Michelle

My name is Michelle Lawson and I work as a distance learning tutor for a university.

Some assignments can be as short as one and a half thousand words, but they can go up to 3000 words in length.

At the end of reading an essay, is when I've heard the student's individual voice throughout the essay, not just the voice of the material that they've read.

A main problem with academic writing is actually structuring, so you've got a clear thread of argument throughout the essay.

We have things like glossaries where they can look up particular terms and what they mean, so they don't have to learn them off by heart, but they need to be able to show that they're familiar with them, that they understand them, and to show that they can use them when they're constructing an argument.

I don't think students should worry too much about making errors in grammar and punctuation and spelling, because that's just one of the marking criteria. The main thing is: we're looking for ideas. If we can understand it, then that's the main thing.

I've marked some really good essays from non-native speakers of English where they've been able to show a really deep understanding of English globally, because they've come across English in global contexts themselves.

I have to balance giving them lots of development points with still encouraging them and showing them actually what they have done well at the same time.

Every university has its own website for helping with things like paragraphs and punctuation and structuring essays. So it's just a case of finding which site works for you.

One first step would be to go to their local library and get a good study skills book out. A second step would be to go onto the internet and find a university academic writing website and there are many of those. But if they have specific queries about structuring or punctuation or grammar or something it would be logical to ask their distance learning tutor for help because we're only too happy to help them.

Go the distance.