



Writing Motivation and Text Genres as Contributing Factors to Historical Writing Performance of College Students

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Introduction

Motivation plays a critical role in students' writing performance, particularly those who struggle with writing (MacArthur, Philippakos, & Ianetta, 2015). For college students in various majors, instructors tend to engage them in writing essays through a critical lens by a) comparing/contrasting key concepts or events, and/or b) presenting a strong and clear argument well supported by evidence, with the consideration of counter argument so as to analyze critical concepts or issues in a comprehensive manner. While both genres are critical in using essay writing as an effective learning tool (particularly for historical content), it's important to examine whether and if any, to what extent writing prompts reflecting two different genres may have differentiated impact on the writing outcomes of college students.

Research Questions

1. What are the writing motivational profiles (i.e., writing self-efficacy, goal orientation for writing) of college students?
2. What is the (compare-contrast vs. argumentative) essay writing performance of college students?
3. Do text genre (i.e., compare-contrast vs. argumentation) impact college students' essay writing outcomes in a differentiated manner?

Participants

A total of 44 undergraduate students were included in the study:

- 28 males vs. 16 females
- Mean age = 22 years
- Ethnicity: 32% White, 16% African American, 39% Asian American, 13% Hispanic
- Each participant completed a writing motivation survey that included two subscales: Writing Self-Efficacy and Goal Orientations for Writing.
- Each student also wrote a total of two historical essays: one compare-contrast essay vs. one argumentative essay, based on the given prompts. Each essay was completed within 40 minutes.

Measures

Writing Measures

- **Total Words Written.** Total words written (*TWW*) is an index of writing productivity. It is viewed as a reliable and valid measure for assessing students' writing outcomes.
- **Essay Elements.**
 - The *compare-contrast essay elements* were scored using the procedures adapted from Shen and Troia (2018), which include introduction, comparisons, contrasts, evidence/details, conclusion, and use of transition words.
 - The *argumentative essay elements* were scored using a researcher-developed rating scale, which include claim, counterclaim, supporting evidence, concluding statement, and use of transition words.
 - Each element will receive a score of 1 if presented. Each of these structural elements was rated on a 0–2 scale. A score of 0 was assigned when a target element (e.g., conclusion) was absent; a score of 1 was assigned when the target element was present, but elementary; and a score of 2 was assigned when the target element was developed and advanced.
- **Holistic Writing Quality.** Each student's essay quality was scored using a 6-point Likert rubric (ratings ranging from 1- 6) adapted from De La Paz et al. (2017). This rubric holistically evaluated the ideas generation, text structure, genre elements, essay coherence, transition, and writing mechanics.

Writing Motivation Measures

- The motivation questionnaires adopted in the current study were developed by MacArthur, Philippakos, and Graham (2016).
- Consisted of two scales: *Writing Self-efficacy (18 items)* and *Goal Orientations for Writing (11 items)* were used in this study. This motivation measure was reported to demonstrate adequate construct validity and internal consistency (see also MacArthur, Philippakos, & Ianetta, 2015).

Data Analysis and Results

Instrument Analysis for Motivation Scales: Self-Efficacy vs. Goal Orientations

- The principal components analysis (PCA) extraction with varimax rotations of the factors with Kaiser normalization was conducted for responses on both the *Writing Self-Efficacy Scale* and *Goal Orientations for Writing Scale*.
- The 18 items on the **Self-Efficacy scale** were found to load on **two** unique factors: **self-efficacy for strategies vs. self-efficacy for self-regulations**, explaining 36% and 27% of the total variance, respectively. 12 items loaded on the strategies factor (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$), and 6 items loaded on the self-regulation factor (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$).
- For the **Goal Orientations scale**, 3 factors were extracted that explained 25%, 24%, and 20%, respectively, of the variance. 4 items loaded on the first factor - **mastery goal** (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$), 4 items loaded on the second factor - **avoidance goal** (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$), and the remaining 3 items loaded on the third factor - **performance goal** (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$).
- Paired t-test was conducted with the two self-efficacy variables, and the result shows that the participants demonstrated significantly higher self-efficacy for implementing writing strategies than self-regulating strategies (see Table 1).
- Repeated measure ANOVA was conducted with the three goal orientation variables. The data indicate that performance-based goals scoring the highest, followed by mastery-based goals. The avoidance goal orientation seemed to receive the lowest scores (see Table 1).
- Compare-contrast essays were significantly longer than argumentative papers, but argumentative essays included more genre-specific essay elements. The holistic essay writing quality of both genres didn't show significant difference, though.

Table 1 Writing Motivational Profiles and Comparisons

Measure	M (SD)		
Self-Efficacy			
Strategies	81.23 (13.17)		
Self-regulation	77.70 (16.05)		
		t = 2.261*	p = .029
Goal Orientations			
Mastery	4.01 (.75)		
Avoidance	2.76 (1.04)		
Performance	4.70 (.51)		
		F = 58.95	p < .001

Table 2 Writing Performance and Comparisons by Genres

Measure	Compare-Contrast Essay	Argumentative Essay	t	p
	M (SD)	M (SD)		
TWW	265.70 (130.25)	235.58 (98.08)	2.38*	.023
Essay Elements	4.41 (2.36)	4.91 (2.32)	-2.186*	.034
Holistic Text Quality	3.09 (1.25)	3.05 (1.27)	.443	.660

Implications

- Explicit and direct training on writing self-regulation skills such as goal-setting, self-instructing, and self-evaluating need to be taught to college students, particularly those who struggle with writing. This can further boost students' self-perceived efficacy on regulating their writing processes and behaviors.
- Engage college students in various writing activities across different subject areas and genres to boost their mastery goal orientation that focuses on development of competence and task mastery.
- Writing interventions need to help college students enhance their idea generating skills, especially for composing argumentative essays; Checklists that specify the genre elements could be very helpful.