# Associations between Writing Skills, Strategies, and Grades in Psychology Undergraduates

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## INTRODUCTION

- Self-evaluation of writing skills has been associated with writing self-efficacy and performance. Writing self-efficacy involves self-assessed writing skills and application of writing strategies.[5]
- According to Bandura's self-efficacy theory, there can be a discrepancy between a person's self-belief and outcomes. Expectation alone does not necessarily produce a desired outcome.[1]
- Previous research has found undergraduate students overestimate their writing abilities. However, as they advance in their academic careers, their self-assessment of skills becomes more aligned with achieved performance.[2, 6]

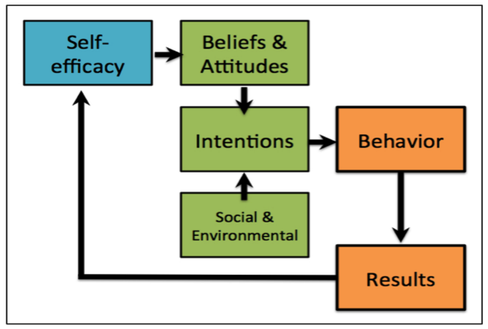


FIGURE 1. Self-Efficacy model[4] and the contributing factors that may influence an individuals' beliefs about their writing abilities.

## CURRENT STUDY

- The goal of the current study is to examine writing self-efficacy of undergraduate students to determine if student beliefs about their writing skills influence the strategies they utilize for academic writing assignments.

### Hypotheses

- 1. Mechanics Writing Skills would be more strongly correlated with During-Writing Strategies than with Pre- or Post-Writing Strategies.
- 2. Organization Writing Skills would be more strongly correlated with Pre- and Post-Writing Strategies than with During-Writing Strategies.
- 3. Writing Skills and Strategies scores would be more strongly correlated for upper-division students than for lower-division students.
- 4. Total Score and achieved score on a graded literature review assignment would have a negligible association.

## METHOD

### Participants

- Undergraduate psychology students ($N$ = 159)
  - 57 lower-division, 103 upper-division
  - 56 upper-division had a literature review assignment graded by their professor on a rubric.
- One participant excluded for excessive non-responding.

### Measure

- Adapted from ESLP 82 Questionnaire with questions regarding English as a second language removed.[3]
- 72 questions about self-reported (a) organization (e.g., setting deadlines, conducting research) and (b) mechanics (e.g., proofreading, formatting) and strategies used (a) before, (b) during, and (c) after writing.
- From the full questionnaire, several subscales were created by grouping questions by topic.

**TABLE 1. ESLP-R Total Scores and Subscales**

| Scale | Number of Items | Content |
|---|---|---|
| **Skills** | **36** | **Views on their overall writing ability.** |
| Organization | 18 | Ability to write logically in an appropriate format. |
| Mechanics | 18 | Ability to use grammar and style accurately. |
| **Strategies** | **37** | **Strategies implemented as part of the writing process.** |
| Pre-Writing | 12 | Reviewing, brainstorming, or outlining before beginning to write. |
| During-Writing | 10 | Habits and behaviors to produce consistent and accurate writing projects. |
| Post-Writing | 15 | Editing, soliciting feedback, and making corrections to benefit current and future writing. |
| **Total** | **73** | **Total for Skills and Strategies** |

**TABLE 2. ESLP-R Subscale Scores**

| | *M* | *SD* |
|---|---|---|
| **Skills** | **137.13** | **18.51** |
| Organization | 68.59 | 9.81 |
| Mechanics | 68.54 | 9.39 |
| **Strategies** | **129.49** | **21.09** |
| Pre-writing | 41.40 | 7.86 |
| During-writing | 38.04 | 5.93 |
| Post-writing | 50.05 | 10.09 |
| **Total** | **266.62** | **34.74** |

## RESULTS

### Hypothesis 1

- As hypothesized, Mechanical Skills had a stronger correlation with During-Writing Strategies ($r$ = .56) than with Pre- and Post-Writing Strategies ($r$s = .39 and .36, respectively). Although unanticipated, Organization Skills were associated with During-Writing Strategies ($r$ = .62; Table 3).

### Hypothesis 2

- As hypothesized, Organization Skills had a stronger correlation with Pre-Writing Strategies ($r$ = .53) than did Mechanics ($r$ = .39). These scales evidenced similar correlations with Post-Writing Strategies ($r$s = .40 and .36, respectively; Table 3).

### Hypothesis 3

- Contrary to our hypothesis, we found a stronger correlation between self-reported Writing Skills and Strategies for lower-division students ($r$ = .72) than for upper-division students ($r$ = .45; Table 4).

### Hypothesis 4

- As hypothesized, the association between Total Score and achieved writing assignment grade was negligible ($r$ = .08). Thus, ESLP-R Total Score was an inadequate predictor of achieved performance.

**TABLE 3. Correlations Between Subscales**

| | Organization | Mechanics |
|---|---|---|
| Pre-Writing | .53 | .39 |
| During-Writing | .62 | .56 |
| Post-Writing | .40 | .36 |

**TABLE 4. Results for Upper- and Lower-Division Students**

| | | Skills | | Strategies | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | *r* |
| Lower-Division | 57 | 139.07 | 16.84 | 135.71 | 20.23 | .72 |
| Upper-Division | 103 | 136.08 | 19.35 | 126.11 | 20.86 | .45 |

## DISCUSSION

- Results suggest self-efficacy is not uniform throughout the writing process (i.e., pre-, during-, & post-writing).
- We found that higher self-report on Organization was associated with higher scores on all subscales, and was strongest during pre- and during-writing.
- We expected to find a higher association between upper-division students' self-reported writing skills and their graded assignments than was observed. Since transfer students come from various colleges, it is difficult to determine if performance is due to self-efficacy or environmental factors.
- Student beliefs about their writing skills did not align with their achieved writing grade. Thus, *only* improving students' writing self-efficacy beliefs may not be enough to improve quality of their work.
- Writing skills and strategies need to be taught, practiced, and evaluated to align self-efficacy and abilities.

### Limitations & Future Directions

- This study was limited to a small sample of psychology students. In the future, researchers should collect data from a larger student population across disciplines.
- In future studies, researchers should also collect pre- and post-class evaluations to determine if self-efficacy changes over the course of the semester.
- Only a small number of participants had graded assignments for comparison. Additional studies could address this by having graded assignments for all participants.
- Although face valid, the ESLP-R has not been validated. Such research should be conducted to examine its utility.

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