

**Bárbara Malveira Orfanò\***

*Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil*  
borfano@ufmg.br

**Ursula Wingate**

*King's College London, United Kingdom*  
ursula.wingate@kcl.ac.uk

## TEACHING ACADEMIC WRITING TO NURSING STUDENTS: DEVELOPING CRITICALITY THROUGH A GENRE-BASED APPROACH

### Abstract

This study addresses the widely recognised difficulties that Nursing students experience with academic writing. Based on genre analysis, teaching and learning materials for undergraduate Nursing students were developed and administered in writing workshops. The materials had a particular focus on the expression of criticality. There is still no agreement in the literature on how to define or teach criticality; however, there is the expectation that EAP experts should teach students how to display critical thinking in academic texts (Bruce, 2019: 107). The study's methodology comprises the following stages: the compilation of a corpus consisting of graded texts written by undergraduate Nursing students including lecturers' feedback comments, identification of linguistic features and patterns responsible for signaling criticality and students' feedback on academic writing workshops. Students' feedback suggests that a combination of genre-based approaches with an inclusive model of literacy instruction offers a sound rationale for the design of academic writing initiatives. Data from a student questionnaire shows that after participating in the workshop and engaging with the activities, students have a better understanding of academic writing and the concept of criticality. Insights gained from the data will contribute to shed light on new trends regarding the teaching of disciplinary writing particularly for students starting university.

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### Key words

nursing education, academic writing, criticality, genre-based instruction.

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\* Corresponding address: Bárbara Malveira Orfanò, Alameda das Lathanias, 1151, apt 202, Bairro São Luiz, Belo Horizonte- MG, Brazil - CEP: 31270-800.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The challenges university students face when writing academic texts in their disciplines have been widely discussed (e.g., Hyland, 2006; Tribble, 2017). Over the last three decades, higher education has witnessed growing internationalisation and widening participation, which resulted in student populations from diverse linguistic, educational, and cultural backgrounds who are less prepared than previous cohorts for the academic literacy requirements of their chosen disciplines (for a discussion of the situation in the UK see Ivanič & Lea, 2006 and Wingate, 2015). This is particularly the case in the discipline of Nursing, where students come from widely diverse backgrounds (e.g., Gimenez, 2008, 2012). In many Anglophone universities, the academic writing support provided to students is not discipline-specific, but mainly consists of extra-curricular, generic 'one size-fits-all' pre-entry or in-session courses that achieve little in preparing students to meet the writing requirements of their disciplines (Wingate, 2006).

Several scholars have commented on the dearth of studies reporting on academic writing in Nursing programs. From a linguistic perspective, Boshier (2013: 264) points out that the discipline of Nursing has been overlooked by discourse analysts, resulting in insufficient information about how subject knowledge is created and communicated within the discipline. In relation to pedagogy, Gimenez (2008: 151) notes that research on writing experiences, needs and difficulties of Nursing students is still incipient in the field of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). The present study addresses this research gap by applying established EAP principles and practices to Nursing education in a case study conducted at a research-intensive university in the UK. In this case study, a corpus of essays from two undergraduate Nursing modules was compiled and subjected to genre analysis, which, together with the analysis of lecturers' feedback, served as the basis for the development of specific teaching and learning resources to be used in bespoke workshops. The resources aimed particularly at enhancing criticality, as this has been identified as lacking in Nursing students (e.g., Gimenez, 2012). The case study aims to provide an example of targeted, discipline-specific academic writing support that can be followed by Nursing educators.

In the following sections we discuss the literature on Nursing students' difficulties with academic writing and on pedagogical approaches to the teaching of writing, before presenting the case study.

## 2. NURSING STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES WITH ACADEMIC WRITING

The factors for Nursing students' writing difficulties discussed in the literature include students' backgrounds, the epistemological diversity within the discipline of

Nursing, students' attitudes towards the value of writing in the field, and their lack of understanding the concepts of criticality and critical thinking.

## 2.1. Student backgrounds

There is wide consensus that Nursing students tend to face substantial difficulties with academic writing (e.g., Gimenez, 2008, 2012; Whitehead, 2002) and that this is particularly the case for non-native speakers of English (Salamonson et al., 2010; Weaver & Jackson, 2011). Borglin and Fagerström (2012: 611) explain that “certain characteristics specific to Nursing students, i.e. more non-traditional students, act as barriers to the acquisition of academic skills”, and that academic writing could be the “one of the most problematic aspects” in Nursing education (Borglin & Fagerström, 2012: 612). Students come from diverse cultural, ethnic and educational backgrounds and often have been away from formal education, thus lacking academic experience (Bottomley & Prymachuk, 2017). Many Nursing students arrive at university through access routes that are less academic than the typical secondary school leaving qualifications (see Gimenez, 2008: 153 for the different access routes) and have received little or no previous training in writing. As a result, students struggle with understanding the communicative purpose as well as the linguistic and rhetorical features of the academic genres they have to read and write. In a more recent publication, Everett (2020) names the large number of non-traditional students as one factor leading to high student attrition. The fact that 50% of Nursing students do not complete their degree course “has contributed to a global nursing shortage” (Everett, 2020: 121).

## 2.2. Epistemological diversity

A problem for students from all backgrounds is the epistemological diversity of Nursing which draws on disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and anthropology (Gimenez, 2012). This diversity is also reflected in the range of genres that students have to produce, which include reflective as well as argumentative essays, article reviews, care plans and care critiques (Gimenez, 2008). To illustrate the epistemological variety within the discipline, Borglin (2012: 611) cites Baynham's (2002: 188) comment: “Pity the poor Nursing student, who is required to write at times like a sociologist, at others like a philosopher, yet again like a scientist and finally as a reflective practitioner!” Nursing students not only have to learn that the various genres they need to read and write may be underpinned by different epistemologies, but also that they have different linguistic and discursive requirements. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that academic publications in Nursing are still dominated by the objectivist or positivist model of science (Gimenez, 2012; Mitchell, 2018), characterised by a citation-heavy style that pays

extensive tribute to previous studies conducted by recognised authors in the field (Ryan et al., 2014). Whilst confronted with this style in their academic reading, students need to learn that it is inappropriate for some of their own writing, particularly that of reflective genres. The epistemological situation in Nursing highlights the importance of explicit, genre-focused, academic writing instruction for Nursing students.

### **2.3. Nursing students' attitudes towards academic writing**

The difficulty of encountering different epistemologies and genres may contribute to students' negative attitudes towards academic writing which have been, among others, reported by Mitchell (2018) and Gimenez (2008). Along similar lines, Laiho and Ruoholinna (2013) found an anti-academic discourse among nurses in practice, who criticised the hegemonic status of academia claiming that there is no link between academic writing and good nursing. Similarly, research conducted by Markussen (2007) indicates that students do not consider Nursing as a scientific discipline or profession that belongs to the academic sphere. Such beliefs foster resistance to academic writing and highlight the need for integrating into Nursing programmes specific courses or workshops aimed at informing students about the value of writing for the study and practice of Nursing as well as providing detailed instruction on how to write specific genres.

A convincing argument for the value of writing in Nursing has been made; for instance, Brennan (1995) observed that academic writing developed students' ability to distinguish relevant from irrelevant information. Similarly, Jones and Brown (1991), who investigated how the teaching of writing can positively impact on Nursing career development, argued that teaching writing in Nursing programmes encourages organised and reasoned thinking, which are important skills for Nursing practice. Friberg and Lyckhage (2013) also claim that writing gives Nursing students the opportunity to bridge the gap between theory and practice, thus preparing them for a patient-centred and evidence-based Nursing practice. The value of academic writing at university for their future career and professional practice as nurses was also recognised by undergraduate students in a study by Lundgren and Halvarsson (2009). However, negative attitudes will persist if students struggle with the requirements of academic writing without receiving adequate support.

### **2.4. Difficulty with the concepts of criticality and critical thinking**

Nursing students are expected to acquire, and exhibit in their writing, critical thinking ability (Borglin & Fagerström, 2012). In a survey of 68 Nursing students, Gimenez (2008) found that they increasingly had to write genres that require

criticality and argumentation as they progressed through the three-year programme. Asked which cognitive demands required by these genres they found most difficult, students named critical analysis, evaluating source materials, and supporting claims with evidence. The concepts of criticality or critical thinking, when they were mentioned in tutor feedback on their assignments, remained obscure to the students. This problem is also mentioned by Borglin and Fagerström (2012: 612), who point out that “the concept of critical thinking can be difficult to comprehend for both Nursing students and Nursing educators due to inconsistent definitions of critical thinking”. Bruce (2019) explains students’ lack of understanding of criticality with the absence of a philosophical or theoretical framework that provides a clear definition and a methodology for its teaching. He therefore advocates the use of a genre-based approach to identify how criticality is expressed in academic writing of specific disciplines. Apparently, Nursing education has not made much progress with the teaching of criticality and critical thinking; as Gonzales et al. (2020: 41) explain, “[t]he lack of critical thinking in student nurses and new graduates has been a concern to the Nursing profession”. Unpacking the concept of criticality and showing students how criticality is manifested in texts was one of the objectives of this study.

### 3. PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE TEACHING OF WRITING

The relative absence of adequate approaches to the teaching of writing in the discipline of Nursing has been discussed in the literature. More than two decades ago, Whitehead (2002) saw a lack of opportunities for practice as an impeding factor to students’ writing development, as at this time there was only a limited number of writing assignments required in Nursing. Whilst this situation has changed with the increasing academisation of Nursing programmes, it seems that writing pedagogy has not developed beyond a study skills approach and is also not provided systematically (Andre & Graves, 2013). A wide range of publications have reported pedagogic initiatives aimed at supporting improving Nursing students’ writing (e.g., Minnich et al., 2018; Murrock, 2019; Oermann et al., 2015; Sakraida, 2020; Troxler et al., 2011; White & Lamson, 2017). However, as Mitchell (2018: 402) observes, these projects range from “quick-fix grammar and APA tutorials to the more time-consuming (and more effective) strategies involving scaffolded levelling of assignments or submission of multiple drafts for feedback”. A common feature of most initiatives is their focus on the mechanics of writing, specific vocabulary, paragraphing, and APA reference conventions, and the focus of instruction is generally on lower-level writing issues (Red Wolf & Wolf, 2022). This suggests that Nursing educators still have a narrow perception of academic writing as a set of transferable skills (Lea & Street, 1998) which, once acquired, can be applied to any

text and writing context. Proposing a shift in this perspective, Mitchell (2018) stresses the need for a different model for the teaching of writing.

The field of EAP offers more appropriate models, in particular the genre-based approach. EAP's genre pedagogy stems from the work of Swales (1990), who defined genre as a type of communicative event within a specific discourse community. An academic discourse community, for instance the discipline of Nursing, communicates through various expert and student genres, such as the research article and lectures (expert), or laboratory report and essay (student). Unlike the study skills model, the genre-based approach does not regard writing as a context-free activity, but analyses texts according to their social function and communicative purpose within a discipline (Ivanič, 2004). Function and purpose determine the structural, rhetorical and linguistic features of text, and writers have to understand both purpose and features to meet the expectations of the discipline (Wingate, 2018). In relation to the genre 'essay' for instance, a Nursing student needs to learn that a reflective essay has a different communicative purpose from an argumentative essay and that, accordingly, the features of these genres are different. Genre-based writing pedagogy is therefore concerned with helping students understand a genre's social function and communicative purpose and find out, ideally through their own analysis of examples from the genre, which features are required. Breeze and Sancho Guinda (2017) provide an excellent example of using genre-based teaching strategies for developing critical and creative thinking in two other professionally-oriented disciplines, Engineering and Journalism.

In EAP classrooms, genre analysis has often been carried out on expert genres such as published research articles. However, as these genres are not representative of those that students have to write, it has been long argued that genre-based writing pedagogy must focus on student genres (Hüttner, 2008), and that the text exemplars used in the classroom should represent the genre students have to produce next and should come from a corpus of assessed texts written by previous students (Tribble & Wingate, 2013). Bhatia (1993) has proposed seven steps which EAP educators need take to be able to analyse genres from unknown disciplines. These include the analysis of the genre's situational context and of previous research focused on the genre, the collection of a corpus of text exemplars, ethnographic study of the genre in its institutional context, linguistic analysis of the genre, and, importantly, the confirmation of findings from the analysis with specialists in the discipline.

These steps were taken in the present study; however, it should be explained that the corpus of Nursing texts compiled was not used for corpus analysis or corpus-based teaching. Whilst corpus analysis has contributed much to the understanding of writing conventions and practices of specific disciplines (Hyland, 2015), Tribble and Wingate (2013) point out that corpus studies have focused either on descriptive accounts of linguistic trends in specific disciplines or on offering students methodological tools to interrogate a corpus to learn about grammatical or lexical patterns prevalent in a genre (for examples see Biber & Gray, 2016; Nunes & Orfanò, 2020). However, as corpus-based pedagogy focuses on decontextualised

chunks of language, it does not help students understand a genre's structure, rhetorical moves or argumentation. Therefore, Hüttner (2008) advocated to apply both quantitative corpus analysis, using corpus tools for the identification of lexico-grammatical features, as well as the qualitative analysis of whole texts for the identification of linguistic features responsible for developing an argument.

Tribble and Wingate (2013) proposed a different route, moving from genre analysis to corpus analysis. In this approach, small corpora of assessed texts from a specific genre are compiled for the development of teaching/learning materials. The materials present whole text exemplars or long extracts; students' analysis of these is based on the comparison between high-scoring and low-scoring exemplars. Corpus analysis is only carried out *after* the qualitative analysis to create supplementary materials, for instance, for deepening students' understanding of lexical or grammatical genre features through the analysis of concordances, collocate tables or lexical bundles. The current study followed this approach of emphasising genre analysis and compiling a small corpus of exemplars mainly for this purpose; this deemed particularly important as criticality, one of the pedagogical foci of this study, cannot be observed in decontextualised data.

#### 4. THE CASE STUDY: DEVELOPING GENRE-BASED TEACHING/LEARNING MATERIALS

Students from two second-year undergraduate Nursing modules at a university in England were invited by email to contribute their assessed assignments to the corpus. Both assignments represented the genre 'essay' (Nesi & Gardner, 2012) of which the students had no previous writing experience. The essay title for the first module, 'Leading and Managing Care', was 'Critically discuss the leadership qualities and skills which contribute to a positive patient experience'. The second module, 'Promoting and Optimising Health in Children's Nursing', required the students to write an essay on the topic 'Discuss the physical and psychosocial impact of the condition on the child or young person and their family. Explain the nurse's role in providing family-centred care in either case'. Some instructions concerning essay content and academic writing conventions (e.g., use passive voice) were provided online.

The students were sent an information sheet with detailed information about the project and asked to sign a consent form if they were willing to participate in the study. Twenty-eight students consented (16 from the first and 12 from the second module), and their assignments were subsequently accessed via the university's online teaching and learning platform. Their essays were downloaded, anonymised, and converted to txt format before being included in the corpus.

To facilitate the researchers' understanding of the genre requirements, the texts were subdivided into two sub-corpora according to their grades. Sub-corpus A comprises texts with grades ranging from 70 - 89; according to the marking criteria,

this grade range shows that the writers demonstrated a highly thoughtful answer informed by wider reading, showed clarity of thought, personal insight and originality. Sub-corpus B consisted of texts with pass grades (49 - 59) for which only a sound understanding of basic concepts is required. This division allowed the comparison of the linguistic and discursive features that determine higher or lower grades. Another important source of information for the researchers' analysis of the genre was provided by the comments made by professors and tutors who had corrected the texts.

#### 4.1. Genre analysis and analysis of tutor comments

For the present study, due to the nature and size of the corpus, we did not use corpus tools for the analysis of the data. Instead, Bhatia's (1993) seven steps to genre analysis were employed to identify the linguistic and discursive features responsible for expressing criticality in the texts analysed. For this type of analysis, it is more fruitful to look at whole texts or sections instead of looking at language patterns across a large range of texts.

We analysed the 28 essays and the accompanying assessor comments for the prevalent shortcomings in the student texts. After coding the data separately, we compared and consolidated the codes. First, the forty critical tutor comments were coded and ranked according to the main themes emerging from the comments. The six most frequent ones are listed below.

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1. Lack of critical thinking/criticality
2. Lack of detail, points underexplained
3. Lack of logic flow of ideas
4. Lack of clarity, cohesion, signposting
5. Problems with structure (inadequate introduction/conclusion)
6. Lack of evidence for claims

By far the most frequent critical tutor comments were concerned with students' lack of critical thinking/criticality, and this consequently became the main focus of our text analysis and materials development. As the next step, we manually analysed the high-scoring and low-scoring student texts for the expression of criticality. Features of criticality, according to the assessors' comments, include a clear link to the essay topic in the Introduction, the synthesis of sources to highlight different positions, using boosters and hedges as well as sign-posting and discourse markers to present, connect and add new ideas and create a cohesive and coherent argument (the two latter features appear separately as points 3 and 4 in the list above, but were also mentioned in some assessor comments in relation to criticality).



In Tables 1 and 2, we provide examples relating to the first feature of criticality, i.e., clearly addressing the essay topic in the Introduction, from a high-scoring and a low-scoring student essay. In Table 1, we have highlighted the phrases and lexical metaphors that link back to the essay topic.

<p><i>Essay title:</i> Critically discuss the leadership qualities and skills which contribute to a positive patient experience.</p> <p><i>Tutor comment:</i> Good introduction, in which you clearly address the essay prompt. <i>Grade:</i> 88</p> <p>In 2020, the ‘Year of the Nurse’, Florence Nightingale’s 200<sup>th</sup> birthday came and went without celebration (World Health Organisation 2020). Florence Nightingale was the first to identify the notion of the nurse as clinical leader. The underpinning principles and behaviours still observed by nurses today are rooted in her earlier written works with emphasis on the collection of data, analysis and reporting and how this, in turn, improves patient outcomes (Stanley and Sherratt, 2010). The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC, 2015) outlines leadership as an essential professional value for all registered nurses regardless of position in the clinical hierarchy. Patients must remain at the centre of care (NMC, 2015) and responding to patient and colleague feedback in a meaningful and compassionate manner is how the clinical nurse leader can ensure the contemporary NHS reclaims its traditional values (West, Eckert, Collins, &amp; Chowla, 2017). By exploring current leadership models in the National Health Service (NHS), it is possible to critically assess leadership skills and qualities and the relevance to the nurse and the impact upon positive patient experience (PPE).</p>
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**Table 1.** Introduction of a high-scoring Nursing essay

As the highlights show, the writer clearly addressed the two main points of the essay topic, i.e., nurses’ leadership skills and qualities and their impact on patient experience. The writer skilfully provides an early example (Florence Nightingale) of nurses’ ‘clinical leadership’ and refers to ‘leadership’ twice again. The second point, patient experience, is also addressed with the lexical metaphor ‘improves patient outcomes’. In the last sentence, the writer makes a direct link to the essay topic by using the same phrases with one reformulation (‘contribute to’ rephrased by ‘impact upon’). As the tutor comment shows, this Introduction fulfils one aspect of criticality.

It is obvious from the Introduction of the low-scoring essay that the student writer addresses a topic unrelated to the essay topic, i.e., that of medication administration errors. Only one term from the essay topic, ‘leadership’, appears in this Introduction, however, this term relates to ‘theories’. Leadership ‘qualities and skills’ and their impact on the patient experience are not mentioned at all.

*Essay title:* Critically discuss the leadership qualities and skills which contribute to a positive patient experience.

*Tutor comment:* The introduction should always contain the elements of the title question and how this will be considered and analysed throughout the assignment. This introduction introduced a completely different topic that may have been relevant to discuss much further into the assignment.

*Grade:* 48

One of the causes of medication administration errors is ineffective communication in a team within the healthcare setting (Hassan et al., 2018) and communication is an essential skill to have. According to The Joint Commission (2008), experts agree that children are vulnerable. Therefore, medication errors can cause harm at a higher rate than adults due to factors such as weight-based dosing calculations and the need for decimal points. Past research has shown that common areas include overdose or underdose, dose omission, mistakes in medication route, wrong medication, wrong person, and not paying attention to a child's changing needs (Manias et al., 2018). According to BMJ (2020), researchers make estimates from evidence and studies that are already available to measure the harm caused by medication errors. They had estimated that more than 237 million medication errors are made in England every year. Due to this many errors, this costs the NHS more than £98 million and 1700 lives. This problem has been recognised as a global issue, as many new medications are being introduced due to an increase in complex conditions worldwide (BMJ, 2020). As a result of this, to ensure medication is administered safely, nurses are trained to continue using the seven rights of medication administration within their practice to reduce errors and promote safety. ... There are many different leadership theories which can either aid towards or hinder multi-professional teamwork. However, the two approaches this essay will cover are the transformational and transactional leadership theories.

**Table 2.** Introduction of a low-scoring Nursing essay

The teaching/learning materials addressed the six areas of shortcomings listed above with a particular focus on criticality. This can be seen in the Appendix, which presents the Table of Contents for the materials pack; two out of six units are devoted to 'showing criticality'.

## 4.2. The teaching/learning materials pack

A materials pack consisting of six units was developed based on the analysis of the genre and of the tutor comments. Each unit has an average of four activities and contains examples from the texts compiled in the corpus. In addition, the materials include an answer key for independent study, as not all units could be covered in the workshops that were offered to the target group (see below). An example from one Unit 3 'Showing criticality through boosters, hedges, comparing and contrasting' is provided in Table 3 to illustrate the teaching approach and the structure applied in all units. An introductory explanation (in this unit focusing on how criticality can be realised in writing) is followed by activities in which students carry out their own

genre analysis on extracts from the text exemplars. The most common tasks involved identifying expressions, discursive strategies, and/or keywords responsible for fulfilling the requirements of the genre in the discipline.

In this example, students had to identify lexico-grammatical features in the extracts of high-scoring texts; in other units they had to compare high- and low-scoring texts, accompanied by tutor feedback comments, to develop awareness of the genre requirements.

**Introduction:** *Criticality is shown when the writer shows a firm stance on a topic or idea, using boosters such as 'very, strongly, of course, obviously, essential, crucial'. At the same time, critical writers also show caution in their claims by hedging them, for instance through modal verbs such as 'could be, might', or tentative verbs such as 'appears, seems, tend to', or adverbs such as 'likely, perhaps'. Hedging is used to make sure that a claim is not outright rejected by the reader, and also to allow alternative views. Lastly, criticality is shown by comparing and contrasting authors and research perspectives. Comparing means shedding light on the similarities and differences present in the literature and highlighting their relevance to the topic under discussion.*

**Activity 1: Identify boosters and hedges in the text extracts below**

**Example A**

Transformational leadership theory guides the majority of the healthcare leadership literature; however, this is likely due to it being the most studied leadership style, not necessarily because it is the most appropriate (The King's Fund, 2015).

**Example B**

Whilst authentic leadership theory seems to simply not be as popular, Gilmartin and D'Aunno (2007) suggest that LMX theory has been subconsciously ignored as healthcare leaders are reluctant to accept that a theory that suggests leaders have in-groups and out-groups, or favorites, might be applicable to them. It is difficult to ignore that this attitude is sadly reminiscent of the head-in-the-sand mindset of the management teams at Stafford Hospital that Robert Francis exposed (2013).

**Example C**

Of course one of the most significant examples of positive change, is the investigations into Stafford Hospital, which may have not happened without patient and relative complaints. This forced the NHS and the DH to look inwardly and make vital changes to improve the quality of care.

**Example D**

Health conditions may affect an individual's physical health, which is the wellbeing and good functioning of organs (Card, 2019). They may also influence one's psychosocial health which is the impact of social factors on a person's mental wellbeing (Card, 2019). Since ASD has affected Jack and Gemma both physically and psychosocially, it is vital to implement family centred care (FCC).

**Activity 2: In the text extract below, the writer reviews and compares sources skilfully. Identify expressions that highlight this comparison.**

Primary research does identify a relationship between compassionate leadership and burnout prevention among psychiatric nurses (Ray, Wong, White, and Heaslip, 2013). Burnout can reduce nurse compassion, harming the therapeutic relationship and is thus detrimental to patient experience (White, 2006; Cetrano et al., 2017; ...). Yet, psychiatric nurses rating their leaders as more understanding, supportive and trusting displayed significantly reduced rates of burnout and significantly greater compassion satisfaction (Cetrano et al., 2017; ...). Similarly, Madathil, Heck and Schuldberg (2014), identified TFL to be successful in reducing rates of emotional exhaustion

in psychiatric nurses. However, the independent influence of leader compassion cannot be established here. Conversely, large-scale research by Bowers, Nijman, Simpson and Jones (2011) suggests leadership compassion has no direct impact on burnout. Rather, compassionate leaders promote better teamworking, which improves ward structure and that it is this which prevents burnout in psychiatric nurses (Bowers, Nijman, Simpson, & Jones, 2011).

**Table 3.** Extract from Unit 3: Showing criticality through boosters, hedges, comparing and contrasting

### 4.3. Workshops and evaluation

The workshops were delivered to the target groups, a cohort of 55 Nursing students who had to write this genre as their next assignment, well in time before they had to submit the assignment. To enhance teacher-student and student-student interaction, the students were divided in two groups, each of which attended a workshop of 1 ½ hours. The workshop covered the first three of the six units of the materials pack, including Unit 3 shown in Table 3. As the materials were designed for independent study, students were able to work through the remaining units on their own. During the workshops, students carried out the activities in groups, while the researchers were available to give advice or answer questions. The communicative purpose of the genre, as well as of the part-genres Introduction and Conclusion (see Casal et al., 2021 for a discussion of ‘part-genres’) in relation to the expected moves and steps, were discussed with the whole group. The students showed high levels of participation and enthusiasm during the workshop, expressing their desire for more workshops of this type.

The participants were asked to evaluate the materials and workshop by completing an online questionnaire. The questionnaire items, comprising ten closed and two open-ended questions, aimed to elicit academic writing support previously provided to the students, the overall organisation of the workshop, students’ perception of learning gains, as well as the kind of support they believe is necessary to improve their writing.

Of the thirty-three respondents, twenty-one (64%) stated that they had never attended an academic writing workshop, as none were offered in their department. They had been given access to some online information and materials but no opportunities for interaction, questions, or discussion. Fourteen respondents expressed their wish and the need for more workshop, as the following statements show:

Example 1: Comment made by student who attended the workshop:

*Please do more of these workshops for students they are so helpful. The lesson is the most I've ever learned since my 3 years being in uni!*

Example 2: Comment made by student who attended the workshop:

*I think this workshop should be provided from first year as this will give the student a good starting point of what to expect in university academic writing. I wished this was provided for me during my first year as I would have benefited from it a lot.*

The organisation of the workshop was well evaluated by thirty-two students (97%), although sixteen commented that the workshop should be longer and that there should be more time for questions, discussion, and in-depth analysis of other aspects of academic writing. The entire group of students remarked that the information provided in the workshop was relevant and clear. In addition, thirty-one respondents commented that the activities provided significant input with direct relevance for the assignments they have to submit for their course. According to thirty (91%) of the participants, the activities enhanced their knowledge about academic writing and equipped them with useful information to improve the way they express criticality in their texts. Particularly appreciated by the students were the examples from students' writing with feedback from tutors, as these contributed to a better understanding of what is expected from them in their assignments. Several students also stated that the workshop had helped them to better understand the concept of criticality and ways of expressing it. The overall very positive evaluation by the workshop participants is in line with previous studies (e.g., Tribble & Wingate, 2013). It is important to note that the student feedback in this study strongly points to the absence of targeted, genre-specific academic writing support within the department, a situation that has been found in other contexts too.

## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

As discussed earlier, academic writing instruction in Nursing tends to be patchy, generic, and focused on low level skills such as grammar, use of terminology, or referencing. It is important to raise Nursing educators' awareness of the benefits of preparing students specifically for the assignments they have to write, and of EAP's pedagogical approach of genre-based instruction. The present study has provided an example of how a corpus of texts written by previous students can be used as the basis for the development of teaching/learning materials that help students to understand the specific requirements of the assignment genre. The student participants in this case study have welcomed the materials and workshop discussions that helped them to understand the genre's purpose and associated linguistic features, making them feel more confident and better prepared for the upcoming assignment. With this kind of support, offered at least for students' first written assessments, student anxiety can be reduced, and performance enhanced. This improves students' overall experience at university and may remove the

negative attitudes towards academic writing that were discussed earlier. Once such specific teaching/learning have been developed, they can usually be used with successive student cohorts. It has been argued that the genre-based approach is best feasible when academic staff collaborate with EAP practitioners (e.g., Murray, 2022; Wingate, 2018). In this collaboration, academic staff would provide the exemplar texts for the corpus and advise on genre requirements, whilst EAP practitioners would analyse the genre and develop the materials. Ideally, the workshops would be conducted jointly by the academic staff member, i.e., the Nursing lecturer in charge of a module and its assessment, and the EAP specialist who developed the materials. Several examples of such collaboration in other disciplines are reported in the literature (e.g., Fenton-Smith & Humphreys, 2015; Murray, 2022). Although such collaboration could not be achieved in the context of the present study, its benefits should be considered by Nursing educators who aim to provide targeted, genre-specific writing instruction to their students.

Although this study was confined to a single case, involving only one student cohort and one instructional invention, the findings chime with those from studies conducted in other disciplines (e.g., Tribble & Wingate, 2013) in relation to students' appreciation of receiving this level of support as well as their enhanced understanding of the genre. Student satisfaction and increased confidence in dealing with their assignments provide a strong argument for following the genre-based approach to academic writing instruction. However, a clear limitation in this study and in previous ones is the lack of evidence of improvements in students' writing performance, achieved as a result of the instructional approach. It is this kind of evidence that is needed to convince academic staff and their leaders to invest time and resources to offer genre-based academic writing instruction on a broader scale. Therefore, more research needs to be carried out that systematically compares performance data of cohorts who have received genre-based instruction with those who have not. For the future, as we might have more data collected it might be interesting to compare the Nursing Corpus with similar existing corpora, for example a sub-corpus from the British Academic Written English Corpus (BAWE). Such study can shed light on how corpus tools in combination with genre analysis can inform academic writing practice in specific disciplines.

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**BÁRBARA MALVEIRA ORFANÒ** is a Professor at the Federal University of Minas Gerais in Brazil, where she teaches English for Academic Purposes and Corpus Linguistics related subjects. She is a member of the Inter-Varietal Corpus Applied Studies (IVACS), Learner Corpus Research Group and coordinates the research group on Languages for Academic Purposes both from Liberal Arts course - UFMG. Currently, she is the vice-dean for International Affairs at UFMG. Her main interests are: Corpus Linguistics, English for Academic and Specific Purposes, oral discourse, the teaching and learning of foreign languages and international education.

**URSULA WINGATE** is a Professor in the School of Education, Communication and Society at King's College London. Her research interests are in theoretical and pedagogical models underpinning students' development of academic literacy, English for academic purposes, and language policies. In her publications, she promotes an inclusive and curriculum-integrated model of academic literacy support, which is based on the collaboration of EAP specialists with academics in the disciplines. Her most recent publications are concerned with process use by novice writers, as well as with convergences and cross-fertilisation between the domains of EAP and EMI.

### ***Appendix***

#### Table of Contents of workshop materials pack

1. Writing Introduction and Conclusion
2. Signposting: Guiding your reader through your text
3. Showing criticality through boosters, hedges, comparing and contrasting
4. Showing criticality by highlighting limitations in ideas, concepts, or methodologies
5. Expanding ideas and developing an argument
6. Providing reference-based evidence