Writing Assignments and Dominant Genres:
Gateways to Understanding Writing in the Disciplines

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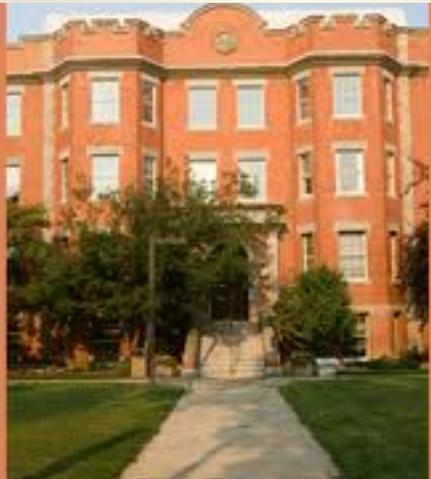Interdisciplinary Studies
Education and Writing Studies

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- **Writing assignment research:** A disciplinary case study of writing assignments in nursing

- **Canadian multi-institutional study:** post-secondary writing assignments (Roger Graves)

    - *What assignments are students asked to write?*

- **My research question: How do nursing students learn the genres they are asked to write?**

- **Two goals of my project:**

  - **Identify** teaching expectations and concerns of instructors who create/teach the writing assignments; and

  - **Document** the learning experiences of students who attempt to learn how to write the document and/or perform the writing task *based on the writing assignment prompt*.

- **Focus: dominant and peripheral genres**

  - **What counts as dominant genre?**

- **Rhetorical genre and activity theory**

  - Genre as recurring social activity, situation, function, ideology (Miller, 1984/1994; Bitzer, 1968; Clark, 2003; Schryer, 1993)

- **Genre in Faculty of Nursing**

  - Learning processes
    - most effective when students link *what to do* with *how to do it* (Carroll, 2002)

  - Writing instruction
    - Enable/constrain learner to "participate effectively and creatively in further practical, social, and intellectual activity of the student's major area of study" (Wells, 1999, p. 48) (Beaufort, 2007)

Recurring genres

- Self-evaluation
- Scholarly paper
- Reflective journal
- Care Plan
- Learning goals
- Peer Evaluation

Top 3 genres

- Self-evaluation
- Scholarly paper
- Reflective Journal

What counts as dominant genre?

most frequent:	self-evaluation (25%) paper (20%) reflective journals (20%)
most culturally important:	self-reflection clinical judgment evidence-based
assigned value:	scholarly paper = 30% reflective journals = pass/fail self-evaluation = 5% to 75

Sample of assignment prompts:

Example 1: "Scholarly Paper"

Example 2: "Reflective Journal"

Example 3: "Community Practice Project"

Most common issues for instructors:

1. **Assignment-specific criteria:**

   – Marking with "General Guidelines" vs. self-made "Checklist"

2. **"Given" assignments (not created)**

   – "this is a canned course"

   – "I have no control over the language"

HOW DO I WRITE THAT?

Most common questions from students:

1. How do I organize the topic? (60%)

2. How do I cite my research in APA format? (25%)

3. What is a primary nursing research article?

4. How do I make a thesis statement?

5. Components: introduction, abstract, cover letter?

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4. How do I make a thesis statement?

5. Components: introduction, abstract, cover letter?

Q: What is a primary nursing research article?

A: *any article with a nurse as the first author*

B: *any article in a journal that has nursing in the title*

C: *any article in a peer-reviewed nursing journal*

D: *any article that discusses a nursing intervention*

E: *don't ask me – ask the one who is marking your paper*

Q: What is a primary nursing research article?

A: Instructor 1: *any article with a nurse as the first author*

B: Instructor 2: *any journal with nursing in the title*

C: Health Sciences Librarian: *any peer-reviewed nursing journal*

D: Course Coordinator: *any article that discusses a nursing intervention*

E: Writing Tutor: *don't ask me – you need to ask the one who is marking your paper*

Q: What is a primary nursing research article?

A: CINAHL: A primary source is a document or record which reports a study, experiment, event or other phenomenon first hand. When a nurse researcher interviews patients about their health behaviors, a pharmaceutical company conducts clinical trials on a new drug, or a health care facility surveys its nursing staff, they are creating primary information.

Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature
www.ebscohost.com/cinahl/

CLASH OF CULTURES

For Instructors

1. **Definitions/interpretation**

   Language matters
   What counts as "scholarly"

2. **Corporate model**

   Deciding powers

3. **Assumptions**

   reading = learning
   learning comes quickly

For Students

1. **Definitions/interpretation**

   Performance matters
   What counts as "research"

2. **Instructor idiosyncrasy**

   Meeting expectation (APA)

3. **Assumptions**

   criteria = feedback
   previous experience

◆ **What does dominant genre mean?**

- ◆ From who's perspective?

◆ **How can we find this out?**

- ◆ Implicit/explicit learning experiences of students
- ◆ Implicit/explicit teaching concerns of instructors

Thank you.
I WELCOME COMMENTS
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Undergraduate Writing assignments: Learning genres across the curriculum
Susan Chaudoir, CCCC 2012, March 22, 2012

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