuring and enabling engaged first year students’ intellectual development towards critical thinking*. Accounting Education (under review)