

STUDENT WEAKNESSES AND SUPERVISOR COMMENTS ON FINAL YEAR PROJECT DRAFTS ON NEWSPAPER FRAMING OF FLOODS

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ABSTRACT

University students take academic writing courses, but they may not adequately prepare them for research writing in their final year project because the genre conventions are largely unfamiliar to students. The study examined the changes made in drafts of a final year project on newspaper framing of floods in response to supervisor feedback. The specific aspects examined are: (1) weaknesses in the content of drafts, and (2) the focal point of the supervisor's feedback. The case study involved the analysis of 11 drafts of a final year project report written by a student in a Malaysian public university. Coding was done at the comment level based on an analysis framework. The results indicate that the main weakness of the student was writing the research problem, which required four drafts and repeated rewriting. The easiest sections were data collection procedures and limitations, and did not need rewriting. The participant description section required only one round of comments. The analysis revealed that the weaknesses were largely due to a lack of synthesis of the literature read and unfamiliarity with the expected content of the various sections of a thesis. The longitudinal analysis revealed that the student sometimes exhibited a delayed response to comments, and the supervisor had to progress from giving referential feedback to rewriting parts of the writing, giving more specific comments, and even using sentence completion to get the student to produce acceptable content in the final year project report. A majority of the comments were on content (69.6% of 125 comments), and the information provided was often inadequate and repetitive. Relatively fewer comments were on organisation (17.6%) and language (12.8%). The study suggests that supervisors need to closely guide the students to conceptualise the research problem, and experiment with various feedback strategies to tailor feedback type to student writing.

Keywords: *Academic Writing, Final Year Project, Research, Supervisor, Comments, Flood Framing.*

INTRODUCTION

University students take academic writing courses, which introduce them to the style and conventions of academic writing. For example, research language, citations of reference sources, and the organisational structure of a thesis. However, research shows that university students have difficulties with citations and argumentative language in their assignments in Malaysia (Mah & Ting, 2012) and the Middle East (Miller & Pessoa, 2016), and the problems are more obvious among less proficient students (Ting et al., 2011). Research writing is fraught with even more difficulties as the genre conventions are new to novice researchers, as shown by Ting's (2011) findings on weaknesses in introductions and discussions based on an analysis of 50 research articles published in eight applied linguistics journals in Malaysia. The research problem was unsatisfactory, and the discussions/conclusions did not contain the essential moves, namely, summarising the study, contribution, and implications. Considering that researchers have problems situating their research in the field, it is expected that students have greater problems writing their final year project reports.

Students beginning research at the undergraduate level have a supervisor to guide them, and the guidance is often in the form of feedback. Numerous studies on supervisor feedback on thesis show a high frequency of referential (direct corrections) and directive feedback (triggering revisions) and occasional expressive feedback (Gedamu & Gezahegn, 2021; Jafarigohar & Hoomanfard, 2018; Saeed et al., 2021). Such supervisory feedback is intended to help students improve from draft to draft, but these studies did not examine how the students revised their writing.

There is a lack of longitudinal studies that trace how lecturers guide students to develop research expertise throughout the final year project process. Beyond existing thesis feedback studies, the findings from this study will contribute in two ways. First, the findings will identify specific writing challenges in different sections of the final year project writing. Second, the findings will offer suggestions for supervisory feedback strategies to scaffold learning of research writing conventions.

The study examined the changes made in drafts of a final year project on newspaper framing of floods in response to supervisor feedback. The specific aspects examined were: (1) weaknesses in the content of drafts, and (2) the focal point of the supervisor's feedback.

In this study, feedback refers to comments that are given by the supervisor on the student's writing, such as written comments in between sentences in the text, margin notes, and track changes. Oral feedback was excluded.

METHOD

The study used a case study research design. In the study, 11 drafts of a final year project student's writing were analysed. The student's project was on framing of floods in *The Star*, a mainstream newspaper published in English in Malaysia. Altogether, the student identified and collected 145 newspaper articles on flooding published in the online version of *The Star* from 1 January to 30 June 2023. The student analysed the framing of the news articles on flooding in Malaysia. The focus of the paper is on the supervision process and the student's writing of his final year project report, and not the substantive findings.

The present study focused on weaknesses in the students' writing from the literature review to the reporting of results in the time frame of one year. The first researcher was the supervisor of the final year project student, who gave consent for his writing to be analysed. The data for the present study consisted of 11 drafts of his final year project report. The contents and submission dates for supervisor feedback are shown in Table 1.

There is a progression from the proposal stage (Drafts 1 to 4) to the results reporting stage (Drafts 5 to 11).

Table 1.*Contents of 11 Drafts of Final Year Project Report*

Draft number	Date of submission	Draft content
1.	April 15	Chapters 1 to 2
2.	May 8	Chapters 1 to 3
3.	May 16	Chapters 1 to 3
4.	July 19	Chapters 1 to 3
5.	October 12	Coding of data
6.	November 7	Chapter 4 objective 1 results – first par
7.	November 14	Chapter 4 objective 1 results
8.	November 21	Chapter 4 results
9.	December 6	Chapters 4 and 5, Abstract
10.	December 19	Chapters 4 and 5, Abstract
11.	December 31	Complete Chapters 1 to 5

The drafts were printed for data analysis. For the type of content that is unsatisfactory (Objective 1), the analysis focused on the inadequacies, although the supervisor made commendations on some parts of the student's drafts. Initially, the coding was done at the topic level (e.g., context of research problem), but later the decision was made to use the conventional headings of a thesis, as researchers have a shared understanding of the research report genre. Table 2 shows the analysis framework for content based on conventional headings of a thesis. Only the essential sections are shown, and redundant sections are not included for the research problem (e.g., Background of Study, Statement of Problem, Introduction) and purpose of study (Aim of study, research questions, objectives of study). The scope was also not included in Chapter 1. For Chapter 2, sections are not given as this depends on the research topic investigated. For Chapter 5, the Conclusion showing the novelty of the study was not required of the student in the university where he was studying. The results are reported qualitatively using examples.

Table 2.*Analysis Framework for Content Based on Conventional Headings of a Thesis*

Chapter	Section
Abstract	Abstract
1 Introduction	Research problem/Introduction Purpose of study Operational definition of terms Significance of study
2 Literature review	Literature review
3 Methodology	Research design Participants/Corpus Instrument Data collection procedures Data analysis procedures
4 Results and Discussion	Limitations Results Discussion
5 Conclusion	Summary Implications of study Recommendations for future research

Next, for the focal point of the feedback (Objective 2), the analysis focused on whether the writing was lacking in language, content, or organisation based on an analysis framework adapted from Cheng et al. (2025), as shown in Table 3. The examples are from Cheng et al. (2025), but the definitions are our own. Cheng et al. (2025) also had the appropriateness category, but this was not used in the present study because it overlapped with language, content, and organisation. The results are reported as frequencies and percentages.

Table 3.*Analysis Framework for Feedback Focus*

Focus	Definition*	Example
Language	Language includes punctuation, choice and grammar	Participants → participants The generalization findings is --- → is So → therefore
Content	Content includes problems of irrelevance, inaccuracy and adequacy of information	The two factors irrelevant to the sentences. Explain how the theoretical framework informed study.
Organisation	Organisation includes misplacement of information in sections, section headings (missing or inappropriate), lack of coherence in sentences in sections	No section of limitations in the study. The introduction section not coherent.

Note. *Definition: our own.

For the data analysis, the comments were coded at the comment level, meaning that if a student's sentence was commented on two times, then these were counted as two comments. Based on the analysis framework for feedback focus (Table 3), the situation of multi-purpose comments did not arise because the three categories (language, content, organisation) are mutually exclusive. The first researcher coded the data. As there was an absence of multi-coders, the researcher ensured trustworthiness of the coding by checking the coding twice against the analysis framework.

For example, content weakness was identified using a rule-based decision procedure based on the definitions and examples given in the analysis framework (Table 3). Content weaknesses refer to irrelevance, inaccuracy, and inadequacy of information in relation to the rhetorical purpose of a thesis section. A section was coded as exhibiting content weakness when the supervisor explicitly or implicitly indicated that the ideas presented did not sufficiently address the stated research focus, lacked necessary elaboration, or contained information that was inaccurate or misaligned with the argument being developed. As an example, the comment "the two factors are irrelevant to the topic sentence" indicated that the information provided did not support the main idea of the paragraph. Similarly, comments such as "this does not answer the research question", "insufficient explanation of the concept," or "the claim is made without supporting evidence" were treated as indicators of content inadequacy. In contrast, comments addressing wording, grammar, or sentence-level clarity were coded as language weaknesses, while comments on paragraph flow or sequencing were coded as organisational weaknesses.

An audit trail was conducted by systematically documenting all stages of the analytic process, including the development and refinement of the coding framework, coding decisions, revisions made during recoding, and illustrative examples for each category. The audit trail allowed the analytic process to be traced and reviewed.

Ethical Considerations and Researcher Positionality

The first researcher held a dual role as a researcher and the supervisor of the participating student. Ethical clearance was deemed unnecessary as the study involved the analysis of naturally occurring educational data, but informed consent was obtained from the student participant. The student was informed of the purpose of the study, the use of his written drafts that were submitted to the supervisor for comments, and his right to refuse to participate in the study. The research was conducted after the student had graduated to minimise undue influence on grading. The data were anonymised through the use of pseudonyms, and identifying information related to the student, supervisor, and university was removed during data handling and reporting. To ensure confidentiality, all drafts and supervisory

comments were de-identified before analysis, and data were securely stored with access restricted to the researcher.

RESULTS

This section describes the results on weaknesses in the content of drafts (Objective 1) and the focal point of feedback (Objective 2).

Weaknesses in Content of Drafts (N=11)

There were 11 drafts of a final year project report. Table 4 shows the sections and the number of drafts with content weaknesses. The main weakness of the student was writing the research problem, which required four drafts and repeated rewriting. The easiest sections were data collection procedures and limitations, and did not need rewriting. The participant description section required only one round of comments.

Table 4.
Section With Weaknesses Based on Number of Drafts

Chapter	Section	Number of drafts	Draft number
1 Introduction	Research problem/Introduction	4	Drafts 1, 2, 3, 4
	Purpose of study	1	Draft 1
	Operational definition of terms	3	Drafts 1, 2, 3
	Significance of study	3	Drafts 1, 2, 3
2 Literature review	Literature review	3	Drafts 2, 3, 4
3 Methodology	Research design	2	Drafts 3, 11
	Participants/Corpus	1	Draft 3
	Instrument	2	Drafts 3, 4
	Data collection procedures	0	
	Data analysis procedures	2	Drafts 3, 5
	Limitations	0	
4 Results and Discussion	Results	4	Drafts 6, 7, 8, 9
	Discussion	3	Drafts 9, 10, 11
5 Conclusion	Summary	3	Drafts 9, 10, 11
	Implications of study	3	Drafts 9, 10, 11
	Recommendations for future research	3	Drafts 9, 10, 11
Abstract	Abstract	2	Drafts 10, 11

Research Problem. Among the five chapters, Chapter 1 is considered the most difficult, particularly the research problem, because the student had comments on it for four consecutive drafts. In Draft 1, the supervisor commented on the jump in ideas from the background on the common occurrence of flooding in Malaysia to community resilience. The comment is shown in capital letters in square brackets in Excerpt 1. The student did not make any revisions for this part in Draft 2. This prompted the supervisor to give more specific comments on the need for topic sentences to capture the main idea because the student was writing a lot of details without a focus. The comments for Draft 2 are underlined in Excerpt 1.

Excerpt 1.

In some parts of the world, flood is a common occurrence especially during monsoon seasons. In Malaysia, the term *flood season* was even created to describe the supposedly unusual occurrence. However, flood is actually normal to be seen or happen in an area that is being developed. A housing area, for example. It can be easy to predict too and it can be put into an emergency plan ahead of time. THERE IS A BIG JUMP FROM THE PREVIOUS SENTENCE TO THE NEXT [Comment on Draft 1]. Community resilience in this context means the ability for a local community to face natural disasters and then come up with solutions on how to solve the problem, other than their survivability

alone.

[Student's name], not clear what point you are trying to make here – write a topic sentence [Comment on Draft 2] A study by Khailani and Perera (2013) have shown that identifying vulnerability in a location is important to enhance disaster resilience in human settlements. Then, Sakurai and Adu-Gyamfi (2020) focused on the usage of a common language, and how it is still lacking to assist the flood victims due to the existence of a multiracial community who have different proficiency in the common language.

What process are you talking about? Write a topic sentence to explain the process. Don't jump into details Other than using the conventional news medias, the government can also utilize social networking sites to make the process quicker and easier due to the nature of two-way communication in the social networking sites.

I don't see anything similar – govt doing something and the other people here. You should delete the strike-through. Write a topic sentence here to show the main point This is almost similar to Robertson et al. (2021) who focused on how experts and professionals engage with local communities and the stakeholders in Malaysia are important to reduce the risks and impacts of flooding, and the emphasize is on the critical role of the communities in enhancing resilience and sustainable development. (Draft 2).

It was only in Draft 3 (Excerpt 2) that the student rectified the coherence problem by writing a transition in the ideas from flooding to studies on the use of a common language to communicate with the affected communities. The new paragraph in Excerpt 2 was placed after paragraph 1, ending with "... other than their survivability alone" (Excerpt 1, paragraph 1). The transition idea was the need for a shared understanding between the flood victims in the community and the authorities.

Excerpt 2

The key factor in all the previous studies are language and communication; it implied that a common understanding between the local residents and the authorities are important in order to spread vital information on flood such as the weather prediction, estimated time of arrival of flood, and the nearest help centre or shelter. This will then assist the local communities greatly to endure and survive the flood.

A study was done to imply the importance of knowing the weak points or vulnerability in a residential area, and the importance of a common language to communicate with the residents. Khailani and Perera (2013) have shown that ... (Draft 3)

The research problem was not easy for the student to handle, particularly the transition from the broad topic to the specific research area, which in this case is the framing of flooding in newspapers. Based on Swales' (1990, 2004) Create a Research Space (CARS) model, the introduction should begin with Move 1: Establishing a territory, which involves (1) claiming centrality by showing why the general topic of flooding is significant, (2) making topic generalisations about what is known regarding floods and media framing, and (3) reviewing previous research to demonstrate how scholars have approached similar issues. For the research problem to be conceptualised well, the student needs to read related research articles on media framing of flooding and study how they are written, besides being familiar with the current state of knowledge.

By Draft 4, the student had learnt to use the summing up sentence for each paragraph to signal the transition. Excerpt 3 shows the new sentences (bolded) in Draft 4, which have been added after the student received feedback on Draft 3. The purpose of this paragraph is to show that news framing manipulates the audience's perception of the importance of the news. In the summing up sentence, the student returned to the central idea of how news framing shapes the thinking and perspective of the public, such as feeling worried about flooding.

Excerpt 3.

Furthermore, according to Abdullah et al. (2022), the idea of holding the 15th general election during the flood season in 2022 has caused major concern and fear among the local communities all over Malaysia, especially when the government's past performance in managing floods is questioned and the potential impact on voter behaviour is almost certain such as uncertainty and rage. **While online news outlets are able to spread important news rapidly, they are also able to 'control' or shape the thinking and perspective of the members of the public on some issues (such as flood). By using the headline of the news to grab attention, the angle of the written content on the other hand are able to influence the emotion of the readers, causing them to feel anxious or fearful for example (Graziano & Percoco, 2017).**

Pattern observed for *research problem*: Across four consecutive drafts, the student struggled to construct a coherent research problem, particularly in moving from the broad context of flooding in Malaysia to the specific research focus on newspaper framing. Early drafts showed abrupt shifts in ideas, a lack of clear topic sentences, and overloading of details without an explicit organising principle. Coherence only improved after repeated, increasingly explicit supervisory feedback and the insertion of transitional and summative sentences.

What the results suggest: This pattern indicates that novice researchers have difficulty conceptualising the rhetorical work of the research problem, especially in realising the move structure required to narrow a general topic into a focused research space. The difficulty reflects limited genre awareness rather than surface-level language problems.

Link to supervision strategy: Effective supervision at this stage requires sustained, scaffolded guidance that makes genre expectations explicit, particularly through directing students to model texts, emphasising topic and summing-up sentences, and aligning feedback with established frameworks such as Swales' CARS model to support the development of coherent problem statements.

Operational Definition of Terms. Next, the operational definition of terms posed problems to the student as he and others either treated it as a glossary containing meanings of words and phrases or a mini literature review. In research writing, the operational definition of terms tells readers how the constructs are measured or analysed in the study, depending on whether it involves quantitative or qualitative data, respectively. Excerpt 4 illustrates the selection of appropriate phrases to define. "Role of language" is not a variable or aspect studied, but the student defined it in Draft 2. The supervisor's comment was "This does not appear in the aim and obj of the study". In Draft 3, the student defined other terms, namely, the content of flood-related articles, Malaysian newspapers, and influencing public perceptions of causes, effects, and solutions. These were still not reflective of the constructs in the objectives of the study.

Excerpt 4.

1.3.1 Role of language:

The term "role of language" can have various interpretations depending on the context in which it is used. In this study, role of language refers to the ability of the writing or the language style used in the Malaysian newspapers to influence its readers. (Draft 2)

Subsequently, the student got closer to what is expected of the operational definition of terms in Draft 4. The expression "content of flood-related articles" was retained (Excerpt 5), and he correctly explained how it is operationalised in the data analysis, that is, inclusive of the type of information, language, and tone. In Draft 4, the student also defined several other terms, which are newspaper articles, phases of flood incidents, episodic and thematic frames, and frame dimensions, which are mentioned in the aim and objectives of the study. Students who are novices in research need to know that their research reports will be read by interested researchers in the future, which is why an operational definition, rather than a conceptual definition, is of paramount importance.

Excerpt 5.

1.3.5 *Content of flood-related newspaper articles*

The content of flood-related articles refers to the information, implicit or explicit messages, and ideas conveyed in Malaysian newspaper articles that are related to flooding events. In this study, the content of flood-related newspaper articles refers to the type of information presented or written such as the location, severity, and impact of the floods (to the local community), as well as the language and tone used to convey the information.

Pattern observed for operational definition of terms: Across multiple drafts, the student initially treated the operational definition of terms as either a glossary or a mini literature review, defining broad or abstract concepts that were not aligned with the study's aims and objectives. It was only in later drafts that the student began to explain how specific terms were operationalised in the data analysis.

What it Suggests. This pattern suggests that novice researchers often lack an understanding of the function of operational definitions in research writing, particularly the distinction between conceptual meanings and analytically grounded definitions tied to research objectives and methods. The difficulty reflects limited awareness of the audience and of how methodological transparency is achieved in research reports.

Link to Supervision Strategy. Supervisors may need to teach students how to identify constructs that need operational definitions, write samples for the student to model, and prompt students to articulate how each term is measured or analysed, rather than what it means in general terms.

Significance of The Study. Finally, the significance of the study may be confused with the research problem. Excerpt 6 shows that the student literally wrote a literature review of the current state of knowledge and cited two studies in Draft 1. The student stopped short of stating how his study added new knowledge to what was already known about the framing of news articles on floods, and how the framing influenced what the public thinks of floods. The supervisor commented that the commentary on the two findings (bolded) forcibly brought in the ideas of language and communication, which were not explored in the two studies. In a sense, the commentary was misleading on the contents of the cited studies.

Excerpt 6.

In the terms of media framing of floods, Yahaya and Nor (2019) have found that language and framing of news articles are able to influence public perception and understanding of floods, particularly with regard to the causes and impacts of floods. Meanwhile, Othman et al. (2018) have found that the media focused more on the rescue and relief efforts, rather than the causes and impacts of the floods. The location for both studies is Kelantan, Malaysia. **Both of the studies focused on the way how the media, both digital and printed, framed the news. The media is highly influential towards the public.** THIS IS EMPTY WRITE-UP. I DON'T KNOW WHAT LANGUAGE AND COMN YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT. YOU CANT FORCE IDEAS OF LANGUAGE AND COMN WHEN THERE ISN'T MUCH REAL CONTENT IN YOUR WRITE-UP (Draft 1)

The student took note of the comment and produced a better, but still not satisfactory, write-up for the significance of the study in Draft 2 (Excerpt 7). The shortfall is that the student was still reviewing past studies, but not linking these to his own study. Without doing this, he could not show the new findings that he might obtain. The supervisor commented in Draft 2: "Complete your argument to show benefit of studies like yours."

Excerpt 7.

In the terms of media coverage of floods, Thornley et al. (2014) have found that language and framing of news articles are able to influence public perception and understanding of floods, particularly with regard to the causes and impacts of floods. Meanwhile, Wickes et al. (2015) have found that the media focused more on the rescue and relief efforts, rather than the causes and impacts of the floods. The location for both studies is Australia. Both of the studies focused on the

way how the media, both digital and printed, framed the news. The media is highly influential towards the public.

Complete your argument to show benefit of studies like yours. (Draft 2)

He made no changes in Draft 3, and the supervisor gave a commendation and a direct instruction: "You are on the right track, write more like another 100 words to explain the importance of such media analysis". The student probably had not understood the comment "benefit of studies like yours" in Draft 2, but when the supervisor mentioned "media analysis" in her comment on Draft 3 (the same piece of writing), the student understood. In Draft 4, he explained three benefits of media analysis. His topic sentence was "Meanwhile, according to Alalwan et al. (2017), there are three benefits of conducting a media analysis."

The gradual improvement in the writing of the significance of the study, from Draft 1 to Draft 4, shows that the student needed specific and direct feedback. Attempts to prompt the students to think and figure out what to write did not work. The supervisor had to give referential feedback, explicitly telling the student what to think and write. This is not ideal in developing critical thinking and may amount to spoon-feeding, but it is possibly the only way to quickly get students closer to the expected norms of writing significance of the study. In an undergraduate degree course, the final year project was conducted over two semesters, and the student had to submit Chapters 1 to 3 at the end of the first semester of the project, and the full report at the end of the second semester of the project.

Pattern observed for significance of the study: Across four drafts, the student repeatedly conflated the significance of the study with a review of existing literature, focusing on summarising prior findings without moving to how his study would extend, refine, or add to current knowledge. Improvement occurred only after the supervisor provided increasingly explicit and directive feedback, culminating in direct instructions on what aspect of "media analysis" to elaborate and why it mattered.

What it Suggests. This pattern suggests that novice researchers have difficulty conceptualising significance as a contribution of the study, and continuously write it in the style of a research gap. The challenge lies not in locating relevant studies but in articulating the contribution, and this requires students to position their study within an existing body of research.

Link to Supervision Strategy. At this stage, the supervisor may need to shift from indirect prompts to more referential and directive feedback that explicitly models how significance is framed as a contribution.

Literature Review. For the literature review, the student embarked on this in Draft 2. The student wrote in a general way, much like a school essay, with few citations of past studies. The supervisor commented, "you haven't done enough readings". Subsequently, in Draft 3, the student produced three sections with two paragraphs and a summary section as follows:

- 2.1 Understanding of Floods
- 2.2 Public Perceptions and Understanding of Floods in Malaysia
- 2.3 Influencing Public Perceptions and Understanding of Floods in Malaysia
- 2.4 Summary

The frustration of the supervisor can be seen in the expressive comment on Draft 3:

What happened to what I teach about writing full summaries – research method assignment 1? You already read so little and yet still want to write such brief things. Final summary – terrible, there is no synthesis of any past findings here (Comment on Draft 3).

Before the final year project, the student had taken a research methodology course, which required him to write comprehensive summaries for five journal articles reporting empirical studies. The summaries required him to state the purpose of the study, describe the method details encompassing

the research design, participants, instruments, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures, and report the results for each objective of the study. However, the student seemed to have forgotten all that he was taught. The reminder or the reprimand jolted his memory, and in Draft 4, he produced a literature review that reflected that of a well-read researcher. However, the student did not display adequate critical thinking in the synthesis section at the end of Chapter 2.

This progression of comments illustrates how the student needed step-by-step guidance to produce an acceptable literature review. Students need to read research reports of empirical studies because they acquire knowledge in the field and the methods for conducting the study. Familiarity with the literature enables them to construct a well-supported research problem grounded in what is already known and what remains to be investigated.

Pattern observed for *literature review*: The student initially approached the literature review as a general, descriptive essay and did not read enough empirical studies on the topic. Substantial improvement was observed only after strong expressive and directive supervisory feedback, which prompted more extensive reading and the production of a structurally appropriate literature review, although synthesis and critical evaluation are limited.

What it Suggests. This pattern suggests that novice researchers often struggle to make a critical synthesis across studies, indicating a lack of ability in intertextual representation, and to apply prior knowledge to a new research context.

Link to Supervision Strategy. Supervisors may need to reactivate prior learning and show examples of how to synthesise two or more related findings so that students do not stop at writing descriptive summaries of past research.

Methodology. Table 4 shows that the student found it relatively easier to write Chapter 3 compared to Chapters 1 and 2. He started writing it in Draft 3, and it took only another draft for him to produce a satisfactory chapter. The write-ups for data collection procedures and limitations were satisfactory from the start. As his study involved the analysis of qualitative data, he needed some guidance on the instrument (i.e., analysis framework) and data analysis procedures.

Excerpt 8 illustrates the supervisor's comment on the instrument section of Chapter 3. The student did not know that it was not enough to mention that an analysis framework would be used to guide the framing analysis or that a questionnaire would be distributed to get readers' responses. Therefore, the supervisor had to give explicit instructions for both instruments to be placed as supporting evidence that the student had prepared them.

Excerpt 8.

PUT ANALYSIS FW HERE

SOMETHING ABOUT THE THEMES, YOU NEED TO TRIAL ANALYSE ONE ARTICLE TO KNOW WHAT YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT. If you don't know what the heck analysis framework is, please refer to research method slides!!

PUT QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS HERE

There is also a need for audience awareness in writing a research report. Being constantly aware that a thesis will be read by the public will make students aware of the need to be detailed and transparent about the methodology in Chapter 3 to ensure replicability of the study.

Pattern observed for methodology: Sections describing data collection procedures and study limitations were adequate from the outset. However, the instrument and data analysis sections were written in a general manner. Improvement occurred after the supervisor gave highly explicit, directive feedback requiring the inclusion and trial use of the instruments.

What it Suggests. This pattern suggests that novice researchers may find it hard to write procedural

aspects of methodology. Difficulties in this chapter stem less from writing ability and more from limited audience awareness and an incomplete understanding of methodological transparency and replicability in qualitative research.

Link to Supervision Strategy. To help students recall the steps for collecting and analysing data, a good instruction to give students is “Imagine someone else will help you collect and analyse the data. Tell the person what to do”.

Results and Discussion. The student submitted four drafts of the results (Drafts 6-9) and only two drafts of the discussion section (Drafts 9 and 11). In Draft 6, the student had prepared a table showing the number of articles and reporting time of flood event (i.e., pre-flood, during flood, post-flood) and listed the total number of news articles reporting these phases of the flood. The table was informative, but the student did not know how to transfer the information from the table to text.

The student also lacked an understanding of the main ideas to be conveyed. He was able to describe some details about a particular Article No. 12 that gave a 24-hour flash flood warning to six states. This was meant to be an example of a pre-flood news article. In the write-up, the student continued with a brief description of Article No. 8, which was a post-flood news article, where Kampung Perdak residents had a quiet Chinese New Year after a devastating flood. After that, Article No. 16 was described. However, the student did not write any topic sentences to tell the audience that he had selected one article each to illustrate the kind of news reports that were published pre-, during, and post-flood events. The inability to see a macro structure in the results is a weakness that was also found by Miller and Pessoa (2016) in their study of history students’ argumentative writing. However, in the present study, the student was able to work on the explicit comments and “sentence completion” types of comments given by the supervisor. Draft 7 showed an improvement, where all the problems pointed out were rectified.

However, there were new problems as learning to describe results is a challenging part of research writing. The new problems in Draft 7 were missing details, general results, and a lack of interpretation. The results were reported at a descriptive level, but there was a lack of analytical thinking about what the results meant. The student could not explain the implications of the following results, as shown in Excerpt 9. In fact, the supervisor had rewritten parts of the results and indicated the changes using Track Changes so that the student could learn from the correction. In Drafts 8 and 9, there were still general writing, missing details, and a lack of interpretation, showing that these weaknesses of reporting results are not easy to overcome. It takes critical thinking skills to understand the meaning of the results. It takes mastery of the conventions of academic writing to write in a specific and informative manner when reporting results.

Excerpt 9.

~~There are three phases of flood according to the newspaper articles, which are ‘pre-flood’, ‘during flood’, and ‘post flood’.~~ ‘During flood’ newspaper articles have the highest number (30 or 66.67%), ~~which is 30~~, followed by ‘post-flood’ (10 or 22.22%) ~~with ten~~, and ‘pre-flood’ was the least reported (5 or 11.11%) ~~with five~~. Similarly, ‘during flood’ newspaper articles have the highest percentage of 66.67%, followed by ‘post-flood’ with 22.22%, and ‘pre-flood’ with 11.11%. YOU DID NOT EXPLAIN THE MEANING OF THE RESULTS.

(Draft 7)

In Draft 9, the student started writing the Discussion section of Chapter 4 to compare his results with related past findings. The main problem is that the student repeated the results, prompting his supervisor to write “ALAMAK, SO MUCH REPETITION IN THE DISCUSSION SECTION”. The supervisor also underlined the sentences containing repetitions. The student should have stated two to three key results, using one sentence each. These would then function as topic sentences for the

paragraphs, making comparisons with other findings.

The student in the present study did not write one-liner citations of results. He was able to select relevant results from other studies and was even able to include method information from those studies (bolded), as shown in Excerpt 10. The contextual information is important because they influence the results. One-liner citations of other researchers' results are not good enough for discussion purposes. The idea of news framing affecting "profits" (underlined) surfaced repeatedly in several paragraphs without a clear link to either the authors' own results or other researchers' results. The supervisor asked the student to reread the journal paper to make an in-depth discussion.

Excerpt 10.

This is different from the finding from this study which only focuses on publications from The Star, which prioritized attention-grabbing headlines to improve reader's engagement and profits. Despite this difference, both studies had found that the publications that were studied have put the emphasis on facts and live reports, which is similar to a finding from a study by Ahmad and Lateh (2016). Ahmad and Lateh (2016) had **conducted a study on the principles, guidelines, and ideologies in local newspapers in Malaysia (Utusan Malaysia and The Star) in their coverage of flooding disasters in Terengganu, Pahang, and Kelantan in December 2012**. Similarly, Ahmad and Lateh (2016) had found out that the articles from Utusan Malaysia and The Star for flood-related articles in December 2012 had largely focused on reporting the flooding disaster as straight news, which emphasizes a straightforward reporting style. MORE FROM AHMAD AND LATEH, READ THE PAPER, THEN YOU CAN COMPARE MORE SPECIFICALLY (Draft 9).

Further on in the discussion section, the supervisor asked explicit questions to direct the student to the kinds of information to extract from the other researcher's publications. Excerpt 11 illustrates why it was not adequate to state that Devitt and O'Neill (2016) analysed "the media" because this can include television, radio, and newspapers. The type of newspapers (mainstream, alternative) can also influence the flood framing. The time of the news report can also influence the framing, whether it is pre-, during, or post-flood. The framing can also be influenced by the extent of damage caused by the flood. The student had repeatedly used the connecting phrase "This finding is similar to a finding from a study by xxx". The connection is superficial. A meaningful connection can only be made if the student rereads the journal article and thinks deeply about his results and the other researcher's results. Sentence completion comments such as "The finding on X involving XX kind of texts is similar to Y's findings involving YY kind of texts because ..." may prompt students to engage in analytical thinking that leads to clarity about the novelty of their results.

Excerpt 11

This finding is similar to a finding from a study by Devitt and O'Neill (2016), which focused on the framing of flood in the media in Ireland. WHAT ARTICLES WERE ANALYSED? WHAT KIND OF NEWSPAPERS? MAINSTREAM, ALTERNATIVE? WHAT TIME PERIOD – IS IT DURING SOME SENSATIONAL FLOOD EVETNS? They had found that there was an association between government commitment and the provision of sufficient humanitarian relief to the flood victims. While it was a well-needed help, the aid from the government is almost always the same for every flooding events. Also, media coverage in Ireland often links presumed effectiveness of flood mitigation efforts with levels of financial investment in structural defenses (engineering approach), and there are contradicting messages in government commitment. While the whole population in Ireland acknowledges the budget needed to mitigate the flood, the government still had to give continuous approval for the flood mitigation projects over the years (from 2009 to 2014) instead of only approving the plans one time when the project was first presented. WHAT ABOUT THE MALAYSIAN POPULATION? (Draft 9)

Pattern observed for results and discussion: Initial results were descriptive, lacked analytical interpretation, and failed to convey the implications of findings. In the discussion, the student tended to repeat results rather than comparing them critically with past studies, frequently making superficial connections or including irrelevant ideas. Improvement was gradual, occurring through explicit,

directive feedback including sentence completion, questioning, and prompts to re-examine source articles for context-specific comparisons.

What it Suggests. This pattern suggests that novice researchers often lack the critical thinking and genre knowledge necessary to write informative, analytic results and discussion sections.

Link to Supervision Strategy. Supervision at this stage benefits from highly specific, scaffolded guidance that directs students to select key results, construct topic sentences, and make specific comparisons with prior studies. The supervisor needs to encourage students to reread the journal articles so that they know more than the main findings of the past studies. In this way, they can use the method details to explain why the results may be similar or different, instead of stopping at the observation of similarity or difference.

Conclusion. Finally, the conclusion chapter had the information in the correct sections, but the content was mostly inadequate in the first drafting (Draft 9). An example is shown for Directions for future research in Excerpt 12. The supervisor gave specific suggestions in the form of questions to trigger the student to think. Earlier, the supervisor had encouraged the student with remarks like “You can say more than this. I know you are intelligent on this topic, write please”.

Excerpt 12.

Secondly is exploring diverse news formats. This study only focuses on straight news articles. SO WHAT IS THE PROBLEM WHEN YOU ANALYSE ONLY STRAIGHT NEWS ARTICLES? Future research could expand the scope to include other formats such as pictures, editorials, and citizen opinions. Analysing these elements in newspaper articles might provide a more comprehensive understanding of how different components of news contribute to framing and shaping public perceptions.

The student added an explanation (Excerpt 13), which provided a basis for recommending future investigations of different formats of news in a newspaper to justify why straight news might differ from soft news. The student was responsive to the comments to add more explanations, which is why Draft 11 was largely satisfactory.

Excerpt 13.

Although straight news articles is easy to understood and generally favoured by the public due to its straight and direct nature, it remains to be known whether the readers will also like or even prefer soft news over straight or hard news.
(Draft 11)

Abstract. The abstract was written last, after the student had written the conclusion. This is a correct approach as the student would have understood the whole study by this time. In the first draft of the abstract (Draft 10), the student was able to follow the conventions of an abstract, that is, include the aim and objectives of the study, method, and results. However, the supervisor commented, “Rewrite, make it concise and yet has lots of info”. This is because there is usually a word limit for abstracts. This is also where the precise and concise research writing skills are needed. The final sentence of the abstract usually presents the great contribution or implication of the study, but the opportunity is often wasted because students tend to write general statements. The implication was missing in the student’s abstract (Draft 10), but after the comment was made, the student wrote the following in Draft 11, as shown in Excerpt 14.

Excerpt 14.

The study suggest that media outlets should write more episodic “during flood” articles with health and safety as the frame dimension in order to maximise viewership and profits.

Pattern observed for Conclusion and Abstract: in the initial drafts, the student provided mostly inadequate content, with limited justification for future research directions and missing implications in

the abstract. Improvement occurred gradually through targeted, scaffolded feedback.

What it Suggests. This pattern indicates that novice researchers were often too general in their ideas and, because of this, failed to demonstrate the significance of their work.

Link to Supervision Strategy. Directive feedback in the form of prompting questions, modelling sentence structures, and encouraging precise articulation of contributions helps students to explain the new knowledge generated by their study, in the context of the field.

To sum up, the analysis of weaknesses in the content of a final year project report draft identified Chapters 1 and 4 as the most difficult chapters to write. In Chapter 1, the student had problems with most sections but progressively improved over the drafts, after the supervisor used various types of comments – from general to specific, and even rewriting parts of the sentences for the student and giving him “sentence completion” to guide his thinking. In Chapter 4, the student had problems providing adequate content for the results, and his disengagement from other researchers’ studies affected the quality of the discussion section.

Focal Point of The Feedback

Table 5 shows the number and percentage of types of feedback given by the supervisor for the 11 drafts of the student’s final year project report. The supervisor made 125 comments, the majority of which were on content (69.6%), which was far more than organisation (17.6%) and language (12.8%).

Table 5.
Number And Percentage of Types of Feedback Focus

Focus	Category	Draft number	Number of comments	Percentage of comments	Total percentage by comment focus
Content	Inadequacy/ Repetitive	Drafts 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11	74	59.2%	69.6%
	Irrelevance/ Inaccuracy	Drafts 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 11	13	10.4%	
Organisation	Misplacement of information in sections	Drafts 1, 2, 3, 7, 4, 9, 10	11	8.8%	17.6%
	Lack of topic sentences in sections	Drafts 2, 3, 6	6	4.8%	
	Section headings (missing or inappropriate)	Drafts 1, 2, 6, 7	5	4%	
Language	Word choice	Drafts 2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10	10	8%	12.8%
	Grammar	Drafts 7, 8, 10	4	3.2%	
	Punctuation	Drafts 2, 7	2	1.6%	
Total			125	100%	100%

On content, the student had more problems with the amount of information (inadequate, repetitive) rather than the relevance of information (59.2% and 10.4% comments, respectively). The inadequacy of content can be addressed through more extensive reading of the literature and having the audience awareness to be complete in reporting the results, while the irrelevance of content can be addressed

through critical thinking of the main message of a particular part of the writing.

On organisation, Table 5 shows that misplacement of information in sections (8.8%) exceeded the lack of topic sentences in sections (4.8%) and missing or inappropriate section headings (4%). The student was generally fine in his writing, but was unsure of the purpose of the sections of a thesis. Thesis writing is formulaic to some extent, meaning that each section has its purpose, academic style, and language. Students who are new to research usually find it challenging, like the student in the present study. However, the supervisor's comments can guide them to master the conventions of the discipline.

Finally, language was not a great hurdle for the student in the study, as shown by the few comments on grammar and punctuation. Nevertheless, word choice is an issue (8% of 125 comments). The inappropriate word choices are connected to research writing versus general writing. For example, in Draft 8, the student wrote, "Article 76 correlates well with Article 4 that was previously mentioned." His supervisor commented, "Do not use the word correlate. You did not run Pearson correlation test. Rewrite this sentence and explain what you mean". In the same way, the word "random" carries different meanings in the research context (i.e., either systematic or by chance) and daily usage (i.e., simply). Some comments on language were to write shorter sentences and sentences that were compact with information, not syntax errors.

Overall, the distribution of feedback shows that the supervisor's main concern was ensuring that the student had a solid research report written in an appropriate language and format. The large proportion of content-related comments shows that the student required support in producing a complete report. Feedback on the organisation of a thesis, although less frequent, pointed to unfamiliarity with the purpose and structure of thesis sections. Language feedback was minimal but showed the need for accurate terminology and citations in research contexts.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study examined the process of guiding a final year project student from literature review to reporting of results on the newspaper framing of flooding. Two key findings will be discussed.

Firstly, the results show that the easiest chapter is Chapter 3, and the most difficult chapter for the student is Chapter 1, particularly the research problem, based on the number of drafts commented on by the supervisor. Admittedly, this is an observation based on one case, but it cannot be generalised. This finding is different from past studies because researchers like Bitchener and Basturkmen (2006) did not compare the relative difficulty of thesis chapters for students. Ting (2011) has shown that research writing is difficult for Malaysian students, but did not make a comparison of the relative difficulty level of the chapters for students. Chapter 3 is more concrete concerning steps in conducting the study, which makes it easier to write.

In comparison, Chapter 1 is difficult because it requires familiarity with the current state of knowledge in order to carve a niche for the study and justify the novelty of the study. Chapter 1 links to Chapter 4, where students have to show how their findings have led to a better understanding of the research phenomenon. Sometimes in a journal paper, the discussion and conclusion sections are written as one section. Bitchener and Basturkmen's (2006) interviews show that the four supervisor-student pairs in a New Zealand university share the understanding that the discussion section should link the results to the literature, summarise, and discuss the results. However, knowing the expectations is only the beginning; writing such content in the thesis is challenging. In the present study, the student had more difficulty with the content with than the organisation or language. The content needs to be presented argumentatively, which is not easy. Conclusions may adopt a problem-solution text structure or an argument structure (Bunton, 2005). Knowing the relative difficulty level of chapters is important for supervisors because it helps them to advise students on time management to ensure timely submissions of their work for assessment.

Secondly, the study showed that students may not act upon feedback immediately, and more explicit and specific feedback is needed to elicit the desired improvements. Researchers have investigated types of feedback, including frequency (Gedamu & Gezahegn, 2021; Jafarigohar & Hoomanfar, 2018; Saeed et al., 2021), but did not mention the delayed action of feedback in their findings. This constitutes a new finding of the present study because our comprehensive literature review showed that prior work did not address this. It is important because it reveals that it is not sufficient for supervisors to comment once. If the student does not take action on the comment, then perhaps a different approach to giving the same comment needs to be experimented with, with the hope that the student understands and makes the necessary improvement.

However, students cannot be overly reliant on their supervisors. They should be able to learn from good examples of journal articles. In fact, the purpose of a literature review is to familiarise students with how researchers build arguments to justify research problems, conduct studies, and present evidence to justify the novelty of their study. Yet students often overlook the importance of literature review and perform it to fulfil the conventions of a thesis. The delayed response to supervisory feedback observed in this study may be attributed to cognitive load, unfamiliarity with research genre conventions, and inability to understand feedback. When students are given feedback on abstract concepts, method, and language issues simultaneously, they may not be able to make the necessary improvements in writing. Their lack of prior knowledge of research writing norms makes it difficult for them to interpret feedback. A strategy to provide some scaffolding to help students in their revision is to make expectations explicit, such as giving samples of how particular sections are written and guided templates or sentence frames. Over time, the scaffolding can be withdrawn so that students can develop more independence in research writing.

This study contributes to the literature on academic and research writing in three ways. First, it adopts a longitudinal draft-tracing approach to examine how students' research writing develops across one year of the final year project, an aspect that has been underexplored in previous feedback studies. Second, it systematically maps students' content and rhetorical weaknesses according to thesis sections, thereby identifying section-specific challenges in introductions, literature reviews, methodology, and discussions. Third, it analyses how lecturers' feedback changes over time in response to students' changing needs, offering insights into effective feedback strategies for supporting novice researchers' acquisition of research genre conventions.

The findings give rise to two recommendations for supervision of undergraduate research projects. First, supervisors should model the research problem early in the supervision process using discipline-relevant exemplars and explicit frameworks such as Swales' CARS model to help students understand how broad topics are narrowed into researchable problems. In addition, for other chapters, templates can be given. Second, supervisory feedback should be progressive, starting with macro-structure and rhetorical purpose before addressing content adequacy and, finally, language accuracy and style.

A limitation of the present study is that it is a case study involving one student, but tracked over a period of one year and 11 drafts of writing. The student in the present case study is proficient in English, which may be why the supervisor made a few comments on language. Despite his good mastery of English, he still had problems writing topic sentences. This is not a language issue but an organisational issue because it involves the ability to see the macro-organisational structure of the writing.

The present study did not set out to investigate feedback strategy escalation, although there were incidental findings on the progression of feedback from general comments to specific comments, such as sentence completion type. Future studies can examine feedback strategy escalation in depth, such as general prompting → specific directive → rewriting → sentence completion. Such studies will bring rich insights into understanding how supervisors adapt their guidance to students' changing needs, and also how students respond to supervisor feedback, showing how scaffolding works to develop research writing skills among novice researchers.

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