Evaluating resource lists: what works to encourage student engagement?

Lois Gray

Learning and Teaching Librarian, Libraries and Learning Resources

Nottingham Trent University

Introduction

Online resource lists linked from NOW module learning rooms have been available at NTU for 10 years. They provide a consistent place for students to find their recommended resources and link directly to the full-text or library availability. New resource list software was purchased and implemented during 2022 so training and guidance on design of resource lists is being reviewed. At this moment of reflection there is a need for evidence-informed guidance to develop resource lists at NTU that support student usage and facilitate course reading.

Studies at UK HEIs (Brewerton 2014; McGuinn 2017) have shown that students place a high importance on resource lists but student views can differ from academic staff. Similarly semi-structured interviews conducted at NTU in 2016 found a range of opinions around how they could be used to influence student reading. The student focus groups revealed that there was a preference for lists to be broken into smaller chunks and a desire for annotation. These themes have been reflected in other UK studies (Siddall and Rose 1014) and these also indicate that students value recommended reading, the consistent nature of online resource lists and structure which aligns with the curriculum. It's not clear however which approaches have the biggest impact for students.

This study aims to understand how resource lists are engaging students at NTU and to identify the value that particular features play in student engagement with resources.

Objectives

To identify how and where specific features are used in resource lists at NTU

To evaluate their impact on student resource list use and reading engagement

The features that will be considered for this study will include:
*   the use of item notes
*   the use of sections
*   the structure of a list (e.g. weekly/topic based)
*   the length of lists
*   online access to resources

Added note

Note: This is a very helpful guide. Have a look at chapter 3 during weeks 2 and 3.
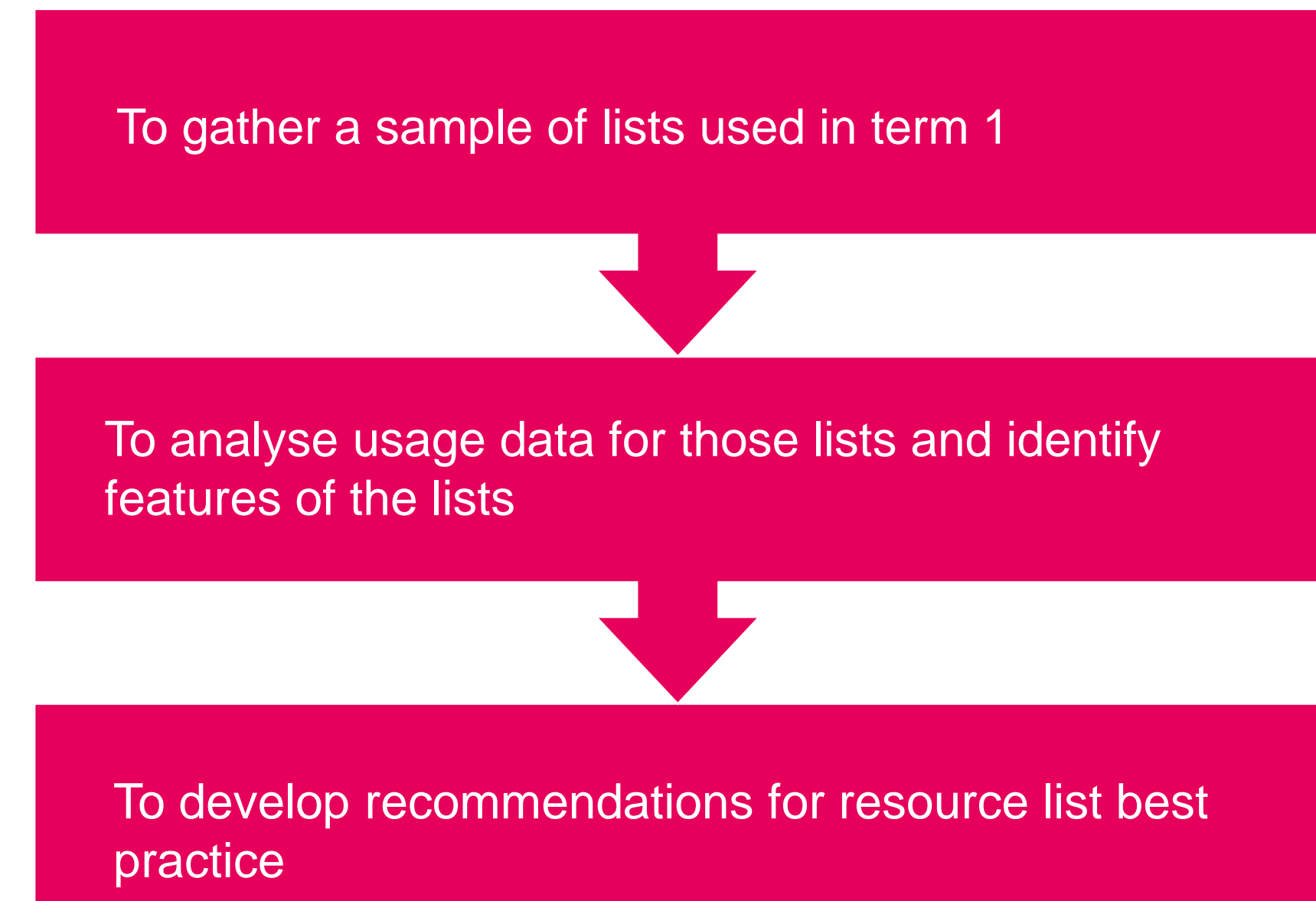
Structure & sections
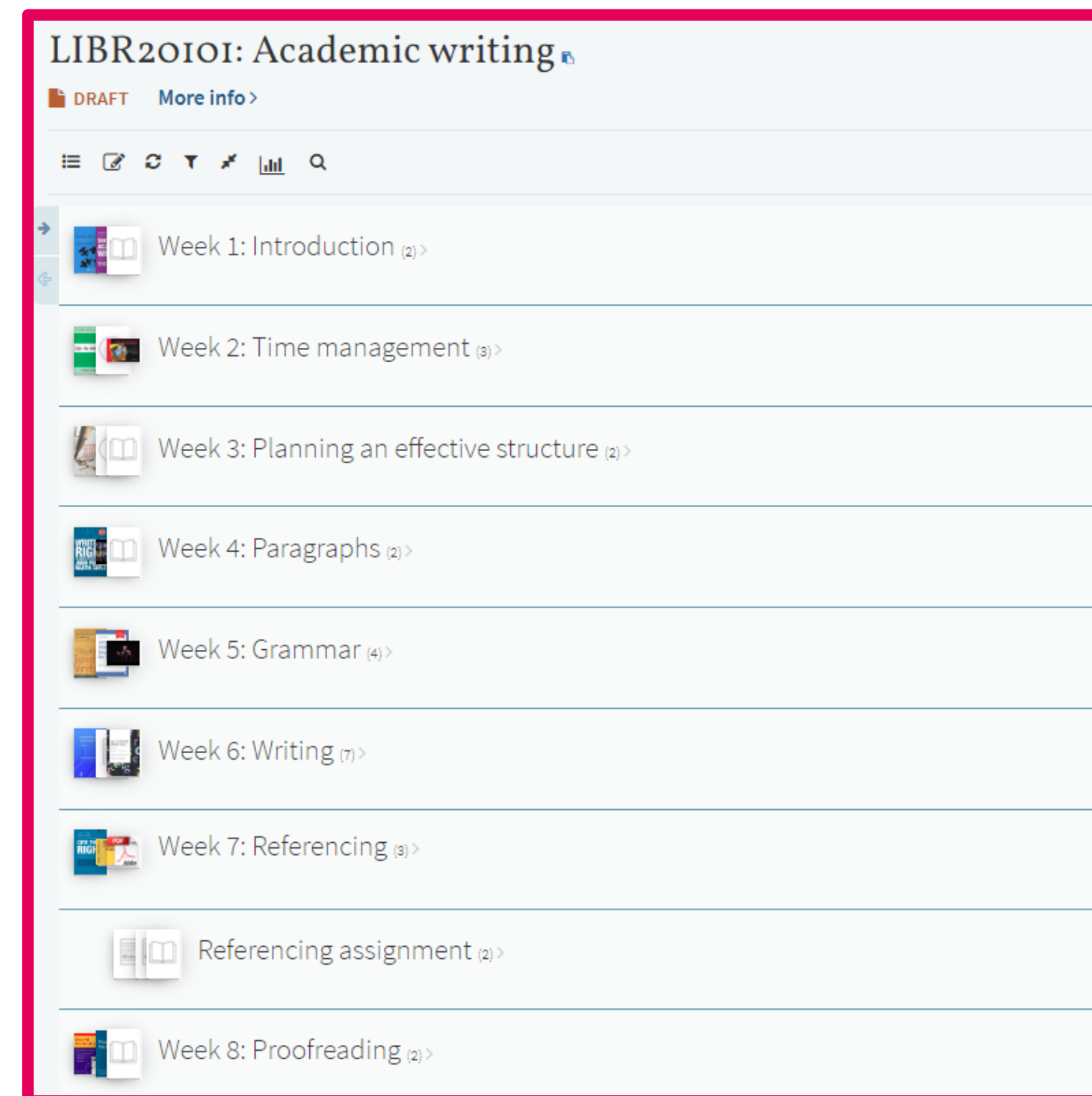
Method

Taking a quantitative approach, this study will use a sample of resource lists from the 2022-23 academic year and use descriptive statistics to document the frequency of resource list features used. The location and frequency of the features within lists will be recorded as well as looking at frequency across the sample. This will enable a better understanding of the consistency and 'typical' look of a list at NTU.

This sample will be based upon usage data to compare the most and least used lists from modules running in term 1. The usage figures will need to be converted to a proportion of the enrolled students to enable comparison. Lists will also be identified from across all Schools to allow for discipline-specific differences and restricted to undergraduate modules to enable a more reliable comparison.

To evaluate the effectiveness of these features analytics reports will be used to look at the usage of items on resource lists and the features associated with those items that have higher usage. This usage data will be anonymised so no user will be identifiable.

Next steps

To gather a sample of lists used in term 1

To analyse usage data for those lists and identify features of the lists

To develop recommendations for resource list best practice

Evaluation

This quantitative study will give a view of current resource list usage and extrapolate recommended resource list practice. However for a fuller picture student views could also be sought via focus groups or survey to understand why and how those features influence engagement.

References

McGuinn, K., et al., 2017. Student reading lists: evaluating the student experience at the University of Huddersfield. *The Electronic Library,* 35 (2), 322-332. DOI: 10.1108/EL-12-2015-0252 [Accessed 30 November 2022].

Siddall, G. and Rose, H., 2014. Reading lists–time for a reality check? An investigation into the use of reading lists as a pedagogical tool to support the development of information skills amongst Foundation Degree students. *Library and Information Research,* 38 (118), 52-73. DOI: 10.29173/lirg605 [Accessed 30 November 2022].

Brewerton, G., 2014. Implications of student and lecturer qualitative views on reading lists: a case study at Loughborough University, UK. *New Review of Academic Librarianship,* 20 (1), 78-90. DOI: 10.1080/13614533.2013.864688 [Accessed 30 November 2022].

Please access the Whiteboard to leave your comments and questions:

Contact the author: lois.gray@ntu.ac.uk