



# RETHINKING WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

LEARNING PERIPHERAL GENRES IN ONE NURSING CURRICULUM

**GENRE2012**  
CARLETON UNIVERSITY

**OTTAWA**

Susan Chaudoir, PhD Candidate  
Interdisciplinary Studies  
University of Alberta, Canada  
[chaudoir@ualberta.ca](mailto:chaudoir@ualberta.ca)

<http://hdl.handle.net/10402/era.25705>

# Research Context

- ◆ **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 constitutes peripheral genre?**



# Research Context

- ◆ Rhetorical genre (RGS) and activity theory (AT)
  - ◆ Genre as recurring social activity, situation, function, ideology (Artemeva & Freedman, 2008; Miller, 1984/1994; Schryer, 2011)
- ◆ 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) (see also Beaufort, 2007, p. 15)



# Nursing Assignments as Genre

- ◆ Rhetorical purpose (role, audience, task)
- ◆ Communicative function
- ◆ Features of disciplinary conventions
- ◆ Complex site of social and ideological action
- ◆ Relationship with recurring texts, acts, interactions



# Nursing Assignments as Genre

## **Dominant genres**

- Self-evaluation
- Scholarly paper
- Reflective journal
- Report
- Handout
- Care Plan
- Peer-evaluation



## **Peripheral genres**

- Scholarly Assignment
- Letter
- Community Practice Project



# Are there patterns?

## **Dominant genres**

- Explicit instruction
- Scaffolded
- Sequenced
- General guidelines for marking
- “learn to write”

## **Peripheral genres**

- Implicit instruction
- Student/peer-directed
- No scaffolding
- Assignment-specific marking criteria
- “write to learn”





# What counts?

## **Dominant genres**

- Most frequent
- Culturally significant
- High mark value

## **Peripheral genres**

- Least frequent
- Insignificant
- Alternative
- Low mark value



# Learning Peripheral Genres

The paradox

## Community Practice Project

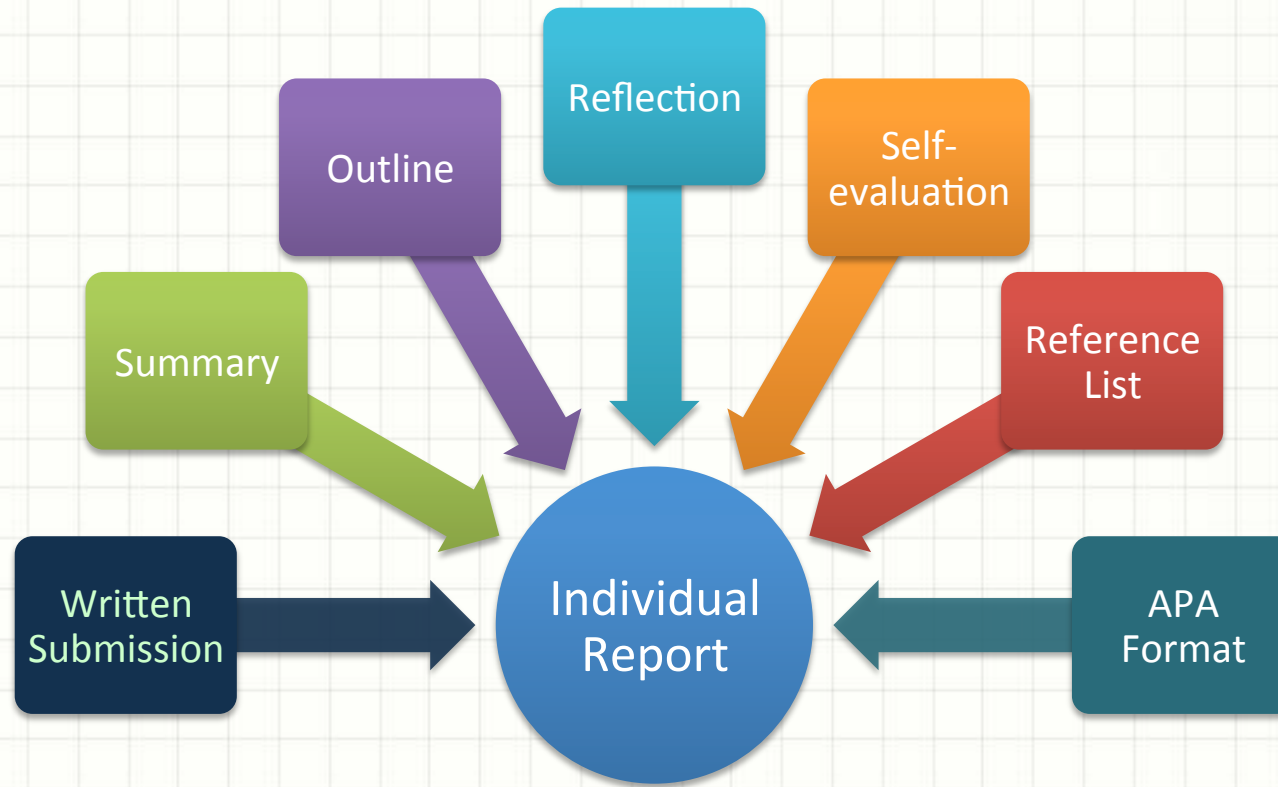
High value:	60%
Culturally dominant activity:	Public education (NEPAB) Peer collaboration
Dominant components:	1. Presentation (25%) 2. Report (25%) 3. Reflection (50%)





# Learning Peripheral Genres

## Community Practice Project Year 1



# How Do I Teach That?

## MOST COMMON CONCERNS FOR INSTRUCTORS

*“The community practice project is **too complex** for year one.”*

- Instructors “given” assignments (not created)
  - » *“This is a canned course.”*
  - » *“I have **no control** over the **language**.”*
- Assignment-specific criteria
  - » Mark with “General Guidelines”

**Tutors consult other tutors to learn how to teach and mark the community practice project assignment**



# How Do I Write That?

## MOST COMMON ISSUES FOR FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS

- **Getting started**

- » *“Our assignments are clear as mud.”*
- » *“There are no nursing-specific supports.”*

- **Organizing components**

- » *“We don’t know what [our tutor] wants. We do it one way, and the next she will not want that.”*

- **Citing in APA format**

- » *“I get more comments on how my formatting is wrong than the actual theories behind my writing. Then they fix my spelling and grammar. This is not helpful.”*

“We could label this assignment *implanting* practice project.  
The label is misleading.”



Labels are libel

**Calvin & Hobbes**



**Calvin and Hobbes** by WATKINSON





# How nursing genres can end up





# Rethinking Peripheral Genres Across the Nursing Curriculum

- **Patterns:** Dominant/Peripheral  
- **Eco-system** of assignments
  - Organic in nature
  - Generational components
  - Polycontextual dynamics
- **Narrative** use of other genres
- **Politics** and emotions







# DISCUSSION

**How do nursing students learn the (peripheral) genres they are asked to write?**

Documenting experiences Identifying concerns Rhetorical listening

# References

- Artemeva, N., & Freedman, A. (Eds.). (2008). *Rhetorical genre studies and beyond*. Winnepeg, MB: Inkshed Publications.
- Beaufort, A. (2007). *College writing and beyond: A new framework for university instruction*. Logan, UT: Utah State Press.
- Carroll, L. A. (2002). *Rehearsing new roles: How college students develop as writers*. Carbondale, IL: SIU Press.
- Chaudoir, S. (2012). *Writing assignments and dominant genres: Gateways to understanding writing in the disciplines*. Paper presented at the 63<sup>rd</sup> Convention of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, March 22, 2012, St. Louis, Missouri. Available at author's web site: <http://hdl.handle.net/10402/era.25705>
- Hyland, K. (2011). Disciplines and discourses: Social interactions in the construction of knowledge. In D. Stark-Meyerring, A. Pare, N. Artemeva, M. Horne, L. Yousoubova (Eds.), *Writing in knowledge societies* (pp. 193-214). Anderson, SC: Parlor Press. Available at the WAC Clearinghouse website: [wac.colostate.edu](http://wac.colostate.edu)
- Miller, C. (1984). Genre as social action. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 70(2), 151-167.
- Miller, C. (1994). Rhetorical community: The cultural basis of genre. In A. Freedman & P. Medway (Eds.), *Genre and the new rhetoric* (pp. 67-78). London: Taylor & Francis.
- Patton, M. D. (2011). *Writing in the research university: A Darwinian study of WID with cases from civil engineering*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Ratcliffe, K. (1999). Rhetorical listening: A trope for interpretive invention and a 'code of cross-cultural conduct.' *College Composition and Communication*, 51(2), 195-224.
- Schryer, C. (2011). Investigating texts in their social contexts: The promise and peril of rhetorical genre studies. In D. Stark-Meyerring, A. Pare, N. Artemeva, M. Horne, L. Yousoubova (Eds.), *Writing in knowledge societies* (pp. 31-52). Anderson, SC: Parlor Press. Available at the WAC Clearinghouse website: [wac.colostate.edu](http://wac.colostate.edu)
- Wells, G. P. (1999). *Dialogic inquiry: Towards a sociocultural practice and theory in education*. Cambridge: CU Press.

# I Welcome Comments

Learning writing assignments in the undergraduate nursing curriculum

**Susan Chaudoir**  
**chaudoir@ualberta.ca**

**www.ualberta.ca**

**<http://hdl.handle.net/10402/era.25705>**

