Reviewer's report

Title: A randomized evaluation of the quality of scientific writing using Web-based versus traditional workshops

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Reviewer: Patricia A Reynolds

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1. The question posed by the authors is well defined, comparing educational aspects of web-based versus traditional workshops in the context of scientific writing.

2. The methods used for to recruit and stratify the sample are clear, calculating that 22 subjects were needed in each sample. However there appears to be an apparent inconsistency as to why 48 were recruited in the section on sample size (when 4 were estimated to be lost through attrition), and in the Participant Flow section when 63 were recruited leading to the 48 subjects (with attrition of 15).

   It would be interesting to know where the site/s of the traditional teaching took place, and more details on the web-based access. Was there international recruitment, for instance? Furthermore, the actual topics reviewed would be valuable to know.

   Descriptions of the two types of workshop was helpful, but e-learning communication was used in the traditional group for off campus students. The extent and effect of this needs to be stated in the results and discussion respectively. Figure 1 of the methodology does not appear to be referred to in the text and is not explicit enough in naming the web-based and traditional sections.

   The measurable factors of manuscript quality, mentor-student communication, and student satisfaction are interesting and valuable. The statistical methods employed are clearly stated.

3. The data obtained appears to be sound, but the qualitative analysis data from the focus groups has barely a mention compared to the detailed statistical analyses otherwise discussed. For the analysis testing the agreement between three inter-observers, an explanation as to why Cohen’s kappa was chosen rather than an analysis such as Fleiss’s kappa (used for more than two observers) would be valuable.

4. The reporting of the data is clear, but all acronyms should be defined when they first appear.

5. There could be some re-organisation of material across sections, the methods include some material that may best be concluded in the discussion, “The use of this technology clearly enhanced students' familiarity with an increasingly popular
method of collaboration, as well as improving the investigators’ efficiency”. The
discussion includes a summary of the findings initially and then reviews ‘no
significant difference’ and ‘differences’ between web-based and traditional
teaching from the literature. The literature review aspects would be better placed
in the introduction where it is stated that that multiple studies have compared
web-based and traditional teaching methodologies but no references to these
were made.

Although the conclusion at the end is stated, a definitive conclusion section
should ideally be named.

6. Some of the potential limitations of the study are well discussed by the
authors, especially concerning blinding.

7. Some of the references need more detail, like page numbers and when the
web pages were last accessed.

8. The title and abstract clearly states the context and anticipated content of the
paper,

9. The writing is generally good English in terms of grammar and spelling, but
there is some mixing of first and third persons.

10. No evidence of obvious plagiarism was noted in areas known to reviewer.

This paper is valuable contribution to the literature in that it does contain data
that suggest that web-based learning was preferred to that of traditional teaching.
Attention to detail and organisation of sections, together with a greater
description of the qualitative analysis would strengthen it considerably.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the
statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

'I declare that I have no competing interests’