

**Purpose of the Findings section or chapter (note: this is an abbreviated findings chapter):**

Generally speaking, the purpose of the findings section/chapter is to provide readers information on the findings from your research study. Findings are essentially major themes derived from your rigorously analyzed data. Findings center on your research questions, and while they don't necessarily have to "answer" your RQs (sometimes findings aren't as straightforward as that), they need to connect to them. Another feature of the findings section/chapter is the triangulation of data—you want to be sure that each finding is made up of your various data types (it's not a finding if it's rooted in one data type), so try to be aware of indicating the data sources as you're discussing the finding. Additionally, your findings section should balance your participant's voices/data. In other words, be aware of how much you quote or use data from your participants and aim to evenly share their data across findings. Like the literature review, the process of coming to your findings involves synthesis, in this case, synthesis of your primary data. If that synthesis hasn't happened during analysis (or if it did happen in analysis, but you're struggling to represent this as you write about your findings), it will show up in your writing (e.g., spending too much time writing about participants independently, giving too much space on the page to one or two participants, etc.). Also like the literature review, and arguably the dissertation as a whole, the findings is an extension or continuation of the larger argument you've been making. This argument is rooted in primary (findings) and secondary (all other chapters of your dissertation) research. To effectively legitimize or prove your findings, you should adequately use data to support your assertions (findings). Lastly, it's important to make sure that you also explain your findings. This section/chapter is a chance to let your voice shine through because you'll spend less time discussing what other scholars have to say on the subject and more on what your research revealed to you.

*Potential Writing Moves to Make:*

- Write findings statements at the beginning of each of your findings sections (ideally, this would be the first sentence of the first paragraph for that finding)
- Use headings and multiple levels of headings as necessary (this helps to guide readers)
- As you discuss your data, remember to include your reflection on it (e.g., if you use quoted material, be sure to explain it and how it connects to the finding)
- You should reference other scholarly literature as it pertains to your findings, but you don't want to overdo it. This section/chapter is where you feature your own voice as it relates to scholarship. Remember, in this instance, readers want to read about YOUR study, not someone else's.
- Include sentences that identify the "so what" of your finding. You should do more than just identify the finding by going one-step further and saying what it means to the phenomena under study.
- Try not to discuss implications of your findings (this is hard to do). You will discuss these in chapter 5/section (Discussion)

### **FINDINGS**

In this study, I examined how a professor and her undergraduate students in an upper-level English course perceived feedback, in addition to how students applied the feedback they received to their written assignments. Importantly, I also examined how the professor provided feedback and used it both to assess their written work and provide instruction. My purpose for the study was to learn more about the ways students and their professor communicated, understood, and learned from one another through using feedback. I also sought to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the ecology of this community of writers by studying the

resources that student participants used to revise and how all participants' writing, revising, and feedback environments impacted their ability to effectively communicate with one another.

**Commented [EKJ1]:** This is where I'm reminding readers what my study was about and why I conducted it. I made this move where I did so that I could situate readers in the context as I prepare to guide them through my findings.

The findings from this study represent a snapshot in time of participants' lives in relation to writing. This work broadens our understandings of the social, collaborative nature of writing that takes place in advanced English courses at the collegiate level and particularly the myriad influences that impact the final product, or paper. These influences, in large part, tend to go unnoticed because of the behind-the-scenes role they play in the writing process and when noticed, are often difficult to address from an instructional perspective because of their varied and dynamic nature.

**Commented [EKJ2]:** Here's where I'm reminding readers why my research matters.

From my analysis, five themes emerged across participants with respect to the research questions. My findings are as follows: (1) students perceived feedback to be shaped by their experiences, situational and context-dependent, and should function to improve the piece, (2) students had similar processes for applying feedback, (3) students used myriad resources to revise their written assignments, however, they were not always aware of all of the resources that they used, (4) the professor perceived feedback as being valuable when it is effective, and feedback is most effective when it is personalized to the writer, dialogic, and instructive, and (5) when providing feedback, this professor predominantly saw herself as a writing coach and likewise provided coaching-style feedback to students in varied modalities, but primarily through digital end comments. Each theme will be discussed within the framework of each research question.

**Commented [EKJ3]:** These are my findings summarized. I chose to put this in the beginning so that readers know what to expect as they read. Doing so anchors them to my text and lets them decide for themselves if I ended up proving my findings.

### Students' Perceptions of Feedback

This finding will be grounded in the discussion of (a) definitions of feedback; (b) the inextricable relationship between students' experiences with and attitudes toward feedback; (c)

students' perceptions of feedback varied according to situation; and (d) their feedback preferences. These sub-findings are thusly organized in an attempt to account for the complex ways in which students perceived the role of feedback on their written assignments and with the intention of creating an easy reading experience for readers.

### **Students Shared Similar Definitions of Feedback**

During my conversations with student participants, it was apparent they had very clear understandings of what feedback is and how they perceive it to function. All of the students perceived that the purpose of feedback is to improve one's writing, that it is provided with good intentions, and the form and style in which it is provided can vary depending upon the context or situation of the feedback event. For example, Alexis defined feedback on written assignments as "any comments, criticism, editing help—any type of those things that you get during the writing process, whether it's formal or informal." In a similar vein, Mekhi described feedback as "somebody going in and seeing what you're trying to go for... Examining the concepts and ideas you're trying to put forward and trying to suggest a way to make it more accurate... sharpen the point I would say." Finn and Rebecca spoke of feedback from more of an academic perspective, with Finn describing it as "the justification given by the person who gave me the grade for why I got the grade" and Rebecca describing feedback as something that has been heavily marked up. The way in which students defined or described feedback played an important role in how they perceived it, and these perceptions were influenced by many factors, but particularly their prior experiences with feedback and attitudes toward feedback.

### **Students' Experiences with and Attitudes Toward Feedback are Inextricably Connected**

What became clear from this study was that students, in verbalizing their perceptions of feedback, discussed it in terms of their prior experiences, most of which took place in a school

**Commented [EKJ4]:** This is a personal preference, but I like reading scholarly writing that makes use of a mini-introduction to individual findings. I like it because it functions like a thesis statement in the sense that it gives me (the reader) a roadmap of what is to come—something I appreciate when I'm reading this kind of academic writing (or academic writing in general).

As a writer, this also acted as a mini-outline, and so it was easier for me to stay on task and focus my writing when I knew what I needed to write about. It also helped me to write section by section and not feel like I had to draft everything as much as possible (which is my default way of writing...I'm a drafter, not an outliner). Writing in this way helped me stay engaged and maintain a good pace because I took it one chunk at a time.

**Commented [EKJ5]:** Notice the sub-section titles. They identify the sub-findings (sub-findings contribute to the major findings) and are written like findings statements (they could be sentences if they weren't titles). Titles are usually difficult for me to write, but when I think about turning them into a brief sentence or statement, it helps me to write them in a way that is more meaningful than say, writing something vague like "Feedback." I hope you see the difference here.

**Commented [EKJ6]:** Notice how in this section (and all the sections), I am following a kind of formula like: claim-evidence-reflection. Also notice how I have synthesized my participants' data to come to my sub-finding, which is the title of this section.

setting or were school-related and their attitudes toward it, and furthermore, these experiences and attitudes influenced their current experiences with feedback. As expected, students' experiences and attitudes toward feedback varied and fell along a continuum ranging from negative to positive. The student who had a predominately negative perception of feedback both in terms of giving and receiving it was Finn. Although the ways in which he applied feedback changed over the course of the semester because of his participation in this study, his thoughts on feedback remained the same. In discussing his perceptions of feedback, he stated:

**Commented [EKJ7]:** Here's how I am persuading readers of my sub-finding: this is the claim or assertion that I'm making.

Certainly, I've never learned anything from anyone that knew how to write. In all honesty, I don't think I've ever listened to, paid attention to, or taken seriously any comments as far as the quality of my writing goes. Maybe if they felt that I didn't understand the assignment, that would be of interest, but as far as the quality of my writing goes, I would usually ignore that. I don't think I took writing... I don't think I've ever taken writing instruction seriously. When I asked him to elaborate on this, he reflected on his past experiences with receiving feedback explaining that:

The problem is I never really got much critical feedback, I suppose, when I was learning to write in high school. No one ever really criticized my writing. It was kind of a thing where I've never really gotten much critical feedback about the way I write.

**Commented [EKJ8]:** Evidential support for claim.

It is apparent, then, that Finn's negative experiences with feedback in high school impacted his attitude toward receiving feedback in another academic environment—college. Notably, he was able to identify that the reason he does not value feedback is because he never received the type of constructive criticism that he was expecting to receive—a kind of feedback that would enhance his writing. His prior negative experiences with receiving feedback caused him to have

a jaded view of it in college where he might have received the kind of constructive feedback he sought if only he would have been open to the possibility of it. In terms of providing feedback to his peers, he said, "I often find peer reviews difficult. And I find it hard coming up with comments that I would have found helpful...I've always tried to be constructive because that's [the kind of feedback] I would want." Thus, his desire for receiving constructive feedback is connected to his own approach to providing feedback to others, and because he is not used to receiving this kind of feedback, or perhaps he is unaware of receiving it, he then struggles to give feedback in a way that he would deem helpful to his peers and by extension, to be of value.

**Commented [EKJ9]:** My reflection on the data and how it connects to the topic of the sub-heading.

Moving along the continuum, Alexis and Rebecca fell somewhere in between regarding their experiences and attitudes with feedback, and this was mostly because their attitudes toward feedback shifted depending on the situation in which it was given. Additionally, both Alexis and Rebecca were employed as writing consultants at TU's writing center and as such believed in the usefulness of feedback and frequently provided it as part of their job duties. Like Finn, in their discussion of feedback they referenced experiences with it. Alexis compared and contrasted a positive experience and a negative experience she encountered with her college professors and how they impacted her attitude toward feedback. During our conversation about feedback, she stated:

**Commented [EKJ10]:** Transitioning to the next claim.

**Commented [EKJ11]:** Claim

Even if it's a paper that I've already turned in for a grade and I can't change the grade, I really like getting specific and constructive feedback, very specific, because, again, I've had a professor, and I feel like I keep going back to the same professor, but all of his comments were very vague...He was like, 'Please be more specific. Please try not to use generalizations. You need to be more clear about what you're saying.' And then he would be like, 'You need more transitions', just very vague things.... And I was like,

‘But how? Where?’

Commented [EKJ12]: Evidence.

Her experience of feedback from this professor was frustrating because although it was meant to be constructive, which is something she clearly articulated in our discussion that she expects feedback to be, she was not able to apply his feedback because it was poorly conveyed—something that all too frequently occurs when feedback is given. Her attitude toward feedback shifted though, when she encountered a positive feedback situation—one in which the feedback from her professor was effective and met her expectations of how feedback should function. She described this situation, stating:

Commented [EKJ13]: Reflection, or making sense of the data, which in this case was a quote from a participant.

One thing she really taught me was concision and organization and stuff like that. And that was really helpful long term, because she just drilled that kind of stuff into our heads. Every draft we'd turn into her, she would give really, really detailed feedback.

As if to drive the point home, she echoed once more that “The English classes that I've been the most successful and excited for, the professors have given me very, very detailed feedback.”

Thus, her attitude toward feedback is dependent upon her experience with receiving it.

In discussing feedback, Rebecca also leaned on her experiences with it to describe her perceptions of it, and as stated earlier, her attitude toward it shifted based on her experiences.

Commented [EKJ14]: Claim

Like Alexis, she compared and contrasted feedback experiences between her college professors, but acknowledged that, “almost all of my experiences have been positive.” She elaborated on this by recounting:

The professor [wa]s just really good at giving feedback, if that makes sense. [His feedback] was always things that were useful. It was never just random marks. It was always like, ‘You should move this word here’, or ‘Change this word to this word, and I'll give you a few options.’ Then...he would always write a little paragraph about what

worked well so it was explained in two ways, kind of, with symbolism marks and then in words. Then he would list places that he thinks the poem could be published. So, you could tell that a lot of thought and time went into the response.

Commented [EKJ15]: Evidence to support claim

Like Finn and Alexis, Rebecca commented on the specificity of the feedback and its constructive nature as being part of what she would consider a positive experience with feedback. In contrast, the negative experience that she described with another professor was so “because it was him pretty much belittling my ideas rather than evaluating my writing style or the success of what I wrote.” In this context, she explained that she “realized he tended to grade low when I disagreed with him. So, I started writing to agree with him, which isn't ideal, but it saved my grade. I felt that it was necessary.” Rebecca’s negative experience perhaps represents one of the more egregious possibilities (and power) of feedback—it has the potential to silence the writer’s ideas.

Commented [EKJ16]: Reflection/analysis

Mekhi’s experiences and attitude toward feedback represent the opposite end of the spectrum in that they are remarkably positive. In fact, he had no negative feedback experiences to share, but described *other* people’s negative attitudes toward reading and writing as negatively affecting *him*. He said:

They just don't like it as much as anything else. People are like, 'I get it', and they don't get it. I guess it kind of brings my mood down a bit. I don't know why. I don't know how to explain that any better... [it leaves me] wondering where all the other writer kids are, [and maybe] they just haven't found me.

To properly understand the context of this quote, it is important to note that at the time of our discussion and his statement here, Mekhi was undergoing the realization that he enjoyed writing creatively and that he wanted to be a professional writer. He was also taking a Creative Writing course for the first time, and was enamored with the opportunity he had to exercise his creativity



through writing and that there was a community of writers out there that he had yet to find, but was seeking. Thus, on a personal note, talking with him about writing, feedback, and revision was always a joy to me and re-invigorated me in my own writing and teaching life. With that said, like the other student participants in this study, he discussed his perceptions of feedback by anchoring them in his experiences and emotions related to those experiences. Like Finn, he began connecting his experiences with feedback to high school, but unlike Finn, his experiences were positive, he said:

I had a really good teacher in 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> grade. A really good teacher, really got us into essay writing, she really made it a lot more fun. Gave us good advice...She made me want to do more with [writing] I would say... She was kind of the first one to...really look at your essays and get you the feedback that you needed. I feel like she looked more at my, or everybody's writing to give us that advice, I really liked that about her.

Mekhi's positive experience with feedback in this instance was that his teacher was engaged with his and his other classmates' writing, but also that by being engaged and giving him the feedback "that [he] needed" she spurred his engagement with his own writing. In a college setting, Mekhi's positive feelings toward feedback were consistent with what he experienced in high school. He said, "I can't make a great paper on anything without feedback because I'm only one person, I only have one point of view. I need others to look at it and see what I'm missing." Mekhi also spoke at length about providing feedback and saw it as an opportunity to greatly improve his writing. According to his statements, Mekhi aligns with his peers in this study in believing that feedback should be constructive. **Therefore, although student participants had different experiences with and attitudes toward feedback, what they had in common was that**

experiences inform attitudes, and these influenced the way they perceived feedback in general and in the context of this course.

### **Students' Perceptions of Feedback Varied According to Situation and Context**

It was evident from the data that students' perceptions of feedback were also influenced by situations and contexts which corroborates with the literature I reviewed on the subject as well (Dowden et al., 2013; Ellis, 2017; Ornella & Treglia, 2008; Smith, 1997; Sommers, 1980, 1982, 2006; Sperling & Freedman, 1987; Straub, 1997, 2000; Walls & Eby, 2020). In the discussion that follows, my use of the word "context" refers to the experiences students shared with me about the expertise of those providing the feedback and the academic disciplines in which those experiences took place.

### ***Students' Perceptions of Feedback Providers Shifted Across Contexts***

For example, all four student participants stated that generally speaking, they preferred receiving feedback from their professors over their peers primarily because the professor was the expert as opposed to a peer, and because professors assign grades to work while peers do not, and earning a passing grade or better was important to all of them. However, there were instances when students valued their peers' feedback over their professor's; the context of which was in Creative Writing courses. For example, when I asked Mekhi about his feedback preferences, he responded:

I probably prefer the professor's more, but it depends. If I'm doing creative writing, I might want my peers more. Just to see what they see when they're reading it so I can tailor it more to a bigger appeal I guess. Or maybe see some things that maybe the teacher wouldn't see because they're in a different generation I guess.

**Commented [EKJ17]:** This is where I bring in the "so what" or "bottom line" of all the information I just spent pages discussing in this section. I do this because at this point, I imagine readers are thinking, "Okay, so I just read this long section of the first finding and it had lots of information in it, that to be honest, I've already forgotten. So what's the takeaway here?" Keeping that in mind, I made sure to deliver a takeaway that was connected to my overall finding and my research questions.

Notice, I'm also transitioning to the next sub-section of the first finding (I use the phrase "perceived feedback" as a preview to the next section and are words that are contained in the next section's title).

**Commented [EKJ18]:** Mini introduction before I dive into the next sub-finding. I also define how I'll be using a word that comes up frequently.

**Commented [EKJ19]:** Don't be afraid to use different heading levels—they help guide both you, the writer and readers. Also, they act as transitions.

As we discussed his comment in more detail, it became clear that in this situation, Mekhi was seeking to appeal to an audience for his work that more than likely would not have included his professor because he would not be his intended audience, rather, his peers would. With all writing, but especially writing that is intended to be exigent beyond the scope of the classroom, feedback becomes more valuable for writers when it comes from their potential audiences, and the better those writers understand their audience, the more successful their writing will likely be. Fortunately for Mekhi, he was already aware of the importance of the writer-audience rhetorical relationship, and so this should prove advantageous to his writing aspirations.

\*\*\*