

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

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Academic Writing During a Pandemic: Using the Writing Meeting to Develop Self-Efficacy

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Abstract: The pandemic brought new challenges to academics' and researchers' capacity regularly to produce quality writing, potentially impinging on their self-efficacy, the belief that they can achieve their writing goals. To address this challenge, we developed a Writing Meeting Framework (WMF), with embedded components of self-efficacy. The aim of this study was to determine if the WMF maintained writing self-efficacy for postgraduate students and Early Career Researchers during the COVID-19 pandemic. 70 participants completed baseline questionnaires, and 26 of those completed post-questionnaires. For those 26 participants, answers to seven of eleven questions showed significant improvements in self-efficacy: improved ability to set realistic and achievable writing goals when working on a specific project and increased confidence in completing their writing goals regularly. This study shows that the WMF can be of benefit when researchers' self-efficacy in relation to their writing is challenged, as during the pandemic, and if maintained into the future.

Paper:

Academic writing during a pandemic:

Using the Writing Meeting Framework to develop self-efficacy

Introduction

Much has been written about the demands of academic writing. However, the mechanisms of productive, successful academic writing remain open to debate, as do definitions of 'productivity' and 'success'. Some argue that success depends on individual skills, habits, attributions or beliefs (Hartley and Branthwaite, 1989; Sword, 2017; Mayrath, 2008; Kempenaar and Murray, 2018). Others argue that connections, communities and 'social writing' are key for academic careers and progression (Elbow, 1998; Grant, 2006; Moore, 2003; Murray, 2014; Moore, 2010).

The pandemic has made academic writing even more challenging for many. It brought new challenges to academics' and researchers' time, motivation and capacity regularly to produce quality writing. This can impinge on their belief that they can achieve writing goals.

To address this challenge, we developed a Writing Meeting Framework (WMF) that uses regular peer-to-peer online structured meetings to maintain self-efficacy – i.e. the individual's level of confidence in achieving a specific task, such as a specific writing project (Hardy et al., 2020). The literature suggests that this is the first study to consider the role of self-efficacy in researchers' academic writing.

Method

The aim of this study was to determine if the online WMF developed writing self-efficacy in postgraduate students (PGRs) and Early Career Researchers (ECRs) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Northern Advanced Research Training Initiative (NARTI) invited PGRs and ECRs to participate, thus accessing a range of PGRs and ECRs. Nottingham Trent University provided ethical approval.

70 PGRs and ECRs agreed to participate and completed an informed consent form. They viewed an online training session about the WMF and were then randomly paired. Each pair (N = 35) arranged four online Writing Meetings over eight weeks.

Components of self-efficacy are embedded in the WMF: setting realistic goals, overcoming barriers, learning from others and encouragement. In order to measure self-efficacy, participants completed individual writing self-efficacy scales (adapted from Zimmerman and Bandura, 1994) before the first meeting (baseline) and after the final meeting (post-measure).

Results

70 participants (mean age = 36.8 ± 9.8 years) completed the baseline questionnaire. After eight weeks, 26 participants with full data (baseline and post-measure questionnaire responses) were included in the analysis.

Descriptive characteristics highlighted greater participation from females (n=20) than males (n=6) and greater engagement from those with no previous writing support experience (n=15) than those with previous engagement in writing support activities (n=11).

Figure 1 displays all responses, showing improvements from baseline to post-measure. Figure 2 highlights the seven components of the questionnaire where there were significant reported improvements.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to determine if the online WMF developed writing self-efficacy in PGRs and ECRs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Results suggest that self-efficacy improved for participants in relation to confidence in starting to write and re-drafting, setting realistic and achievable writing goals, overcoming distractions and sharing writing for feedback and support. Participants demonstrated significant improvement in their ability to set realistic and achievable writing goals when working on a specific project and developed confidence in completing their writing goals regularly.

These results support previous research (Hardy et al., 2020) on in-person Writing Meetings, which showed the importance of writing peers using this framework for maintaining their confidence in predicting what is possible and realistic in a writing session. The results confirm Hardy et al.'s assumption that non-judgmental feedback from a writing buddy during goal setting prompts the writer to set appropriate, realistic goals that match their perception of competence for the writing task. This confirms that the online WMF was successful in supporting these writers' self-efficacy during the pandemic.

Conclusions

While previous studies showed that the WMF supports academic writing, this is the first to focus on self-efficacy. This study shows that the WMF can be of benefit when researchers' self-efficacy in relation to their writing goals is challenged.

A strong sense of self-efficacy promotes achievement and wellbeing (Bandura, 1997). Those who maintain self-efficacy are likely to see barriers to writing as challenges to overcome, rather than threats to avoid (Hardy et al., 2020). In times of crisis – like a pandemic – or with intensifying pressures to publish – as in research assessment – this is even more important. It is vital, therefore, that academics, researchers and doctoral students have ways to develop and maintain self-efficacy in relation to their academic writing. The WMF is one way to achieve this.

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Figure 1. Differences between pre- and post-measure questionnaire responses.

Variable	WM (n = 26)		Difference (Baseline – Post)	Effect Size
	Baseline (Mean ± SD)	Post-Measure (Mean ± SD)		
Q1	3.65 ± 1.36	4.27 ± 1.22	-0.62 (-1.16 to -0.07)*	0.45

Q2	3.92 ± 1.13	4.54 ± 1.24	-0.62 (-1.03 to -0.20)*	0.60
Q3	4.46 ± 1.17	4.69 ± 1.23	-0.23 (-0.69 to 0.23)	0.20
Q4	3.23 ± 1.56	3.92 ± 1.41	-0.69 (-1.16 to -0.22)*	0.60
Q5	4.65 ± 1.23	4.92 ± 1.50	-0.27 (-0.92 to -0.38)	0.17
Q6	3.54 ± 1.39	4.12 ± 1.11	-0.58 (-1.08 to -0.08)*	0.47
Q7	3.58 ± 1.14	4.00 ± 1.36	-0.42 (-0.96 to 0.11)	0.32
Q8	4.46 ± 1.45	4.96 ± 1.15	-0.50 (-0.92 to -0.08)*	0.49
Q9	3.31 ± 1.41	3.85 ± 1.54	-0.54 (-1.09 to 0.01)	0.40
Q10	3.65 ± 1.65	4.38 ± 1.70	-0.73 (-1.33 to -0.13)*	0.49
Q11	3.77 ± 0.99	4.58 ± 1.47	-0.81 (-1.45 to -0.16)*	0.51

Significant difference between the pre- and post-measure questionnaire responses at $*p < 0.05$. Effect sizes using Cohen's d are as follows: small ($0.2 \leq d < 0.5$), moderate ($0.5 \leq d < 0.8$), and large ($d \geq 0.8$).

Figure 2. Baseline and post-measure questionnaire, highlighting seven areas of significant improvement: 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 and 11

1. I can start writing with no difficulty.
2. When working on a specific writing project, I can set realistic and achievable writing goals.
3. I can use my first attempts at writing to refine my ideas.
4. I can find a way to concentrate on my writing even when there are many distractions around me.
5. When I have a pressing deadline on a writing project, I am confident I can manage my time efficiently.
6. I can refocus my concentration on writing when I find myself thinking about other things.
7. When I get stuck writing a specific project, I can find ways to overcome the problem.
8. I can revise a draft of my writing project to make it more coherent and succinct.
9. I can protect my writing time.
10. I share writing drafts with others when I need feedback and support.
11. I am confident in completing my writing goals regularly.