



Journal article

Faculty: Medicine

Department: School of Public Health

Module: Research Portfolio 4

Degree: Global Master of Public Health (GMPH)

Level: Postgraduate

Number of students: 105

Weighting: 90%

Module ECTS: 15

Module Type: Core

Assessment overview

The journal article is a 4,000 word written account of a piece of research based on students' final research projects. The assessment is part of a Research Portfolio module delivered on the Online Global Masters of Public Health programme. The article tests the authentic skills of being able to write up a research project clearly, concisely and work to the specifications of the journal article students might want to submit to once the assessment process has been completed.

Programme overview

Global Masters of Public Health is a fully online degree with 105 students (numbers as of 2021/22) coming from across different parts of the world. Students on the programme are part time mature students who are often working and are spread across many different locations and time zones, hence the programme is spread over 2-3 years.

Design decisions

Rationale for the choice of assessment

One of the aims of curriculum review was reducing assessment burden and making sure that assessments were varied, authentic and appropriate. Authenticity was therefore the main driver for the assessment choice and design. The team wants to build a community of Public Health researchers, and to do that they want to train them to be able to feel confident to read, understand and undertake research, and be able to write it up. With the journal article, it was felt the students were taken through the entire process of identifying a problem, developing their research question, collecting data, and writing it up in a research journal article, mirroring the real research process. The assessment acts like the first round of peer review - before they even submit it to a journal article it gets double marked and feedback is provided.

Fit with other assessment methods on the module and programme

The assessment is the main part of Research Portfolio 4 module. There are four modules that are interlinked, i.e. research portfolios 1, 2, 3 and 4. Throughout those four modules the students design and develop different aspects of their own research project. In Portfolio 4 they undertake their research and then they write it up as a journal article. The Journal Article is very closely linked to the vlog assessment where students are asked to summarise their research to a lay audience.

Practicalities

Preparation for Students

The students are given the handbooks for the research portfolio in the induction period at the start of September. There is an induction session where the team invites them to go over what the research portfolio is and what assessments are involved. This is where students can read about the journal article. The assessment requirements are outlined at that point explaining the brief, outlining the criteria involved in the assessment,

Insights colour key

Educational Developer

Inclusivity

Learning Designer

Registry

Careers

Interviewee: Natasha Croome, Senior Teaching Fellow in Public Health, Deputy course director



including the rubric, percentage weighting, and when the assessments are due. This is done early as students tend to feel some anxiety about such a heavily weighted component of the degree. Transparency is important and the team are open about it throughout the entire Masters so students can ask questions. The team also organises a live session closer to the assessment date. This is an opportunity to go over the assessment, the rubric, the expectations and answer any outstanding questions. Throughout the RP modules, they provide exemplars for all written assessments.

Supporting students through the project

Students are supported by working with supervisors. The expectations of the supervisors is that they have to read the journal article and provide feedback.

The teaching team also supports students through drop in sessions. Every 4 weeks students can drop in and ask questions whether that be about the assessment or about their own research or if they just want to talk because this final term is very different to the other terms. This is provided in addition to email contact, office hours and online forums.

Submission, Marking, and Moderation

Students submit two versions of the same assignment - one with acknowledgements that won't be marked and one without acknowledgements that will be marked. There are two blind independent markers marking the assignments separately taken from the academics in the school of Public Health. Sample moderation is applied to some samples - one of the module leads reviews a percentage of assessments. The lead reviews the grading and the feedback and intervenes if and when necessary. Feedback for the journal article is further moderated by the five teaching staff for RP4 - each take a selection of (all) the students' journal articles and read the feedback to make sure they are happy with the feedback that goes out to students.

The criteria are as follows:

- Abstract - Is the abstract clear, focused, concise?
- Introduction - Has the student consulted, read and understood the related literature? Is the literature appropriately cited and referenced? Has previous research been critiqued? Is there an effective justification of the aim?

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- Methodology - Are methods described in detail? Do they reflect sound scientific practice? Were they implemented in a creative, problem solving fashion? Are ethical issues considered (if appropriate)?
- Results - Have the results been presented appropriately? Are the results complete?
- Discussion - Has the student demonstrated a critical understanding of the results and their implications? Has the student appreciated the limitations of the data/methods and discussed the subsequent generalisation of results and directions for further work?
- Writing style and referencing - Style including delivery, language, tone, and grammar

[Please click here for the full rubric.](#)

Feedback

Formative feedback is provided by the supervisor linked to the criteria. The supervisors are provided with the training that clearly outlines what the expectations are. In terms of summative feedback, students are provided with combined feedback from the two markers alongside their grade.

In terms of engagement with this feedback there is a suspicion that a lot of students just look at the grade and are less interested in the feedback but there comes a time when they will find this feedback useful. This is because the majority of students didn't have any experience with research prior to starting the programme hence doing the project is a big undertaking.

Advantages of the assessment type

- The authentic nature of a journal article puts students in a good place to publish the work they were doing extending the audience for their assignments beyond the markers;
- Students can develop skills around writing concise information, conveying content that are important in this line of career and reworking content to fit the audience of the journal. Selecting the journal also helps to develop important skills as students learn to understand the environment within which they will be operating;
- As students on the online programme are from across the world, employers in different parts



of the world could be looking for different things - some will value the research aspect, especially the published one, more. Hence for some students, especially the ones hoping for a career in research, a journal article will be a more appealing and authentic option.

- Giving students the freedom of choice to pursue their interest can help them sustain their interests and motivation

Limitations of this assessment type

- Writing the rubric is difficult because of the range of methodologies that students can apply. Hence the question of “is their research methodology scientifically appropriate”, which is one of the criteria, can be difficult to unpack and assess given that one student is doing a qualitative study, one is doing a secondary data analysis, one is doing a survey or a systematic review or a scoping review. The rubric covers what students are marked on, but it can't be as specific as one might want it to be because there's so much variety that makes it difficult;
- This has implications on marking allocation that then limits the pool of assessors to those familiar with a given methodology. This is particularly challenging for qualitative projects. Within School of Public Health there are only a limited number of staff who are familiar with this methodology and it can be difficult to identify appropriate markers;

Advice for implementation

- When designing assessment that is closely linked to other modules and builds on knowledge and skills presented elsewhere it is important to ensure that the same task is not (in effect) assessed twice as part of a different module at a later stage; the nature and purpose of each assessment at each stage has to be sufficiently discrete to ensure that students are building / progressing on what they have done previously and not simply replicating it.
- It is important to strike a balance between giving students appropriate choice and agency – but also ensuring that they are sufficiently informed/ supported in the choices they make, particularly if this can have implications for future study and employment prospects.
- Supervisors, students and markers need to be given clear detailed guidance regarding the

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assessment and the purpose of the assessment. For the markers and supervisors guidance on feedback (including how to write constructive feedback and what to focus on) would be beneficial;

- Keeping track of how students engage with their supervisors and supervisors and whether both are responding on time is important;
- Identifying appropriate markers for diverse projects takes a long time so needs to occur far in advance;
- Having a more detailed rubric could be beneficial. In the case of this module this is not possible. Providing training or guidance to staff and students regarding expectations is equally important;
- Consider the possibility of plagiarism, especially as the cohort includes students from different academic backgrounds where the standards may vary. A similarity checking tool may be helpful, provided both staff and students are trained in how to understand its function and the score it gives;
- To help with students engagement with forums introduce semi-anonymous posts and signpost regularly to the forum as the main platform of communication with the faculty (if that is your preferred method)
- Make sure that the way the brief is presented to the students is written with inclusivity in mind, this includes being concise and using font that is accessible for students with specific learning needs such as Arial or Verdana;
- It is useful to direct students to inclusivity tools that all students could benefit from such as concept matrix which can help them better organise their ideas
- When providing feedback ensure there is useful information that students can take forward in the future. This could include comments about publishing or some useful transferable advice they could use when working outside of academia;
- When integrating exemplars ensure that these are discussed alongside marking rubrics to help students develop better understanding of what different criteria mean in practice and what performance at different grade boundaries looks like;