

APSU Writing Center

Reverse Engineering Academic Writing in Your Field

What is Genre Analysis?

- Genre analysis is the study of a text to understand how a specific type of writing works. It involves examining:
 - How the text is organized
 - How it uses evidence
 - The vocabulary and style it relies on
 - The expectations readers in that field have
- You then analyze what the author is doing to make the text recognizable as part of a particular discipline or profession.
- Understanding these patterns helps you:
 - Read more effectively in your major
 - Recognize disciplinary expectations
 - Write more confidently within your field

How to Perform a Genre Analysis

- Choose a professional or academic text from your major or intended field.
- Read the text carefully while analyzing it at the rhetorical and sentence-level.

Rhetorical (Global) Level Questions

Focus on the overall structure and purpose of the text.

- **Structure**
 - How is the text organized?
 - Are there clearly labeled sections (e.g., Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion)?
 - Where is the thesis or main claim located?
 - How does the structure guide readers through the argument?
 - When and how are key terms defined?

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Rhetorical (Global) Level Questions

- **Purpose**
 - What is the overall goal of the text?
 - Where and how is that purpose indicated?
 - Does the introduction identify a research problem or gap?
 - How does the author position their work within existing research?

- **Audience**
 - Who is the intended audience?
 - What background knowledge does the author assume?
 - Are specialized terms explained, or are they treated as common knowledge?
 - How does the text address or engage readers in the field?

- **Support (Evidence & Research)**
 - How are claims supported?
 - What types of evidence are used (data, experiments, surveys, textual analysis, case studies)?
 - Are charts, graphs, or tables included?
 - How much context or background is provided?
 - How is credibility established?

Sentence-Level Questions

Focus on writing patterns, grammar, and language.

- **Formatting & Citations**
 - What citation style is used (APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.)?
 - How are sources integrated (signal phrases, parenthetical citations, footnotes)?
 - Are direct quotations common, or is paraphrasing preferred?

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Sentence-Level Questions

- **Sentence Structure**
 - How long are most sentences?
 - Are they simple, compound, or complex?
 - Does sentence structure vary by section (e.g., more technical in Methods)?
 - What transitions or signpost phrases are used?

- **Vocabulary & Language**
 - What field-specific terminology appears frequently?
 - Are abbreviations used? Are they defined first?
 - Are key terms repeated consistently rather than replaced with synonyms?
 - What verb tenses are used in different sections?
 - Is passive or active voice more common?

Looking at Research in Your Field

- Analyze how researchers gather and present data.
- Determine whether collaboration is common (multiple authors).
- Examine how recent the sources typically are.
- Identify what counts as strong evidence in the discipline.

Examples by Field:

- Engineering articles may emphasize experimental data and visuals.
- Psychology articles often foreground research design and statistical analysis.
- Literary study articles may emphasize theoretical frameworks and textual interpretation.



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References

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Purdue Online Writing Lab. (n.d.). *Genre analysis & reverse outlining*. Purdue Online Writing Lab. https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/graduate_writing/thesis_and_dissertation/genre_analysis_reverse_outline.html