

Helping thesis writers to think about genre: What is prescribed, what may be possible

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Graduate students often feel anxious about whether their writing is as it should be—and if not, why not? (How should it be? And how can they tell, other than by pleasing or displeasing their supervisors?) At the same time, some wish to be more creative, but not to risk the success of their academic “audition.” This article discusses a WAC-like seminar that, drawing on genre studies, helps to mediate these concerns for graduate students in an Australian university. They are introduced to genre analysis and encouraged to find patterns of structure, style, or strategy in theses in their area. At the same time, they look at examples that suggest a range of possibilities for creativity. The seminar demonstrates how the “interpersonal” work of a thesis can be achieved both by adhering to convention and by diverging from it.

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