

LEARNING WRITING ASSIGNMENTS IN THE UNDERGRADUATE NURSING CURRICULUM

Findings from one doctoral research study

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Susan Chaudoir, PhD(c)

Faculty of Education



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada



chaudoir@ualberta.ca



UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Interdisciplinary research & collegiality

chaudoir@ualberta.ca

BACKGROUND

Writing Assignment Research:

What do students write in their major area of study?

Graves et al. 2009

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chaudoir@ualberta.ca



My PhD Study

**How do
undergraduate
nursing students
learn the genres
they are asked to
write across the
nursing curriculum?**



Chaudoir (2014; 2011; 2010)



chaudoir@ualberta.ca

Why This Study?

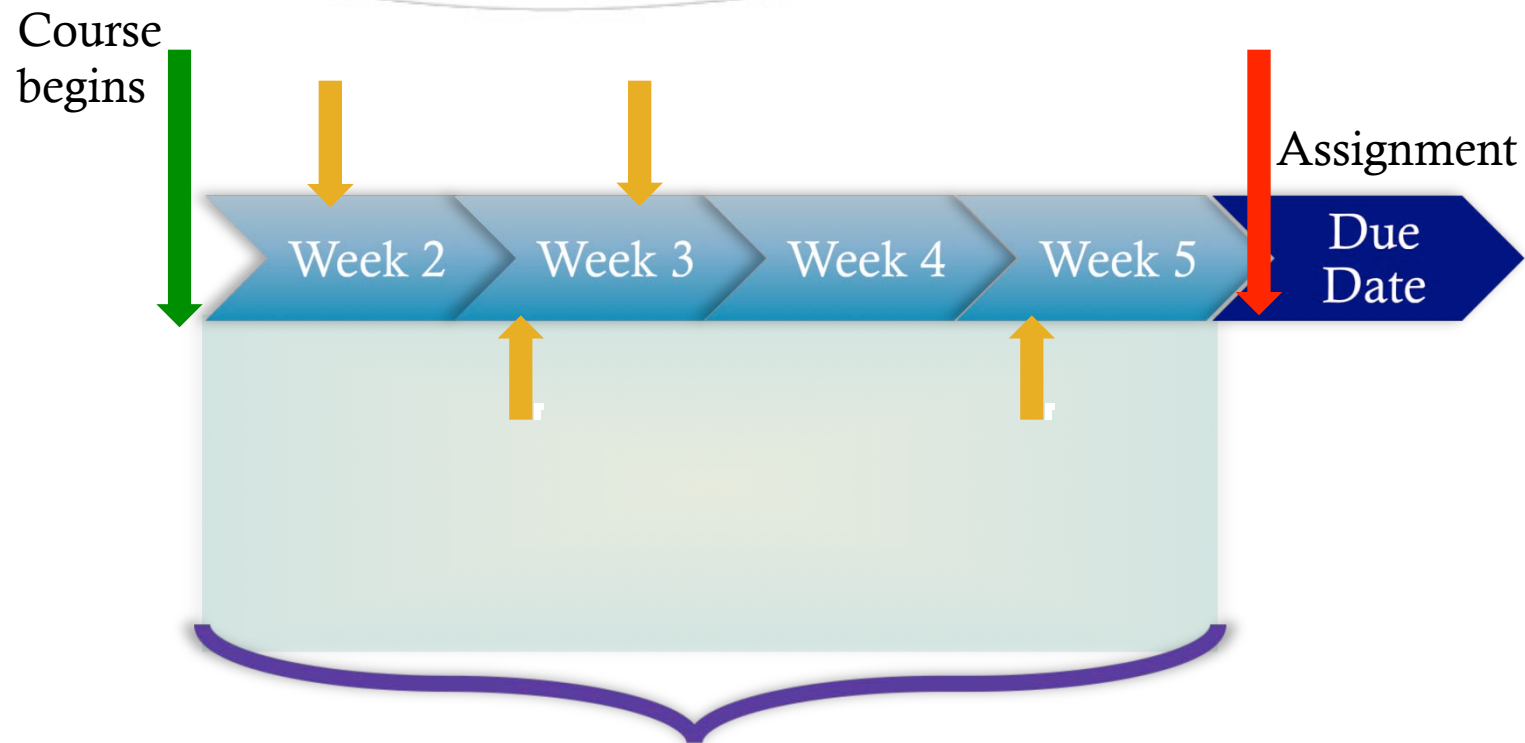
Disciplinary writing instruction across all four years of students' major study

(Beaufort, 2007, p. 15; Carroll, 2002, p. 89; Cooper & Bikowski, 2009, p. 219)

Social processes of learning *before* the assignment was turned in for a grade



What Did I Study?



Social process of teaching and learning to write



Methodology

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS:

Rhetorical genre (Miller, 1984)

Situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991)

37 PARTICIPANTS: 31 students and 6 tutors

3 GENRES: Scholarly Paper, Reflective Journal,
Community Practice Project (clinical assignment)

METHOD: Institutional Ethnography

observation (classroom, peer-writing sessions)

interviews (semi-structured; focus groups)

textual analysis (assignment & classroom documents)

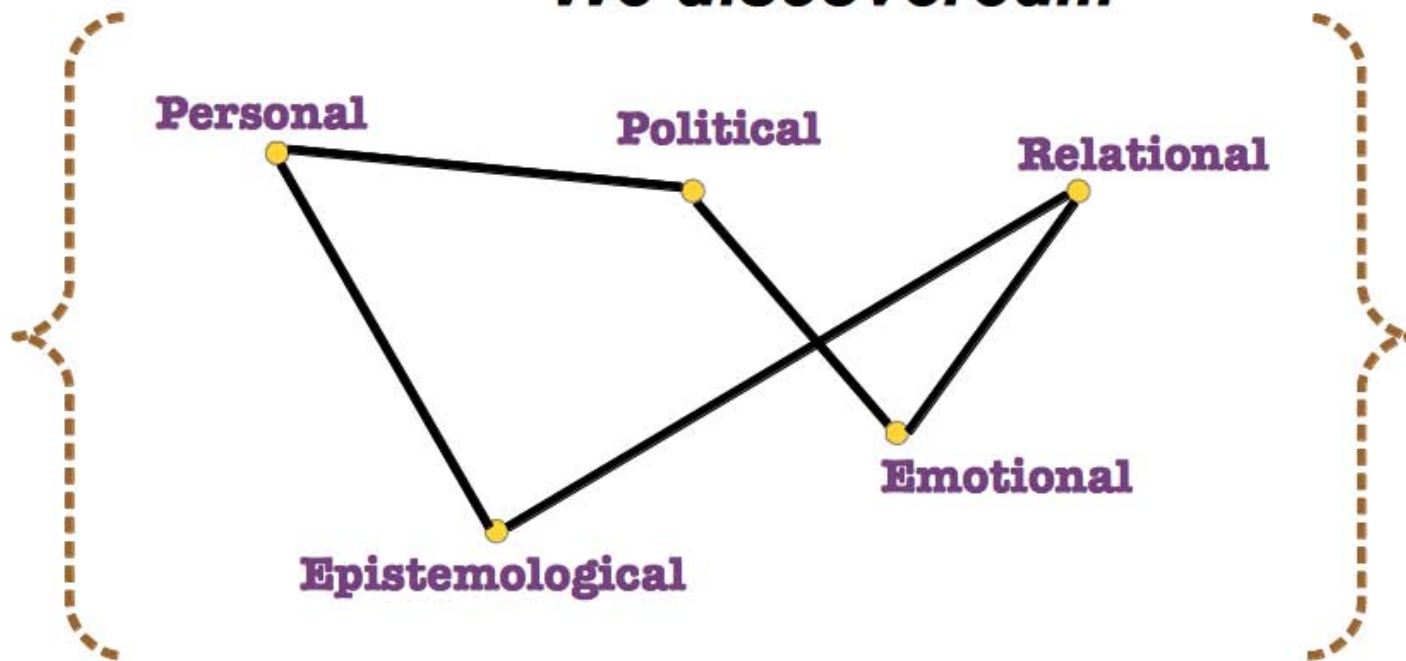
ANALYSIS: Content analysis



We thought students & instructors would talk about the assignment

Findings

Instead...
We discovered...



Shared Concern

#1 Communication

Opening the Conversation



Perspectives of Writing in Nursing



Learning to swim [students]

Writing is like swimming, and it's hard to start swimming if you don't have water or know what liquids you're going to be swimming through We need solid ground so that you can step on something to start with. ~Katie



Teaching a new culture [instructors]

Learning to write is really like learning a new culture. As a teacher, I am introducing them to the culture of nursing. The terminology & the way terms are used are different. There is going to be a little culture shock, but they assimilate, and by the time they graduate it is second nature. ~Sandra



Year 1

Giving/Getting Feedback (specific, timely, discussed orally)

It's really annoying when I get my first comments back and my tutor says 'good reflection.' What do you mean by 'good'? ~Alyssa

I find one-on-one conversation works better than written comments. [instructor]

Defining genre

Not so straightforward. *Defining the reflective journal can be mindboggling. It's called a reflective journal in one place, a practice journal in another. Are these the same?*

~Lea

Differentiating key terms / assumptions of key terms

- Identify — analyze — describe — report

Not expecting:

- Contradictory “tutor preferences”
- Instructions “open to interpretation”
- Evaluation differences



Year 2

Personal disappointment

I should get it by now: *It's my responsibility to find a way to put things into full sentences and paragraphs where tutors will understand what I'm getting at. And that's rather difficult . . . Just because I'm aware of it, doesn't mean it's easy . . . or that I can do it. ~Katie*

Disciplinary distinctions

We write differently here: *I am beginning to understand that writing in nursing is different and challenging. But it is a good different and a good challenge, because it is contributing to my professional development. ~Tonya*

Self-recognized growth

Professional: *I'm better at concentrating on nursing interventions. ~Amy*

Academic: *I no longer take on writing the whole thing. Instead, I have to look at my writing in stages, and set mini-goals, so that I can find a thinking point. ~Katie*



Year 3

Trusted networks & “building rapport”

Librarians: *Librarians can be your best friend.* ~Amber

Trusted person: *I like talking with another person about my paper, but not just any person; I already know who I can trust in this context and talk on the level of how it will be conducive to competencies.* ~Anita

Practitioners: *I talk about the assignment at work . . . I like getting input from a nurse who has experience with the topic.* ~Tina

Academic politics

Culture of competitiveness: *Writing brings out a lot of frustration and competition. We are trying to learn from each other but yet beat each other out with grades; we are trying to keep from but also share with each other, well, that gets frustrating when trying to write a paper.* ~Edward

Reading challenges

I have trouble reading: *Reading an academic nursing research article is almost too advanced for me. I don't get the wording that they use, so, I just go to the abstract. That's it. I don't have the time to read all of it, and I often don't understand any of it.*

~Carmen

Year 4

Hidden meanings

Behind the instructions: *[Our tutor] says to 'be creative.' They're looking for certain things, not creativity* ~Brian

I found, over all these years, [that] learning to write is about 'what do I think the tutor wants me to say.' ~Leslie

Behind the grade: *Students believe that they are scholars if they are A-students . . . Some tutors are so stuck on APA that they give a big weighing to it . . . And by 4th year, students believe they are scholarly if they get an A-mark or have perfect APA. But that is not scholarly writing. Writing is a search for knowledge and involves leaving them to make clinical decisions for professional practice.* [instructor]

Teaching younger nursing students

Mentoring program: *I really learned how to write in nursing when I had to teach it to my mentoring first-year students who were struggling with it.* ~Andrew



Students Writing Across this Nursing Curriculum

Teaching Culture

- Year 1:** most open
- Year 2:** most vulnerable
- Year 3:** most integrated
- Year 4:** most cooperative

Learning to Swim

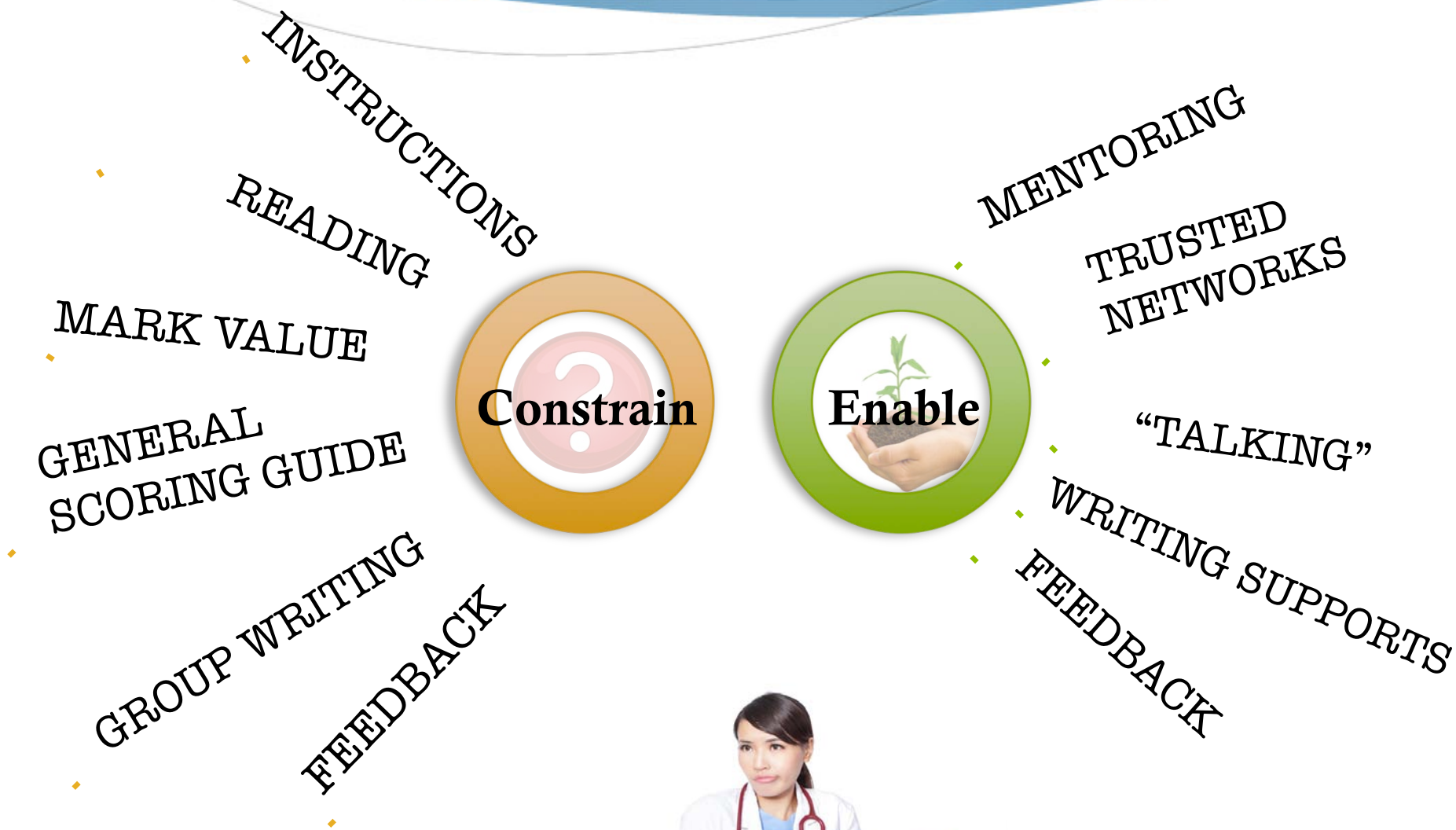
- confusion
- competition
- connection
- completion



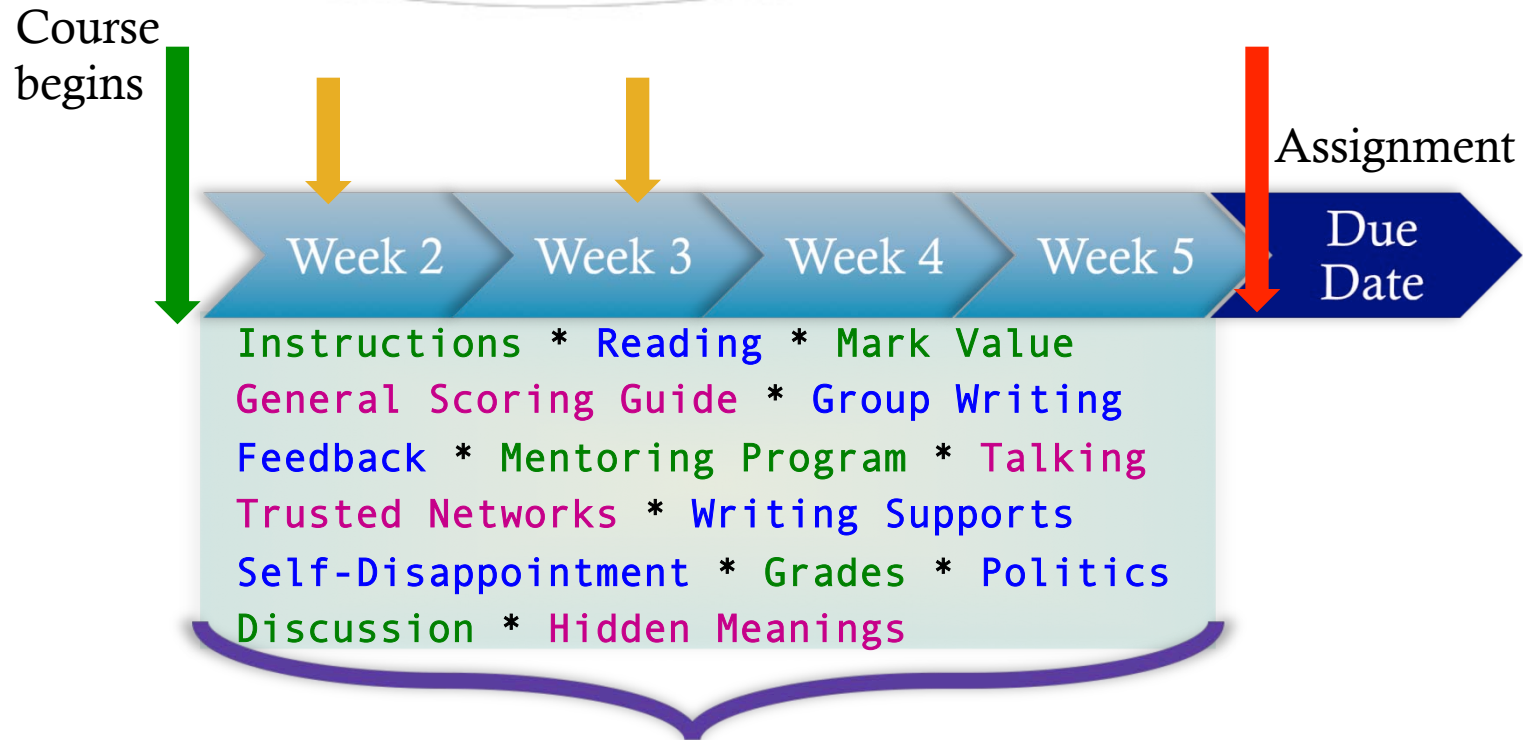
4 Years of Learning to Write



4 Years of Learning to Write



4 Years of Learning to Write



Social process of teaching and learning to write



How Do Students Learn to Write?



“Talking”
Reading **Mentoring**
Discussion
Hidden Meanings
Definitions **Self-Disappointment** **Networks** **Instructions**
Mark Values
Scoring Guides
Writing Supports **Trust** **Grades** **Politics**
Group Writing
Feedback



How Do Students Learn to Write?



- *“Our relationship with [the tutor] is central to our learning.” ~Anita*
- *We look to [the tutor] to help us write clearly about the content.” ~Andy*



Opening the Conversation:

IMPLICATIONS

STUDENTS LEARNING TO WRITE
IN NURSING EDUCATION

Feedback

Reading

Expectations / motivations



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chaudoir@ualberta.ca