

Pedagogical Approaches and Teaching Strategies Used in Nursing Education to Teach Academic Writing: A Scoping Review

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Academic writing is a specific style of writing used in educational and scholarly contexts. It is defined by its formal tone, clarity, precision, structured organization, and reliance on credible sources to support the ideas or information presented (Purdue Online Writing Lab, n.d.). It is used to describe existing literature on a specific topic, develop and structure arguments, convey complex ideas, and present research findings (Thonney, 2011). Academic writing comprises various forms, such as essays, research papers, reviews, theses, and dissertations, each of which demands a distinct style, tone, and structure. Typically adhering to a specific format (e.g., American Psychological Association style), academic writing plays an important role in fostering students' critical thinking abilities and understanding of academic content (Mitchell et al., 2023; Sahoo & Mohammed, 2018). In nursing education, academic writing is considered an effective strategy to assess the cognitive abilities that students require for clinical practice, including knowledge, decision-making, problem-solving, and critical thinking, as well as their communication skills (Bradley et al., 2024; Hawks et al., 2016; Oermann et al., 2015; Tseng et al., 2025; Wolf & Wolf, 2023).

Tyndall and Scott (2017) claim academic writing is one competency that distinguishes baccalaureate-prepared nurses from other health care professionals, while Whitehead (2002) emphasizes the importance of academic writing in demonstrating scholarship within the discipline. Despite its importance, there are growing concerns in nursing education about students' writing skills (Hutchinson & Pederson, 2023; Johnson & Rulo, 2019; Mitchell et al., 2021; Sasa, 2020). While faculty express concerns about sentence structure, development of arguments, progression of thought, and use of credible sources (Mattsson, 2016; Roberts & Goss, 2009; Singleterry et al., 2016), students identify a lack of support, uncertainty about expectations, and insufficient time to complete writing assignments or develop writing skills, and they question the value of writing in their future careers (Gopee & Deane, 2013; Jefferies et al., 2018). Johnson and Rulo (2019) identify a need to improve the academic writing skills of students in undergraduate programs as "an absolute priority in nursing education programs today" (p. 58).

According to Mitchell et al. (2018), nurse educators approach writing from either a generalist or a disciplinary perspective. From a generalist perspective, writing is taught as an overall skill and is commonly taught outside of nursing, often through an English department. From a disciplinary perspective, writing is taught predominantly by nursing faculty. While future nurses are required to write for interdisciplinary audiences, discipline-specific writing is believed to help students learn the writing conventions and styles of their own discipline (Hawks et al., 2016). Discipline-specific writing requires students to learn how to access nursing knowledge (Hawks et al., 2016) and helps socialize them to the practice of nursing, apply theory to practice, and develop their identity as nurses (Andre & Graves, 2013; Borglin, 2012; Mitchell, 2018).

The literature includes descriptions of both pedagogical approaches and teaching strategies to address students' writing abilities in nursing education. Pedagogical approaches are the theoretical or philosophical stances used to inform how writing is taught or assessed. For example, constructivist approaches are student-centric and use student reflections to address academic writing. Social constructivist approaches use collaborative teacher–student interactions, while liberationist approaches involve students and teachers working together to identify the instructional approaches (Munna & Kalam, 2021). Other pedagogical approaches draw on theoretical tenets such as self-efficacy that target students' beliefs about their own abilities to write in specific contexts (Mitchell et al., 2017). Teaching strategies, on the other hand, are the intentional instructions or curricular activities used to teach and/or assess students' writing. In a systematic review of teaching strategies used to teach writing, Oermann et al. (2015) identified 80 published papers describing a specific strategy employed to improve the writing skills of practising nurses or nursing students. Although the authors noted that many papers focused on writing

in nursing, they did not differentiate between academic and professional writing. Nonetheless, this review identified a range of strategies used to teach writing, including assignments, workshops, courses designated for writing, faculty feedback, and independent learning activities. Although the quantity and range of the work in this area is encouraging, the results are primarily descriptive and non-research based. The review also included approaches used with all levels of nursing students (i.e., undergraduate and graduate) and practising nurses, yet the discipline-specific academic instructional needs of pre-licensure students likely differ from those of graduate students or practising nurses. Our current scoping review addresses this gap and focuses on the research pertaining to the effectiveness and/or outcomes of approaches or strategies used to teach discipline-specific academic writing to pre-licensure nursing students.

Methods

This scoping review was originally conducted with a broader research question pertaining to teaching academic writing to pre-licensure students enrolled in health professional programs, which included nursing students. We used the Joanna Briggs Institute methodology for scoping reviews for this broader question (Peters et al., 2020), and the process included identifying a research question and sub-questions; conducting a comprehensive search of the academic and grey literature; screening and selecting studies; and collating, summarizing, and reporting on the findings. While the broader review examined pre-licensure health students, the focus has since been narrowed to teaching academic writing in nursing education. The main research question that guided this review was the following: What pedagogical approaches and teaching strategies to teach academic writing to pre-licensure nursing students have been examined? Three sub-questions were also identified:

1. What are the characteristics of the pedagogical approaches and teaching strategies (e.g. single versus multi-faceted approaches, individual versus group approaches)?
2. How is academic writing assessed?
3. How is the success of pedagogical approaches and teaching strategies determined?

Searches were developed by a librarian with input from the review team and conducted in MEDLINE (Ovid), Embase (Elsevier), CINAHL with Full Text (EBSCOhost), Nursing & Allied Health (ProQuest), and ERIC (EBSCOhost). The searches reflect the broader population of pre-licensure students in health programs, and the strategies are available in a data repository (Goudreau, 2024). We also conducted a search for unpublished research reports in Open Access Theses & Dissertations, OAlster (WorldCat), and Google Scholar. Only reports published from 2010 to 2023 were included as this period aligned with the Global Commission on the Education of Health Professionals call for changes in pedagogy with a greater focus on communication, such as academic writing (Frenk et al., 2010). The searches were conducted on December 23, 2023. Articles were included based on the population (pre-licensure nursing students), concept (approach or strategy to teach academic writing), and context (academic institution) and published in English or French. We identified a total of 172 research reports. Two researchers screened the titles and abstracts and excluded 149 reports. Two additional researchers then reviewed the full-text reports of the remaining 23 papers, with 12 deemed eligible for final inclusion. The reasons for the exclusion of full-text papers were incorrect population ($n = 8$) and incorrect focus ($n = 3$). The extracted data are presented in Table 1 and include key characteristics of the studies, strategies, and approaches identified for the development of nursing students' academic writing, and the main outcomes of the studies.

Results

A total of 12 research reports were included in this review (see Table 1). Studies were published between 2009 and 2023 and were conducted in six countries, with the most common country of origin being the United States ($n = 6$). One study was conducted in Canada. Of the 12 studies, seven were quantitative, three were qualitative, and two were mixed methods. Of the seven quantitative studies, four involved a pre-test/post-test design, two were quasi-experimental, and one was descriptive. Of the four qualitative papers, three were exploratory descriptive, and one was action research. Eleven of the included studies had obtained approval from an ethics review board at their respective authors' educational institutions.

The number of approaches or strategies used to teach academic writing to nursing students varied across studies (see Table 1). Six of the studies used singular approaches or strategies, while the other six used multiple writing approaches or strategies. Six of the strategies involved students working alone, while the other six involved students working with other students and/or faculty.

Table 1

Characteristics of the Included Studies

Author(s), year Country	Population	Study design and aim	Pedagogical approaches or teaching strategies	Method of assessing student writing	Approach to determining success of approach or strategy	Success of approach or strategy	Conclusion/ recommendations
Beccaria et al., 2019 Australia	69 first-year students in a bachelor's degree program	Mixed methods To examine the impact of an online tutorial on students' academic writing and self- efficacy.	Pedagogical approach: constructivism An online tutorial service called Smarthinking Essay Self-efficacy	Essays	Essay grades Student scores on self-efficacy in writing scale	Successful Students using the tutorial service received higher essay grades than those who did not. No differences were found in writing self-efficacy between groups who received the online tutorial and those who did not.	Prompt feedback on students' written work helps with the development of academic skills, information literacy, and academic integrity. Not all students will access optional resources.
Brown & Cicchino, 2022 United States	68 students enrolled in a first-semester fundamental course	Quantitative descriptive Pre-test/post-test design To understand students' perceptions of online peer-review feedback on an academic writing assignment.	Pedagogical approach: constructivism Teaching strategy Online platform used to facilitate peer feedback on a required written assignment	Not identified	Pre- and post- test surveys on student perceptions of peer-review process	Successful A total of 91% of students agreed that peer review was relevant to their professional growth, and 96% would want to participate in peer review again.	Peer-review activities for writing assignments need to be well designed and should be a part of a scaffolded writing assignment.

Friberg & Lyckhage, 2013 Sweden	34 faculty members and approximately 560 students	Qualitative action research To generate solutions to address faculty and student concerns with academic writing.	Pedagogical approach: liberationism Teaching strategy Models for literature-based essays Academic essays	Not identified	Students' reflective journals	Successful Students reported improved skills in literature retrieval and academic writing. Students described the model as helping them to appreciate the need for evidence-based practices.	Models developed in collaboration with faculty and students help with academic writing. For faculty, models help guide critiques of students' work and assign grades. For students, models provide a tool to guide their writing.
Garvey et al., 2023 Australia	92 first-year students in a bachelor of nursing program	Mixed methods To evaluate the outcomes of a multi-activity curriculum approach intended to enhance students writing skills.	Pedagogical approach: social constructivism Multiple approaches embedded across the curriculum: writing centre involvement, unit outlines, scaffolding assignments, one-on-one feedback sessions and tutorials Essay	Grading rubric	Grades on academic essays Student attendance at voluntary writing tutorials and supports Student survey	Successful A total of 51% of students perceived improvements in their own writing and 34% reported increased confidence in their writing. Only 24% of students opted to have individual consultations with a writing advisor. Of those, 63% reported improvements in writing, compared to 44% who did not have individual sessions. Overall, 59% reported improvements in referencing, and 49% reported improved summarizing, paraphrasing, and quotation referencing.	Students need support to develop skills in writing. Interdisciplinary collaboration between faculty and staff from the writing centre can be effective in supporting students. Students' confidence in their own writing can be improved when supports are available.

Ghazal et al., 2018 Pakistan	118 third-year students in a bachelor's degree program	Quantitative quasi-experimental To compare the impact of feed-forward scaffolding on an outline of a writing assignment compared to the same feedback of a draft of the entire paper.	Teaching strategy Scaffolding writing assignment Essay	Grading rubric Feedback on writing Meetings with faculty to discuss writing	Grades on academic essays Frequency with which students contacted faculty for clarification on feedback	Successful Significant differences were reported in the grades of students in the intervention group. Students in the control group visited faculty more compared to those in the intervention group. No significant differences were noted in the feedback provided to groups.	Students' academic writing improves more when they are given feedback on a draft of a paper compared to receiving feedback on only the outline of a paper.
Harrison & LeBlanc, 2016 Canada	14 students and six faculty	Qualitative descriptive To assess the experiences of students and faculty who use an interactive platform that supports students' academic writing.	Teaching strategy Online platform with learning modules	Not identified	Student and faculty surveys Focus groups with students and faculty	Successful The online platform and modules were easy to access and helpful. Suggestions on how faculty could better use the platform to assist students with their writing were identified.	Students and faculty perceived the tool positively. Students suggested more writing examples and opportunities for feedback on their work. Faculty requested more consistency in how the platform was used across the program.
Hutchinson & Pederson, 2023 United States	34 first-year students, 10 second-year students, and five third-year students	Quantitative descriptive Pre-test/post-test design To determine if a workshop can improve students' experiences, confidence, and knowledge of American Psychological Association (APA) format.	Teaching strategy Workshop	Not identified	Survey of students' experience and confidence with APA pre- and post-workshop	Successful Significant improvements were identified in students' knowledge of and confidence in using APA format.	Students benefit from a writing workshop. A university's writing centre can assist with teaching students academic writing.

Mandleco et al., 2012	82 second-year students	Quantitative descriptive To evaluate students' writing confidence after completing a writing-intensive scholarly nursing course.	Teaching strategy Writing-intensive course Short impromptu writing activities Literature review	Computerized language instruction and practice software assessment tool for grammar	Comparison of grammar scores pre- and post-course Student logs on progress on meeting writing goals Changes in students' confidence in writing	Successful/unsuccessful Students' performance on academic writing improved significantly in 12 of 26 categories. Student confidence in writing improved steadily over a 4-month period.	Students' knowledge and confidence related to academic writing improved significantly after completing a course that included writing.
McMillan & Raines, 2011	46 first-semester students	Quantitative descriptive Pre-test/post-test design To determine the resources and supports available to assist students in a baccalaureate nursing program with writing.	Teaching strategy Co-development of class with students and librarian Scaffolded essay Writing experts involved in teaching writing Peer review Writing tutorials Course credit for seeking assistance with essay from the university's writing centre Essay	Grading rubric Librarian involved in essay's grading component Peer review guided by a standardized assessment tool	Student survey	Successful A total of 89% to 98% of students agreed that a librarian helps with information literacy. All students attended at least one individualized session at a writing centre. Up to 85% agreed that the peer-review process for student papers is helpful, and 87% believed devoting class time each week to a writing assignment was beneficial.	Collaboration with a university's support services (i.e., librarian and writing centre) can improve students' writing.

O'Flaherty & Costabile, 2020 Australia	Nursing 60 first-year students	Quantitative quasi-experimental To describe the impact of a simulation on students' active learning, knowledge acquisition, self-confidence, and development and application of critical thinking, specifically in their academic writing.	Pedagogical approach: constructivism Simulation Summary of the simulation	Written appraisal of a case study Turnitin	Comparison of case study grades pre- and post-simulation Student satisfaction survey	Successful Students rated improvements in confidence in academic writing, particularly transforming knowledge to clinical practice. No pre-intervention grades were obtained.	If designed correctly, simulations can be used to improve critical thinking in academic writing.
Parilo et al., 2019 United States	Nursing 11 former students	Qualitative descriptive To explore students' experiences with faculty–student writing partnerships.	Pedagogical approach: social constructivism Teaching strategy Faculty partnering with students to publish a peer-reviewed manuscript	Not identified	Student surveys and interviews	Successful Students reported that the experience was positive. Student participation was prompted by their enjoyment of writing (71%), desire to improve their résumé (86%), or a topic of personal interest (15%). Manuscript writing took up to 1 month (29%) or 2 to 3 months (43%). A total of 75% of students perceived that the majority of the manuscript was their own work.	Student–faculty writing partnerships are beneficial for students' future professional development.

Roberts & Goss, 2009 United States	Nursing	Quantitative descriptive Pre-test/post-test design To examine the effects of an online tutorial to improve nursing students' writing skills.	Teaching strategy Online tutorial consisting of common writing errors, mechanics of writing, and APA format Scaffolding assignment in which students submitted essay drafts for feedback prior to final submission	Grading rubric for essay	Pre- and post-test surveys on components of an academic paper and APA format Online discussion Comparison of essay grades to those of former students who did not have access to the tutorial	Successful Significant improvements in grades were noted after the intervention.	An online tutorial offered to nursing students improves academic writing.

Types of Pedagogical Approaches and Teaching Strategies

Pedagogical Approaches

Six of the included studies addressed a pedagogical approach, and six addressed a teaching strategy only. Of the studies that addressed a pedagogy, six (100%) incorporated one teaching activity (Beccaria et al., 2019; Brown & Cicchino, 2022; Friberg & Lyckhage, 2013; O’Flaherty & Costabile, 2020; Parilo et al., 2019). One study (16.7%) incorporated more than one activity (Garvey et al., 2023). These studies applied the pedagogical approaches of constructivism, social constructivism, or liberationism. Of the four studies that used a constructivist approach to teach writing, one used simulation (O’Flaherty & Costabile, 2020) to develop critical thinking skills in academic writing; one examined self-efficacy following the use of an online platform to provide feedback to students who were writing an academic essay (Beccaria et al., 2019); and one examined the feasibility of peer-review support and/or feedback on students’ academic writing (Brown & Cicchino, 2022). Of the two studies based on social constructivism, one examined the effect of a “multi-layered approach” (p. 1) that used tutorials, immediate feedback, and co-development of supports to assist with students’ academic writing (Garvey et al., 2023). The second explored student–faculty writing partnerships for the development of manuscripts for publication (Parilo et al., 2019). Only one study used a liberationism pedagogical approach to examine a writing activity and used a collaborative program approach to develop and implement models that addressed student challenges with academic writing (Friberg & Lyckhage, 2013).

Teaching Strategies

All studies included a teaching strategy to address academic writing. Seven categories of teaching activities were used to examine academic writing (see Table 1). The categories of activities included essays ($n = 8$); workshops, courses, or sessions ($n = 5$); standardized rubrics/feedback from faculty ($n = 5$); online platforms ($n = 3$); scaffolded writing assignments ($n = 2$); peer-to-peer feedback ($n = 3$); and simulation ($n = 1$). Of the eight studies that examined essays, three identified a focus of the writing activity, including person-centred care (Friberg & Lyckhage, 2013), community health promotion (McMillan & Raines, 2011), and a case study (O’Flaherty & Costabile, 2020). One study indicated that the writing activity was part of a required mental health course (Ghazal et al., 2018). Three studies described writing activities in terms of helping students to use APA format (Brown & Cicchino, 2022; Ghazal et al., 2018; Roberts & Goss, 2009) and to apply the structured format of *describe, evaluate, suggest* (Brown & Cicchino, 2022). No information was provided about the focus of the academic writing activity for the remaining two studies (Beccaria et al., 2019; Parilo et al., 2019).

Five studies examined a designated writing workshop, course, module, or session. Three of these studies reported on activities directed towards faculty. Friberg and Lyckhage (2013) reported on monthly workshops offered to faculty over 1 year to improve their ability to teach academic writing. Garvey et al. (2023) reported on a multi-faceted curriculum-wide activity that included modifying course content and classroom writing assessments. Roberts and Goss (2009) described a semester-long course offered by an English department to faculty who were interested in learning more about teaching students to write; this course addressed how to develop writing assignments and give feedback. Mandleco et al. (2012) compared students’ academic writing and confidence before and after completing a required 14-week course with advanced writing content that included “short impromptu writing activities” (p. 3), free writing, mini essays, and journalling. Two studies focused on sessions designed to improve students’ academic writing. Hutchinson and Pederson (2023) examined the impact of a 1-hour writing workshop on students’ experience, confidence, and knowledge of APA format. Roberts and Goss (2009) reported on

the outcomes associated with an online tutorial that contained PowerPoint slides on common writing errors exhibited by students.

Five studies reported on the use of standardized rubrics and/or individualized faculty feedback or supervision as a teaching strategy to academic writing. Garvey et al. (2023) reported on the use of individualized consultation provided to students by faculty and the university's writing centre. Beccaria et al. (2019) described "prompt feedback" (p. 7) provided by faculty, and Roberts and Goss (2009) identified the use of faculty feedback but did not elaborate. One study described the use of rubrics as a teaching tool to help students improve their writing (Garvey et al., 2023) but provided no details on the contents of the rubric or its use as a teaching tool. Ghazal et al. (2018) described their study's rubric as directing faculty to provide feedback on the following elements of a student's paper: a) the introduction, including a description of the topic, its significance, and relation to the topic of the assignment; b) the main body, with integration of relevant literature, legal and ethical framework, and course content; and c) the conclusion and overall quality of the paper, including APA formatting.

Three studies looked at online platforms as interactive teaching tools for academic writing. Beccaria et al. (2019) examined how an online writing support system affected students' perceived writing self-efficacy. Harrison and LeBlanc (2016) examined students' experiences with an online platform that consisted of six modules related to academic writing: a) sorting information; b) retrieving and organizing credible information; c) writing for specific audiences; d) preparing academic papers and using APA format; e) writing clearly and precisely; and f) revising academic papers. The platform also included interactive activities requiring students to identify proper and improper writing techniques. Roberts and Goss (2009) explored the effectiveness of an online writing tutorial to teach students the mechanics of writing. Two studies identified scaffolding as a teaching activity for academic writing; one of these studies, by Garvey et al. (2023), provided no detail on this learning activity. Similarly, McMillan and Raines (2011) discussed plans to implement a scaffolding approach for academic writing but also did not report its use within their research.

Two studies examined the use of peer-to-peer feedback as a teaching activity. Brown and Cicchino (2022) reported on students' perceptions of using a "peer review activity worksheet" (p. 304) to provide feedback to a peer on a written assignment while also seeking to determine whether students found the feedback helpful for improving their own writing. McMillan and Raines (2011) offered two 1-hour peer-review sessions to the class, then required students to use the essay's grading rubric to guide their evaluation of their peer's written work. Parilo et al. (2019) examined student-faculty collaborations aimed at writing papers for publications. O'Flaherty and Costabile (2020) explored the impact of a virtual simulation on students' ability to demonstrate critical thinking in a piece of academic writing.

Assessment of Academic Writing

The assessment of academic writing was reported using four primary methods: grading rubrics, pre- and post-tests or surveys, student feedback, and grades on writing assignments. Two studies used more than one method of assessment, such as both a grading rubric and pre- and post-tests, or both student feedback and pre- and post-tests. Five studies did not report how student writing was assessed (see Table 1).

Of the studies that used a grading rubric, three assessed writing within sections of an essay using a rubric, including the introduction, body, or conclusion (Garvey et al., 2023; McMillan & Raines, 2011; Roberts & Goss, 2009). Other aspects of writing that were assessed using grading rubrics were the description of the issue or problem (Ghazal et al., 2018; McMillan & Raines, 2011; Roberts & Goss, 2009),

exploration of the professional role related to a specific topic (Ghazal et al., 2018; McMillan & Raines, 2011), analysis of an issues or issues and demonstration of critical thinking (Ghazal et al., 2018; Roberts & Goss, 2009), use of APA format (McMillan & Raines, 2011), and the mechanics of writing (i.e., sentence structure, organization, cohesiveness, content development) (Roberts & Goss, 2009).

Success of Pedagogical Approaches and Teaching Strategies

Ten distinct approaches were used to determine the success of pedagogical and teaching strategies. One approach to evaluating the success was to compare the grades of students who engaged in the approach or strategy with those who did not (Beccaria et al., 2019; Ghazal et al., 2018; Roberts & Goss, 2009). Another approach was to solicit student feedback qualitatively through interviews, open-ended surveys, and focus groups (Brown & Cicchino, 2022; Friberg & Lyckhage, 2013; O’Flaherty & Costabile, 2020) or quantitatively through measures such as surveys (Garvey et al., 2023; McMillan & Raines, 2011; O’Flaherty & Costabile, 2020). Short pre- and post-tests were also used to evaluate students’ knowledge of a subject related to writing before and after the approach or strategy (Hutchinson & Pederson, 2023; Mandelco et al., 2012; O’Flaherty & Costabile, 2020; Roberts & Goss, 2009). Student self-reflection on whether they perceived their writing had improved was used in two studies (Mandelco et al., 2012; Parilo et al., 2019). Only one study elicited faculty feedback on the quality of the approach or strategy (Harrison & LeBlanc, 2016). Additional methods included measuring student confidence using computers before and after the approaches or strategies (Beccaria et al., 2019) and the frequency of student visits to faculty offices for follow-up support or clarification (Ghazal et al., 2018). Regardless of the mode of evaluation, all studies reported some improvement in writing and/or student understanding after the pedagogical approach or teaching strategy was employed.

Discussion

This review mapped the published research on approaches and strategies to teaching academic writing in nursing education. Interpretation of the review findings indicate five areas of discussion: a) use of evidence-informed teaching strategies in nursing education; b) research on the scholarship of teaching; c) writing in nursing education; d) assessment of student writing; and e) the need for continued development of instructional approaches to support students’ writing.

Evidence-Informed Teaching Strategies

Despite the comprehensive search strategy, only 12 studies were located that met the inclusion criteria for the review. This result was surprising given that the systematic review conducted nearly a decade ago located 80 published reports that included insights, suggestions, and writing strategies used by nursing faculty. This discrepancy indicates that while efforts are being directed towards developing student writing, little research is being published in the area. Either research on educational approaches is being conducted but not published, or instructional efforts are being used without supporting evidence. This finding is consistent with those of Mitchell (2018) and Mitchell et al. (2017), which claim that in writing instruction, faculty often conform to disciplinary norms and subscribe to established approaches or approaches they are most familiar with.

Stevens and Cassidy (1999) defined evidence-based teaching as “the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the education of professional nurses” (p. 3) and proposed three strategies for advancing evidence-based teaching: increase the number and type of educational studies, disseminate research widely, and develop a nursing education agenda. In a national online survey of 295 American nurse educators, the majority reported using evidence to support

their teaching but considered written course evaluations, conference materials, class feedback, and student comments to constitute evidence (Patterson & McAleer Klein, 2012). More recently, Kalb et al. (2015) reported that faculty do not always consider available evidence when identifying and enacting changes in instructional strategies. Given that the concept of evidence-based practice is pervasive in nursing education (Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing, 2022; Giddens et al., 2022), further work is needed to understand the evidence that faculty use and create to inform what and how they teach.

Research on the Scholarship of Teaching

Educators face unique challenges when they use student participants to examine their instructional approaches (Schnurr & Taylor, 2019). Research on the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) conducted in the learning environment places students in vulnerable positions as research participants, requiring careful consideration and protection of their rights. Ethical issues for nurse educators to consider and address when designing SoTL research include undue influence (perceived coercion or pressure to participate), dual roles (learner versus participant), and confidentiality (identity attached to research data for student evaluation) (Schnurr & Taylor, 2019). The relationship between the educator and student must be recognized as having a power imbalance. Students may feel that declining to participate in faculty research could negatively affect their academic standing; alternatively, they may feel that agreeing to participate could benefit them (Innocente et al., 2022). This undue influence, whether real or perceived, may create an environment in which students are captive participants, affecting their ability to freely participate in research according to their own values, wishes, and preferences (Innocente et al., 2022; Schnurr & Taylor, 2019). When engaging in SoTL, researchers must also navigate the “dual role” of educator and researcher, in which the challenge lies in balancing research and teaching objectives that may conflict, such as when class time is used for research (Schnurr & Taylor, 2019). In a review of existing Canadian university research ethics guidelines, the authors found that six universities identified classroom research as an intrusion and felt that investigators who conduct research in the classroom should justify the pedagogical or educational value for students (Schnurr & Taylor, 2019). The ethical challenges of conducting research on students may partly explain the limited research on strategies for teaching students how to write.

Writing in Nursing Education

While this review focused exclusively on academic writing, students must also learn how to write professionally and/or for clinical practice. The purpose of academic writing is to construct an effective, formal argument clearly and concisely, while the purpose of clinical or professional writing is to convey information and ideas quickly in a workplace. Arguably, today’s newly graduated nurses need to be able to write both professionally and academically (Jamieson et al., 2017; McRae et al., 2023). Although equally important, academic writing and professional writing serve different purposes, are aimed at different audiences, and likely require different instructional approaches. None of the studies in this review considered whether approaches or strategies to improve academic writing also improve professional writing and vice versa. Unlike academic writing, for which students are often provided time and support, professional writing usually takes place in busy work environments under time constraints (Jamieson et al., 2017; McRae et al., 2023). Pengelly et al. (2023) describe professional writing as being “hidden in plain sight and rarely mentioned or addressed” (p. 6). However, given the important role of writing in sharing information and delivering patient care (Pengelly et al., 2023), concerted efforts should be directed towards teaching nursing students clinical and/or professional writing. Furthermore, nursing curricula are often heavily laden with essential content, leaving little flexibility to add additional materials. Future studies should examine how best to approach academic and professional writing concurrently.

Assessment of Student Writing

Assessment of student learning and performance is integral to both students' and teachers' understanding of learning, including areas for student development and curriculum improvements. As noted by Aull (2020), assessments with individualized feedback are most impactful in improving student writing—which supports a student-centred approach to teaching writing skills. Findings of this review suggest that grading is the primary means of assessing writing in nursing education. While the assignment of grades can be an effective way for categorizing students' performance and distinguishing among performances that are below average, average, or above average, they tend to reflect performance on a single task (i.e., a written piece of work) or on multiple tasks at one point in time (i.e., post-course) (Schwab et al., 2018). Anderson (2018) argues that the use of grades to measure improvements is problematic because they do not easily measure progress, particularly for high-achieving students who have little, if any, room to improve. Further, while some of the studies in this review reported measures to uphold the validity and reliability of assigned grades, some did not (Ghazal et al., 2018). The feasibility of using student grades to determine the success in writing should be considered within the wider discussion of how best to evaluate student performance.

The majority of the approaches or strategies that researchers used to strengthen academic writing focused on the mechanics of writing well within academia. These mechanics included formatting and referencing (e.g., APA) (Harrison & LeBlanc, 2016), as well as organizing a paper and attention to grammar (Mandleco et al., 2012; Roberts & Goss, 2009). Given that grades were frequently used to evaluate competency, many of the specific academic writing assignments likely also required students to demonstrate mastery of a particular topic or subject area. Showing mastery of a writing style and a topic/subject area improves students' knowledge but does not fully prepare them to become academic writers. Additionally, "good students" know what kind of style and content their professors want them to produce, meaning that students may develop the ability to write for a particular course or professor without developing the skills to write for "real-world" academia (Mumford & Atay, 2021).

In "real-world" academia, researchers write and publish their work for many reasons, such as to contribute to academic conversations, to present new evidence, or to develop new arguments (Mumford & Atay, 2021). These aspects of academic writing have little to do with the approaches and strategies used to teach or assess academic writing in the classroom. Students rarely have an opportunity to write for such an audience, and as such, they do not benefit from the resulting diversity of perspectives. In the studies included in this review, students had few opportunities to write for an audience beyond a single (faculty) assessor. The students' writing was mostly evaluated by one person with feedback possibility limited by personal factors, such as biases, fatigue, or turnaround time.

Need for Continued Development of Instructional Approaches

Findings from this review showed a range of pedagogical approaches and teaching strategies used in nursing education to teach academic writing. One element not addressed in this review is artificial intelligence (AI), including ChatGPT. The rapid growth in AI is creating transformational change throughout society, including education (Kilinc, 2024). Recent reviews of AI in nursing education specifically highlight several current and future opportunities of its use (Glauberger et al., 2023; Gunawan et al., 2024; Lifshits & Rosenberg, 2024; Ma et al., 2025). In Gunawan et al.'s (2024) review on ChatGPT in nursing education, nearly 40% of the 46 included papers highlighted its potential to enhance students' academic writing. The review identified ChatGPT as a tool that can assist students in generating content, proofreading and editing written work, identifying grammatical errors, and paraphrasing and summarizing materials. It emphasized that ChatGPT supports these activities rather than performing them entirely (Gunawan et al.,

2024). Despite its potential benefits, nurse educators continue to express concerns about the possibility of students using AI tools for cheating and the risk of inaccurate information (Abujaber et al., 2023; Bouriemi et al., 2025; Farrokhnia et al., 2024; Sun & Hoelscher, 2023). De Gagne (2023) also cautions about the need to protect students' privacy and security given AI's ability to access personal information from its users. AI tools can also challenge traditional methods of assessment, as instructors may struggle to gauge a student's individual writing capabilities when such tools are involved (Escalante et al., 2023).

AI is fundamentally reshaping the way education is delivered, creating new opportunities for personalized learning, efficiency, and accessibility (Glauber et al., 2023; Gunawan et al., 2024). AI tools offer significant potential for enhancing students' writing skills, such as providing real-time feedback, assisting with grammar and structure, and offering personalized learning experiences. Ultimately, the success of using AI tools as a teaching strategy for academic writing depends on whether and how nurse educators adopt them. Nurse educators must consider various factors, including the tool's ability to complement traditional teaching philosophies, its alignment with learning objectives, and its capacity to foster critical thinking and independent learning. Further research is needed to understand how AI can be used most effectively to enhance teaching and learning while ensuring that students' well-being and academic integrity are upheld.

As the nature of academic writing continues to evolve with technological advances and the rise of blogs, social media, and other digital media, nursing students must be prepared to engage in these new forms of writing. Traditionally, nursing education has focused on scholarly papers and clinical documentation, but the growing influence of digital platforms in health care and education demands that students develop skills beyond conventional academic writing (Erden et al., 2024). Blogs, podcasts, and online forums provide unique opportunities for nurses to share knowledge, discuss emerging practices, and engage with both peers and the public. Preparing nursing students to write effectively for these platforms is crucial, as doing so will allow them to communicate research findings, advocate for patient care, and contribute to health care discussions in accessible and impactful ways. By incorporating these non-traditional writing formats into nursing curricula, educators can equip future nurses with the tools they need to navigate a rapidly changing landscape and improve their professional communication in diverse contexts.

Limitations of the Review

There are several limitations to this scoping review. Due to its scoping nature, this review does not purport to prescribe possible solutions to best address how academic writing should be taught in nursing education, including whether or how AI should be integrated into nursing curricula. Further, despite using a systematic approach to conduct a comprehensive and broad search strategy, some relevant research reports may have been missed, particularly given the imposed language restrictions of English and French on the search. Although important, non-traditional forms of academic expression that are often overlooked in academia, particularly those related to Indigenous cultures (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2024), were not captured in this review. These forms, such as storytelling, oral traditions, and other culturally significant forms of expression, are important and warrant further exploration. Lastly, as individual studies were not assessed for their methodological quality, the findings of this review may have been limited. Although assessment of methodological quality is not a requirement of scoping reviews, not assessing for risk of bias is acknowledged as a possible limitation to scoping review methods.

Recommendations for Research

By mapping the literature on pedagogical approaches and teaching strategies used to teach academic writing to nursing students, this review identified some recommendations for future research. There is a need to understand how educators choose their teaching strategies and the role that evidence-based methods play in nursing education. Future research is needed to investigate the psychometric properties and to validate the variety of measures and rubrics used to guide and assess student writing. Furthermore, future experimental or longitudinal study designs that discriminate for impact of individual components of multi-faceted writing strategies will help in the effort to establish evidence-informed strategies for teaching writing in nursing education.

Conclusion

This scoping review provides a comprehensive overview of the available research on pedagogical and teaching strategies used to teach academic writing to students enrolled in nursing education. The pedagogical approaches and teaching strategies that researchers employed focused mainly on the mechanics of writing well and not necessarily on the content of the writing. This review highlights a need for evidence-informed pedagogical approaches and teaching strategies for teaching academic writing. Furthermore, it points to a need for considering and possibly integrating emerging learning tools, such as AI, into teaching practices. By adopting these innovative technologies, nursing educators can enhance the learning experience, providing students with personalized feedback and fostering critical thinking. However, educators must remain vigilant in assessing the impact of these tools, ensuring that they complement traditional methods and contribute to students' overall academic development.

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