

# **Instructional Techniques that Cultivate Writing Skill Mastery**

Holli R. Leggette, Holly J. Whitaker, & Brooke Prather



# Introduction

- Universities are becoming more concerned with course and program learning outcomes.
- Writing well is, perhaps, the most important outcome for students enrolled in advanced agricultural media writing courses.
- Instructors who want to maximize learning outcomes will implement the most effective techniques to cultivate skill mastery.
- Lingwall and Kuehn (2013) noted reflection was important to help students move from surface-level writers to deep-level writers.



# Purpose

- Investigate students' perspectives on which writing techniques were most effective in moving them toward writing skill mastery.
- What do agricultural communications students see as the most effective techniques for cultivating writing skill mastery?



# Method

- Students ( $N = 131$ ) enrolled in an advanced media writing course at Texas A&M University.
- Three consecutive semesters
- Qualitative content analysis (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1999) of written critical reflections throughout the course.
- Examples of questions.
  - What class activities helped you the most (e.g., peer review, instructor feedback, AP style quizzes)?
  - What new writing behavior or strategy do you feel you've developed that you intend to use again?



# Method

- Data analyzed using open coding (Strauss, 1987).
- Trustworthiness was established using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) guidelines to achieve
  - Credibility—reflexive journal, persistent observation.
  - Transferability—triangulation, peer debriefing memos, and audit trail.
  - Dependability—thick description in reporting the results
  - Confirmability—reflexive journal, triangulation, and peer debriefing memos



# Findings

- **Constructive feedback** in a structured, regular format from the instructor and peers provided a human connection.
- Students benefitted from a structured method of **peer revising and editing** forcing in-depth critique and input.
- **Lab work** designed to reinforce lecture content motivated students to strengthen new skills and maintain attendance.



# Findings

- Students achieved skill mastery with **increasingly difficult examples** of attribution, paragraph construction, and sentence structure provided by the instructor.
- Students reflected on their writing skill mastery and noted the **reflections** reinforced pathways for how they developed mastery.



# Conclusions

- Implementing instructional techniques students saw as most effective increased learning outcome achievement.
- Using lab work to reinforce lecture material helped students apply knowledge and skills before advancing in the course, promoting scaffolding and the understanding of knowledge.
- Reflections played a role in increasing skill confidence, which Lingwall and Kuehn (2013) found reflection was important to developing deep writers.





# Recommendations

- Practice
  - Provide students opportunities to consistently apply skills by reinforcing course content through lab activities.
  - Implement reflections periodically throughout the course.
  - Use learning outcomes to design course content, instructional techniques, and activities/assignments.
- Research
  - Measure the effectiveness of each instructional technique.
  - Measure the impact of each instructional technique on students' learning outcome achievement.

