

Student Perspective

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How and why I use PebblePad, including its limitations and benefits

I am currently in my second year of a part-time PhD in Pedagogical Research into Plagiarism. As my PhD needs to fit around a full-time job as a researcher at Aston University, it is important for me to organise my PhD work easily and efficiently. For a research student like myself, PebblePad is a helpful tool for recording my thoughts and reflections, and more practically it provides a record of meetings and the work that needs to be done.

Initially, my use of PebblePad was similar to that of a diary or reflective journal in which I would record my thoughts at the time of writing. Wherever I was or whatever I was thinking about my research, I would be able to write it up in PebblePad instantaneously. The nature of my full-time job allows me to 'dip in and out'

of PebblePad in the office or whilst working remotely. This ease of access is a distinct advantage over my previous way of working, such as in Word. With PebblePad, I can access my research ideas wherever I go without worrying about saving my work to USB. In addition, as a part-time student it is reassuring for me to know that I can use my time efficiently as and when I find the opportunity.

One concern of mine as a research student is to know when to stop reading and having the discipline to stay focused. With my references and thoughts recorded in PebblePad, I feel confident that I can return to a point of reference at a later date and it will not get lost in a file full of paperwork.

My diary style entries also illustrate the chronology of my thoughts and the development of my research ideas.

As I am beginning to write up my literature review, PebblePad has provided an invaluable record of the mental thought process of my research over the last year. Similarly, PebblePad has provided a visual representation of my research activity over the last year, giving me an indication of when I have been, and when I am most likely to be productive in my work.

PebblePad also provides me with a portfolio of my writing and smaller scale literature reviews. Whilst I do not use PebblePad as the sole means to record my notes from the literature, I do use it when writing useful summaries of the key points of my literature review. Further, this compliments my own personal electronic bibliographic database. In the future, research stu-

dents like myself would find an application such as a bibliographic plug-in useful just as it is currently possible to plug-in to Word files.

PebblePad is currently my only method of recording the minutes from my research supervisions. As yet, I have not shared this information with my supervisors but should this become a

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requirement of the supervisory process, I feel confident I can access this information retrospectively. Moving forward, I intend to link my assets to create a summary of my research over the last year.

1. What do you know now that you wish you'd known when you first started using PebblePad?

I now know how to link my 'thoughts' together using the webfolio tool. When I first started using PebblePad I taught myself how to use it but I did not link my separate thoughts into a webfo-

lio. I have a great number of stand-alone assets but I would have liked some more guidance on how to link these together or examples of how other research students have done this.

2. How would you sell the idea of PebblePad to new students?

I would strongly recommend they use PebblePad as a tool for reflection and providing a chronology of their research ideas. By starting early, it makes the writing up stage a lot easier and far less daunting.

3. What advice would you offer to lecturers (or course designers) thinking of using PebblePad?

Encourage research students to use PebblePad from the start of their degree. PebblePad has been extremely valuable in illustrating my thought process, this is something which is not done so easily in retrospect.

Acknowledgements

Case study by Lucy Cave

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