

‘Ask a Question’: Student use and misuse of academic online support

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Ask a Question – online assignment review, feedback and enquiry response service



Rationale

- Online academic support seldom researched
- Is the service meeting student learning needs
- Examine how students use/misuse the service
- Recommendations for improving the service

‘Misuse’ refers to using the service in a way not intended

Literature

TEQSA (2015) – universities accountable for supporting student transition to HE

Online support convenience (Kim, Kwon, & Cho, 2011; Lear, Li & Prentice, 2016)

Online learning enrolment rate developing 16.4% annually (Mehta, Makani-Lim & Easter, 2017)

Change from remedial/ bolt-on/deficit models (Cottrell, 2001; Bennett, Dunne, & Carre, 2000; Wingate & Dreiss, 2009)

Embedded approach – learning through subject discipline best practice (Wingate, 2006; Chanock, 2013)

Is technology making a difference in learning (Nora & Snyder, 2009)

Cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2001)

Third party providers ‘bullish about opportunities’ (Pennington, 2016)

Southern Cross University demographic



In comparison to higher education sector averages SCU has:

- 25% lower socio-economic status students, sector average 15%
- 60% students from regional communities, sector average 20%
- 40% first in family
- Higher percentages of Indigenous students

Mixed method

- **Corpus analysis of 600 questions from 'Ask a Question' in S1 and S2 2016**
 - Anthony's (2016) AntConc used as analysis tool; 40, 457 word tokens in corpus
- **Matched corpus themes with typical student questions**
- **Surveyed Academic Skills staff on their experiences in responding to 'Ask a Question'**

Categories of question types and associated frequencies

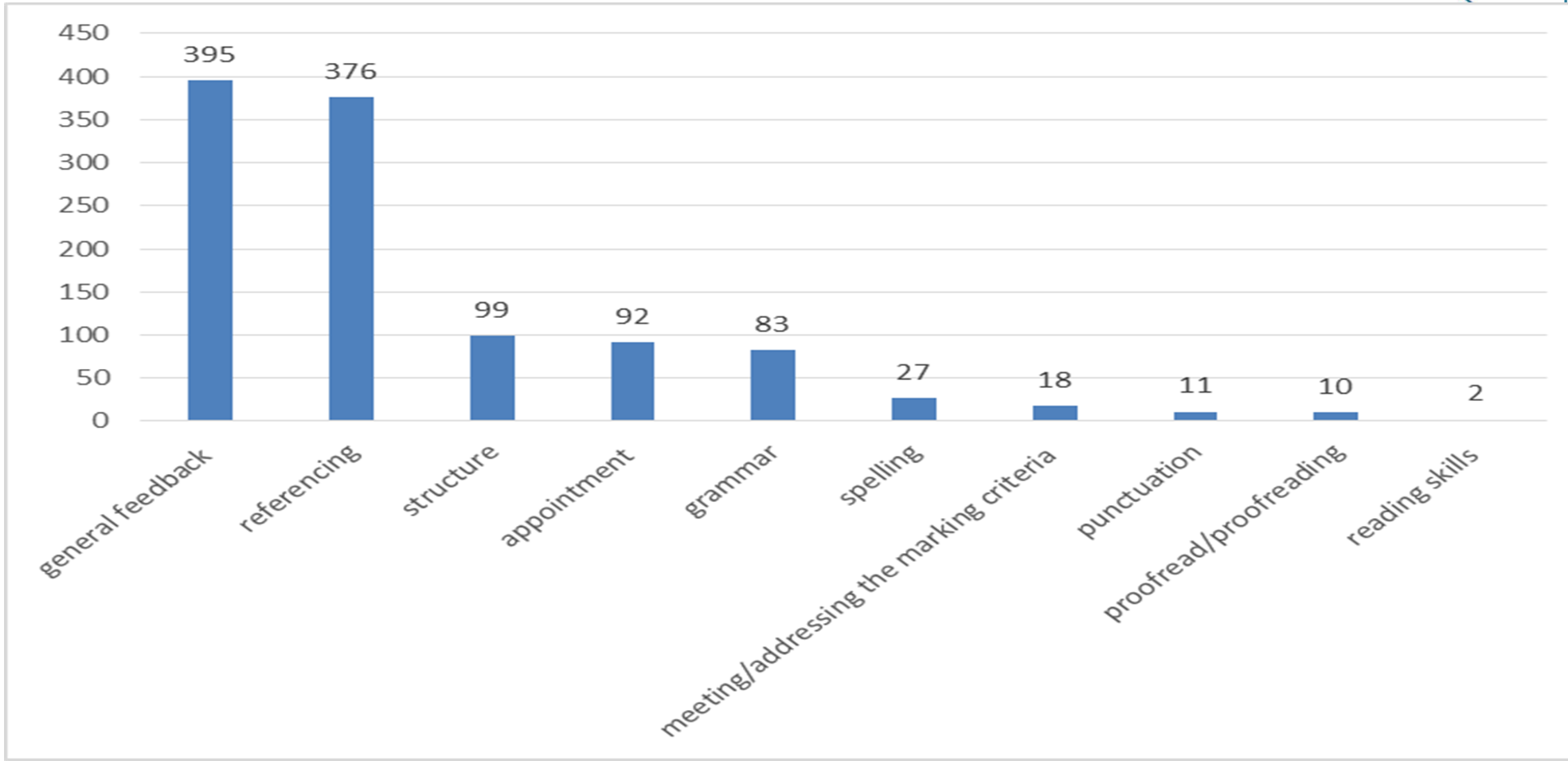


Table 1. Sample student questions for each of the categories

Category	Fre- quency	Sample student questions
General feedback	395	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I would like some general feedback about this assignment• Can you review my essay and provide general feedback?• Hi there I was just after some general feedback on this assignment in regards to meeting criteria, spelling, grammar and flow.
Referencing	376	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Would it be possible for someone to review my assignment which has been submitted to advise if the referencing is correct or is classified as plagiarism, please?• Hello, I have completed my essay could you please advise me: Is my referencing correct? Have I met the criteria and answered the questions? Is my layout correct and does it make sense?
Structure	99	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have I structured this critical review correctly and do my paragraphs work?• Can you please review the structure and the flow of my essay?• Hello, I am making statements in my introduction for my essay that need referencing. Is it ok to reference in your introduction or is that something you only do in the body of the essay? Sorry, this is the first essay I've written in 20 years and my first academic essay ever.

Challenges for Academic Skills Staff

- **Time** – 30 minutes allocated per assignment review is not enough
- **Unrealistic student expectations** – proofreading and editing; feedback on too many aspects, begging for marks, or asking for help on the due day
- **Asking for assistance more than once** on the same assignment
- **Uploading too many files** without reference to what they are and/or how to use
- **No details** about which unit/School, assignment question or marking criteria

Academic Skills staff comments:

- *Thirty minutes is often too short to cover all the aspects to the level required.*
- *It's not a proofreading service so students need to be specific in their request for feedback.*
- *Students being 'lazy' submitting work that is nowhere near complete...*
- *Multiple attachments without reference to what they are and how they want us to use them...*
- *Sometimes the same names keep coming back and making the round again and again*
- *Students double, triple and quadruple dip with repeat requests for feedback already provided but they have not changed or corrected their errors*

Student use and misuse of 'Ask a Question'



Appropriate use:

- Answered the question?
- Met the marking criteria?
- Am I on track?
- Referencing check
- Structure and format advice

Misuse:

- 'shopping list' approach
- Review just before due date/time
- Not correcting previous errors
- No assessment details included
- Pleading for marks

Sample misuse questions:

- *Hi there, I would love for someone to check over my essay for any grammar, punctuation, spelling and referencing, along with anything else that needs work*
- *Please check the answer is it according to question assignment 3 because I need 30 marks out of 40 and help me to improve my assignment...please help me thanks for kindness*
- *Plz guide me through English grammar, references and sentence structure*

Unsolicited feedback on outsourced service

- Some students expressed disappointment with quality of after-hours study support
- Too general, too vague, not helpful or specific enough, not detailed to unit, not in-depth
- Returned to Academic Skills for more discipline-specific and unit-based support
- **Students wrote:** Some students perceived a difference in value of academic support offered
 - *...offered no constructive feedback at all*
 - *...feedback was most vague and not a helpful response*
 - *Did not give me much useful feedback at all*
 - *My essay was given the 'all clear' but I'm still not satisfied*
 - *Feedback was too general and didn't help me improve my work*

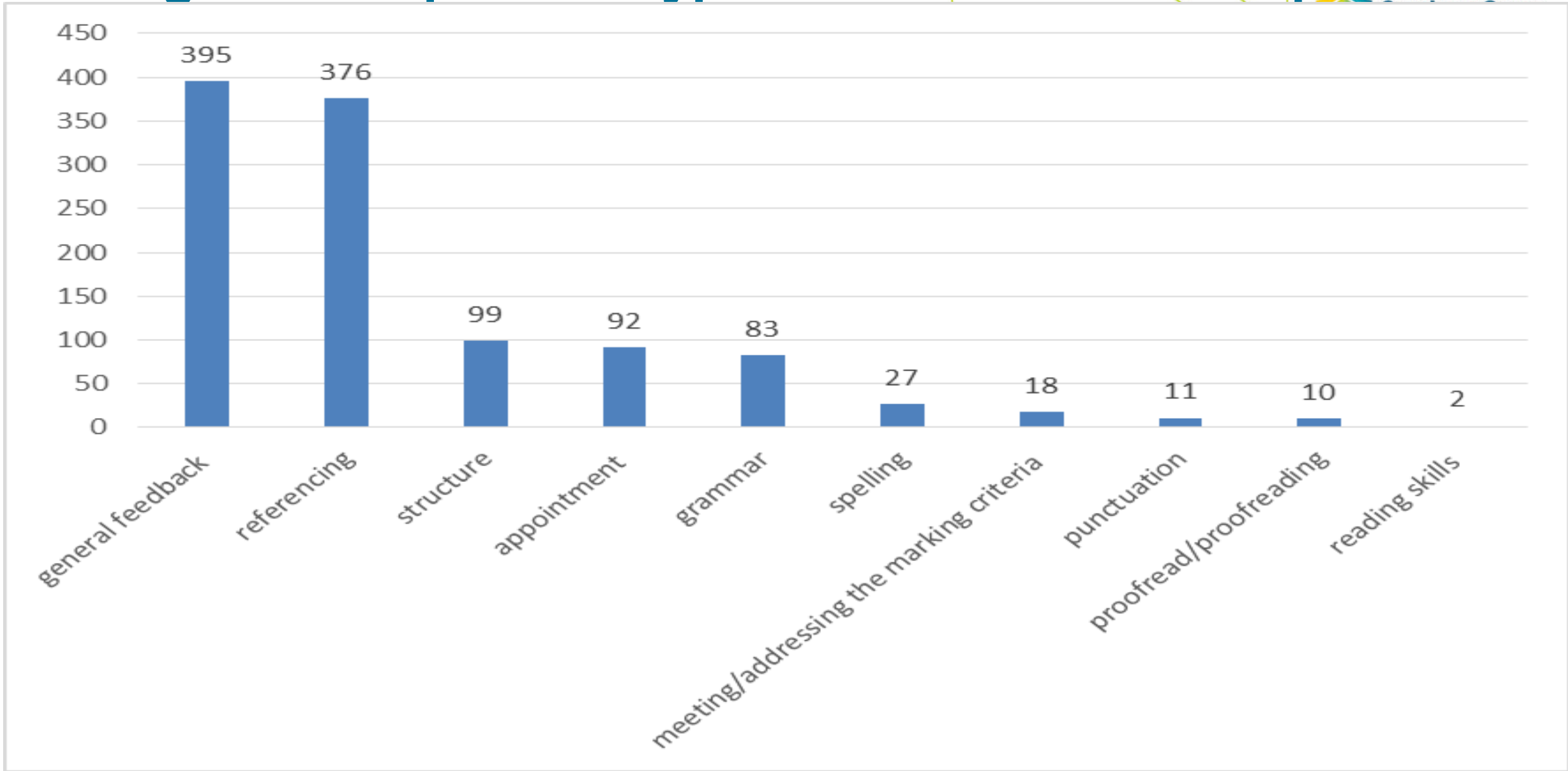
Recommendations

- Allow more time for AS staff to respond to questions
- Limit number of questions to avoid overuse of the system
- **Differentiate general feedback from specific unit-based support**
- Market expectations clearly – student testimonial videos, digital signage, FaceBook, Instagram, staff meetings, posters, etc.)
- Provide more online referencing resources for support

Questions or comments?



Categories of question types and associated frequencies



Ask a Question