



# What assignments do university professors ask Nursing students to write?

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# Roger Graves



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wac  
c4w  
writing initiatives  
webmail  
efs

I'm new to the University of Alberta, having come from the University of Western Ontario where I was Director of the Program in Writing, Rhetoric, and Professional Communication in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. In my new position here I'll be working with faculty and students across the university as part of the Writing Across the Curriculum initiative. I will also be working with students and faculty in the Department of English and Film Studies.

I am the author, co-author, or editor of five books and 29 articles, including Writing Instruction in Canadian Universities. My current research interests include the development of doctoral student writing, writing assignments across disciplinary fields, and rhetorical approaches to text encoding. Currently I serve as co-Vice-President of the Canadian Association for the Study of Discourse and Writing (CASDW) and a member of the Executive Board of the Canadian

**Recent presentations**  
This page contains links to pdfs of slides displayed at presentations I've given.

**Books**  
This page displays the covers and descriptions of books I've authored, co-authored, or co-edited

**Blog: Thinking About Writing**  
A new blog on writing-related issues

<http://www.ualberta.ca/~graves1/index.html>



# Canadian context: a primer

- With one or two exceptions, no required first year writing courses; writing historically taught through the study of literature
- WAC programs that support faculty members are few and far between; WAC programs more commonly support students (“How to write a psychology paper” workshops for students)
- Wide range of writing centres; perhaps the closest point of comparison with US context
- Disciplinary support for writing more common—not **across** the curriculum but **in** the discipline



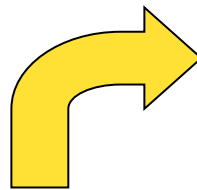
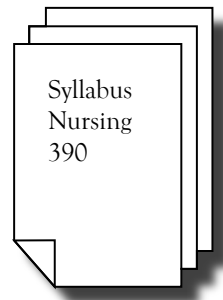
## Previous study

- R. Graves, T. Hyland, B. Samuels. Undergraduate Writing Assignments: An Analysis of Syllabi at One Canadian College. *Written Communication* 27 (3).
- This study collected 485 assignments from 179 syllabi at a small liberal arts college in Ontario
- My co-authors will talk in detail about that study on Saturday morning at this conference



# Methods: Assignments

- We gathered copies of course outlines and assignments that are given to students
- All assignments and documents were coded by the researchers

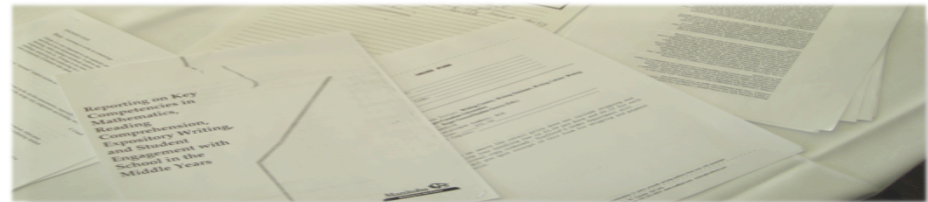


- course year level
- genre
- word length
- value (percentage of final grade)
- source documentation
- provision of feedback
- method of assessment (rubric, holistic, analytic)



# Coding

- Coding scheme developed in pilot study
- Syllabi and assignments collected, copied, and systematically numbered
- All assignments and documents coded by the researchers
- The coded assignments entered into an Excel data sheet and imported into SPSS for descriptive data analysis





# Research questions for the Nursing study

- What range of genres of writing assignments are Nursing students asked to write?
- Does this range vary over the 4 year program?
- Do these assignments get longer and more common in upper years of the program?
- How might instructors scaffold writing assignments within a course to help students achieve the course goals and develop their writing skills?



# WAC at University of Alberta

- Faculty development, individually and in group workshops
- Classroom support for instructors in the disciplines: getting their students started on writing assignments
- Research: writing “inventories” to describe how departments use writing now (baseline data) and to inform discussions of how to expand, direct, or improve the use of writing for learning





# Faculty of Nursing writing assignment analysis

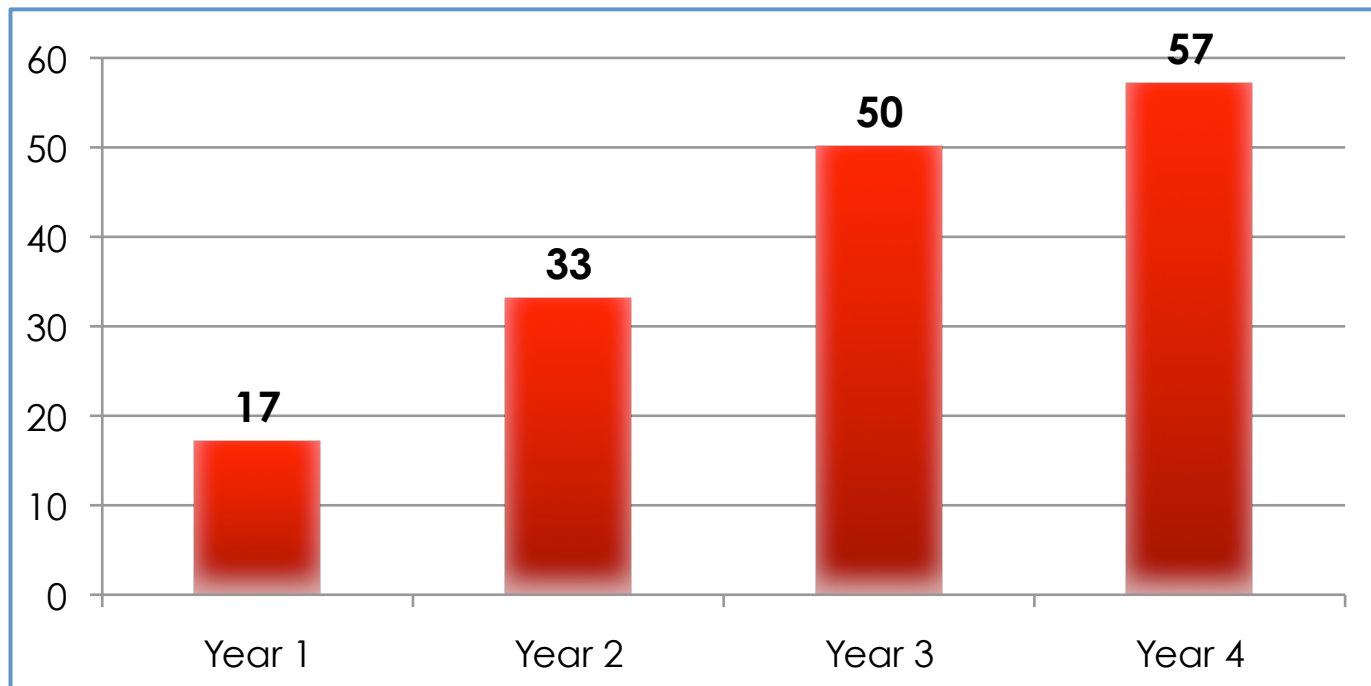
## Analysis Overview

Number of courses analysed	42
Number of courses with writing assignments	36
Number of writing assignments	157
• writing assignments in Year 1	17
• writing assignments in Year 2	33
• writing assignments in Year 3	50
• writing assignments in Year 4	57

Courses not analysed: 192, 193, 292, 408, 410, 461, 492, 498, 499  
Reason: no current syllabus provided



# Number of writing assignments by year level



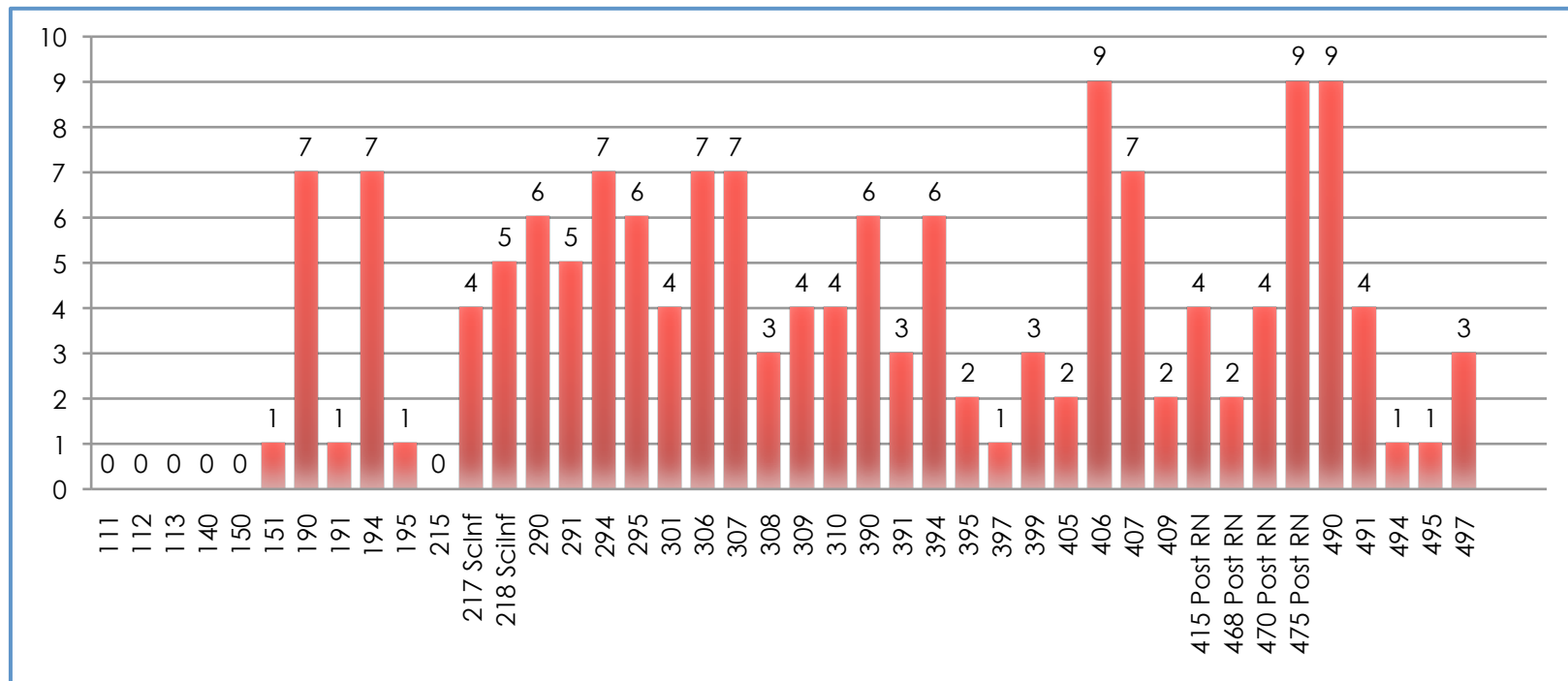


# Number of courses with writing assignments

<b>Year</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Total number of courses (n=42)</b>
1	50%	5 out of 10 courses
2	86%	6 out of 7 courses
3	100%	12 out of 12 courses
4	100%	13 out of 13 courses



# Number of writing assignments per course



Do number of assignments increase as nursing students advance?

YES

# Types of writing assignments



<b>Self Evaluation</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Paper</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Handout</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Personal Goals</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Journal</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Report</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Peer Evaluation</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Group Email</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Presentation</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Outline</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Annot. Biblio.</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Proposal</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Field Notes</b>	<b>1</b>

# Assignment type grouped by year



<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Year 4</b>
Self Evaluation	38	4	11	8	15
Paper	29	4	2	14	9
Handout	17	2	6	7	2
Personal Goals	12	2	2	5	3
Journal	12	0	3	4	5
Report	12	0	2	1	9
Peer Evaluation	11	2	2	4	3
Group Email	11	2	2	5	2
Presentation	8	1	2	2	3
Outline	3	0	0	0	3
Annot. Biblio.	2	0	1	0	1
Proposal	1	0	0	0	1
Field Notes	1	0	0	0	1



# Nested writing assignments

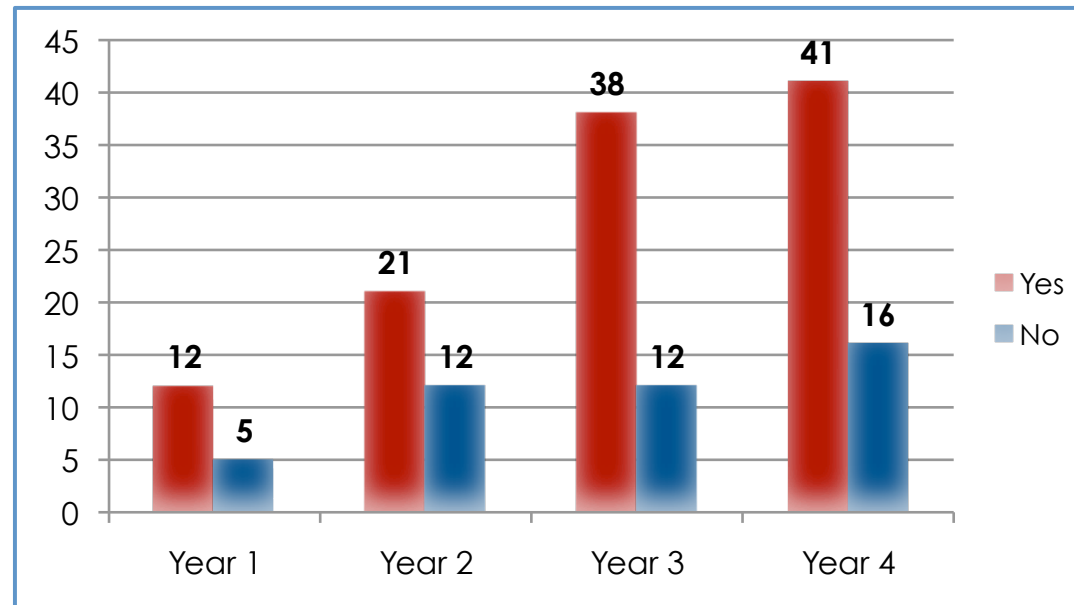
<b>Nested</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Year 4</b>
Yes	112	12	21	38	41
No	45	5	12	12	16

How many nested assignments are there in the nursing student's programme?

$$112 = 72\%$$



# Nested writing assignments grouped by year level



Do assignments get progressively more nested as nursing students advance?

**YES**



# Length of writing assignment grouped by year level



<b>Length</b>	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Year 4</b>
500	0	5	5	5
750	0	7	4	8
1000	4	3	2	13
1500	1	1	0	0
1750	0	0	4	1
2000	2	0	0	1
2250	0	0	0	3
2500	1	1	0	1
3250	0	0	0	1
3500	0	0	1	0
4500	0	0	1	0

Do assignments get longer as nursing students advance?

*Writing assignments do not get longer, but they increased 400% between Year 1 and 4*

# Audience of writing assignment grouped by year level

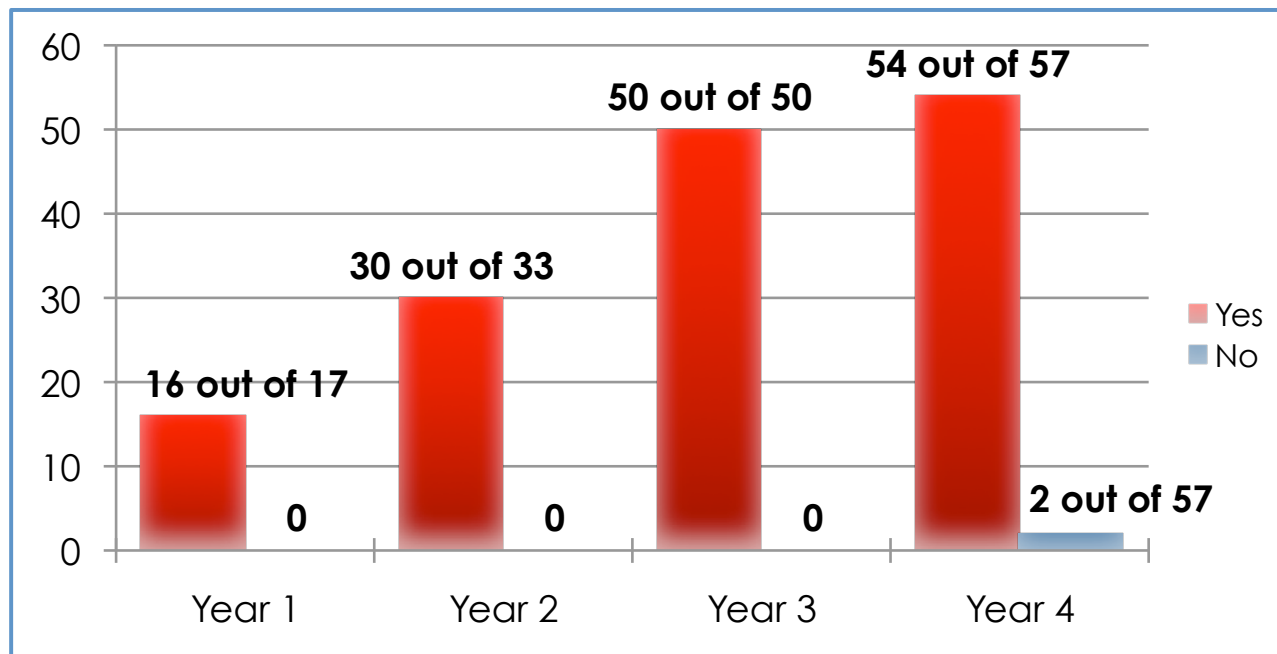


<b>Audience</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Year 4</b>
<b>In Class</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Outside Class</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>No data</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

Who are the nursing students writing for?

*The professor, marker, or peers*

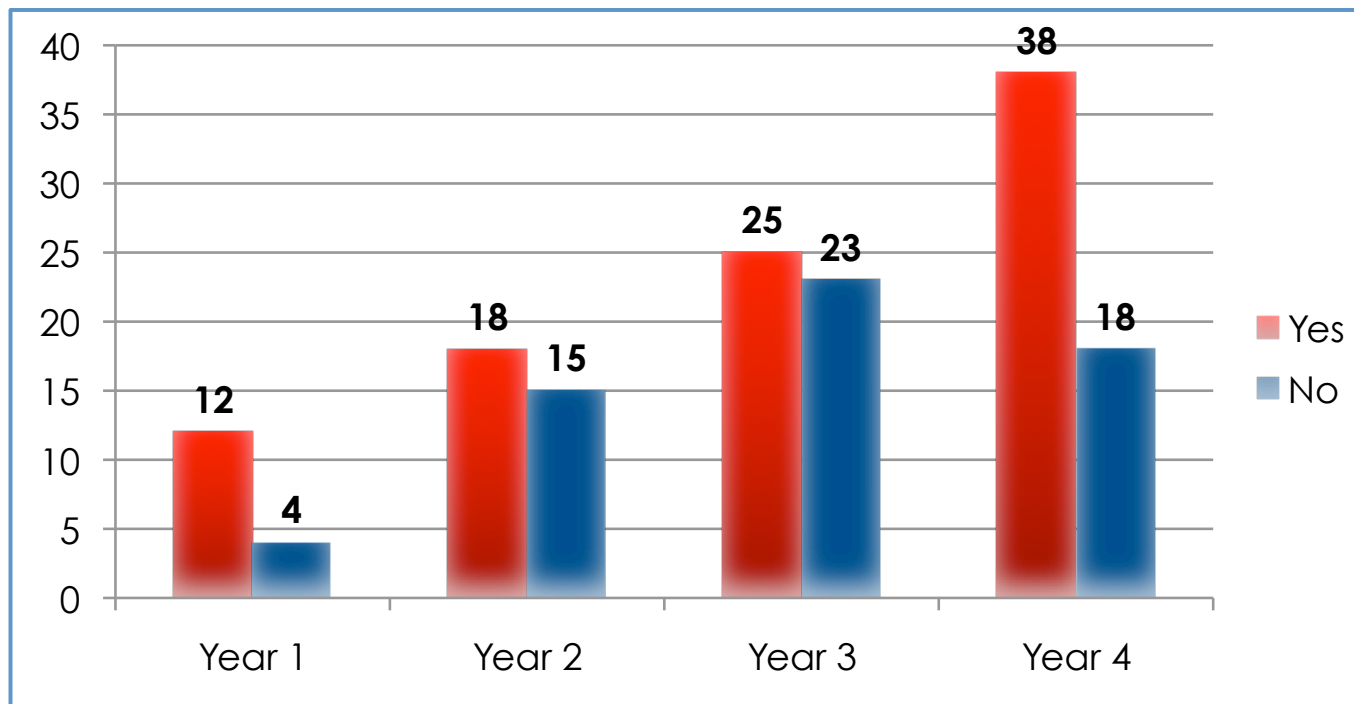
# Feedback on writing assignments grouped by year level



Do nursing students get feedback early in their programme?

**YES**

# Rubric for writing assignments grouped by year level



Are rubrics provided for nursing students throughout their programme?

*60% of the time*



## Other disciplines

- Currently we have collected writing assignment data for a service learning program, political science department, and geography department and have interest in this kind of a study from a physical education faculty and an english department
- We will begin comparing data between disciplines this summer and fall 2010
- <http://www.ualberta.ca/~graves1/index.html>