# Model texts in an advanced academic writing curriculum: Unravelling an instructional strategy

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# Model texts in an advanced academic writing curriculum: unravelling an instructional strategy

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Research Centre for Learning, Teaching and Technology

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## Context

University degree (BA, <u>MA</u>)
Distance learning
Online, Flexible,
Self-paced
Mature learners

**Context 2**

- Mature attitude, motivated learners

- Ample professional (teaching) practice knowledge and experience

- Learning to enrich practice

MSc Educational Science
Highly motivated professionals
Non-university background
Self-paced, Flexible, Online
Writing-intensive curriculum

- Challenges of

  – an advanced academic curriculum for practitioners

  – distance (self-paced, flexible) learning and teaching

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**Academic writing**



- "Crafting knowledge" (Kellogg, 2008)

- From disciplinary awareness to disciplinary identity

- Academic enculturation

- Adopting rhetorical conventions of academic genres

- Developing authentic and authorial voice

Castello & Donahue (Eds.), 2012. University Writing: Selves and Texts in Academic Societies

**(Teaching) Writing at advanced level:**
                     **practice, dialogue and modeling**
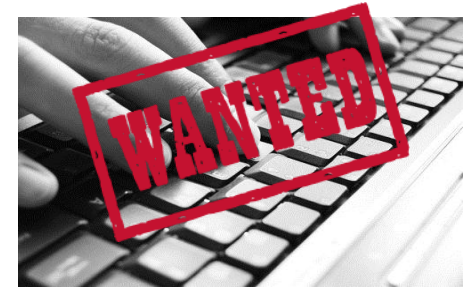


- Maturity and practice

- Shared writing practices

- Insights in complexity and "messiness" of the process

- Experts as models

**Studying models independently**



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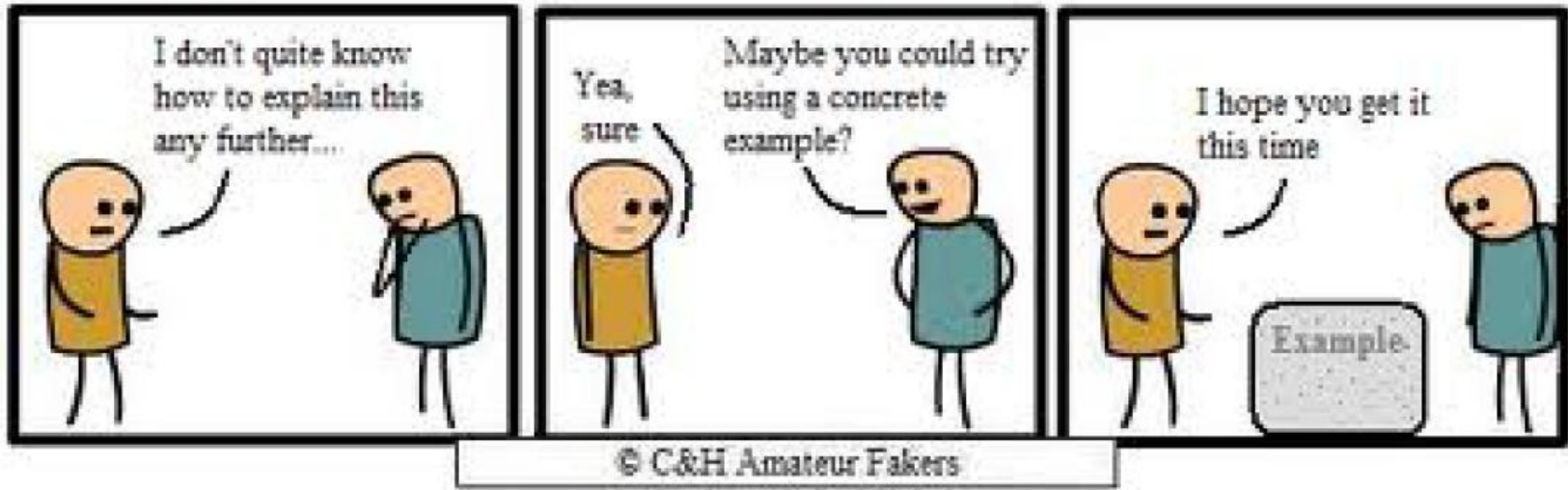
Studying models (model texts) is not particularly effective:

Effect size = .22 Grades 3 through college (Hillock, 1986)

Effect size = .25 Grades 4 – 12 (Graham & Perrin, 2007)

**Charney & Carlson, 1995:**

*College undergraduates writing a Method section*

Model texts: "no automatic benefits", however:

- Better writing performance on a more difficult task (!)

- Higher salience of topical information

- Effect on text structure

- Effect on selection of information (both relevant and irrelevant)

- Adequate judgments of the quality of models

**Models as teacher's support: A ubiquitous instructional practice**

" Day two considered what one could learn from _examining other articles in one's field beyond the actual findings of intellectual content_.

**_We looked_** _at how to analyze_ the textual argument structure of varieties of scientific writing, including genre organization and function; the way evidence, theories, and reasoning were presented, and intertextuality in relation both to reference and to the use of specialized language".

(Bazerman, Keranen & Prudencio, 2012, p. 244)

**Research questions: studying models independently**

*How do model texts support of advanced student writers?*

*How can mastering a new genre be supported with model texts?*

*Does incorporating teacher's voice make a difference?*

*What do student writers learn from model texts?*



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# Are model texts effective as a support tool for writing in a new genre?

**Are model texts effective as a support tool for writing in a new genre?**

Mature students, post-graduate level

Age M= 41 (SD 9)    *F* 70 %

Non-university (teacher training) background: 84%

Completed ca. 40% of the pre-masters/masters' program

**Conference as a learning experience**

- "Research talks" as an academic genre (Swales, 2004)

- Peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991): observing, processing and reporting

- State-of the-art domain knowledge and trends

**Review writing**

- Reader oriented

- Integration of multiple perspectives and voices

- A new authentic academic genre

**Conference review as a new genre in an writing intensive curriculum: the goals**

- Inform the reader about an academic event

- Evaluate the event from several perspectives

- Underpin judgments from several perspectives

- Integrate

  - domain knowledge (state-of-the-art sources, trends and views)

  - author's perspective (background, motivation, learning goals and objectives)

**Model texts**

- Authentic student writings (minor abridged)

- Good not flawless

- Different approaches to the task:

     stronger in narrative  vs stronger in criticism

**Cues for the reader**

- Anchored in the text

- Explicit (**text**) & subtle (**colour**) teacher cues

     references to task requirements

     elaborations & explanations

een samenhangend geheel werd: vanuit het theoretische kader van Boshuizen, de praktische invulling van de onderzoekers naar een conclusie gebaseerd op theorie met oog voor de weerbarstige praktijk. Daar de dag met name in het kader stond van praktische uitvoering van onderzoek zoals dat op dit moment plaatsvindt en niet zozeer in het zoeken naar andere of nieuwe manieren om onderzoek in de onderwijspraktijk vorm te geven, vond er, voor zover ik kan inschatten geen kennisverrijking of vergroting van inzicht op wetenschappelijk niveau plaats. De vraag is natuurlijk of dit de doelstelling was van de conferentie. Het zal zeker zo zijn dat op individueel niveau, afhankelijk van de leervraag van de deelnemers, kennisverrijking heeft plaatsgevonden. De kans hierop was nog groter geweest indien de aangesproken doelgroep bij het gedeelte waarin de onderzoeken werden besproken, wat nu in mijn ogen vooral de jonge onderzoeker was, evenwichtiger was geweest, dus richting de onderwijspraktijk. Stel dat er was gewerkt met duo-presentaties, waarin zowel de onderzoeker als een vertegenwoordiger van de organisatie hun licht lieten schijnen over de ervaringen met wetenschappelijk onderzoek in de onderwijspraktijk, dan was er als vanzelf een discussie ontstaan tussen deze 'werelden'. Dat er dan wellicht geen drie maar 'slechts' twee onderzoeken konden worden gepresenteerd had volgens mij geen afbreuk gedaan aan het geheel. Beide partijen zouden zich kunnen buigen over de vraag 'Wat kan de onderwijspraktijk brengen in de onderzoekspraktijk, zodanig dat er

**Opmerking [O17]:** Een uitwerking van het *structuurcriterium*. Met name met de laatste zin geeft de recensent expliciet aan wat de dag tot een samenhangend geheel maakte

**Opmerking [O18]:** Een uitwerking van *cognitief criterium*. Kennisverrijking interpreteert de recensent nogal eng – geen nieuwe inzichten over onderzoeksmethodologie, dus geen kennisverrijking. Het stuk zelf bevat een nuancering – er zijn ingangen gezien in de presentatie van Gulikers en in de keynote. Door op deze ingangen met behulp van de literatuur voort te bouwen had de recensent van deze nuancering een sterk leerpunt kunnen maken. De recensent laat overigens ter afsluiting van de recensie wel zien wat kennisverrijkend was, de nieuwe inzichten waren voldoende om de eigen organisatie door te lichten op de mate van

**Design**

Task 1: Learning Phase  Task 2: Test Phase  Task 2: Test Phase

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Writing task | Writing task* | Writing task* |
| study of 2 model texts + <br> + *reflecting on the task* | Writing task* | Writing task* |
| study of 2 model texts with cues + *reflecting on the task* | Writing task* | Writing task* |

Learn by writing: **n=20**

*Learn by models:* **n=20**

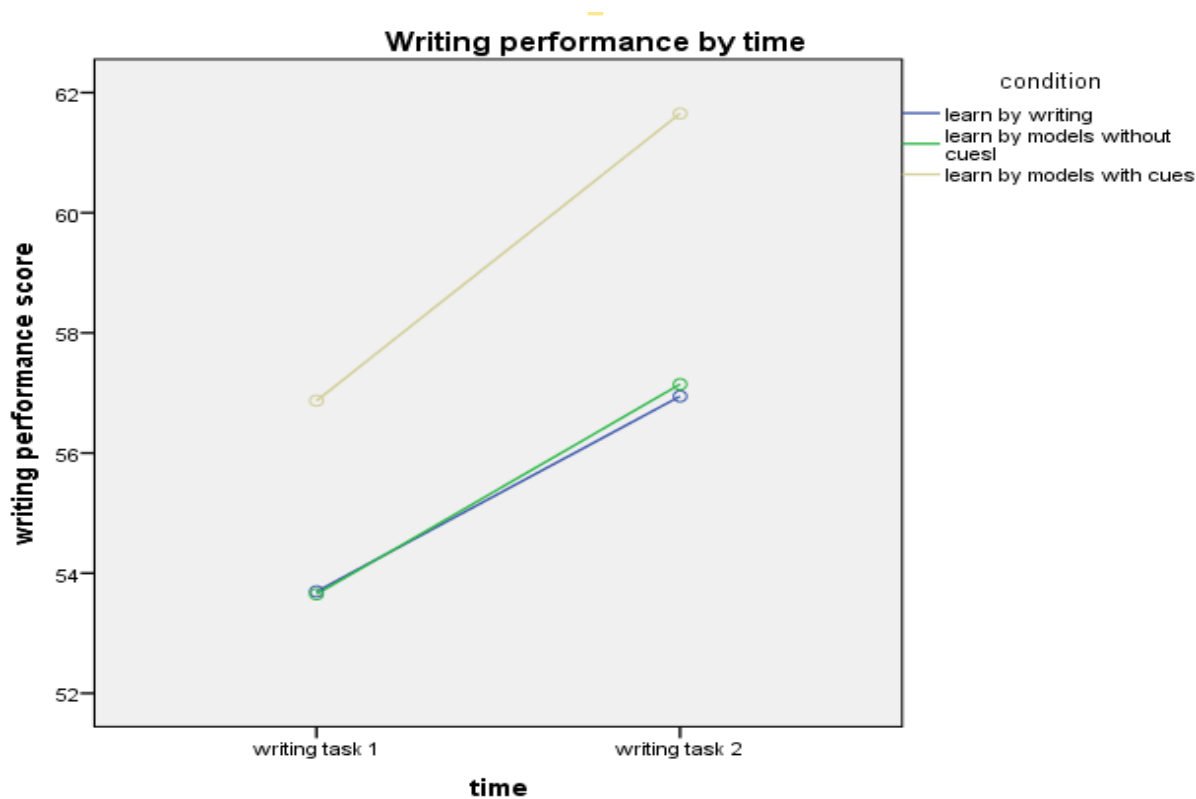Learn by models and cues: **n=21**

**\*Self-reports**

(time spent, effort, judgment of learning)

**Results**

No sig. difference in writing performance between groups

Writing performance improves over time in all groups



Writing performance by time

Holistic performance measure: interval score constructed through Rasch modelling of 10 5 level rubrics
Two raters,
ICC = .70 - .80

$(F(2, 58)=6,568,$
$p=.013, \eta p^2,=.102$

Perception of time investment on writing varies

Task 1: $H(2) = 5,159$  $p=.076$

Task 2: $H(2) = 10,787$, $p=.005$

*Learn by models+ no cues x  Learn by writing:*

$U=67$, $z=-3,209$, $p=.001$, $r=-0,5$ (Bonferoni correction p=.0167)

"Learn by models without cues" condition is perceived as more time consuming (or demanding?)

**A reflection on the outcomes**

- A positive outcome from the curriculum perspective

- Effect of additional scaffolds (cues) is not clear

- More sensitive instruments are needed (Charney & Carlson, 1995)

# Insights in learning from models:
## Text analysis of student reflections

**Reflecting on studying models:**
**How do students learn from models?**
**What do students (say they) learn? Do embedded cues support learners?**

*… Reflect on lessons that you can draw from studying models in view of review writing tasks that you will perform later in this course … .*

One page reflective notes, n=38

Systematic text analysis method by Geisler (2004):

Segmenting text (t-units), coding for meaningful units, reliability checks, analysis of patterns, significance testing ($\chi^2$)
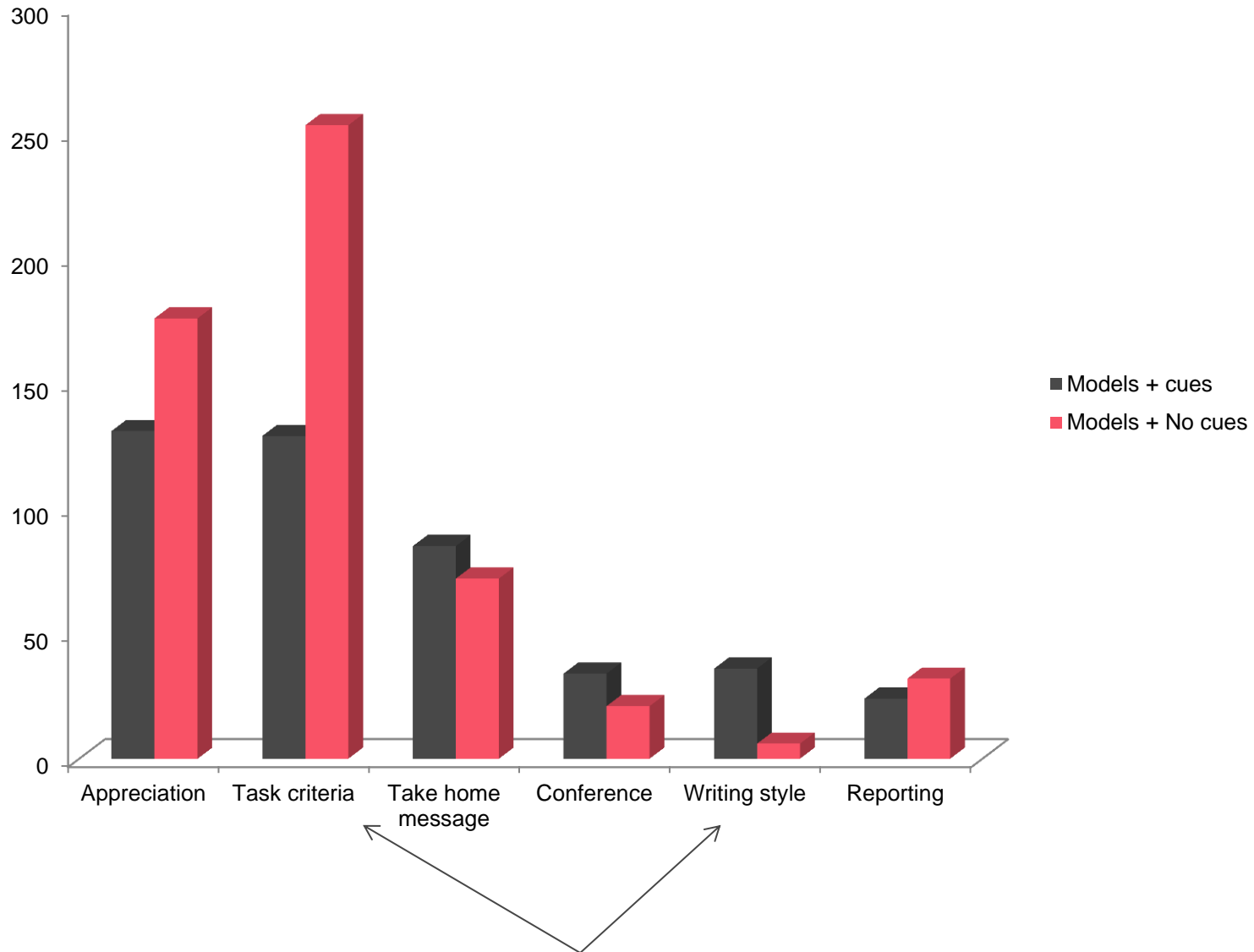
**Reflecting on studying models: what do students say?**

- General appreciation ("reader perspective")

- Assessing the models by task criteria (separately or comparing) [[plain observations or elaborations]]

- Take-home message (for review writing)

- Take-home message (learning from conferences)

- Reflecting on one's own writing style and approach to writing

- Reporting what they have read
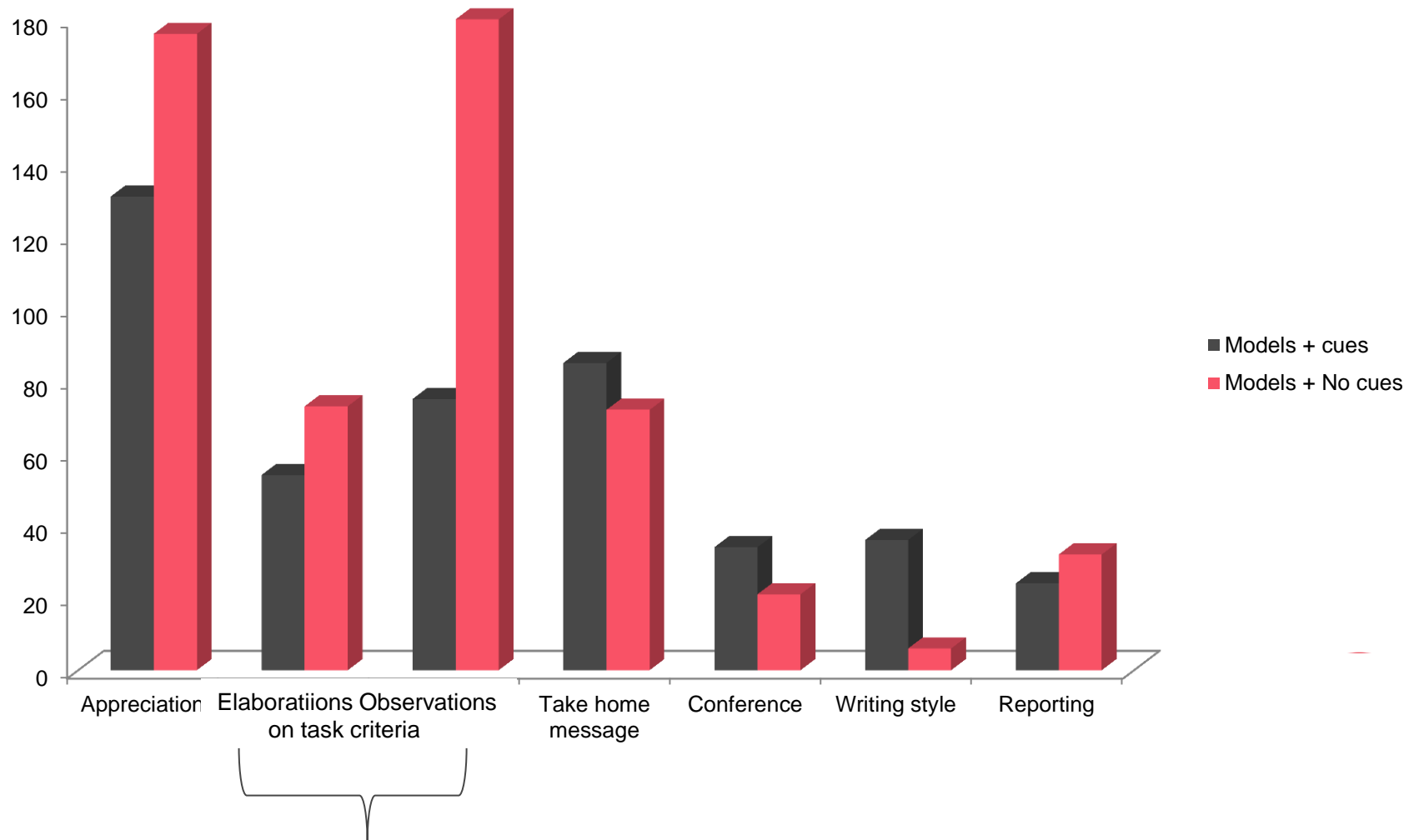
2 coders, 26% (10),  $k = .75$ /weighted $k=.804$

$χ² (6)= 65,7, p < 0.001$

**Do cues matter?**

$χ^2 (6)= 65,7, p < 0.001$

**Do cues matter? 2**

**Do cues matter?**

- Cues are not imperative for learning (=drawing lessons)

- "Assessing" of the models vs "Elaborating" on the models – two modes of studying model texts which seem equally effective

- Studying models is an invitation for reflection / "*how do I do it*"(?)

**What do reflections tell us about studying models?**

- Verbalizing task (genre) requirements

- Reader perspective seems "activated"

**Insights in student learning from models:**
**what do texts say about student learning from models?**

**Text introductions**

*… Write a critical review of the event you attended, use relevant theoretical and professional knowledge and insights to inform the reader and evaluate the event. Underpin your conclusions …. Formulate a learning objective and reflect on it "…*

Systematic text analysis by Geisler (2004): rhetorical moves (Swales)

Introductions of review 1, n=61 (three conditions)

Coding by 2 raters, in 2 iterations, $k= .799$

- Introduction of the event (facts & names)

- Introduction of the topic (rhetorical questions, statements, elaborations with sources)

- Personal introduction of the author & background

- Authors' statement of interest

- Author's learning objectives and questions

- Outline of the text

χ² (10) = 127,04, p < 0.001

**Structure of the review introductions**
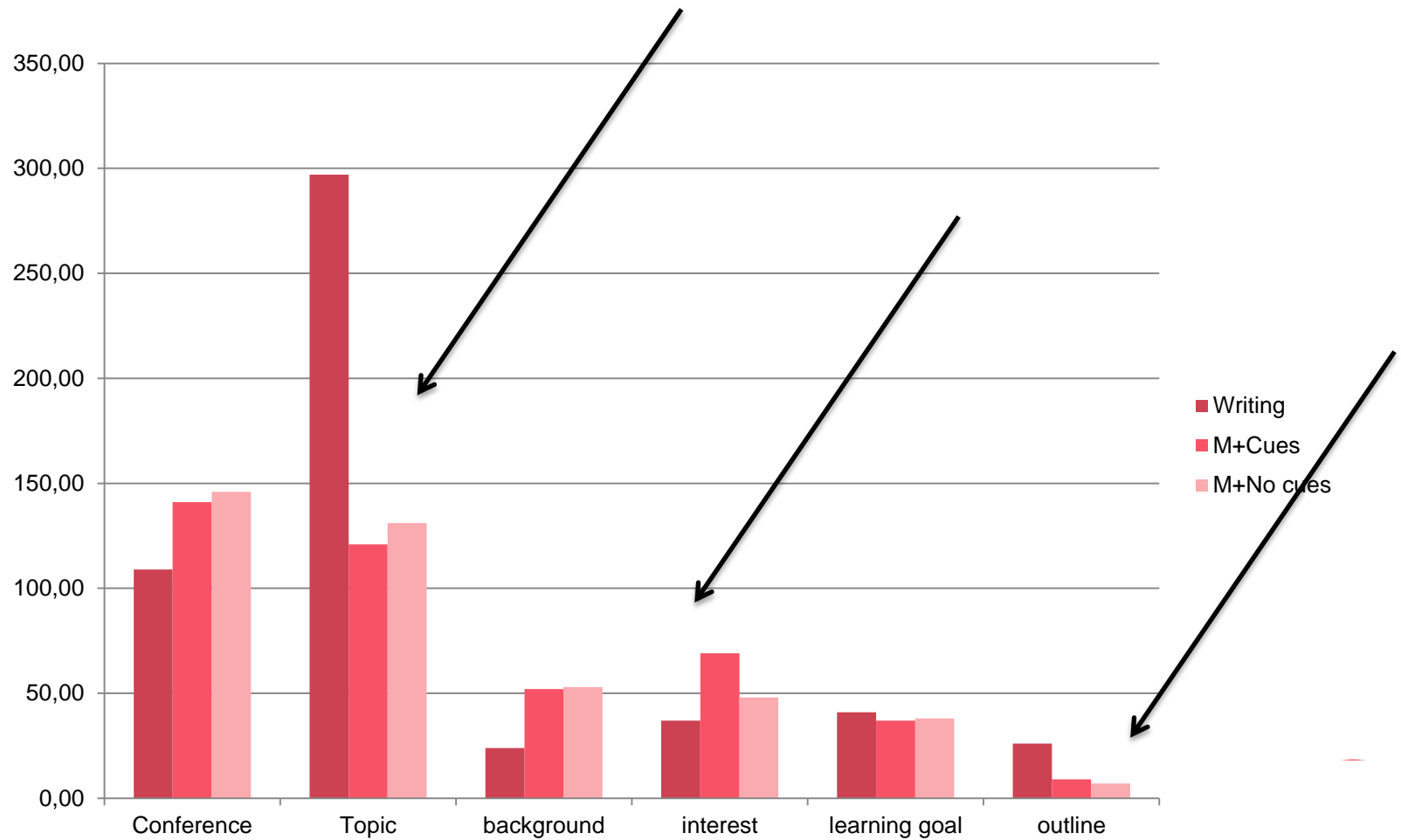
**Reflecting on the outcomes**

Prompted by the models: less "essay writing"

Prompted by the models: author's personal perspective

No effect of cues visible (?)


Further analysis is needed (elaboration on the topic elsewhere, underpinning, use of domain knowledge and sources)

**Concluding**

*Studying models (model texts) belongs in the instructional strategies toolkit*

*More insights in how writers learn from models needed*

*What do model texts support (planning? self-efficacy?)*

*How can rich dialogue (with models) be designed in flexible learning and working environments?*

**Thank you for your attention!**

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