

DISSERTATION

ACADEMIC WRITING RETREATS FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS:

A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

ACADEMIC WRITING RETREATS FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS:

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Writing retreats have proven to be a productive experience for faculty, if they are well-organized, focused on bulk writing and assist in reaching an individual's goals and connection to his or her writing. If writing retreats have shown productive for faculty, arguably there may be even greater opportunity for success considering students are seeking writing interventions to support completing their thesis or dissertation and graduating. This study examined the experiences of graduate students who participated in a writing retreat, if it was beneficial for them and understanding the aspects that led to productive writing.

This qualitative case study on academic writing retreats was researched and examined to understand graduate writing retreats. The study provided retreat participants the opportunity to share their experiences at a *CSU Writes* graduate writing retreat, and the information gained can be used to inform other universities and academic professionals who are seeking interventions to support productive writing.

The primary data source was collected from interviews with 30 participants who had attended a *CSU Writes* retreat during the research period. In addition to participants interviews, the data collection included an interview with the Director and facilitator of *CSU Writes*, a document review and evaluation of the participant evaluations and the researchers direct observations of the presentations, group discussion and the group writing environment of the retreats. The data analyzed and collected from this study provided an overview of the

participants' perspectives on their experiences at an academic graduate writing retreat, their writing results and what occurred at the retreat to facilitate productive writing. In addition, this study provided an initial retreat design model from the review of the literature to support graduate writing and a proposed updated model after the research was collected and analyzed. The writing retreat could be suggested for students feeling stuck, procrastinating writing and in need of an intervention to move forward.

The findings from this study expound that graduate students found retreats effective for writing productivity. This outcome, concluded from participants experiences was due to the fact that participants recognized the retreat provided an opportunity to complete a lot of writing over a period of two days, two and a half days or five days. The participants additionally stated they experienced productive writing by being part of a group where they felt an accountability to write, the retreat provided dedicated uninterrupted writing without distractions, they alternated between writing and editing depending on their personal productive times of the day, they set goals for the retreat or goals for each writing session and followed the retreat agenda of writing sessions with breaks versus binge writing.

Although writing with others may be viewed as a distraction, the study discovered that writing with others resulted in positive feelings such as motivation to write, a commitment to writing and a focus and intensity towards writing. The conditions which supported productive writing were feeling part of a community of writers through writing together as a group, group discussions, learning many students experienced similar challenges to productive writing and identifying as writer as a direct result of completing a lot of writing. Out of the 30 participants interviews, 26 participants reported they either met or exceed their retreat writing goals. Based on the study's findings and results, writing retreats are a viable intervention for universities to

consider for graduate students writing a thesis or dissertation and seeking productive writing.

Also, a proposed retreat model to consider was provided and evaluated.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Writing is an ongoing and necessary skill of academia (Ferguson, 2009; Murray & Newton, 2009), considering “scholarly writing is an important factor” (Boice, 1987. p. 9) and part of the foundation of an academic career (Cameron, Nairn, & Higgins, 2009). Many enter into academia for different reasons or interests such as teaching, researching, studying a field of interest or passion, mentoring students, and writing, (Goodson, 2016, p. 23); however, when writing their dissertation or thesis, many students perceive writing as the difficult part of their academia role and student success (Harris, Graham, Mason, & Saddler, 2002; Silvia, 2007; Stainthorp, 2002). In addition, one half of doctoral students do not finish their program and one third of these students leave during the dissertation phase (Nerad & Miller, 1996; Roberts, 2010). These alarming student statistics may be due to the unstructured, independent, and isolated process of writing a dissertation or thesis (Maher, Fallucca, & Mulhern Halasz, 2013). To explore why this phenomenon exists, it is important to understand the complexities of writing and writing in academia.

Writing requires a means of recording thoughts and ideas to make visible to others via paper or on a computer (Jackson, 2008). Although this is quite simple, the process that leads to bringing thoughts and ideas into actuality is complex and iterative (Cameron et al., 2009; Elander, Harrington, Norton, Robinson, & Reddy, 2006) and has even been referred to as a “messy process of engagement with the word” (Grant & Knowles, 2000, p. 11). Writing involves a variety of dissimilar aptitudes such as writing strategies, process based techniques, intellectual elements, and identity and emotive components. Writing strategies include routines and rituals, goal setting, creating the space for uninterrupted writing and scheduling. The

writing process based techniques include planning the outline or planning what to write, drafting from a blank slate, editing and revising the paper, and telling the story (Ezer, 2016; Hayes, 2000). The intellectual elements include technical skills, analytical abilities, organization of thoughts on paper, and stretching the mind to synthesize related or unrelated distinctions. The innovative and emotive components including sense of self, self-efficacy or confidence, innovation, identifying as a writer, and self-doubt or fear of less than satisfactory writing (Ezer, 2016; Jackson, 2009; Petrova & Coughlin, 2012), in addition to a connection to the meaning or purpose of the writer’s voice (Cameron et al., 2009). The following figure provides an overview of the key areas for writing productivity;

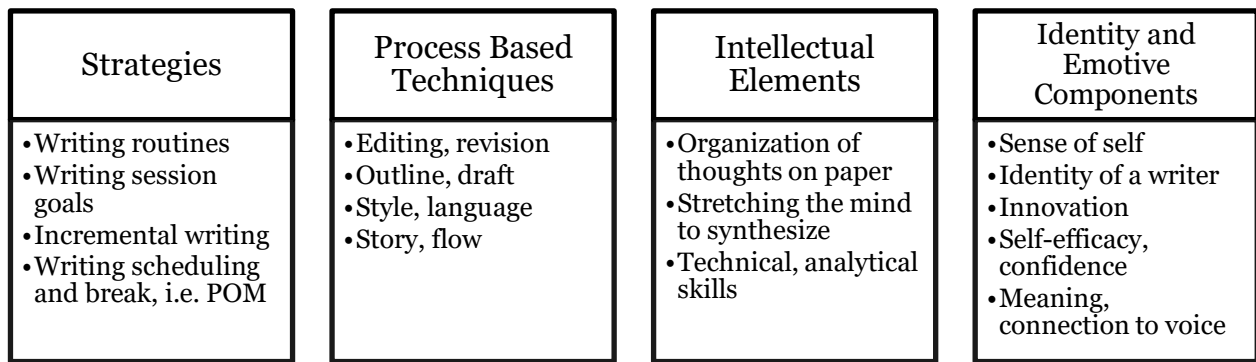


Figure 1.1. Four key aptitudes for writing readiness.

Writing is an acquired practice that fosters the skill of writing (Silvia, 2007). The act of writing may be complicated, because writing is developed and learned; we learn to write by writing, and improve our writing by writing (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014; Ezer, 2016; Grant & Knowles, 2000); by extension, writing is a reflective practice that is learned by doing (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014). Academic writing does have some important conditions, such as an audience, a purpose, a flow of how information is presented, a writing style, a problem to solve (Swales & Feak, 2012), and a reflexive form of scholarship (Jackson, 2008); however, once understood, the

approach presents in an organized manner. Considering writing is a learned activity through the process of writing, therefore, academic writing concepts would need to be learned as well.

Scholarly Writing and Identity as a Writer

Successful writing for academic scholars is a requirement for graduation and crucial for an academic career; however, students often lack instruction and skills on how to write in higher education or a doctoral dissertation (Cameron et al., 2009; DeLyser, 2003). Universities may focus on providing support for publication, but there is limited attention or writing resources provided on how to write a thesis or dissertation, consequently leaving students underprepared to write a dissertation and present their findings (Ferguson, 2009; Maher, Seaton, McMullen, Fitzgerald, Otsuji, & Lee, 2008). Academic writing is not a subject typically offered to graduate students nor are faculty typically provided training to teach academic writing (Boice, 1987); however, graduate scholars are expected to have advanced academic writing skills (Aitchison, 2009; Moore; 2003). This leaves students possibly learning from professors uncomfortable with academic writing themselves or receiving writing feedback from professors possibly lacking necessary skills to provide constructive writing feedback. The result can leave students feeling less than adequate (Aitchison, 2009; Antoniou & Moriarty, 2008a; Silvia, 2007). Largely, the process based techniques and intellectual elements are areas students can seek support through writing centers, writing coaches, and seek feedback from their advisor and even their peers. Generating ideas while reading journal articles, a process called interactive reading and interactive note taking, is a way to learn to synthesize and organize thoughts, while reading academic journals and dissertations in the student's field (Single, 2009).

As much as academic writing is scrutinized for the limitations, Ezer's (2016) research indicated students "learned how to write" in academia (p. 59), as they made the transition from

social writing, such as on social media, to academic writing. Ezer (2016) went on further to state that “writing develops through social mirroring” (p. 61), and writing becomes an integral part of students’ academic life. Social mirroring is the way we see ourselves based on paradigms, opinions, and perceptions of the people around us (Schermer, 2010). Social mirroring can have a positive effect amongst others who regularly produce writing, or it can have a negative effect around those who did not focus on writing or lost confidence in their writing. This is where university writing communities and resources are crucial. Moore (2003) found those in a writing community or writing group obtain writing skills faster and support each other better to complete assignments. Another important position often missed in writing, even academic writing, is writing can promote a state of wellbeing for students when the literary work they composed provides liberation through sharing their findings with others on paper (Ezer, 2016; Gibbons, 2012; Goodson, 2017).

The aptitude of innovative and emotive components for writing also needs to be considered. Ezer’s (2016) research found that related to academic students’ identity and their writing, the academic writing undermined students’ self-confidence and their writing ability due to the structured format or word count expectations. Antoniou & Moriarty (2008a) found in their research that academic writing often “suppresses one’s own true voice” (p. 158) and left limited room for creativity. Due to this, academic writing brings emotional anxiety versus purpose (Moore, 2003) which can leave students disconnected from their writing. In addition, Goodson (2017) explained that students “don’t see themselves as writers” (p. 11). This mindset can hinder their ability to grow as a writer. These obstacles for academic writing are presented as insignificant in the literature, therefore, providing no viable solutions. Grant and Knowles

(2000) summarized this issue well by clarifying that academic writing has to find two voices: one for scholarly writing and one that is interesting and alive.

Collaborative Writing and Writing Interventions

Another common assumption of writing is its only effective in isolation (Mewburn, Osborne, & Caldwell, 2014; Wilson, 2000). Students have been encouraged to write alone throughout school; they are given assignments and go home to write. Even if a group assignment includes writing, students may divide the assignment and write alone but then submit the paper as a group; however, they may meet to work on the creative part of the assignment, such as designing a poster board together. This isolation excludes the chance for collaboration, sharing of ideas, creativity, different kinds of learning, and social community (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, Talbot, Verrinder, & Ward, 2009). However, writing independently presents many benefits, for instance, as a way to improve critical thinking (Quitadamo & Kurtz, 2007). In addition to experiencing critical thinking and decisions, Crockett (2017) stated independent writing lends itself to gained confidence and skills, such as how to make sense of the world based on personal experience and observation and the ability to learn from mistakes. Since independent writing is a proven method for learning and critical thinking, understanding writing in groups was explored in this study.

If writers feel writing in groups are distractive (Wilson, 2000), on the contrary, research has shown writing in groups inspires, builds creative energy (Farr, Cavallaro, Civil, & Cochrane, 2009) and encourages social mirroring. Thus far the benefits, challenges and common interventions of academic writing for students have been presented, therefore writing strategies for academic writing will be further discussed.

Many universities offer writing support through writing centers for students and scholars to help guide the writing process based steps, such as style, basic editing, or outlining. There are also many books on this topic; although, the dissertation writing guidebooks were found to offer limited usefulness because they focus on tips and tricks and provide a linear structure which is not always applicable for everyone (Kamler & Thomson, 2006; Maher et al., 2008). Even with the increased publications of dissertation guidebooks and with the influx of writing centers, students still struggle with writing strategies such as goal setting, writing routines, productive writing, and the motivation and emotive components such as identifying as a writer and being connected to their writing (Moore, 2003). Creative writers are taught to commonly connect with their identity as a writer and their writing, as well as the process of transformational learning or a transformation experience through their writing (Antoniou & Moriarty, 2008a); whereas, this connection is overlooked in academic writing.

Some universities provide various interventions to assist students with writing support. The common approaches are (a) writing centers supporting practice based steps and rhetorical issues, (b) writing groups to provide peer support and feedback on writing and may also write as a group, (c) writing workshops or seminars on various writing topics such as grants, (d) writing coaching and consult for various feedback and support, (e) writing courses (e.g., methods chapter), (f) advisor-committee direction, and (g) writing retreats. Writing interventions and resources support student writing; retreats and writing groups additionally can create an intellectual community and remove the feelings of isolation felt amongst graduate students during the dissertation or thesis process (Maher et al., 2013; Wittman, Velde, Carawan, Pokorny, & Knight, 2008). Though there are many options for supporting the writing efforts of graduate students, the incompleteness rate is still high, and productive group writing practices for graduate

students overall are understudied (Aitchison, 2010). For example, United States universities (Bourke, Holbrook, Lovat & Farley, 2004; D'Andrea, 2002) show attrition estimated for doctoral studies collected during the 1990s to 2001 being higher than 50% and cohort doctoral attrition estimated as high as 85%. More recently, the attrition rate hasn't shown any change, van der Haert, Arias Ortiz, Emplit, Halloin, & Dehon (2014) displayed the doctorate attrition rates in Europe and US during 2001 and 2010 between 47% and 50%.

The research conducted on writing retreats for faculty is ample and had a positive impact on productive writing; there are 25 peer reviewed journals for faculty between 2001 and 2017 compared to five peer reviewed journals between 2000 and 2017 for graduate students on writing retreats. Along the same lines and to draw from for comparisons, the research on graduate writing groups has shown to support productive writing (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014; Ferguson, 2009; Maher et al., 2008; Maher et al., 2013). Both interventions, writing groups and writing retreats, aim to focus the time spent as a group (depending on how the group is designed) on actual writing (Mewburn et al., 2014), therefore, research from academic writing groups was provided and cited to understand group writing. Writing groups are another intervention universities use for productive writing and often, writing groups form after attending a writing retreat and assume similar characteristics for group writing (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014).

The Writing Retreat

What is available on graduate student writing groups and retreats shows conclusive results. Maher et al. (2013) had success with graduate writing groups. Although the specific numbers were not provided, the study found that graduate students in writing groups meeting one or two times a week for two to three hours increased the number of doctoral graduates and had a decreased time to complete the graduate degree. Another study including graduate students who

attended a week-long retreat resulted in four students completing their dissertation (Farr et al., 2009). A retreat was productive from spending uninterrupted time on thinking, writing, sharing ideas, and receiving feedback daily (Wilson, 2000) and resulted in students completing chapters of their dissertation. At the same time, writing groups and writing retreats results are impressive; Ferguson (2009) stated any face-to-face interventions with peers will support productive writing. Students communicated feelings of isolation when writing their dissertation, coupled with receiving limited feedback, lack of confidence and feeling unsupported (Aitchison, 2009). Even though dissertation writing has a self-directed learning component (Brookfield, 1984). Support even from peers in writing groups and retreats can increase confidence and motivation (Ferguson, 2009; Hay & Delaney, 1994; Morss & Muray, 2000) which can counterbalance the isolation of writing (Larcombe, McCosker, & O'Loughlin, 2007; Moore, 2003).

Productive Writing and Writing Retreat Structure

Since writing groups for graduate students are well documented in the literature (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014; Ferguson, 2009; Lee & Boud, 2003; Maher et al., 2013), the similarities amongst retreats are discussed. Some of the similarities are providing a safe environment of peer support to discuss challenges, sharing peer critique, cultivating peer accountability, developing writing confidence as a scholar and increasing writing productivity. The main differences between a writing group and retreat are retreats offer an extended amount of uninterrupted time away from the day to day and are a facilitated event. Writing retreats offer the removal of interruptions to show scholars what fewer distractions and writing regularly—a writing routine—can accomplish (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014; Murray & Newton, 2009). Additionally, time away from the to-do list eliminates overcommitting and multi-tasking to allow time to reflect on a student's identity as a writer and provide transformational learning

activities to connect deeper to his or her writing voice and creativity. If one was concerned about writing on command or being bound by time, participants in an academic writing retreat found the structured environment led to an increase in writing productivity along with creativity (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014). The writing routines introduced at a retreat can leave students thinking the newly learned strategies and habits are not a transferable environment (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014). Research has found that many retreat participants have successfully kept to a new writing routine and/or started a routine writing group (Farr et al., 2009) to keep focused on the new writing strategies and behavioral changes. Studies showed retreats not only provided an opportunity to solely focus on writing but showed positive results in writing productivity (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014; Farr et al., 2009; Moore, 2003; Wilson, 2000).

Retreats are not to be mistaken with binge writing; however, the topic of binge writing versus incremental regular writing has been investigated for faculty. Binge writing, which is holding off to write until large chunks of time are available, is a writing habit that presents challenges. Binge writing triggers emotions such as anxiety and guilt from not writing regularly and the constant feeling of the need to write (Boice, 1987; Boice, 1989; Boice, 1997; Johnson, 2004; Silva, 2007). This produces further procrastinating and complaining about writing, resulting in less writing than incremental writing (Boice, 1997). Ultimately, this creates for writers what is called a “creative illness” (Boice, 1997 p. 1), which reduces productivity, motivation, and creativity and replaces these emotions with unfavorable emotive components such as stress, anxiousness, fatigue, and even depression (Boice, 1997; Silva, 2007). Many scholarly writers who use binge writing or last minute writing to meet a deadline; perhaps this is because no one has shared with them the benefits of incremental writing and how binge writing negatively impacts their productivity, creativity, and mood.

The literature suggests the main focus of an academic writing retreat is writing; furthermore, a well-rounded holistic approach could be considered: breaks, exercise, wellness, reflection on writing identity, emotions, and why writing was stalled or stopped, education on writing strategies and ways to approach writing routines, guest speakers, and lastly, building a sense of community with those experiencing similar challenges or experiences through group activities and discussion (Moore, 2003). Wilson (2000) found academic writing retreats were part writing sessions, part motivational seminar, and part building group community and support. What made academic writing retreats unique from other forms of writing interventions were they introduced the function of regular bulk or session writing, which is writing during established fixed periods of time, and they provided ample time to initiate change of unproductive writing behavior. When stress and anxiety is replaced with incremental, bulk writing and this goal is feasible, what follows is productive writing with ease (Moore, 2003; Silva, 2007).

Productive writers schedule time to write regularly (Silvia, 2007). Creating the habit of writing regularly can be compared to other habit forming or behavior changing practices (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014), such as exercising (Johnson, 2010), cooking healthy meals, and training for marathons. Many runners, as I have experienced personally, train one hour a day, take one day off a week and complete marathons successfully. In comparison, a routine of writing one hour a day can be created to complete a writing project. Important strategies to consider for a writing behavior change include: how many days a week to write, how much writing time per session, times available during the day to write, time of the day you tend to be most productive, and goal setting for each writing session. For example, when deciding how much time to write per writing session, Murray (2014) referred to productive academic writing sessions as “snack times” (p. 5) and encourages to use blocks of 15 to 90 minutes for writing.

Many writers struggle with the common adversary of writer's block. The way to overcome writers block is to write (Boice, 1990). Silva (2007) found that academic writing is technical, which is practical and idea driven; therefore, waiting for inspiration is not advantageous. Despite the fact that academic writing may not require inspiration, creative productivity is needed and beneficial through regular planned incremental writing, even when time is bound and hectic schedules create limitations (Johnson, 2010). Interestingly, a study on set or scheduled writing time showed that this group produced twice as many ideas versus the group who wrote when they freely felt the need or was inspired (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014; Boice, 1982; Johnson; 2010). If idea generation limits writing, then it may be too early to write and there may be need to consider alternatives, such as reviewing additional literature (Single, 2009), conceptualizing the project, or venting in a journal about what is sabotaging the ability to writing (Jensen, 2014). Another successful strategy authors advocate helps eliminate writers block or idea generation is to write freely and revise or edit afterwards (Boyle Single, 2010; Johnson, 2010; Murray, 2014, Silvia, 2007). This temporarily turns off the critical eye so writing can continue. Writing approaches need to be personalized to fit individual needs; nevertheless, being educated on successful writing interventions with time to experience the behavior change is accomplished during writing retreats.

Higher education students easily identify as a student, researcher, or instructor, however, not always as a writer (Goodson, 2017). When research is written, it can become documented knowledge; therefore, it would be beneficial to explore the significance for graduate students to relate to being a writer to take away this notion of waiting to be inspired or to connect deeper to their writing. Mayer et al. (2008) admitted one develops identity as a writer through writing. For example, with creative writing, writers naturally relate to being a writer because this

translates deeper to identity and connects with their actual writing. Though different for academia, as the writing is evidence based, there is a scholarly or intellectual realism to the writing. Conversely, there can also be a purpose, curiosity, or even passion for academic writers to connect with a writing identity (Mewburn et al., 2014). This lack of identity as a writer could be one of the hindrances underlining stalled dissertations, thesis, or writing projects which can be discussed and experienced in writing retreats.

Writing Behavioral Changes and a Worldview Transformation

An inquiry into a worldview transformation or deeper connection with writing can start simply by exploring, “Who am I as a scholar, as a writer or an academe,” and “What does my topic and message inform the world on and how” (Grant and Knowles, 2000)? These questions are personally directed toward the individual’s identity and emotions versus an artifact or scholarly journal where developing the literature review and contemplating how the research informs the literature. Graduate students’ questions to explore are, “What am I most curious about within my topic and what does writing and completing a dissertation or thesis mean to me, in addition to the credentials?” A deeper connection to writing or a message takes more than a few minutes. Some orchestrate ideas through speaking aloud while others make sense through journaling and reflecting; regardless, retreats can create the space and time to understand these ideas. This approach has similarities with developing transformational workplaces and finding a deeper meaning or connection with their work and people (Wheatley, 2006). Business leaders adopt a similar approach to time away from the day-to-day through retreats to work on specific priorities, such as company positioning, strategic direction, mergers and acquisitions, or transformational work such as organizational culture. Successful retreats do not end when

participants leave, as the foundation has been set for new goals, timelines, planning, and leadership practices (Fineran & Matson, 2015).

In their research, Wittman et al. (2008) through analysis of field notes at a writing retreat showed a transformative learning outcome and changed worldview of academia for healthcare professors by starting with their biases and assumptions of who they were as teachers. At a different writing retreat consisting of twelve graduate students, the students spent a week together and accomplished significant amounts of writing; so much so, a professor visiting the retreat stated after the students shared what they written that the students were “in touch” with their research and writing (Wilson, 2000, p. 10). The paper did not elaborate what was meant specifically by being in touch with their writing but creative writers refer to this when writing involves the whole or all aspects of self, such as, intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual (Antoniou & Moriarty, 2008b). Farr et al., (2009) found through participant evaluations and surveys that the academic writing retreat increased a sense of self, meaning writers viewed themselves as scholars who have something important to share through their academic writing. Aitchison & Guerin (2014) found through a narrative enquiry method, writing in groups brings a mindfulness, sense of energy, and collective discipline which gave meaning to their writing through cognitive coherence, an attitude change through unspoken persuasive actions of the group (Pasquier, Rahwan, Dignum, & Sonenberg, 2006). Indeed, words such as sense of self, connecting with all aspects of self, mindfulness and cognitive coherence can be viewed subjective; granted, the outcomes may be impressive with increased motivation, creativity, wellbeing and productivity (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014).

It is evident by these studies that in addition to the things that hold students back from writing, such as writing strategies, practice based techniques, and connecting at a deeper level to

a scholars' work, the retreats address solutions through education on writing strategies, as well as behavioral or transformative experiences. Transformation requires reflection, dialogue with others and activities or exercises to target the change (Wittman et al., 2008). All of these encompass a behavior change. Behavior change occur when exploring beliefs, biases, and assumptions about the student's purpose for writing a thesis or dissertation with strategies to support the new behaviors (Murray, Thow, Moore, & Murphy, 2008). This can be accomplished being away from the day to day responsibilities and schedule, therefore, making retreats a viable intervention to writing behavior changes and productivity.

Lastly, another common obstacle for scholars is finding the time to write, which is real and challenging. Those working in academe have full schedules of teaching, advising, committees, meetings, etc. Many times, students work full time at a university or for other organizations. Despite the obvious importance of balancing work, life and writing is crucial for students to graduate, changing the outlook on time to write by selecting different words is beneficial. For example, finding time to write versus creating time to write (Goodson, 2017) sends the message to move into action. Goodson (2017) found that if one must find time to write, it will always result in no available time.

Another helpful change is using writing rituals instead of writing habits. A habit is brushing your teeth every morning; a ritual is morning coffee. Rituals are perceived as relaxing or enjoyable. Rituals create space in the mind for writing, versus an anxious approach to writing. Personal rituals create a state of mindless activities that, according to anthropologists and psychophysiology, actually shuts out other daily activities or thoughts (Wyche-Smith, 1993). Some ideas of rituals are hiking with friends or the dog on the weekends, or meeting friends on Fridays for happy hour. In a writing ritual, examples are to begin a writing session by cleaning

or organizing the space before writing or brewing a fresh pot of coffee. I enjoy the aroma of essential oils with a few deep breaths. For completion of the writing session, examples of rituals are a five-minute break after a certain amount of writing, such as the Pomodoro technique which recommends a break after 25 minutes of writing (Mewburn et al., 2014), making a cup of tea, listening to music, or walking the dogs. Creating writing rituals can be rewarding and easy. Sword (2017) recommended to refine writing rituals through behavior modification. For example, if you're tempted to check email during your writing time, the ritual can be to record your thoughts on a sticky note first before taking a break to read emails.

Summary

When writing can be enjoyable, transformational, or educational, it is a tool that deepens knowledge (Goodson, 2017); therefore, if one continues to have stalled writing projects after building in rituals, initiated writing strategies, and practice based techniques, it could be a phenomenon, such as, more information on the topic is needed, a connection to the purpose of the project has not been established, the identity as a writer is negative or nonexistent, and/or a worldview look at what the message of the individuals writing brings to the world is missing. These problems necessitate writing retreats because they address the practical reasons why writing is stalled, such as time management, while introducing writing strategies and a deeper connection to writing which results in writing productivity.

Problem Statement and Purpose

Writing retreats have proven to be a productive experience for faculty if they are well-organized, focused on bulk writing, assist in reaching an individual's goals, and connected to his or her writing. If writing retreats have shown productive for faculty, arguably there may be even greater opportunity for success as students may not suffer from

the image of needing help with writing because as they are still learning. Some universities regularly use writing retreats as a way to take academics out of their daily environments to provide time to solely focus on writing. The retreats provide education on topics related to productive writing, and these retreats offer an opportunity to remove scholars from their isolation by connecting them with other scholars sharing similar writing challenges. In addition to productivity, the group retreat approach to bulk or incremental writing versus binge writing in isolation has provided many other benefits.

Some of the benefits studied for faculty writing retreats are establishing writing routines, setting goals for writing, reducing anxiety created from not writing through emotional support, and helping end isolation by establishing accountability and a writing community. What has not been studied in an academic setting are the behavioral changes or transformational aspects that connect writers to their work, such as identification of a writer, a sense of self in writing, finding meaning in their writing, and being a reflective writer. These aspects may not be easily understood and identified through a presentation, as they require education with activities through experience and reflection. Writing retreats can be a positive experience when designed with a well-designed approach and agenda which establishes clear expectations to write, set writing goals, and have reflective writing. There is no set process on how retreats or workshops are developed, designed and delivered; although, a few outlines of retreat agenda have been provided (Grant, 2008).

Problem Statement

If academic writing retreats are productive for faculty, understanding how academic writing retreats are designed to increase productivity for graduate students would be beneficial. In response to the problem of not knowing how effective academic writing retreats are designed and administered for graduate students, there is a need to investigate graduate writing retreats as an empirical study due to the graduate student views of needing support with writing strategies, writing confidence and writing commitment (David, Wright & Holley, 2016) and the number of all but dissertation (ABD) students in graduate programs.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to learn what is needed for writing retreats to be effective for productivity. This study expounds how retreats can be developed and organized to support behavioral shifts of writers through reflective activities and group discussions, along with bulk writing sessions to meet the students writing goals and deadlines. This study also offers recommendations from the graduate students perspective of what is helpful and what is not helpful. Considering graduate students are not commonly identifying with their role as a writer (Goodson, 2017), learning writing strategies and engaging in reflective activities at the retreat may be the catalyst to change this uninformed perspective.

Research Questions

The following research questions are designed to gain knowledge on the design of academic writing retreats and if the retreats are productive, how are they productive. Using case study methodology to guide the study, the following questions seek to identify if the retreats were productive, how the design of the retreats support a sustained writing routine

and writing behavior change, and lastly, does the deeper connection to the identity of a writer and the writing strategies lead to a behavior change of an increase in productive writing?

1. How do participants perceive what occurred at the writing retreats?
2. Why was writing at the retreat productive and counterproductive?
3. How did the design of the retreat impact or hurt productive writing?
4. Why do participants experience obstacles to writing during the retreat and afterwards?
5. How often were the participants' goals achieved or not achieved? How did they achieve them or why didn't they achieve them?
6. How is writing as a group different from writing alone?

Overall, how do the other aspects of writing, such as identity of a writer, writing strategies and behavior changes, and writing in groups impact writing productivity?

Significance of Study

Writing retreats are a compelling experience to increase writing productivity, establish a writing routine, achieve writing goals by eliminating the isolated approach, and create a community of peer based support (Cope et al., 2016; Farr et al., 2009; Kent, Berry, Budds, Skipper, & Williams, 2017). What is not researched in the literature on writing retreats are the other aspects that stall students from completing or starting their dissertation or thesis, such as the components of managing emotions or having a deep connection or purpose to their writing and identity as a writer. Workshops provided within the retreats

are a mechanism to afford an environment for a group of individuals to experience learning, change, and motivation, which is accomplished through hands-on activities and discussion and participant engagement within the group. This research will include workshops within the retreat to focus on changing behaviors on writing, tips to improve organization and writing routine, and in addition, transformational activities to increase motivation by experiencing a deeper connection to their writing and writing in groups. All of this delivers the result of increased, productive writing.

The current studies on writing retreats for faculty and writing groups for students in higher education are all positive; therefore, the current literature provides a strong foundation to explore and investigate further the design of the retreats to include behavioral and transformational focuses for productivity and motivation. Change or transformation occurs on a micro or individual level as well as on a macro or group level. Retreats provide a forum to not only actively experience change at a micro level, but also at a macro level, as there is comfort in learning others are struggling with similar obstacles which are not always known when working in isolation. Lastly the collective mindfulness, coherence, or wisdom from the group's energy when writing together allows for interactions and collaboration, which is the perfect setting to reflect and identify with something greater than what one can do alone. This collective group coherence will be discussed further in the literature review

Writing retreats, when appropriately designed, can become the method for graduate students to participate in to achieve writing productivity on an intellectual, practical, motivational, and deeper transformational level. Retreats are commonly used in business as a

means to get away from the day-to-day rigor to look at a situation differently, such as identifying issues, establishing new directions, providing training and setting goals (Fineran & Matson, 2015), and tapping into the collective group thinking or energy (Briskin & Erickson, 2009). Using writing retreats as a means to identify why writing has stalled, learning techniques for meeting writing goals, and having a connection to one's writing suggests writing productivity would be an outcome. What is unknown is the actual design of an effective retreat for graduate students or what occurs at the retreat: Does it create a behavior change in one's writing routine and what transformational design activities are best suited for writing success? To support this significance of research, a doctoral one day writing retreat study (Davis et al., 2016) and a weekend graduate writing retreat (Singh, 2012) expound results of an increase in writing confidence and motivation including completion of dissertation chapters. This study will add to the current body of literature in regards to writing retreat design and writing productivity for graduate students with the focus on behavioral change and transformation.

Operational Definitions

This research will refer to the following terms:

- *Retreat*: creating a space or event to withdraw from the day-to-day to focus on a specific purpose, such as writing, personal change, or establish strategic direction for a company. It is generally a day or longer, offsite or in a quiet uninterrupted location, a casual environment with a mix of individual time and group discussions. It is participative in nature (Campbell & Liteman, 2003).

- *Academic Writing Retreat*: a group of scholars meeting in a location for a designated time dedicated to writing and writing activities designed to educate and inform on writing routines to increase writing productivity to meet writing goals (Murray, 2014b). *Academic Writing groups*: two or more scholars meeting in a location or remotely during regularly scheduled time dedicated to writing immersion and initiatives, such as research, writing, reviewing each other's work, providing feedback, discussing ideas and challenges, and providing peer support through a community (Lee & Boud, 2003).
- *Academic Writing Centers*: provide feedback on projects in the areas of grammar, style, language, sentence structure, and storyline.
- *Training*: an organized procedure by which people learn knowledge and/or skill for a definite purpose. Training refers to the teaching of acquired and applied knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes needed by a particular job and organization (Swanson, 2009).
- *Workshops*: a workshop is a short-term learning experience that encourages active, experiential learning and uses a variety of learning activities to meet the needs of diverse learners (Brooks-Harris & Stock-Ward, 1999).
- *Retreat Design*: the actual agenda including how the sessions are delivered, such as lectures, group interaction, individual reflection, training, etc.

- *Writing Workshop or Seminars*: a brief intensive course of education for a group focusing on specific tasks, such as grants, storyline, style, etc. (Rosser, Rugg, & Ross, 2001).

Parameters

The study is restricted to graduate students who participated in a Colorado State University CSU *Writes* writing retreat. CSU *Writes* is open to all students.; although, the invitation and material for the retreats explain what the writing retreats support for students and what they do not support. Some students may be writing in their second language and may have different writing challenges, so the retreat may be a misalignment for a student if they are seeking support with sentence structure or ESL. In addition, the participants of CSU *Writes* are not required to complete the evaluation at the end of the retreat nor interview with the researcher; therefore, this study may be lacking feedback from participants who chose not to participate. Lastly, the researcher has participated in the retreats as a participant and observer which may leave students hesitant to share full disclosure.

Assumptions

This study assumes the participants are providing appropriate and accurate feedback and experiences on their writing retreat experience to results in writing productivity. This study assumes the participants can provide a fair evaluation of the retreat they attended and was interested in addressing their writing productivity.

Background

CSU *Writes* supports the academic writer, specifically, graduate students and faculty with writing interventions, such as academic writing groups, academic writing workshops, drop in writing sessions called show up and write, writing retreats, writing resources, and consultations. CSU *Writes* offered their first writing retreats for graduate students in the Spring 2016 semester. Not only was there an overwhelming interest, the feedback on the evaluations and during the group discussion was positive: Participants communicated progress on their writing. A two-day retreat was offered over spring break and two five-day retreats were offered at the end of the Spring semester. CSU *Writes* allowed 30 participants, knowing there would be some attrition. With over 20 participants, the facilitator, Dr. Quynn, had an intern to assist with coordination of the facilities, refreshments and student check in.

For the location and logistics, the retreats were on-site in a private conference room from 8:30 am to 3:30 pm including a half an hour for lunch. Group breaks were set on schedule, although, breaks were taken as needed. The private location of the conference rooms made it easy to focus, and small breakout rooms were available nearby if participants wanted to work in a small group or individually. Lunch cost was covered by the school on one of the days and snacks and water were provided each day. The students' advisors were invited to the complementary lunch which led to rich discussion on writing progress, thoughts, and ideas. For the two-day retreat, which also was the first graduate retreat, a dinner celebration was provided on campus approximately one month afterwards where students had a chance to share progress, receive a small gift, and meet the speaker and funder of the program, the graduate school.

I personally had the experience of attending the two-day retreat and one of the five-day retreats, both resulting in progress on my writing. Admittedly, the two-day was more difficult as

I felt I was just getting started with the flow of writing and it ended; although, it did influence the continuation of creating an incremental uninterrupted writing schedule at home. At the second retreat, I was more prepared due to my past retreat experience. Naturally, having five days was more productive; although, the intensive writing and over hour drive back and forth each day was wearing. By extension, I have attended off-site retreats (related to business and coaching) in the past and they are productive for many reasons, but offering on site retreats are still productive and satisfying enough to get the writing done.

Researcher's Perspective

My experience as a participant in two CSU *Writes* retreats has allowed me to understand academic writing retreats and its impact on writing productivity and routines. Recently, my dissertation was a stalled project due to isolation, lack of a writing routine, lack of confidence in my role as a researcher, and not identifying myself as a writer. Academic writing retreats are not unique, necessarily, compared to other writing retreats where the goal is to produce writing. Due to the boundaries of academic writing, a different set of skills, including intellectual capacity and industry specific research approaches, require support for a certain way to present data.

As acknowledged in the background, I have attended many retreats, workshops, seminars, and trainings as a participant in organizations and as an entrepreneur. These experiences have shaped my perspective on the importance of the design of retreats to be experiential, interactive, and new learnings applied during the retreat. As a graduate student researcher, I know my professional experience is solid but I have growth for new and deeper knowledge and perspectives to be obtained through this study. I consider myself a

practitioner and a continuous learner. I see this study initially being helpful data for CSU *Writes* to grow as well as informing students of other positive interventions to finish their writing projects and graduate.

The interest in this study has become personal: The retreats are extremely productive, and I feel the need to share these different strategies to overcome stalled writing or procrastination with graduate students. I know how frustrating and anxiety driven being all but dissertation (ABD) is for me. This study will provide a deeper understanding of the impact of academic writing retreats and how the design practices influence the results.

Lastly, I chose qualitative research for this study because I enjoy looking at the data and also learning the meaning behind the data. After over twenty years' experience in organizations as a Human Resources/Organizational Development professional, and now an owner and producer of a product, I continue to experience the same phenomena. Once the data are reviewed, there is an important story underneath it. To discover the underpinning, I will use qualitative inquiries such as interviews, focus groups, and observation.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This qualitative case study is designed to empirically inquire on why the event and strategies of writing retreats for graduate students are productive and to understand how retreats can be constructed to further support writing productivity with a focus on writing identity and motivation.

This chapter addresses the theoretical constructs of academic writing retreats, productive writing, and writing behavior change approaches, specifically cogitative behavior techniques which is commonly used in wellness and lifestyle coaching. An in-depth review of relevant research is organized into the following sections: (a) summary of academic writing retreats; (b) emotional components and obstacles to writing; (c) writing strategies; (d) writing in groups, community and identify; (e) writing behavior shifts; (f) theories for group writing; (g) academic writing retreat design practices; (h) dissertation and thesis research; and, (i) anecdotal evaluation and feedback from a graduate student CSU *Writes* writing retreat.

To review the literature, I conducted a comprehensive search of many the databases: i.e., *ERIC EBECO*, *Web of Science*, *Business Sources Complete*, *Lexus Nexus Academic*, *Psyc INFO*, *Academic Search Premier*, *Dissertations and Thesis* and *Google Scholar* using select word searches. The word searches included: (a) retreats, (b) writing retreats, (c) academic retreats, (d) writing groups, (e) management retreats, (f) writing identity, (g) transformative learning and writing retreats, (h) writing creativity, (i) academic writing (j) social writing, and (k) writing productivity, resulting in 23 peer reviewed journal articles for the literature review. As articles from these key word searches were identified, I reviewed their references for further articles. I searched all the articles cited and searched all related articles.

I also conducted a review of books with the book title or table of contents title that had “writing groups” and “writing retreats” through *Google Scholar*, in journal article references and a search through *Amazon*. I then searched all of the references in the books for additional articles. Overall the majority of the scholarly and peer reviewed journal articles related to “writing retreats” were in education and a few in healthcare; the articles in business were generally from trade related journals, publications, or magazines.

The topic of this study provides a few needs: a current review of the literature on writing retreats for graduate students, an addition to research of a deeper perspective of connecting academic writers to self-identification as a writer, and a creation of meaning and sense of self during students’ thesis or dissertation resulting in a behavior change or transformation. The majority of literature on academic writing retreats was on faculty retreats and focusing more on publication, which showed positive results on writing productivity (Aitchison & Guerin; 2014; Farr, Cavallaro, Civil & Cochrane, 2009; Moore, 2003; Wilson, 2000). Although, Kornhaber, Cross, Betihavas, and Bridgman (2016) recently published an integrative review of academic writing retreats, there is a need for further investigation of academic writing retreats to validate the actual outcomes and understand the results of academic writing retreats. Additionally, this research will investigate an area that is generally underrepresented in the literature: graduate writing retreats.

Some of the common writing barriers for faculty provided in the literature that perhaps may be applicable for graduate students are time constraints and competing responsibilities if they have a full time job and/or work, teach and stalled writing during their doctoral research, feel isolated and lacking support, and limited confidence in their writing (Kornhaber et al., 2016). Antoniou & Moriarty (2008a) went further to include the inspiration to write.

The successful strategies provided in the literature were establishing incremental writing, setting writing goals, scheduling regular writing time, and writing routines (Boice, 1987; Kempenaar & Murray, 2016; Murray et al., 2008). These strategies are introduced in academic writing retreats and have shown results in writing productivity (Jackson, 2009; Moore, 2003; Murray & Newton, 2009; Singh, 2012). Participant feedback from academic retreats included comments such as a preference to the structure of the retreats (Murray & Newton, 2009), meeting their writing goals and for some exceeding their goals (Grant, 2006), and finding writing enjoyable (Moore, 2003). Although, the writing retreat feedback was positive, Petrova & Coughlin (2012) expounded that further research is needed to understand the impact of the retreat design, such as structure, duration, and participation. What is understudied is writing retreats for graduate students and how the retreat is designed to impact writing productivity and what specifically occurs to increase the motivation to write and sustain the new writing behavior changes or habits. This following section covers a review of the literature in the areas of the writing retreats to understand what is known about academic writing retreats and what still requires empirical research.

Summary of Academic Writing Retreats

Writing retreats are not a new concept and commonly used by literacy writers (Singh, 2012); although, there may be a various range of expectations from participants based on their personal experiences with writing and retreats. An academic writing retreat provides structured space intended to provide an uninterrupted series of time dedicated to writing and supporting academic writing in a safe environment with the intended outcome to complete a writing goal (Murray & Newton, 2009). Petrova and Coughlin (2012) further expounded that academic writing retreats, if designed well, will increase motivation to write, and have potential for a

transformational experience. To uncover the current knowledge on academic writing retreats, the following figure, four areas of academic writing retreats, provides a visual representation of the key themes explained in four areas: writing in groups, community & identity, emotional components, writing strategies and writing behavioral shift.

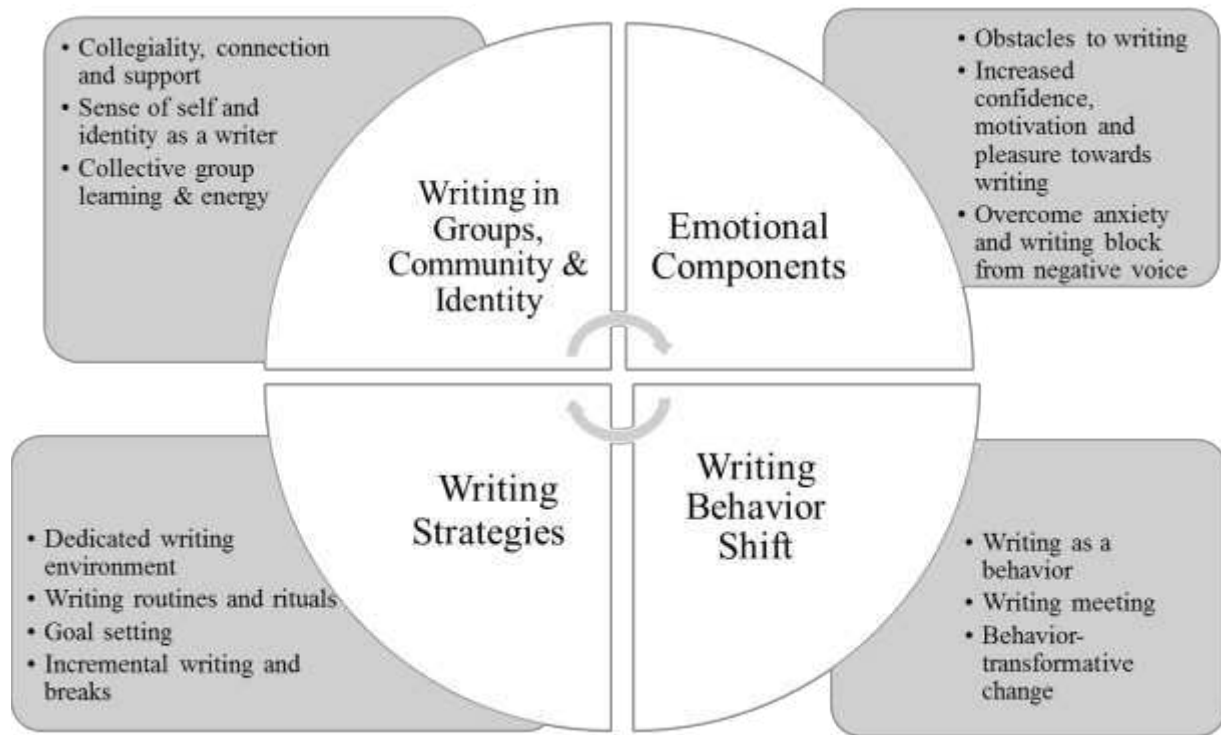


Figure 2.1. Four areas of academic writing retreats.

The empirical literature selected and reviewed for this study maintained a focus of academic writing retreats; whereas, literature that focused on academic writing interventions to increase writing output, such as writing groups, was not selected. The literature mostly represented faculty writing retreats, in addition to one study of PhD students and two studies in clinical settings with an outcome to be published. Every article had a goal to increase writing output with the intent to be published. The students had a goal to complete their dissertation or a chapter of their dissertation. All of the retreats resulted in meeting the increased productivity and

writing output, and some even achieved more than their intended writing goal. Even with all positive productive writing results, Grant (2006) experienced feedback that retreats are considered irresponsible and an escape from responsibilities, particularly noted were an escape for women faculty from domestic responsibilities (Moore, Murphy, & Murray, 2010). Although, the focus of this study was not on women and academic role, this topic is discussed in this literature review. The next section provides the four areas that impact productive writing retreats.

Writing in Groups, Community, and Identity

Identity as a writer. Identity as a writer was recognized as a positive result of writing retreats with Grant (2000; 2006) using a deeper term stating writers identify with their sense of self. Writing identity perceptions formed as early as grade school; as an illustration, students limited themselves to their grades and feedback, and then a sense of self was formed. Participants feedback on sense of self at one of the retreats was explained as, “having something worthwhile to say” (Grant, 2006, p. 490). Having an identity as a writer is not mentioned much in graduate school; although, one’s identity as a writer has an influence on writing confidence and motivation (Grant, 2000). Those who wrote regularly identified with being a writer (Grant, 2000); therefore, active writing, which occurs at writing retreats, provides an opportunity for participants to have a change in perception and see themselves as a writer. Interestingly, those who struggled to perceive writing habits continuing after the retreat, did not relate to being a writer (Murray & Newton, 2009). This showed actual writing is what identifies someone as a writer which is cultivated at retreats. Not everyone had their new writing strategies in place after one retreat, especially if the retreat was for a weekend. Farr et al. (2009) and Petrova and Coughlin (2012) referred to the identity of a scholar or academic and the profound change that

took place at the retreat when one changed their paradigm as a writer; it was acquired not only through writing but also the interactions, thinking, and reflecting.

Identity or the roles we hold for ourselves can be rewarding or belittling. An identity as a writer tends to be a rewarding one, possibly even captivating, such as a speaker. Interestingly, Ivanic (2004) compared academic writing to those of the artist because writers decide how to integrate a word or an idea, and Ezar (2016) agreed with Ivanic (2004) and went further to explain writers were involved in a process of personal experiences which showed up in their writing identity (Ezar, 2016). Academe supported identity by creating a culture of writing through retreats (Girardeau, 2014). Being comfortable with all of the roles with writing led to satisfaction, creativity, and accomplishment, and when made aware of this gap in sense of self, deep scholarly transformational shifts occurred (Grant, 2000).

A significant indicator that writing retreats are productive is the interest in attending other retreats. Participants expressed on the evaluation that they had interest in wanting continued use of the writing intervention of attending writing retreats as a way to keep their writing productive (Grant, 2000; Grant, 2006; Petrova & Coughlin, 2009; Singh, 2012). Participants from the other studies may have had an interest in attending additional retreats, yet it was not asked of them or was not captured as significant research for the study (Cable, Boyer, Colbert, & Boyer, 2013; Oermann, Nicoll, & Block, 2014; Swaggerty, Atkinson, Faulconer, & Griffith, 2011). Attending just one retreat was a great way to be introduced to the strategies and intervention; admittedly, it may not be long enough for sustainable writing results. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, participants reported that it was sustainable after the retreats; although, Moore (2003) expounded that longer term evaluation of this claim needs to be investigated further.

Collegiate connection and support. Those in academe are expected to be strong scholarly writers, as in any profession; however, having an awareness of engaging deeper with writing or developing further in writing skills is important. To improve scholarly writing, one needs to write (Goodson, 2016). Casey, Barron, & Gordon (2013) and Garside et al. (2015) found writing retreats were a desirable place to understand writing challenges as the retreats established an environment where learning was acceptable. This was reinforced through providing collegiate support provided by peers for faculty or senior staff for junior faculty and advisors for graduate students; moreover, some retreats had coaches or utilized the facilitator as a coach to engender the support (Farr et al, 2009; Garside et al, 2015). Receiving feedback from peers may be a new experience for academics and brings upon fears of criticism from others; Petrova and Coughlin (2012) ensured the retreat participants' feedback was constructive and the benefits from the feedback provided was acknowledgment through being part of a collegiate group and their contributions supported the community in their writing.

Some retreats did not provide time on the agenda to review others' work, but the retreat provided time for small group discussion on fears, struggles, and blocks for writing which was reported to provide as a sense of connectedness, support, and comfort (Casey et al., 2013).

Collective group learning and energy, social writing. Writing in groups or social writing is represented frequently in the literature: It was represented through giving and receiving peer feedback and groups discussion from presentations. To explore the writing group phenomena, the research on collective groups was fitting as it referred to group learning, wisdom, and energy. The literature also referred to an energy, flow, and buzz that occurred when writing in groups. Murray (2014c) referred to this as a collective discipline. Writing retreats participants in the research conducted by Garside et al. (2015) explained the impact of writing in

groups created an energy or buzz and a feeling of being-in-the-zone as everyone is writing, and as a result, it fed on the feeling to continue writing. Casey et al. (2013) had similar feedback from the participants in their research stating the collective group energy resulted in motivation to write more by being collectively engaged in writing activities with participants experiencing similar challenges. This collective group had an “alchemy” effect (Casey et al., 2013, p. 10411), transforming a basic writing experience into writing of greater value or productivity, hence, creating an environment of trust and commitment to the writing process. Lastly, Murray (2014c) referred to group writing as a collective energy which led to focused writing. Participant feedback in Murray’s study (2014c) stated that this group presence was felt with even one additional person in the room; however, Murray (2014c) also expounded that if participants did not follow the group writing structure, it was distracting.

Another collective, group or social outcome of writing retreats is learning. Different from the traditional way of solitude writing, collaborative group writing supported faster learning of writing approaches and encouraged awareness of writing challenges (Moore, 2003). To explore this further, perhaps, writing in groups created a shared purpose—connection or collective consciousness (Jackson, 2008). In Backe’s (2008) book, *The Living Classroom: Teaching and Collective Consciousness*, Backe explained the phenomena of the collective consciousness that occurred within a classroom. This collective consciousness, which referred to as unintended, cognitive resonances between people, created a learning environment or transformation as the group takes on shared beliefs and goals; this prompted action, such as productive writing in this case of this research. Levi (2003) studied collective resonance, and Levi’s (2003) dissertation defined it as “a felt sense of energy, rhythm, or intuitive knowing that occurs in a group of human beings that positively influences the way they interact toward a common purpose” (p. 2);

meaning, the groups produced an energy or rhythm that had a positive influence, which was important for writing productivity. Collective resonance was referred to in Levi's dissertation as flow experiences or a collective flow, which related to the current research on writing retreats as participants felt their writing flowed during the structured group writing sessions (Moore, 2003; Moore, 2010; Singh, 2012), once again adding to the reinforcement to use group writing for productivity. Levi chose the wording "collective resonance" from the research, although Levi described the phenomenon of "collective" as interrelated with other concepts such as collective intelligence and collective wisdom. The research on collective group work viewed as energies or synergies is understudied in the literature; the phenomenon assists to describe what is transpiring in group structured writing sessions.

Emotional Components and Common Obstacles to Writing

Common obstacles to writing. Competing responsibilities impact prioritizing writing in academe. The common writing obstacle was workload: the challenge of an increasing workload with responsibilities, such as teaching, advising, committee members' roles, and administrative duties (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009). PhD students study found heavy workloads as their barrier as well due to their teaching and research responsibilities (Singh, 2012). In healthcare, the students had added responsibilities in their clinical care in addition to their academic responsibilities (Oermann et al., 2014). The literature expounded that writing retreats brought upon a positive discussion of participants stating they do not have time to write versus perception of available time to write (Cable et al., 2013).

Emotional components. In addition, role responsibilities and emotional components are a common barrier to writing, such as fear of rejection from publication which causes low confidence. Moore (2003) went further to state a major reason why writing projects did not even

get started was due to a lack of confidence. Moore (2003) and Moore et al. (2010) learned in the writing retreats that some participants stopped writing after a devastating writing critique or feedback experience. Dickson-Swift et al. (2009) further added to this claim that journals have a rejection rate of 65%; although, the literature on writing retreats found that the peer community, support, and feedback along with participants meeting their actual writing goals resulted in an increase in confidence (Murray & Newton, 2009). Grant & Knowles (2000) found women particularly experienced self-doubt as they struggled with academe's competitive individualized culture; however, having the opportunity to discuss these common struggles experienced amongst academe women was a positive retreat design outcome. The collaborative culture and opportunity for open discussion of work suggested retreats may be more appealing for women (Moore et al., 2010), although, having an increase in academic writing output was desirable to all genders.

Fear of rejection and low confidence in academic writing are joined by anxiety as a common emotional barrier to writing, (Cable et al., 2013; Grant, 2006, Grant & Knowles, 2000). Anxiety reduced the desire to write, negatively impacted motivation, and led to writing blocks (Sword, 2017). Writing retreats not only showed positive results to writing productivity in every one of the studies, but the participants also experienced incremental uninterrupted writing as a means to manage these primary challenges: increased workload, lack of available time, and support for the emotive components (Kornhaber et al., 2016). Some participants stated potential drawbacks of the retreats in their evaluations. The retreats were too intensive and questioned if the strategies and interventions introduced during the retreats could last and transfer to the work environment after the retreats concluded (Moore, et al., 2010). Discussion on the sustained writing habits after the writing retreats are addressed later in this chapter.

Confidence, motivation, pleasure, or joy towards writing. Writing retreats resulted to improve confidence and reduced anxiety; furthermore, another paradigm introduced was participants experienced joy or pleasure in their writing again. The structured retreat format left participants not only with successfully meeting their writing goals, the environment of solely focusing on writing without interruption allowed for a flow in creativity (Singh, 2012). This led to writing being connected to joyful moments that created “deep emotional attachment to academic work” (Kern, Hawkins, Al-Hindi, & Moss, 2014, p. 835). To achieve joy, academic writers moved toward writing spaces which resulted in support, motivation, and confidence, while reducing negative emotions from their unproductive, unstructured writing strategies and environments.

Kerna et al. (2014) found joy could be also be connected with place or space of writing, since recent research showed that location could contribute to the fact that in some spaces individuals tended to experience more joyful moments in the academic writing. For example, people who work off campus at a home office tended to feel more joy. Additionally, joy in academic writing was not necessarily only connected to the writing but also to the writing environment and individuals who were seeking a similar purpose for writing (Murray, 2014c). Considering this, writing retreats offer writing places area away from an individual’s typical work space either off site or on site.

Writing Strategies

A common barrier to writing was available time or perception of time available. All of the writing retreat studies resulted in productive writing, while many of them went on further to identify the writing productivity continued after the retreat (Farr et al., 2009; Murray & Newton 2009; Petrova & Coughlin, 2012; Oermann et al., 2014). Learning writing strategies or

interventions was one of the top reasons why participants felt the retreats were productive. The main strategies of a writing retreat were the structured uninterrupted incremental or block writing time, establishing an outline or goals for the day or sessions, taking regular breaks, and building collegiality in group discussion (Moore, 2003; Petrova and Coughlin, 2009). Murray and Newton's (2009) writing retreats were different from other studies in the literature because not only did they provide an agenda with established times and space, they went further to include how they used the structured time each day, which is discussed next.

Dedicated writing environment. The strategies Murray and Newton (2009) found important were writing as a group in one room and writing in progress with peer reviews—discussions. Writing together in one room lent itself to brief discussions with a partner or group on the writing goal of the sessions or day which reported as helping to keep the writing session remain focused. Additionally, the reflection at the end of the writing sessions, referred to as writing in progress, provided immediate feedback with ability to incorporate revisions immediately; participants noted this practice developed persistence in their writing (Murray and Newton, 2009). Writing together in one room is a unique aspect of the retreats which is discussed further in the writing in groups section.

Writing rituals

Writing rituals are also recognized to support strategies during the uninterrupted dedicated writing time. Some were very specific rituals, such as sitting in different places or seats for writing versus editing (Wyche-Smith, 1993); whereas, some include listening to music or targeted breaks, such as a short walk or getting a fresh cup of coffee. Along the same lines, participants stated the actual approach to their dedicated structured writing time became the ritual (Sword, 2017). Writing retreats many times attracts the same participants due to the

productive amount of writing and collegiate connections; therefore, another favorable writing ritual is writing in the presence with the same people who are similarly dedicated to their writing (Murray, 2014c).

Goals setting. There is plenty of research on the effectiveness of goal setting; although, goals can be easily overlooked because a common goal is the date the writing project is completed. What was different with writing retreats was not only was a goal set for the retreat, but goals were also set for each writing session. During each writing session, time to identify which tasks were most productive took place, suggesting there were certain times when a writer's focus and energy is strongest so the actual writing time should take place during that time (Jensen, 2014). For example, if mid-morning from 10 am-12 pm is one's highest energy, during the writing retreats, the session scheduled during that time would be for writing and the session goal after lunch would be for editing. Outside of a retreat, it may not be applicable with one's schedule, but this works well if planning to write on a day off. This kind of goal setting is important to writing productivity during a writing retreat and will be explained in greater detail in the retreat design practices section.

Incremental writing and breaks. Requiring regular time for breaks may appear unproductive on the surface; however, Kern et al. (2014) stated taking breaks that included movement of the body could bring about positive feelings. "By exercising the movement of the body, trainees feel better about themselves and have more self-confidence in their performances" (Kern et al., 2014, p. 838). Therefore, incorporating movement during breaks led to feelings of self-confidence, which subsequently led to the feeling of competence and productive writing. Incremental writing or bulk writing was the main strategy of the writing retreat as it established the majority of the agenda. Incremental writing was the expectation, everyone in the group had a

commitment to write which eliminated procrastination, and lastly participants knew to expect writing breaks with activities and group discussion enhancing the collegiality and community of scholars (Farr et al., 2009).

Additionally, Grant's (2006) study on writing routines, rituals, and strategies not only added to productive writing but also to pleasurable writing by expounding on establishing regular writing times and routines with breaks. This not only saves time but reduces anxiety because writers know when writing is taking place on a regular basis. All of these strategies led to writing productivity, and similarly, Goodson (2016) recommended a strategy to write quickly and edit slowly. The brain requires two different approaches to writing and editing but this can be more difficult to work on simultaneously when different levels of focus are needed (Elbow, 1998). Writing is a generation of ideas, which is more creative, and editing is an analytical detailed process. Writing retreats support this separation of tasks because the writing sessions were typically 90 minutes to two hours long a few times a day; the key to writing quickly was conducting research and preparing what to write prior to the retreat (Farr et al., 2009).

Writing Behavior Shift

While there are many factors and reasons for this increase in writing productivity, such as preparation prior to the retreat, uninterrupted time at the retreat, and the structured writing sessions, it is important to first understand productivity and how it relates to academic writing. The word productivity can be grouped with performance, goal setting, and actions, which are all important. What is different in this study is academic writing productivity requires an actual change—particularly a behavior change.

Writing as a behavior. Murray (2014b) referred to writing as a behavior, and to improve habits or skills, it required a change. There was a plethora of literature on change such as

organizational change, transition change as between jobs and developmental change as in a professional development plan. Writing change fell under behavior change models where a change is wanted, but the actual behaviors are not in line with the goal of the change, such as in those struggling to lose weight. There is a similarity of challenges with weight loss and writing. Both require exercises, either physical or mental, creating time and preparation of food or writing thoughts. Murray summarized productivity for academic writing as “raising unconscious processes to a conscious level provides clarity in thinking about writing, and this facilitates writing” (p. 104). This may not have much meaning to someone who has not experienced this shift; although, one can have an unconscious to conscious level experience about productive writing at a writing retreat.

Murray (2014b) developed a behavior change approach to help writers manage competing tasks and create time for writing by using motivational interviewing (MI). MI is often referred to as cognitive behavior therapy, which occurs when the practitioner is correcting limiting belief systems (Miller & Rollnick, 2009); however, MI is essentially a counseling method which can be viewed more similar to coaching practices of guiding individuals to support their motivation for change through collaboration and possibilities. Cox, Bachkirova and Clutterbuck (2014) referred to MI for health related coaching in *The Complete Handbook of Coaching* as a modifying cognitive behavior technique called cognitive behavior coaching (CBC) to engage, motivate, and set goals. To summarize, MI is best suited for individuals who are considering a change and access one’s internal motivation by reframing or experiencing his or her current situation with a new situation of possibilities and actions (Zuckoff, 2015).

In a study using MI to adhere to behavior change for weight loss (Smith, Heckemeyer, Kratt & Mason, 1997), the reasons to change actions for loss weight were not discussed, instead

the participants were asked a series of open-ended questions in regards to what they wanted and asked to reflect on their responses. The participants were also asked to identify their concerns, while the interviewer supported their awareness for the reason a change is needed. As a result, adding MI for behavior change resulted in adherence to the recommendations of the program (Smith et al., 1997); therefore, MI associates well with coaching techniques because focusing on changing behavior is more than educational. Additionally, MI is serving when the newly learned behavior is experienced, offered time for reflection, addressed concerns and provided feedback (Zuckoff, 2015), which is similar to coaching.

Writing retreats are an ideal environment to create this behavior change because retreats provide an opportunity for participants to experience the new writing behaviors or strategies. Murray (2014b) research referred to writing retreats as “writing meetings,” and in Murray et al.’s (2008) earlier research, “writing consultations.” The writing meeting provided a framework to identify writing derailments and align against writing goals and worked best with those who were faced with the need to change or upgrade their current approach to writing (Murray, 2014b).

Understanding one’s actions or behaviors is significant when writing is to be prioritized. Murray et al. (2008) found that having more time to write does not necessarily equate to prioritized and productive writing. Boice (1987) studied academic writing productivity over three decades ago and expressed the impact of writing behaviors for academics such as establishing writing routines, writing goals, and writing support results in productive writing outcomes. MI was designed to address two focuses: This change is important and the individual is confident to make the change (Zuckoff, 2015). Likewise, Murray et al. (2008) stated in their study how academic writers needed to explore their beliefs on the importance of writing, such as to be

published and their ability to change their writing habits, regardless of their perceived available time.

Writing meeting and behavioral-transformative change. Murray et al.'s (2008) writing meeting (Table 2.1), adapted from the MI technique called exercise consultation, was constructed to be used amongst two peers: with a writing coach or with a retreat facilitator. If used with a peer, one acts as the consultant conducting the interview and one is the writer receiving the consultation; then they switch roles.

Table 2.1: *Writing Meeting Steps*

Step	Addresses	Mechanism
One	Stage of change	The stages of change: preparation, action or maintenance.
Two	Values and beliefs	Benefits and drawback of prioritizing writing, and the significance of their stage of change in relation to their values and beliefs.
Three	Strategies to overcome unproductive writing	Identify barriers and strategies to overcome the barriers.
Four	Writing session goals and long-term goals	Set goals in relation to their stage of writing readiness, values, and beliefs.
Five	Address potential writing conflicts	What are the high-risk areas that can overturn writing priorities and options to overcome them.
Six	Prepare action plan	Moving goals into actions. This part is completed by the writer; whereas, the other section is completed by the consultant.

The writing meeting can increase writing productivity as it engages individuals to understand what their writing habits are currently, while opening possibilities for change by addressing the obstacles or perceived obstacles towards the change and establishing achievable actions. Behavior change research suggests that it is common to lapse and relapse through different stages of change; therefore, attending more than one retreat and also repeating the

writing consultation to achieve a behavior transformation is optimal (Murray et al., 2008). Game (1991) summarized the effects of behavior change in writing by referring to change that is a way of being or way of becoming and results in a sustained change or transformation; therefore, if writing becomes part of one's routine, lifestyle, or way of being, a transformation has occurred (Grant and Knowles, 2000).

Theories and Phenomena for Group Writing

This section addresses theories and phenomena that are applicable for writing retreats with two referred to in scholarly journal and books: containment theory and community of practice. This section also expounds on two phenomena with academic writing retreats; indeed, both have impact on productive group writing: collective wisdom and feminist traditions. Although feminist traditions fall under feminist theory, for purposes of this research it is referenced lightly in the literature under feminist traditions, and therefore discussed in this section as a phenomenon.

Containment Theory

Writing retreats are an effective strategy to manage writing time as well as to bring joy, confidence, and collegiality as an academic writing group; additionally, writing retreats positively influence writing productivity and perception of one's self as a writer. Since writing as well as publishing are two of the most important skills in academe, the focus on productive writing is not to be ignored and writing retreat studies show positive results; although, the literature had limited research on theories related to writing retreats or group writing. Murray's (2014b) book, *Writing in Social Spaces: A Social Process Approach to Academic Writing* noted two theories, containment theory and community of practice theory. Both aimed to explain the effect and influence of writing retreats or writing in groups on individuals and groups.

Containment theory in relation to academic writing retreats was primarily based on the notion that writing retreats adopted features of containment. Murray (2014b) explained in relation to writing retreats, “containment is about the processes that enables people to manage (contain) unmanageable (uncontainable) thoughts, feelings and experiences” (p. 104). This fits with writing productivity because the intent is to move from anxiety and procrastination to motivating, incremental productive writing. Containment theory in relation to writing retreats offered three basic principles (Murray, 2014b); first, writing retreats provided an environment where writing is the primary focus. If writing was not the focus, possibilities of productive writing was limited. Secondly, the writing environment provided structure to enhance productive behaviors. This included strategies such as bulk writing times, writing in group spaces and scheduled group discussions to reduce procrastination and stagnated actions. Thirdly, writing retreats contained feelings of writing-related anxiety. Writing-related anxiety was a common challenge leading to stalled writing or writer’s blocks, which made it difficult to concentrate on writing. Overall, containment theory offers an explanation why these elements are important for successful writing retreats and how such a forum could influence the writing process.

One of the most important components of the containment theory is holistic containment which requires a defined primary task. Murray (2014b) explained that if a key task was clearly stated, not only was it easier to focus, it provided meaning and satisfaction when performing it; consequently, if the task was not clear, feelings of anxiety and confusion took over. In an academic career there are usually numerous competing tasks and academics know writing is an important piece of the profession (Casey et al., 2013), so if writing is not identified as a primary task, it can lead to anxiety. Making writing a primary task does not indicate that other tasks be neglected; however, writing can be a primary task for the certain period of time.

When writing was not a primary task, Murray (2014b) found, “containment theory explains why individuals find it so difficult—often impossible—to privilege writing over other professional roles and tasks” (p. 107). Writing-related anxiety, also referred to as writer’s block or failure to achieve writing goals, presented itself as a lack of time for writing. This anxiety may be accompanied by shame and perfectionism about writing, leading to feelings of guilt, fear, and dread (Murray, 2014b). In the situation of anxiety, or other emotional components, writing retreats focused significant time on writing; therefore, writing-related anxiety could be suppressed through containment. In summary, containment theory can be used to support, explain, and address problems connected to writing; and, structured writing retreats offer a place where writing can be contained and productive.

Community of Practice Theory

The Communities of Practice (CoP) theory explains how when people engage in shared processing of a similar issue or challenge, they can address the issue or move past the challenge through interactions (Wenger, 2011). This theory supports what occurred at writing retreats, as the students were aware that other retreat participants were in similar writing situations and they were motivated to write through group discussions.

In researching writing retreats, Murray (2014b) found CoP to be a significant phenomenon in social writing and based it on three components: mutuality of engagement, identity of participation, and legitimate peripheral participation. The concept of mutuality of engagement occurred when participants who were engaged in writing retreats were giving and receiving feedback on each other’s writing. The second component, identity of participation, was derived from mutual engagement and aimed to “develop an identity as a writer” (Murray, 2014b, p. 62). The third element, legitimate peripheral participation, means “experiencing the legitimacy

of writing and legitimizing the self as writer” (Murray, 2014b, p. 62). Writing in groups was a crucial element of writing retreats (Gardside et al., 2015; Herman, Abate, & Walker, 2013), and, from the position of CoP theory, group engagement was where learning occurred and was experienced. This led to support for the ideas of “identity as a writer” and “privileging the writing.” Regardless of the fact that participants could potentially already be skilled writers, at structured writing retreats they could learn new practices and “they learn that the key mechanism of this is the presence of and interactions with other writers” (Murray, 2014b, p. 63). Indeed, a writing retreat participant may not be new to writing; however, what may be new to their writing practice is using writing strategies, writing peer feedback, or identifying themselves as writers. Murray (2014b) reported that writing retreat participants have described that they are still learners of writing.

Graduate writing retreats are a community of practice, and this is supported by Wenger’s (2000) three key elements for a community of practice to exist. First, the group or members of the community are joined together by their understanding of the community and contributions to it. Secondly, the community builds through interactions and engagement. Finally, the group follows a shared way to approach something and the community learns from the social support. Graduate writing retreats demonstrate these three elements. The group was formed because students identified a desire for productive writing and a definitive need to write. The group developed a sense of community from the interactions, experienced commonality through their writing challenges, and they then expressed that they learned new writing strategies and behaviors that led to productive writing.

Wenger (2000) described the phenomena of when new members join a community and want to be part of the community as inward trajectories. The new member wants to identify with

the group and participate even though their initial participation may be limited while learning group norms and expectations. As the new member experiences the group, they establish an interest in membership because the group shares similar challenges or expectations. This is beneficial to recognize regarding graduate writing retreats because retreat participants have expressed that their productive writing was a direct result of being part of a community of likeminded people with similar challenges. Along the same lines, participants stated that when they learned they were not the only ones with struggles, they were motivated to write. Additionally, group members provided support and shared what they had previously learned. This openness and communication created a feeling of comfort for new retreat participants by becoming a more involved member of the community.

Writing retreats in relation to CoP theory are not primarily focused on output of publication and completion, but directed at organizing writing time in a new way, dedicating time to writing, structuring the writing day or session, legitimizing writing as part of a role, and building collegiate relationships to support writing. Writing retreats not only address writing, but also address emotions, time-management, writers' identity, and even reading of academic literature that impacts writing. As Murray (2014b) explained, participants of the writing retreats “make more space for reading and focus their reading towards specific writing projects” (p. 65), which results in writing productivity and outputs.

Smith (2003) expounded that learning is in the relationships between people in CoP theory; therefore, when using writing retreats as the subject, group writing could be productive because of the group relationships that develop. Kent et al. (2017) and Snyder & Wenger (2010) agreed with Smith (2003) and proceeded to further describe the social community that develops at the retreat as a significant influence on transforming and improving writing practice.

The research conducted in this study explains how the community of peers formed at the retreats was focused on similar goals and writing output, which then resulted in writing productivity. This outcome fully supported CoP as the theoretical framework for graduate writing retreats. Containment theory also supports this theoretical framework for graduate writing retreats due to the fact that structured environment and writing were the primary foci; in this case, the sense of community demonstrated and acknowledged by graduate students was pronounced.

In the research Murray (2014b) collected on faculty writing retreats, the collegiate relationships built were integral, and this phenomenon was acknowledged in the theoretical framework under Communities of Practice. However, the relationships built at the faculty retreats were described as a chance to network and meet colleagues. The distinction of graduate student retreats was that the relationships built and the process of becoming a part or member of a community was considered to be essential to the outcome of productive writing and will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Collective Wisdom

Collective wisdom has significance mentioning with the phenomenon of social writing in academic writing retreats. Collective wisdom occurred in group activities and group learning and may be referred to as group dynamics, which does have some similarities. Group dynamics is the study of the behavior of groups, especially group decision making activities such as deciding on the retreat ground rules (Forsyth, 2009). Collective wisdom was described as a group of individuals who came together for a circumstance. Learning may occur, but with the intent that something better will be produced through a communicative exchange and interactions (Briskin & Erickson, 2009; Forsyth, 2009). In addition, group dynamics is referred to in organizational

dynamics and organization culture where collective wisdom may be referred to learning situations (Briskin & Erickson, 2009).

Collective wisdom was aligned with transformation; a change in thinking and behavior with focus on deep listening and reflection, untapped creativity and ultimately a newly found understanding (Briskin & Erickson, 2009). To further support the importance of the collective wisdom of a group, Ainsworth (2010) expounded that the outcome of a group activity, or retreat in this case, was impacted by the contributions of the participants. Collective wisdom was dependent on thoughtful conversations (Ainsworth, 2010); therefore, the ability to tap into deep listening, thinking, and reflection can shape the group discussion, in addition to the outcome.

Collective intelligence was used interchangeably with collective wisdom (Surowiecki, 2004), although, they are not the same. Briskin & Erickson (2009) explained that the word wisdom is different from intelligence: “Wisdom implies thoughtfulness, an ability to deeply reflect on personal experiences or identity, with a capacity for applying discretion and intuitive understanding” (p. 8). Intelligence is associated more with mental capacity or an approach which may not support reflective activities. Collective wisdom also had similar concepts with collaborative learning applied with the peer reviews. Even though collective wisdom was not associated with writing retreats in the literature, it had the concepts to explain how group activities, such as peer review support and writing in groups. This supports the collective wisdoms phenome that better products are produced with a group being that writing output is the outcome of writing retreats.

Feminist Traditions

The second notable phenomenon, feminist traditions, has significance with academic writing retreats and favoring feminist traditions; although, it remains lightly addressed in the

literature. Perhaps studies have not recorded the imbalance. Moore et al. (2010) suggested that it is the norm of having more women than men attend writing retreats. Some retreats were only offered include to women (Grant & Knowles; 2000; Grant, 2006). It was presented that women still struggle with the male focused culture in academia careers; therefore, having time with just women aided in the group cohesiveness to discuss common collegiate challenges and identity with being a writer (Grant & Knowles, 2000). In addition, what has not been addressed in the literature is the retreat completion rate of men compared to women.

Overall, it could be noted that both community of practice theory and containment theory were aimed to solve writing-related problems. In the case of containment theory, it was mainly aimed to consider the negative emotions connected to writing, such as anxiety, procrastination, and problems with time-management. While community of practice theory was mostly directed to development of writer's self-perception and privilege the act of writing. Along the same lines, collective wisdom and feminist traditions supported the phenomena of writing in groups; whereas, collective wisdom pointed out the group energy or flow the participants stated occurred when writing together and feminist traditions brought out energy flow of motivation as the group felt supported by peers experiencing a similar deduction.

Academic Writing Retreat Design Practices

The four parts that make up retreats are writing strategies, behavior shifts, writing in groups, community and identity, and emotional components. All are equally important, in the same way the actual design is significant to the success of the retreat. The design practices included three stages: planning the actual retreat, creating the event agenda, and closing out the retreat post-retreat (Petrova & Coughlin, 2012). The following provides a summary of each step in each design stage with a visual representation.

Planning						
Logistics (dates, times, meals, length, location, size, facilitator, advertise)	Purpose- Outcome of Retreat	Target Group for Retreat	Funding- Cost (University and Participant)	Participants Apply	Participant Selection	Pre-Work, Goals, Meeting Prior to Retreat

Figure 2.2. Planning stage for writing retreats.

Planning

The first step is planning the actual event and an overview is provided in Figure 2.2. Singh (2012) created an adaptable model for writing retreats that supports planning and emphasizes these important decisions. Planning a writing retreat started with the size of the group, the location of the retreat including if it is off campus or on-campus, sleep accommodation if it is an overnight event, the length, dates and times of the event, and meals included (Singh, 2012). The literature favored holding retreats from two days to five days. The two-day or two and a half day retreats were typically over a weekend; whereas, three days or more days were during the week (Casey et al., 201; Kornhaber et al., 2016). Grant (2008) expounded that the two-day retreats made it difficult to fully settle into the writing as participants are just into the flow; hence, between three to five days was recommended with five days being ideal. After the logistical aspects were completed, the communication and email would be prepared and shared as appropriate to the target group.

Other planning aspects included the purpose and outcomes of the retreat. The purpose was specific to an interest or need, such as article writing or graduate thesis-dissertation writing,

and the anticipated outcomes were related to goals, such as publication, chapter for a dissertation, or grant submittal (Singh, 2012). Grant (2008) agreed with Singh (2012) and went further to publish a facilitator's guide specifically for academic writing retreats; for example, the retreat target group could be opened to other forums, such as mixed universities, mixed gender, and education-position level. If these forums were applied, Grant (2008) stated that the ground rules needed to clearly address a shared culture of confidentiality, just as all retreats would have confidentiality in their ground rules. Grant (2008) recommended limiting the size of the group in comparison to the experience of the facilitator and more than twelve participants in a group with an experienced facilitator can be challenging because the level of commitment and intimacy gets lost.

There are a few other important considerations for the planning stage of the writing retreat; first, if the participant interest outnumbered the available spaces. Farr et al. (2009), Herman et al. (2013) and Oermann et al. (2014) required an application process, but the specifics of the application were not provided. Grant (2008) recommended using well thought-through retreat goals for attendance selection while Moore (2003) followed a first-come basis and Herman et al. (2013) applied a random number generator. For those who were not selected, they were placed on a waiting list (Herman et al., 2013).

Farr et al. (2009) had a unique situation due to the high interest as a result of the ongoing support the university provided towards retreat writing. This was validated being that the retreats had been in existence for nine years. Farr et al. (2009) expounded saying, writing retreats "has been the primary stimulus for change" (p. 16) in regards to productive publishing, likely explaining why they had more participants versus retreat slots. Funding is an important piece to planning a retreat and it was not divulged in the studies; although, Farr et al. (2009) shared they

have a sponsoring Dean who funds them and the participants were required to pay a small fee that was nonrefundable. This fee respects the investment of the retreat and prevents last minute cancellations. Girardeau (2014) urged to not let limited funding derail writing retreats as there are other options, such as using regional campuses nearby, hosting a dinner at a home, or covering just one meal. Casey et al. (2013) supported Girardeau (2014) as their study chose to hold a three-day writing retreat for faculty on-site with much success.

Participant pre-work and preparation for the retreat would to be decided in the planning stage. At minimum, goals should be established before the retreat; Grant (2008) recommended having the participants send their goals to the facilitator prior to the event. Some retreats required the participants to meet with the facilitator to review goals as the preparation (Singh, 2012). In addition to setting retreat goals, Petrova and Coughlin (2012) met with participants to understand their writing confidence and commitment as well as any other writing challenges; consequently, topics may be added to the agenda as a workshop or special material. In summary, what was essential for the participant preparation phase was that participants come prepared to write (Dickson-Swift et al., 2008); therefore, the need to conduct and review research prior to the retreat was most important for productive writing. Grant (2008) recommended the writing group or participants individually meet with the facilitator four weeks prior to the retreat, where Cable et al. (2013) paired junior faculty with senior faculty and suggested they meet two months prior to prepare. The pre-retreat activities were integral to the retreat success because being prepared to show up and write resulted in productive writing.

The Agenda

Opening the Retreat (introduction, facilitator role, ground rules, review agenda items and times)	Writing Warm Up	Bulk Writing	Group Activities (Presentation & Workshops)	Facilitator Support, Coaching	Writing Strategies (Incremental, planning, A-B Time, outline and goals, sustain new habits)	Closing the Retreat (achievement, ceremony/ gifts, evaluations)
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Figure 2.3. Creating the agenda for writing retreats.

Creating the Agenda

The second phase, creating the event agenda (Figure 2.3), establishes how the actual time will be dedicated each day, which consists of: opening the retreat, closing out each day, meal and break times, presentation and workshop items, group activities and most important, uninterrupted block writing time. The initial meeting or opening meeting of the retreat set the stage for the writing environment; it addressed any questions or concerns participants had and included introductions; the participants provided a brief description of their retreat goals (Herman et al., 2013). For graduate students, the introduction would also include writing challenges (Garside et al., 2015). Next, the facilitator explained their role, reviewed the agenda, and established the ground rules with group input. The ground rules should not be skipped as it supported the group cohesiveness through participant agreements such as the start and stop times, silence space, confidentiality, participation in group activities, and peer support (Grant, 2008).

Some retreats also included a writing warm up to get started with the comfort of writing easily, also referred to as fast writing (Grant, 2008), spontaneous writing (Boice, 1990) or free writing (Elbow & Sorcinelli, 2006). This timed writing assignment is meant to be free of an academic voice and used as an idea generator for starting a writing project. Researchers suggested writing by hand and discussing the prompt warm up and experience with a partner. Girardeau (2014) started their retreat with fifteen minutes of free writing on any topic to get ideas flowing and to separate the writing process from the editing process, and they concluded the activity with a debrief; whereas, Grant (2008) provided a topic related to the writing project such as, “take five minutes to brainstorm all ideas in relation to the writing topic” (p.15) and debriefed in pairs. For graduate students, a free writing exercise can be identifying as a writer or their goals for the retreat; this timed exercise was important because it introduced the practice of using block writing sessions (Murray & Newton, 2009).

Organizing the retreat agenda to include time for group writing provided a productive positive experience. Sharing space to write was viewed as a motivating factor (Garside et al., 2015; Herman et al., 2013) as a community of writers started to develop. Similarly, Casey et al., (2013) had participants request to write together in the same room and expound that writing in the presence of others led to high productivity, as well as a collegial supportive environment. Petrova and Coughlin (2012) agree with Herman et al. (2013) and Casey et al., further stating, writing in the company of others brought joy to writing; although, they also acknowledged those who declined group writing and preferred to write in solitude at the retreat can be motivated just by visually seeing others writing. Writing in large groups can be inspiring. Farr et al. (2009) stated they were surprised how productive writing with others was; however, they also included time for those who wanted to write in solitude.

Depending on the length of the retreat determined how much time was available for presentations and group activities, such as peer writing shares or peer editing (Grant, 2008). Workshops or targeted presentations complimented the pursuit of writing while providing relatable educational and learning activities; some common topics offered at academic writing retreats are journal publication, book proposals, grant writing or topics for graduate students, such as finding your academic voice (Grant, 2008). Faculty writing retreats had the added advantage of utilizing retreat participants as speakers or presenters, as they are scholars of many academe topics. As for graduate retreats, topics for guest speakers and presentations were selected by taking into consideration the writing challenges mentioned in the application process (Grant, 2008). The workshops or presentations was also used to continue to build on the collegiate relationships through incorporating group discussions and exercises (Grant, 2008).

There are many options for group activities during the writing retreat and the literature has shown them effective for learning and collegiate support. Petrova and Coughlin (2012) found that peer feedback process was not only an important part of an academic community, but it also played a role in the development and identify of being a writer by receiving constructive feedback from peers. Girardeau (2014) agreed with Petrova and Coughlin (2012) and expounded further that the group activities and discussions assisted to develop the collaboration with peers experiencing similar challenges. Swaggerty et al. (2001) used group editing sessions to provide feedback and enhance collaboration while celebrating writing achievements. Similarly, Grant and Knowles (2000) heard from their participants that the critical feedback and appraisal of each other's work added richness to the experience. Murray and Newton (2009) added further that the value of peer review was the ability to incorporate the feedback immediately at the retreat. In addition to peer reviews, peer editing, and peer feedback, Grant

(2008) recommended other activities for learning and collegiate support, such as reading aloud and using the writing consultation process which was covered in the containment theory section.

The role of the facilitator is not only needed for coordination of the retreat from preparation through post retreat, but it is integral during the retreat. Farr et al. (2009) expounded that the facilitators role is crucial; they need to understand the emotional components experienced from writing, while having the ability to provide strategies to overcome this, and in addition, the ability to lead scholarly discussions. Petrova and Coughlin (2012) went further, stating the facilitator was foundational to building a safe, supportive retreat environment for productive writing. The facilitator can also take the role as a coach for the participants. Girardeau et al. (2014) recommended a fifteen-minute consult for writing project support; although, the facilitator can hold a writing consultation following Murrays (2014c) writing meeting or writing consultation for supporting behavior changes. If a retreat did not have a facilitator, some research showed one of the participants volunteered to facilitate in addition to their writing goals (Casey et al, 2013; Grant, 2008), or a shared group responsibility was followed (Grant & Knowles, 2000; Grant 2008); although, these two scenarios were the case for experienced retreats.

Bulk writing time is the most important part of the agenda and the main reason why the writing retreats exist. The concept of uninterrupted writing time was introduced by Boice (1990), with suggested strategies for productive writing and ways to overcome stalled writing or writing blocks. Introducing writing strategies is valuable to the retreat. Participants can be introduced at a pre-retreat group preparation meeting through a pre-read handout or a workshop topic during the retreat. Retreat writing strategies can start with education on binge writing versus routine writing (Boice, 1990; Silvia, 2007) and blocking regular time or creating time on

the calendar versus trying to find time to write (Goodman, 2016). Murray (2014b) went further to expound that writers need to privilege their writing. This approach works by protecting writing time and moving to quiet places where the writing will not be interrupted.

Zerubavel (1999) also introduced a deeper strategy to managing writing time by identifying A writing time and B writing time. A-time can be referred to as your A game-time when you are easily focused; therefore, A-time is reserved for writing. On the other hand, B-time may not lend itself to the most effective writing; although, the time is used to make progress on other important project tasks, such as editing or researching. A and B times are particularly helpful to introduce at retreats as they usually offer blocked writing time in the mornings, afternoon, and sometimes evenings. Lastly, plan an outline or goals for each writing session is an effective strategy to stay on course without getting sidetracked or missing your A time; Zerubavel (1999) also recommended deliberately preparing for more time to complete a goal, also referred to as under-promising and over-delivering. Effective writing strategies can resolve unproductive writing or writing blocks through incremental writing habits, according to Boice (1990). Even writing thirty minutes a day can keep a writing project flowing (Girardeau, 2014).

Retreats can sometimes be viewed as a temporary fix (Girardeau, 2014); however, stepping away from conflicting priorities for a few days to focus on writing resulted in productive writing and new habits. The participants stated productive writing was a retreat outcome, and by having an opportunity to experience blocks of time dedicated to writing without interruptions was enough to initiate new writing routines, overcome barriers to writing, and sustain these habits after the retreat concluded (Cable et al., 2013; Grant, 2006; Kornhaber et al., 2016; Moore, 2003). The uninterrupted group writing space felt safe and supportive for

the participants and was referred to as a sanctuary or protected or sacred time; this led to joy in writing, motivation, and ultimately productive writing (Farr et al., 2009; Grant, 2003; Kornhaber et al., 2016). Another indicator of productive writing was the participants asking when the next retreat will be offered or expressed interest in a writing group to keep the group writing momentum going (Garside et al., 2015). The uninterrupted writing time and space offered in a retreat setting sums up everything in this research study as it provides progress on writing, develops or deepens a writing identity, encourages collegiate collaboration, reduces fear and anxiety from procrastinated writing, brings joy to the writing process and sets the stage for a sustainable writing practice after the retreat concludes (Kornhaber, 2016).

Some retreats incorporated a daily closing of the writing day by sharing their successes and discussing their challenges. This was done as a group, in pairs, and individually by journaling or free writing (Swaggerty et al., 2011). Holding a discussion for the closing the writing project for the day or for closing the retreat allowed time for the participants to reflect on their productive writing sessions and allowed the mind to relax into the rest of the day or evening knowing the writing day was beneficial (Grant, 2008). Jensen (2014) recommended using a project box to organize files and thoughts to initial a ritual that provided the motion of actually closing the box when writing has commended for the day. The project box can be an actual file holder-box or an electronic file-box. The post-retreat phase in the next section will discuss closing out the retreat.

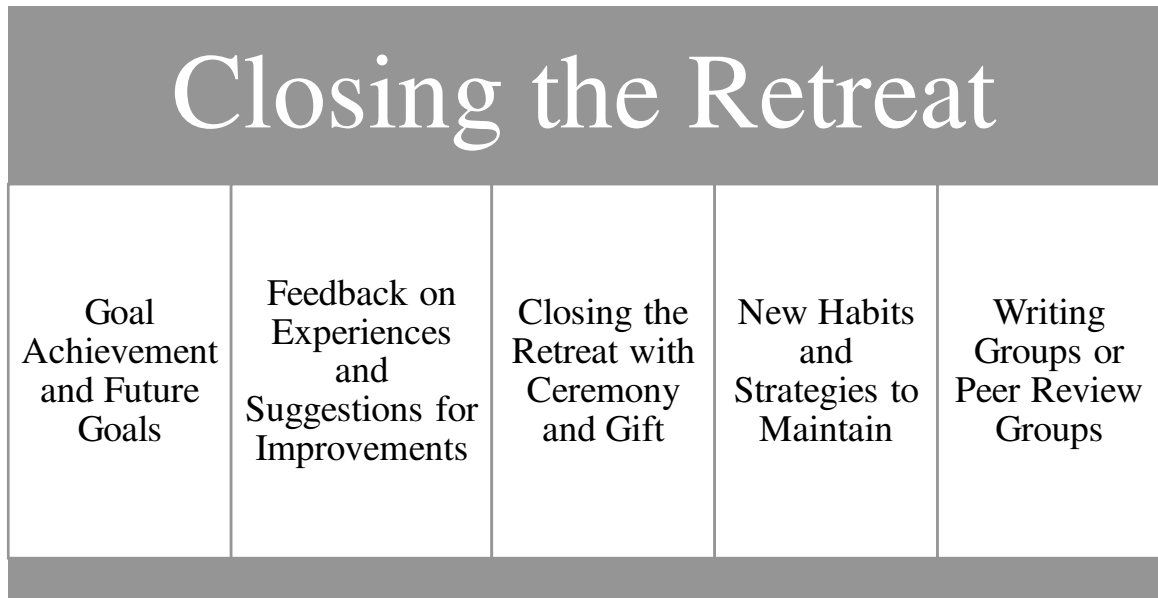


Figure 2.4. Closing the writing retreat.

Closing the Retreat

The third stage is for closing the retreat (Figure 2.4) and discussing strategies to maintain productive, enjoyable writing. Grant (2006) recommended closing the retreat as a group discussion and focused on three things: gathering information from participants on their experience of the retreat, reflecting on how to sustain their writing routine, and capturing the progress against goals with items for next steps. If the size of the writing group was large, the progress against goals instead can be discussed in pairs and reviewed by the facilitator on the evaluation.

Other useful discussions for closing the retreat outside the pertinent goals achieved and next steps for writing was identifying the actual behavior changes that occurred and what the participants learned about their identity as a writer (Garside et al., 2015). Farr et al. (2009) closed out their retreats with an inexpensive memorable gift, such as a pen or notebook and held a ceremony with a certificate of completion. After the feedback was shared and the ceremony

conducted, participants completed an evaluation or sent in an electronic version afterwards, such as survey monkey.

To sustain the writing routine, writing groups are encouraged. Murray (2014c) found that in addition to creating spaces for writing, participants favored writing with others and indeed wrote more productively with those whom they completed a retreat. This was due to a variety of reasons, such as the retreat participants experienced and understood the writing habits and strategies for productive writing and used them; the retreat participants built a community and comfort with each other; and lastly, they shared a need to privilege their writing time (Murray, 2014c). If starting writing groups were not feasible, small groups can be created for peer review and provide feedback on their writing. This encourages retreat participants to maintain the writing routine goals with a continued safe, supportive community (Murray, 2014c); these groups either meet in person or virtually.

Post retreat follow up was also encouraged to gather feedback on progress after leaving the retreat. Garside et al. (2015) found most participants met their goals or achieved progress on their writing project after the retreat. The few who did not progress had a new focus, such as a new job or a different writing project took precedence to the project they worked on at the retreat. The reality is, writing retreats is an effective way to introduce and experience productive writing strategies that can be used immediately; although, as with many new habits, it requires practice to sustain and turn into a regular habit. Sustaining habits can be achieved through attending other retreats, joining a writing group, and setting up a regular schedule of uninterrupted time and space to write.

Review of Related Dissertation and Thesis Research

At the time of this research study, there is not any research on academic writing retreats published in ProQuest Dissertation and Thesis Global; although, there are a few studies on writing groups, all but two were conducted in grade school so not related to graduate writing groups. From the writing groups or social writing genre, two studies applicable to this topic were selected for this research study. In the first dissertation titled, *Masters Level Graduate Student Writing Groups: Exploring Academic Identity* by Ruggles (2012), the study expounded that graduate students attributed their successes in writing to their regular writing practice and acknowledged the change when they increasingly identified themselves as writers. By being active participants in the writing group provided evidence of meaning-making towards their writing. As their writing emerged, they connected to who they were; consequently, their ideas when writing also were aligned with their identity (Ruggles, 2012). Lastly, the students admittedly stated the peer review process helped to develop their writing skills, which also supported their identity as a writer (Ruggles, 2012). Although this research was conducted for writing groups, the development to their identity as a writer suggests the impact of social writing and building a sense of self or identify as a writer results in productive writing.

The second dissertation titled *Undergraduate Students' Attempts to Initiate and Maintain Writing Center-Facilitated Writing Groups: A Narrative and Self-Reflexive Study* studied undergraduate writing center-facilitated writing groups and distinguished congruent outcomes as in social writing or writing retreats (Scoppetta, 2015). Most compelling was what the researcher discovered from the literature review and research on writing groups (Scoppetta, 2015). When writing in groups, making meaning or mean-making out of one's work is a social process; therefore, a deeper understanding or connection to one's work occurred when discussing the

writing project and feedback exchange transpired (Scoppetta, 2015). Knowledge formulated with others, as from a peer review process or group activities. By extent, discussion brought out a new awareness (Scoppetta, 2015), education and learning can be transformative. In summary, when routine writing is developed, it changed the view or feelings toward writing, similarly, participants at writing retreats who experienced a writing routine reported feelings of joy and motivation (Scoppetta, 2015). Lastly, Scoppetta (2015) reported participants whom were in groups for either common challenges or goals built community. Considering that the scholarly community, which lends itself toward an individualized writing atmosphere, when put into social writing spaces such as a retreat or writing groups can lead to collaboration, learning and positive feelings towards writing.

Both of those studies explored the phenomena of what transpires from writing groups, which may or may not be common experiences of writing strategies as suggested for writing retreats; nevertheless, these studies support that writing in groups or social writing is not only productive but is transformational as it develops the productivity through writing from, identifying as a writer, group activities, group participation, and peer feedback. These were all found in the research for writing retreats as well.

Anecdotal Evaluation and Feedback from CSU Writing Retreats

CSU *Writes* created, directed and facilitated by Dr. Quynn held three graduate writing retreats in the Spring of 2016: one was a two-day retreat and two were four-day retreats, with a review of the evaluations from one of the four day retreats. The top reasons graduate students attended the writing retreat was their dissertation or thesis was stalled; they did not know where to start or they were not making progress. They were seeking support with writing and time management or productive writing, healthy writing habits, less anxiety about writing, and writing

strategies. Many also wanted guidance on how to write their dissertation or thesis and skills for improved writing. The results suggested that most valuable were bulk writing and breaks leading to productivity. Anxiety was replaced with motivation which brought joy to students' writing. The writing strategies, tips and habits established better organization and time management. Lastly, the retreats were not focused on how to write a dissertation or thesis; although, presentations were provided to assist with language and voice, some students indicated the presentations assisted them with writing, while other students stated they still needed support in this area.

Some of the areas in the literature review that were not listed on the evaluation as valuable or needing improvements were writing identity, writing in groups, group activities and peer review-feedback, and building a community of scholars. The retreat participants experienced all of these at the retreats outside of peer reviews, so it would be helpful to know why they were not as impactful. Also, the facilitators, Dr. Quynn offered the students a consult and all noted it was very helpful. The areas for improvement had mixed responses. For example, some wanted more writing time and some wanted a half day; some wanted fewer speakers and some wanted more to speak on writing, editing, critical note taking when researching and examples of dissertation. Lastly, the scheduled breaks were well received and the added suggestion was to include a relaxing activity such as coloring or stretching.

CSU *Writes* graduate retreats were well attended and the feedback was that participants experienced an increased writing productivity. Age and curriculum demographics would be interesting to add in addition to the completion rates.

Summary

Researchers have explored academic writing interventions through writing retreats, but little research had been focused on graduate writing retreats. Given the need for graduate student writing support to complete their dissertation or thesis, this research will provide empirical data on a writing intervention that has proven successful for faculty. In addition, this research is providing a review of the literature on the design practices that make an academic writing retreat successful through writing strategies, social writing, emotional components, and a behavior change approach. If writing requires a change in behavior or habits, as in lifestyle changes, the writing meeting designed by Murray (2014b) would make sense to incorporate in the retreat to sustain new habits after the retreat has ended. The writing meeting, which uses the behavior change approach, motivational interviewing (MI) will be discussed further in methods section as study attempts to provide a connection towards the writing retreats design and productive writing. Therefore, it is clear that more research needs to be completed to better understand academic writing retreat for graduate students, and the purpose of this research is to explore and understand how academic writing retreats are designed to increase productivity for graduate students which will be investigated through a qualitative case study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and explain the practices that exist at a graduate writing retreat and how they impacted productive writing. Although there has been research published on faculty writing retreats, there is limited empirical research on graduate student writing retreats. Additionally, this study explored what creates productive writing, and how a retreat design resulted in productivity; moreover, it investigated experiences of the retreat participants and the retreat facilitator. This bounded single case study followed the exploratory approach of Yin (2014), which included an in-depth collection of the data and reported a case bounded theme.

Qualitative research—specifically, case study—was chosen as the appropriate design to explore and explain an issue within a case (Creswell, 2007). As for this study, the case or event was the graduate writing retreat. Furthermore, a qualitative approach was chosen because this study methodology was situated in the natural setting, thus allowing for a detailed exploration of the participants' understanding of how their writing was productive. The flexibility to explore a deep understanding from the participant's experiences could not be accomplished with just quantitative research.

This chapter discusses other qualitative designs considered but not selected as the methodology for this study. The methodology chapter will provide information on the research design, data collection, data collection technique, analysis and validity. This study was designed to provide empirical research on practices that existed at an academic writing retreat and how they lead to productive writing.

Research Design

The research problem presented in this paper can be explored through many methods; therefore, this section explains why case study was chosen and the rationale for why other methods were considered but not selected. Qualitative research is an interest of the researcher due to its open and flexible design options, and case study specifically enabled the expanded opportunity to complete an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon or case within real world constructs (Yin, 2014).

Qualitative Research

The definition of qualitative research, though considered simple in some respects, has a well-discussed paradox which has drawn my interest to it. Its basis is to uncover meaning of a problem or issue that needs to be explored, which emerges through planned and sometimes unplanned questioning with complex interactions to establish a theme (Creswell, 2007); this ambiguity or inductive analysis can be unsettling for some due to the approach of validity that is used in quantitative research. The research is written from the researcher's reflective practice through the voice of the participants. The literature provides insight into the problem, while allowing space for further knowledge as the problem is under exploration (Creswell, 2007). The outcome or findings includes an interpretation of the problem and results in a proposed solution or call to action (Creswell, 2007). This fits well with this research as the problem investigated is practitioner oriented; therefore, the actionable discovery would be beneficial for those who design and facilitate writing retreats.

The benefit of qualitative research is its fluid technique, possibilities, evolving approach, discovery (Strauss & Corbin, 2008), and end result of insight into more than the initial questions. In qualitative research, the topic of objectivity raises concerns due to the researcher's personal

perspectives and world views. One way to address objectivity is to ensure sensitivity is present. Sensitivity refers to putting the researcher into the actual research. To adequately adhere to this, the researcher compares the data against their experience and perspectives; secondly, the researcher focuses on the similarities and differences in the data and presents the participants' views, while the researcher synthesizes the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The researcher must consider their knowledge and experiences so they have a sense of where to begin, but they must remain open as the data unfolds while asking questions, and reflecting on the meaning of the data (Merriam, 2009). As the researcher, I have experience with the case under inquiry and will discuss how this will be exercised under validity and researcher bias. The role of a scholar-practitioner is a desire I hold for myself professionally. Lombardozi (2013) described the scholar-practitioner as a process of applying theory into the practitioner's practice, and through the act of critical inquiry and reflection, new concepts are brought into the research. Robson (2011) explained how case study research suggests solutions to problems; therefore, the results can add relevance for academics and non-academics. Next, I will describe two qualitative methods, phenomenology and grounded theory, that were considered for this research, although not selected.

Phenomenology was considered for this study but not selected; although, this study draws on qualitative research interview and coding practices similar to phenomenology. It is the study of understanding the essence of an experience and what all the participants have in common in relation to a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2007), such as describing the lived experience of the participants. The analysis is based on several examinations of shared experiences of individuals. In studying academic writing retreats, the shared experiences will be understood but this research will go a step further to also capture the unique in-depth understanding of the

writing retreat event. Furthermore, phenomenology is more directed at statement and meaning or the essence of experience or phenomenon; whereas, case study aims more at the description and themes of the event or case. Lastly, case study focuses more on the development and details of the issues and acknowledgment prevailing to the event (Creswell, 2007).

Grounded theory was also considered but not selected for this study. It is another qualitative approach to inquiry which seeks to generate a theory. Strauss & Corbin (2015) explained how descriptive qualitative research informs an event and can provide concepts and tell a story; whereas, theory goes deeper to explain why the events occur. While grounded theory also has many aims that would fit well with this study, such as why the events occurs, grounded theory specifically forms a theoretical explanation (Strauss & Corbin, 2015), where this research on writing retreats may not lend itself to theory development. Lastly, grounded theory data are compared from one group to another and the analysis is derived from the similarities and differences amongst groups so a theory can emerge (Creswell, 2007).

After examining case study research design, the strong interest for this research design is the focus on the event or case, versus individual(s) as in phenomenology or theory development as in grounded theory. To summarize, this study's design focused on an explanation described in detail in relation to its natural context to understand the boundaries between phenomenon, the issue, and its circumstances (Yin, 2014).

Case Study Research

Case study is a research approach to develop an in-depth description or analysis of a case or multiple case to understand an issue or problem through themes (Creswell, 2007). The intent is for the researcher to explore, explain, or describe one issue or concern and then provide an in-depth understanding for one case or more cases. What sets case study apart from other research

designs is the study is conducted within a bounded system (Creswell, 2007), which is the actual case(s). For purposes of this study, the case is the writing retreat and is a single case study, meaning each writing retreat was investigated similarly to explore an in-depth understanding of the issue, concern or phenomenon. Yin (2014) expounded that case study is for the researcher who desired to understand a social phenomenon that involved a real world perceptible (p. 4); therefore, case study fit well with my research.

Case study is not always referred to as a methodology. Creswell (2007) did refer to it as a methodology; although, other researchers refer to it is a strategy of inquiry or a research strategy (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). This difference in labeling case study a methodology or strategy leads to the variance in the definition of a case study. Creswell's (2007) definition of case study is well explained and applicable for this research study: Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time. Although detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information: e.g., interviews, observation, documents, and reports a case description and case bounded themes (p. 73).

In *Case Study Research*, 4th edition, Yin's (2008) reference to case study as a strategy had a similar intent to Creswell's (2007): "Case study is a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence" (p. 18). In Yin's 5th edition (2014) of *Case Study Research*, a few changes were made to the case study definition. Yin's (2014) definition continued to address empirical research conducted in real life, and Yin (2014) referred to the case as the phenomenon versus bounded system. In Yin's 4th edition (2003), he did not directly refer to case study as a method; although, Yin's 5th edition (2014) definition referred to case

study as an empirical inquiry and explained “how the method is practiced is the entire book” (p. 17). On the other hand, there is agreement on the significance of the bounded system and clearly defining the case and its boundaries with an in-depth understanding of the case or cases and using multiple sources of data for research (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014).

This study examined the design of graduate academic writing retreats. Due to the nature of this research, case study is selected because it is a clear single instrumental bounded case seeking to explore and explain an in-depth understanding of the phenomena through multiple sources of information in its real-life environment. The next sections will discuss the data collection tools, procedures, and analysis.

Data Collection and Procedures

This single case study approach and analysis of CSU *Writes* graduate writing retreats encompassed several retreats. In this study, the researcher collected the data in its natural real-life environment and thematically explored an in-depth analysis where the key generalizations emerged for graduate writing retreats. The patterns and themes explored in this research examined a bounded system, the graduate writing retreat, and provided informed conclusions on writing productivity and included the factors that contributed to the results.

Population and Sample

A phenomena or bounded system in case study is the process, activity, event, program, or several individuals (Creswell, 2007). To establish the criteria for the research, a purposeful sampling strategy was selected. Purposeful sampling was applicable because its purpose is to identify a source of data that is relevant to the area of study and allows the researcher to select participants who can provide an informed perspective on the research problem and central

phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The subjects of this study had the real life perspective of the phenomenon as they were participants of a CSU *Writes* graduate writing retreat.

The participants in this study were graduate students of Colorado State University (CSU) who attended a CSU *Writes* retreat. CSU *Writes*, managed by the Department of English at CSU, is designed to organize and facilitate groups of writers to assist CSU's faculty, students, and staff to write more frequently and productively. The CSU *Writes* retreat is facilitated in a workshop style and the intent of the retreats are for the participants to make progress on their writing project which is accomplished through introducing writing strategies and approaches that impact participants writing habits, commitment, time management, and ultimately, assist participants in meeting their writing goals. The intent of the graduate retreats is for students to develop habits and a writing routine that support incremental routine writing versus a boot camp or crisis writing approach.

CSU *Writes* retreats has an ample interest from students, which has resulted in capping the enrollment at 30 students per retreat. The sampling group from the retreats provided enough participants for the researcher to describe an in-depth analysis of the case and inform on the patterns and trends. Several retreats were offered at the Colorado State University campus during the research period and 30 individuals are invited to attend each retreat. The two and half day weekend retreats were held Friday afternoon through Sunday late afternoon, CSU *Writes* had several retreats scheduled throughout the Fall, 2016 semester and the Spring, 2017 semester. The retreats sometimes do experience attrition; with two semesters of writing retreats, there was enough participants to reach the sample size of 30.

CSU *Writes* is open to all students and departments; therefore, the sample organically included a variety by department (e.g., engineering, english, psychology, and education

departments), age, gender, and ethnicity. Additionally, seven participants who interviewed attended more than one CSU *Writes* retreat which was noted, collected, and analyzed, as the impact of attending more than one retreat provided a different informed perspective. The sample in this study was derived by the researcher attending the CSU *Writes* retreat as an observer, interviewer, and facilitator support. To build rapport with participants, Creswell (2007) recommended the gatekeeper is well informed of the study and aids in gaining confidence of the participants.

The participants were fully informed of the study and the data collection activities compiled at the retreat. The retreat facilitator, Dr. Quynn, introduced the researcher and this study at the beginning of each retreat. Then the researcher discussed the purpose of the study, the amount of projected time needed from the participants if they choose to interview, and the sources of data to be collected from the retreat for the study (i.e., observation with field notes, recorded interviews, group discussion throughout the retreat, evaluation at the end of the retreat, and an potential follow up survey or interview questions). Furthermore, the researcher also informed the participants that the individual interviews and group discussions were to be recorded and the researcher provided a consent form to sign at that time (Refer to Appendix B and C for the Consent Forms). In case study research, multiple sources of data are collected to provide an in-depth real life description of the case (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). The researcher also clarified with the participants that if an interview was not fully completed during the retreat or a participant preferred to interview after the retreat, the researcher will set up a time to complete or initiate the interview after the retreat. This research received approval by the Colorado State University's Institutional Review Board on October 21, 2016.

Demographics and Length of Retreats

Of the 30 participants interviewed, 20 were PhD students, one was a Medical Director MD (Veterinary) student and nine were in a Master's degree program. Woman participants were the majority: 24 were interviewed, six men were interviewed, and five of the interviewed participants openly provided to the researcher that English was their second language. The fact that fewer men volunteered to interview may be due to the fact that a few of the males commented in the interviews how the word "retreat" was less appealing for them, but because they heard the writing retreats were beneficial, they decided to give it a try. CSU *Writes* does not keep track of the female to male demographics and the number of ESL students.

At the time of the interviews, seven participants had attended their second retreat and two participants their third retreat. Some had attended additional retreats since the interviews were conducted. As discussed in the last section, the interviews occurred at six different retreats; Table 2.1 provides the breakdown of participants to the length of the retreat they attended. The numbers in Table 2.1 have more than 30 participants because the breakdown included whether a participant attended more than one retreat.

During the research period, three different lengths of retreats were offered. The weekend retreats were offered four times; they started Friday afternoon and ended Sunday afternoon and were noted as helpful to accommodate those who work and/or have classes during the work week. Although, some mentioned these weekend retreats were difficult because they were tired from the work week. The two-day retreat was offered once during the research period on the Monday/Tuesday during spring break week. The five-day retreat was Monday through Friday and was also offered once during the research period after the spring semester ended. A typical

retreat day started at 8:30 a.m. and ended at 4:00 p.m. or 4:30 p.m., the weekend retreat started at 1:00 p.m. on Friday afternoon and ended at 4:30 p.m. on Sunday.

Table 3.1
Number of Participants Interviewed to the Length- Days of the Retreat

Retreat Length	Two days (Monday/Tuesday) over spring break	Two and a half days on the weekend	Five days (Monday through Friday)
# of retreat participants interviewed	8	25	3

Data Collection

The techniques for data collection for case study are similar to other qualitative research design techniques employing interviews, group evaluation, focus groups, reviewing existing documents, and observations; although, interviewing and observation are most used in case studies (Creswell, 2007). The primary data collection source for this study was the individual interviews with the students who participated in the retreats, and secondly the participant evaluations from each retreat. In addition, the data collection included conducting observations of the retreat environment and during group discussions, one retreat included pictures (pictures were IRB approved prior to the last retreat), a review of the participant evaluations including evaluations from retreats prior to the research collection period, and interviewing the retreat facilitator.

The research conducted at the CSU *Writes* graduate writing retreats was collected between October 21, 2016 and May 16, 2017. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (Appendix B) was received October 21, 2016. A total of 30 participants were interviewed, and the interviews were conducted either in person at the retreat or on the phone at an agreed upon date and time after the retreat. The interviews were collected from six retreats and three

participants volunteered to interview on the phone from a retreat prior to October 21, 2016. The observation and focus group data were collected at the five retreats the researcher attended between October 21, 2016 and May 16, 2017. At the writing retreats, the researcher collected observational data by noting the setting, the interactions among the participants during the group discussions, and the overall environment of the retreat. The participant evaluations questions reviewed, coded and summarized for themes and patterns from seven retreats.

Interviews. The retreat participants had the option to meet with a CSU *Writes* director and facilitator for 15-30 minutes (depending on the number of participants) to discuss their writing project and receive guidance where applicable. The researcher interviewed participants at the retreat, although, optional as well, between 20 and 30 minutes (depending on participant interest), and focused on the four areas of academic writing retreats (Figure 2.1). Yin (2014) recommended for case study interviews to be focused and shorter, no longer than one hour, versus occurring over an extended amount of time. The interviews were offered in person at the retreat or after the retreat via phone or in person and they were recorded. The interview questions were not shared with the participants beforehand because sharing the questions may have drawn more attention to writing strategies and concepts introduced and experienced at the retreat and potentially influence the participants responses.

The researcher opened the interview explaining the intentions of this study, which was to provide empirical research on graduate writing retreats and support CSU *Writes* retreats for students in the future. Additionally, the purpose of the participant's feedback was to draw upon their experience to inform the study, as the interviews were a semi-structured approach with open-ended questions. The participants were informed again that the interviews are recorded and asked if they had any question about the research, interview, or the consent form they signed.

The open-ended interview process allowed for the participants' perspective to unfold during the interview as the researcher respected the structure of the participants' responses. The interviews, exploratory in nature, supported describing the case and its context in detail and understanding the process and components of an academic retreat design for writing productivity. As a researcher, the participants' time was valued and ensured the interviews were completed as timely as possible without interfering with the quality and integrity of the data.

Lastly, the retreat facilitators interview, who is also the Director of CSU *Writes*, lasted one hour and provided knowledge, insight and experience of what occurred from a group leaders frame of reference at the writing retreats. In addition to the researcher's notes, the interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The participants were guaranteed a confidential interview, and furthermore, their recorded interview and supporting data were kept in confidential files.

Document review. The documents examined in this study were the graduate writing retreat evaluations. The evaluations were reviewed and coded from seven CSU *Writes* graduate writing retreats that provided 132 evaluations. Out of the seven retreats, three of the graduate retreats occurred prior to the researchers IRB approval date October 31, 2016, and four of the retreat evaluations were after the researchers IRB approval. The following table provides the breakdown of the retreat length and semester by the number of evaluations reviewed.

Table 3.2
Number of Participant Evaluations to the Length and Semester of the Retreat

Retreat Length	2 day Spring 2016	5 day Summer 2016	5 day Summer 2016	2 ½ day Fall 2016	2 ½ day Fall 2016	2 ½ day Spring 2016	2 day Spring 2016
# of retreat participant evaluations	20	15	17	23	14	21	22

The participant evaluation (Appendix D) includes two sections, a Likert scale and open-ended questions. The Likert scale questions seek a level of agreement, i.e. agree, neutral and disagree. The Likert scale has seven questions for the first four retreats and one additional question about the retreat room was added to three retreats evaluations, leaving a total of eight questions for three of the retreat evaluations. One question, Q7, did not support the research questions in this study because its directed towards CSU *Writes* feedback, although, its included in the analyze and findings to reduce confusion.

The second section has four open-ended questions and two questions support this research study and are included in the review, coding and analysis. The two questions are, “I attended this retreat because...” and “What did you find most valuable among the retreat offerings?” The other two open ended questions were directed toward CSU *Writes* or the facilitator, for example, “Did the presenter manage time well?” and “CSU *Writes* offers valuable support for my academic writing needs.” Consequently, these questions were not included in the document review and coding. Merriam & Tisdell (2016) expounded document reviews are examined and analyzed similar to interviews or observations, therefore, the two open ended questions included in the document review were coded for themes and patterns and analyzed similar to the interviews.

In addition to investigating the themes and patterns of the evaluation, the researcher reviewed the documents for accuracy and authenticity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To ensure accuracy and authenticity, Merriam & Tisdell (2016) recommended checking documents for completeness and if it has been tampered or edited; additionally, what was the purpose of the document, under what circumstances was the document produced and “to what extent was the writer likely to want to tell the truth” (p. 177). The documents were fairly easy to obtain; the

researcher requested copies via email from the CSU *Writes* director and facilitator, and the researcher ensured the evaluations remained confidential.

Observation. Observation of the retreats was accomplished by the researcher attending four retreats during the research period. During the retreats, participants were mostly writing, for example, four out of the six hours were writing hours. During the additional time, participants took breaks, had snacks, ate lunch, viewed a presentation or participated in a group discussion-activity. The observations were captured through the retreat environment, characteristics or behaviors of the participants writing practices, their level of engagement related to writing and interactions with the facilitator and other students. The researcher also observed any actions that deferred from the agenda, such as additional breaks, leaving for long periods of time, or writing alone outside the retreat room. These observations were used as data for insight into the overall design of the retreat: for example, possibly breaks during a certain time of the day were too short, versus a specific reason a participant chose to take an additional break.

The retreats concluded with a group discussion that lasted between 15- 20 minutes depending on the amount of group sharing; here, the participants had an opportunity to share their experiences, both positive and negative, as a group. This group discussions were conducted by the facilitator who asked clarifying questions when applicable and the researcher observed and took notes. Creswell (2007) recommended the researcher keep a journal to assist with reflection, participant observation, and field notes; the researcher followed Creswell's recommendations.

Data Storage. All of the data, notes, interviews, and journals were stored in a locked cabinet, and the key was held by the researcher and electronic files will be erased after the dissertation is completed. Any notes on computer files were password protected. Following the

completion of the study, audio recordings will be destroyed. Transcripts and the participant pseudonym files will be maintained by the principle investigator for three years after the study.

Data Analysis

In case study analysis, it is important to have a detailed description of the case that can establish the patterns and themes through categorical aggregation (Creswell, 2007); therefore, many sources of data were collected. Robson (2011) referred to the emergence of patterns and themes during the analysis stage as thematic coding analysis. This coding approach analyzed the data through the description of the cases, with respect to the emerging themes and concepts, and organized the data into an in-depth picture of the case. After multiple levels of abstraction, specifically the similarities and differences, the thematic codes were grouped into the main categories. The codes or themes selected aligned with the researcher's questions on the writing retreat design for graduate students, and focusing on activities, practices, and interpretations. Case studies can report on the case descriptions, cross case comparison, or even generate a theory (Creswell, 2009); the original intent of this study is provided in the research; an in-depth case description.

The identification of the data categories was the first step in the analysis process. This was done by highlighting the repetitive and similar context of the responses and weighing the verbatim records or instances that occurred through the interviews, documentation review, and observation field notes, until patterns of commonality and contrast were identified. The patterns, insights, and concepts were captured through the participants' experiences, concerns, results and new habits, or learnings; once studied and correlated, the themes were placed into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet where the core themes were established. Microsoft Excel was also used to manage the data and assist with categorization; as the researcher needed to "study the outputs to

determine whether any meaningful patterns emerge” (Yin, 2014, p. 134), and then make sense of the data, as the researcher was the main analyst.

Once the themes emerged, which Creswell (2007) calls categorical aggregation, they also were compared against the Literature Review and explained how they are similar or dissimilar to the literature. This was done through different arrays, metrics, and flowcharts. Yin (2014) recommended manipulating the data and arranging the data in different ways that’s impactful; the data was presented by most frequent in this study. Another analytical strategy is to move data into different categories or tabulations and create different matrixes. This research followed the theoretical proposition strategy (Yin, 2014), which meant the case objectives and design were based on a scheme which created the research questions that connected to the review of the literature; therefore, a new discussion or proposed solution emerged.

Lastly, generalization was applied, called naturalistic generalizations (Creswell, 2007), to the research questions and phenomenon in a framework displayed through tables and diagrams and a comparison against the initial design from the literature review and a case conclusion.

Validation

In qualitative research, the process of validation is followed to ensure credibility and accuracy of the data between the researcher and participants was obtained. Creswell (2007) viewed validation as a strength to qualitative studies since the data is collected directly from the participants and from real life scenarios. Additionally, the importance of validity for case study is warranted when researchers “want to employ systematic procedures” (Creswell, 2007, p. 207) from their study. This study resulted in a case conclusion, and the intent is to propose procedures for an academic writing retreat design for graduates.

The following strategies, triangulation, member checking, building trust, peer review and reflectivity was used in this study and described below. Triangulation, “the most well-known strategy for validity” (Merriman, 2009, p. 215) and is recommended by Merriam (2009), Creswell (2007), and Yin (2014) for validity. Yin (2014) explained triangulation is when the findings have been supported by more than one source which strengthens the evidence through multiple sources of data collection. This study investigated, compared, and crosschecked between the interviews, the participant evaluation, and the observation for validity.

Member checking is when feedback is obtained from interviewees on the discovery and findings. Merriam (2009, p. 217) stated, “this is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what the participants say or do.” This study included members checks during the interviews by the researcher interpreting back the preliminary analyses and asking the participants if their experience was captured. Also, the researcher followed up with some of the participants after the interview was completed to check for accuracy and clarity.

Building trust with participants in the field through engagement and observation is essential to better understand the phenomenon and to check for misinformation (Creswell, 2007; Merriam; 2009). The researcher was at each full writing retreat and engaged with the participants throughout the retreat to build trust with the participants.

Peer review was used as a strategy. Merriam (2009) expounded that the research committee, specifically the methodologist, is a built-in peer review process. Creswell (2007, p. 208) supported Merriam stating each member provides feedback on “methods, meaning and interpretations,” which was adhered.

Lastly, checking for researcher's position or reflexivity. Here the researcher critically reflected on their interpretation of the data to understand how the researcher's values or experiences influenced the conclusions (Merriam, 2009). Researcher bias is important to check for because I have personally experienced the CSU *Writes* writing retreats; therefore, the researcher's intent of this study was made clear to the participants explaining the data will be checked for bias throughout the data collection and analysis process through critical reflection and the peer review. The main bias from the researcher for this study is the researcher's personal writing success with CSU *Writes* writing retreats.

This researcher's intention was to follow the fulfillment of the dissertation requirements and will be reviewed appropriately by the dissertation committee to avoid any instances of negative validity.

Summary

The chapter provided a review of the methodology chosen and the case study approach to conduct this research. Also, the chapter explained the procedures such as the population sample and data collection and analysis. This study did utilize the open ended, semi-structured interviews as the primary investigation tool in determining a successful design for graduate writing retreats for productivity. The data collection and analysis were structured to ensure a descriptive study and validation strategies were established so the data had credibility and accuracy.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS, RESULTS, AND ANALYSIS

This chapter provides the findings of the qualitative case study conducted at Colorado State University's *CSU Writes* graduate writing retreats and presents the results and analysis of the study. The data for this study were collected primarily through individual interviews; 30 graduate students who attended *CSU Writes* retreats volunteered to be interviewed. The data analysis also includes: a review of 132 participant evaluations completed by attendees at the end of writing retreats, an interview with the *CSU Writes* retreat director and facilitator, and direct observation of the discussions held during and at the end of each *CSU Writes* retreat. In this chapter, the findings are presented in three sections: the six research questions using thematic coding analysis from the participant interviews, a document review of the participant evaluations, and observations of the retreat environment and writing retreat characteristics.

Research Question Coding and Analysis

The research questions were designed to capture whether graduate academic writing retreats were productive, and, if they were productive, how the designs or agenda of the retreat made them more or less effective for improving graduate student writing. Also, the questions addressed how the retreats supported a sustained writing practice and established routine writing behaviors. Moreover, did writing in groups support writing productivity, and did the connection of participants to an identity as a writer have any significance to writing behavior changes?

Themes for each research question were identified using coding and analysis. The participant interviews provided most of the data and strengthened the analysis through the group discussions, observation, and participant evaluations. All participants who volunteered to be interviewed stated that the writing retreats were a positive writing intervention for CSU, and, therefore, a strong component in being interviewed was to support *CSU Writes*. This section

details six specific research questions presented by theme with supporting quotes from individual interviews.

Participant Interviews

RQ1: How do participants perceive what occurred at the writing retreats?

Responses to this question and the themes coded originated from the interview questions, “What was the main benefit of attending the retreat?” and “What, if anything, surprised you at the retreat?” Participant responses to these questions resulted in the development and coding of the five themes presented below. The primary themes are:

- learning writing strategies to support new writing behaviors,
- achieving writing productivity,
- ending writing procrastination and negativity towards writing,
- gaining a new view on writing, and
- realizing writing is a priority.

Learning writing strategies to support new writing behaviors. Nineteen out of the 30 participants (57%) stated that the writing strategies provided at the CSU *Writes* retreat were the most beneficial part of the retreat. The writing strategies consisted of understanding the participants’ most productive writing times in the day, ending a writing session so the writing momentum was not disrupted between breaks, setting up a routine writing schedule, and writing during distraction-free times. In one response, a participant stated that “I learned how to write at the retreat,” referring to the strategies taught. Although learning “how to write” was not explicitly stated as part of the CSU *Writes* retreat curriculum, the inference was that the writing strategies learned led to more productive writing.

One student indicated that learning when the most productive writing time of the day was led to more writing: “Identifying those peak productivity times works. These times are not necessarily when I was actually writing beforehand, so that was eye-opening for me.” A few students indicated how strategies such as establishing new writing routines and using scheduled writing sessions were beneficial for them. One student said,

It’s like sort of pulling myself out of my regular routine and carefully rethink what I wanted my new routines to be, in order to be successful. I think there is more, sort of a collective, and the whole package of the retreat together that I think was the most beneficial, as opposed to one single aspect. Never before have I taken time out to really try to schedule out the specific writing blocks for what I wanted to accomplish.

Another student commented on creating a new writing schedule: “Prior to the writing retreat I had no designated blocks for writing in my schedule. Now I shut off my email during the writing blocks and I have a schedule that I'm trying to keep to.” A different student commented on how attending the retreat and using the strategies led to knowing how much writing can be accomplished. The student said, “This weekend retreat allowed me to self-track how much I can write in a session.”

At the writing retreat, sticky notes were provided and students were instructed to use them as tools to note where writing ended before taking a break in order to pick it up again without reviewing all of the previous material. The writers could then pick up easily where they had ended. One student recognized how this writing strategy of tracking where she left off before breaks helped her to stay organized between writing sessions, which was beneficial to her efficiency. She stated, “What's huge for me and helped me a lot was to go back after a break to a sticky note, I felt it helped so much with productivity.”

Students shared how the writing strategies were beneficial overall: “I think I got more education out of (the retreat) than expected, like the different writing strategies I hadn’t expected,

which was definitely a plus.” Some participants commented that the writing strategies taught at the retreat gave them new methods for how to organize their writing time and their space to be more productive, and that attending the retreat allowed them to try the new strategies they learned. They made statements such as “I was never taught how to write,” and indicated that at the retreat they learned of more effective approaches to increasing writing productivity.

The participants’ views of their own effectiveness of writing when using the writing strategies suggest that their use of time management tools translated directly into writing skills. Some participants felt that by managing their time and organization, they were more “academic” writers. One participant shared, “The writing strategies helped define academic writing for me,” and another participant said, “I feel I now have some writing skills to really be able to become a better academic writer.” One student commented that the writing strategies not only made him a better writer, but also a more efficient writer as he was able to begin and end writing without starting over between each writing session: “The strategies are about learning just practical things about how to be a better writer, so I’m not rereading everything every day, or starting from the beginning and how to start and stop in the middle.” Two participants noted that in their graduate program, they were not trained in writing, especially in writing large documents like a thesis or dissertation. One participant stated, “We aren’t taught how to write or provided writing strategies, there isn’t education on writing a dissertation and my advisor doesn’t help with writing.” Another student commented on the fact that while training was conducted for teaching, there was no training for writing: “We don’t get training on writing, but before we teach we get training on teaching.” These two participants shared that attending the writing retreat was their first exposure to writing while in their graduate program. The participants’ views of using the

strategies suggest that writing skills were interchangeable with organization and time management tools, and this resulted in improved writing productivity.

Writing productivity. Seven of the 30 participants interviewed (23%) stated that improved writing productivity was the main benefit of the retreat. The intent of the writing retreat was to accomplish considerable amounts of writing; therefore, the participants' response of productivity as the main benefit support the retreat goal. Participants defined writing productivity as being able to stay focused and write for a period of time that led to progress on their writing project.

One participant had writing blocks for the past six months and her writing retreat experience moved her past this into writing. She stated, "The retreat really helped me get through some of the writing block issues I've had in the past six months, I just needed to start anything, and I wasn't expecting to be as productive during those writing sessions."

Through the writing retreat, one participant learned how long she was able to write for, and her ability to remain focused improved. She stated,

I was able to sit down and write for two hours. I usually wait until the time feels right and try to get work done, but to say I'm going to sit down and write for two hours and focus and work through the distractions was new; I realized that I can keep working and be productive.

Similarly, another participant was surprised by her own resolve and how much she was able to write at the retreat. This participant shared, "I can't believe my own determination to make such a dent in my own work with how far I've progressed and getting the initial draft out on the page."

Other participants responded to what surprised them about writing productivity and the retreat. One stated, "I did not expect to be as productive. By the end I had written as much of my report as I could of with the research I had." Another participant commented that once she established a writing schedule, she was more productive. The retreat "helped me to get a

schedule going and get myself to develop a productive writing practice, to get myself writing regularly and making some progress.” A different participant was pleased with her progress and productivity at the retreat: “To almost have a complete draft done at the end of the retreat was amazing. I’m still thinking about it and can’t believe that happened and so glad it did.” One participant noticed not only better productivity, but also how much better she felt about her writing when staying focused: “The last chapter of writing felt a lot better and took much less time than the previous chapter because I wasn't writing efficiently at all.”

Ending writing procrastination and negativity towards writing. Six of the 30 participants (20%) stated that the main benefit of the retreat was getting past mental blocks, procrastination, and feeling down about not writing. Procrastination can also present as being easily distracted or not seeing writing as a priority, which can then lead to further procrastination. The responses from participants regarding getting past their negativity towards writing varied. Students experienced everything from a reduction in stress, to ending procrastination and stalling, and even to moving past mental blocks. One participant said, “This retreat has helped me get past being stressed and tired and not writing.” Another participant stated that her previous habit of taking extended breaks between writing has ended: “Prior to retreat and the writing group, I went long periods of time without writing and would procrastinate.” One participant shared that the retreat helped her move beyond her prior writing routine and her mental blocks: “The retreat helped me get over that mental block. I think just knowing that I have actually tried this, and I know that it works better than what I was doing is justified.” Another participant found the writing sessions helped to put an end to delayed writing: “The retreat got me past the stalling factors and now using chunks of time to sit down and write.” One participant realized at the retreat that they were stalled because they couldn’t get past

writing the opening paragraph: “I realized you don’t have to start at the beginning of the chapter, I get stuck there, and I can start writing at any part.” Another participant found that attending the retreat provided him with a different perspective on writing regularly: “The writing retreat was a great sort of wake-up call and a very unique experience that was able to take me out of the day-to-day to write.” Participants demonstrated that the retreat provided an experience where procrastination, stalled writing, and negative feelings associated with not writing could be resolved through dedicating periods of time solely to writing.

Identity as a writer and writing relationship. Five of the 30 participants (17%) stated that the retreat changed their view on writing or changed their relationship with writing, which, in turn, led to increased writing productivity. One of the discussions at the retreat addressed the question of whether participants identified as a writer. Responses showed that many graduate students never thought of themselves as writers even though they wrote a lot. This sentiment was illustrated by some of the participants. One shared, “To me, identifying as a writer was transformative [in] how it affected my approach to writing and the personal relationship with writing—something I’ve never heard before.” Additionally, through the “identifying as a writer” discussion, another participant learned a different way to approach their writing and experienced lower stress and anxiety because of it: “A writing relationship lowered my stress and anxiety by gathering more info on how to approach writing.”

A second discussion at the retreat centered on the idea that writing is the main mechanism needed to express the participants’ research discoveries. This discussion often resulted in participants having a different perspective on writing and their own identity as a writer. Two participants found this discussion provided a new approach to or view of their writing. One explained, “Identifying as a writer. Like I honestly thought that was a really helpful

way to kind of just like see what I'm doing and how I approach writing now is really different.”

The second participant said, “I think identifying as a writer really changed how I view writing and giving myself a break on my writing.” Not only were participants exposed to the concept of identifying as a writer, but this particular worldview perspective also resulted in a different approach to writing or a different relationship with writing that was productive.

Writing is a priority. Four out of 30 participants (12%) realized at the retreat that writing had become a priority for them. One participant said,

Since starting out graduate school and mostly doing fieldwork and research, there isn't a whole lot of advertisement of how much writing is part of your life as a graduate student and if you want to go this beyond graduate school, you need to write.

From the retreat experience, a participant acknowledged that she now wants writing to be the priority: “I realized I would like it (writing) to become a habit of putting the writing as a priority.” Focusing on the right thing, writing, was what one participant identified as a positive result from the retreat: “The retreat shifted me back into staying connected to what I need to be doing, i.e., writing.” Another participant further posited how the retreat made him focus on writing, stating,

Thinking about it from the perspective of: this is how you get out of here. You know, this is actually what you have to do, the other stuff and kinds of things doesn't really matter if you don't actually write it all down.

The retreat provided an opportunity for participants to focus solely on prioritizing writing. As a result, they experienced renewed focus on what was important to the productivity and quality of their writing, and they felt better equipped to prioritize writing in order to graduate.

RQ1 summary. Research question one (RQ1) sought to uncover what graduate students believed to occur at the writing retreats. Participants' responses revealed that they did not know what to expect from the retreat; however, the responses provided strong evidence that the most significant benefit of attending the retreat was learning new writing behaviors.

Not only did the new writing behaviors increase writing productivity, but the participants also stated that having an opportunity to apply the writing strategies at the retreat was the primary motivating factor for them. This factor resulted in the acknowledgment of a need or desire to change their own approaches to writing. The environment at the retreat, which included writing strategies and group discussions, was ideal for a behavior change and writing productivity. One of the most significant precipitating factors to a writing behavior change was altering the writing relationship by making writing a priority and ending procrastination. Table 4.1 provides a summary of the main themes of what the participants perceived to be occurring at the writing retreat.

Table 4.1
Themes of What the Participants Perceived Occurred for Them at the Writing Retreat

Themes	Response % per theme
Learning writing strategies for new behaviors	57%
Writing productivity	23%
Ending writing procrastination and negativity towards writing	20%
A new view on writing	17%
Making writing a priority	12%

RQ2: Why was writing at the retreat productive and counterproductive? The concept of writing strategies was the main overarching theme as to why the retreat was productive or beneficial. This research question goes on to provide more detailed information about which strategies participants found most valuable. At the beginning of the retreat, different writing strategies were shared in a presentation. Since strategies were shared before the writing sessions began, many participants used the strategies throughout the retreat and some

participants commented on their experience of using the strategies during the group discussions at the end of each writing session.

All 30 participant responses included statements indicating that the writing strategies were helpful. The participant responses concluded that the following writing strategies were most helpful and beneficial: establishing regular writing sessions which are uninterrupted and have flexibility for additional breaks if needed, identifying the most productive writing times during the day and blocking off or protecting that time for writing more challenging pieces, setting writing goals for the writing retreat or each writing session that are obtainable and realistic, recording where the writing session ended so momentum continued into the next writing session, separating sessions for writing from sessions for editing so the focus of the writing session is to draft quickly and writing is not slowed down or interrupted by the editing process, and taking regular breaks as suggested in strategies such as the Pomodoro Technique (POM). The main interview question used for this research question was, “How were the writing strategies helpful?”

Established writing sessions. The retreat agenda included established writing sessions ranging in length from 90 minutes to three hours and had breaks built in between the writing sessions. Participants could take additional breaks when needed or choose to work through established breaks on the agenda. Twenty-three participants (77%) considered this flexibility to be beneficial. One participant who attended more than one retreat found the structure of the retreat helpful to the foundation of writing, and, at the same time, the flexibility within the structure led to knowing the retreat could be individualized:

What's nice about the retreat [is] they lend themselves to what makes them work for you. They give you some structure but also not so structured that if you're stuck in doing things one way, there is room to do your own thing within the structure.

Another participant explained how having the writing sessions within the retreat helped maintain focus for a certain amount of time, knowing there was a means to an end: “I think it helps a lot because it blocks off a significant amount of time, so okay, I can do this and have the stamina to work for 2½ hours, and then also I can do something afterward.” One of the participants agreed that the flexibility to take breaks when in the writing sessions was helpful, but found that sitting for an extended amount of time was difficult:

I wasn't able to sit through an entire writing session, I can't not move from my chair for three hours, but I liked how we take breaks when needed. I could tell that there is definitely chunks of time writing that are more productive and splitting it up was really helpful instead of what I'm so used to—binge writing.

The benefit of established and structured writing times was further supported in the interview with the facilitator and director of CSU *Writes*. When asked, “What was most impactful for the graduate students for their writing projects from attending the writing retreat?” she stated:

I think that it is a combination of things that come together, and I think it's the structured times that model a writing practice for them. Many graduate students find it difficult to write for a couple of hours. I think it's the structured times that get people together, working together so that they don't feel alone and it gives them access to a practice to follow.

The established writing sessions at the retreat allowed participants structured, uninterrupted time to write as a group with built-in breaks to avoid burnout. The writing sessions also provided flexibility for those who did better with more frequent, shorter break times within the writing sessions.

Writing during productive times. Nineteen out of 30 participants (63%) found writing during certain peak times of the day led to increased overall productivity. Participant responses about writing during certain times varied from making the times of the day when one is most productive available to write rather than addressing other responsibilities, to noticing when their

highest energy for writing each day takes place and to do other writing-related tasks during their lower energy times of the day such as editing or researching. One participant became aware that she was not using her high-energy times of the day for writing and made some changes to her schedule to increase productive writing: “It’s a matter of making the hard choice of choosing to prioritize writing in times when you previously didn’t and you realize that that’s your best bet for writing.” Another participant realized that she used her high-energy times of the day for tasks that did not require much focus: “I’m in engineering, just typing in equations, and so I realized that this is something I could be doing in less productive times such as B or C time.” To review from Chapter 2, “A, B and C times” refers to noticing energy times throughout the day and aligning them with writing times, which require energy. A different participant commented that knowing how energy varied throughout the day would have helped her writing to be more productive: “Gosh, I wish I’d known about noticing times of the day and energy years ago.” Writing during one’s productive times may not always be feasible; however, if those times were known and occurred during the retreat, it was noted as beneficial for productive writing.

Setting goals. Fifteen out of 30 participants (50%) set goals for the retreat and 14 participants (42%) set goals for each writing session. The respondents saw the benefit of setting smaller obtainable goals versus one large goal of finishing a chapter, paper, or dissertation. One participant commented that goal setting mattered because it helped with the breaks between writing sessions. This participant shared, “Goal setting is more specific now which helps with writing transitions.” Another participant experienced the ease of having smaller, defined session goals versus one large goal as a means to stay focused. The participant explained, “It’s much simpler to have goals for the writing sessions.” Two participants commented on how goals assisted with productivity. One stated how the set goals for each session led to increased

productivity each week by sharing, “I set goals for the sessions for productivity and producing X amount of work per week. That's really helpful; I really like that.” Another participant viewed the establishment of smaller goals as a tool to be productive: “It’s another tool for making me more productive, I’m setting smaller goals like for the day or each section.” Although half of the participants did not set goals, those who set smaller goals acknowledged how helpful it was to productive writing.

Recording before ending the writing session. Fourteen participants (42%) stated that the strategy of noting where they left off before ending a writing session was helpful to keep the momentum going. At the retreat, sticky notes were provided to easily record where participants left off and what to focus on when starting the next writing session. Three participants shared how this strategy made them a more productive writer. One participant stated that recording where he left off made it easy to not repeat work. He said, “The strategies are some of the just practical things about how to be a better writer, so I’m not rereading everything every day, or starting from the beginning and how to start and stop in the middle of something.” Another participant agreed and felt the productivity was sustained all day by recording where she left off after each writing session:

Giving us the advice, like to take the last part of the writing blocks to wrap up and plan for the next session using the sticky post-it note was really necessary to be able to be as productive in the afternoon.

Using the post it notes, one participant noted, made it easier to keep the writing momentum moving forward:

I like the post-it suggestion and making it clear that you're not going to go back and reread what you did, you're going to keep moving forward. I used to find myself in that circle and changing the whole writing again.

At a writing retreat, keeping the momentum flowing was beneficial; therefore, the strategy to use the sticky notes or other means to note where the participants left off during breaks was recommended.

Separating writing from editing. Eleven participants (37%) stated that the strategy of separating writing from editing was helpful. Four participants' responses illustrate their experiences of when they divided their writing from their editing: "The one strategy that struck me the most was separating your editing from your writing. That was mind blowing to me, and I tried it and it was so much more effective." One participant experienced writers block that ended when she focused on either writing or editing. She said, "Prior to this strategy, I was getting really stuck in a writer's block and overthinking every sentence itself." Two participants stated that they were more productive when writing or editing; one even wrote more. Another shared, "By separating those two, I actually found that I'm writing a lot more than I used to." The other participant either edited or wrote in each writing session: "I was productive by using the transition between editing one chapter and writing another chapter in separate sessions." Although it may have been natural to start editing during the crafting of sentences, some participants acknowledged that separating these two activities made it easier to write more.

Pomodoro (POM) Technique. Seven out of 30 participants (23%) specifically stated they used the Pomodoro (POM) Technique to help manage long lengths of writing time while maintaining motivation to write until the POM break. The POM was recommended as a separate strategy to have productive writing through each writing session while offering some additional break time, which worked well for some participants. One of the respondents stated:

Writing for the hour and half to two hour chunks is perfect for me but also the POM is good. Having 25 minutes of writing and like five minutes off—I tried it in a couple sessions—and I think that actually works pretty well for me.

The POM technique was not noted by the majority of participants as beneficial, yet those who struggled to continue writing for the whole writing session and used this technique were able to stay focused on writing until the group break times.

RQ2 summary. Research question two (RQ2) ascertained and provided an explanation of what the graduate students learned and experienced at the retreat that led to productive writing. The writing strategies learned by the participants were not only the backbone of a successful writing retreat, but the participants also believed that the organization and time management tools were ultimately the previously-broken thread to becoming a more productive writer.

What the participants believed to occur at the retreats was significant for them: as their confidence in writing increased by learning which writing strategies worked for them, they wrote more. Additionally, the management of their time was viewed as a indicative result of the retreat, such as established writing sessions, setting goals, separating editing from writing, and maintaining momentum between writing breaks. More importantly, the writing retreat environment gave them a safe place to try out new strategies and discuss the inner workings of productive writing behaviors with peers. Table 4.2 provides a summary of the themes on why productivity improved.

Table 4.2
Themes on Why Participants Found Writing Productive at the Retreat

Why Participants Found Writing Productive at the Retreat	Theme
Established writing sessions	77%
Writing during productive times	63%
Setting goals:	
• For the retreat	50%
• For each writing session	42%
Record before ending the writing session	42%

Separate writing from editing	37%
Pomodoro (POM) Technique	23%

RQ3: How did the design of the retreat impact or hurt productive writing? The retreat was designed to support productive writing and establish healthy writing habits. To capture and understand how the participants perceived the retreat design, the research questions were “Any suggestions for the format of the retreat?,” “Was anything missing from the retreat?,” and “How were the writing strategies helpful?” The responses to the interview questions provided the following themes to understand what facets of the design of the retreat supported productive writing: community of writers, group discussions, time to try new writing strategies, identity as a writer, the facilitator meeting, and the physical writing space and environment.

Community of Writers. Twenty out of 30 participants (67%) stated that the retreats led to a feeling of being part of a writing community or a community of writers. They experienced this due to the time they had to share ideas and questions, which established a social aspect of the discussions while also allowing for dedicated, distraction-free writing time. It was also acknowledged that *CSU Writes* provided a connection or community for graduate students through the retreats as well as the ongoing workshops, the show up and write sessions, and the writing groups.

One participant delineated between the benefits of her academic community within her department and the writing community established at the writing retreats: “I have a strong academic community in my department but just do not have a community in the sense of writing and writing productivity as at the retreat.” One of the participants went on further to state that the sense of community from the writing retreats was a motivating factor, saying, “I definitely think

the writing community was part of the reason why it's so motivating to write together because you did feel kind of like in a bonded experience with everybody." Another participant shared how this experience led her to feel like part of the university, which she hadn't before. She said, "The writing retreat provided a feeling of being connected to CSU now with having a writing community." Creating a community of peers who provide a feeling of being supported as an academic writer is an experience that retreats can foster for graduate students.

Group discussions. The retreat began with introductions during which participants shared what they were working on, their current writing schedule, and if they had any writing concerns. Following this was an interactive presentation on the writing strategies, which included small breakout groups for those less comfortable speaking in front of a large group. This presentation varied depending on the length of the retreat and the prioritization of writing time by the facilitators. Additionally, group discussions on how the writing sessions went were facilitated as an open discussion at the end of each writing session.

Eighteen out of 30 participants (60%) stated that the retreat design, which included learning of writing strategies and group discussions, were beneficial, and two participants stated they just wanted to write. The participants who stated they benefited from the group discussions said it was helpful to learn that other graduate students experienced similar writing struggles and that hearing how the other students managed them helped retreat participants stay motivated. One participant shared, "I liked the more open forum just because the suggestions that are given are developing you as an individual and writer." Another participant stated that the time she had to talk with other participants was beneficial for her, explaining, "The more time to talk to people about how a technique worked for them or any other techniques out there that we didn't touch on

are also helpful.” One of the participants saw the value in the group discussion at the end of the writing session and reflecting on her goals and next steps:

I especially liked the regrouping for 10 minutes and in terms of thinking about what you’ve completed against your goals and where do you want to go with them. I think that's really important because it helps something that very few of us get to practice.

Another participant agreed with holding the group discussions at the end of writing sessions and proceeded to share how the group discussion established both empathy and support for frustrations:

I think it's a place where I really benefit from talking after we're done writing. Like kind of closing up what is difficult and what you know [and] what works well and what didn't work. There's a lot of kindness, empathizing at the retreat and it helps. Sharing what we are working on and we talked about what works, and the frustration and what didn't work. It's kind of like we are all in this together.

By learning how other students experienced similar struggles, one participant found the group discussions particularly helpful, and shared, “I like the student questions and discussion, learning what others are doing and their struggles. It’s nice to know others struggle and deal with similar things.” Likewise, one participant commented on how the group discussions were supportive:

I like having those breakout sessions to kind of break up the day. [It] was nice to have a chance to talk it out with her peers. We were all just coming together and able to talk and then we did have the break out groups to discuss, that was nice to get helpful support.

Some participants commented further on how the balance of the presentation of writing strategies and the group discussions in addition to the dedicated writing session was beneficial.

One participant acknowledged that the retreat design of more than simply writing was helpful: “I like the mix of writing and information given. It was a really nice balance.” Two participants attended two retreats, and one of them explained how the initial discussions and presentations set up the retreat environment for successful writing:

I got the most on the first afternoon—the strategies and discussion. I think all of the things on the first day were a good reminder to set up the atmosphere for writing. All good things to think about.

At his second retreat, the other participant agreed it was helpful to have the initial discussions and presentations, stating, “It was good to hear the strategies again.”

Two participants had a different experience regarding the presentations and group discussions, stating that the time allocated for these two events was long, as they wanted to start writing: “The presentations and group discussions was just a little long. It was like two hours, and I was really excited to write. To help stay focused, maybe breaking that up a little bit on the first day.” Another participant wanted the option to write during the presentations and group discussions: “Having the breakout session and education optional and those can attend if they want a break from writing, so others can just write.” Though some participants were excited to write, participants also suggested that the presentations and group discussions were beneficial for them to experience and reflect on when heard more than one time.

Although not all the participants interviewed found the group discussions useful, many found the presentations and group discussions in the design of the graduate retreats to be beneficial. In addition to the presentations and group discussions, the sessions provided time for students to learn new writing strategies and behaviors, have a chance to try them out, and hear how other students integrate and manage their own writing practice and projects. Some participants stated they returned to the retreats because they needed a review of the writing strategies and a chance to try new ones.

Time to try new writing strategies. An unplanned outcome of the retreat design that was noted in 15 of the 30 responses (50%) was the ability for learning transfer to occur at the retreat. Consequently, as the participants had an opportunity to try writing strategies at the retreat just

after they learned them, they were able to make informed decisions about which new writing behaviors fostered more productive writing; this is an example of learning transfer.

One respondent shared the benefit of being able to use the new writing behaviors immediately after learning them. She stated:

It was beneficial to have some time to try to write and use the techniques, and then come back and reflect on the techniques and how you learned the technique. You got to practice it right there and try new behaviors out that work for you.

Another respondent compared her experience of attending other workshops on writing and being unable to transfer the skills learned into a habit:

You always go to these workshops about writing habits and learn a good writing habit, but you never actually get to the point where it becomes a habit. In these workshops (CSU *Writes* retreats), it has helped me form new habits due to the fact that you have time to actually practice the habit.

Other participants shared their experiences of the learning transfer of writing behaviors at the writing retreat. One shared, "I got to trial and error the strategies and learn what works for me." Another participant found that using the strategies as soon as they were learned was beneficial: "What I'm learning and thinking about, I'm applying now." Yet another participant agreed that applying the new strategies was helpful, and went on to further expound on how the reinforcement of writing strategies occurred. She shared, "The retreat allows to practice and reinforce new and good behaviors." Two more participants expressed their satisfaction with applying what they learned at the retreat, stating, "The ability to apply what you learned about the strategies, it helps that writing process while you're actually going through what was learned there," and "You get a chance to hear new stuff and you tested it out already to see what works for you." Another participant believed that by using the strategies at the retreat, this resulted in a behavior change: "I've had a complete behavior change at the retreat; now I can write my

analysis.” The ability to apply writing strategies immediately after learning them is an ideal way to be able to quickly learn what works best and establish new behaviors before the retreat ends.

Identity as a writer. One of the group discussions included in the design of the retreat reflected on “What is a writer?” and “What if you identified yourself as a writer?” The participants’ experiences with this was captured in the interview question, “How has an academic community and identity of a writer connected you with your writing differently?” Fourteen of the 30 participants (47%) stated that after attending the retreat, they saw themselves as writers or at least moving toward thinking of themselves as writers.

Students provided varied reasons as to why they do not identify as writers, including: students with English as a second language (ESL) who felt they were not writers as a result of the language barrier, students who were in a master’s program that did not require much writing, students who did not feel their writing was good, students who saw themselves as their discipline (e.g., engineer or scientist) instead of a writer such as those in English as a discipline, and students who were not writing regularly.

For the most part, the reason students stated for their shift in why they saw themselves as a writer was because they accomplished a large quantity of writing. Twelve of the 30 participants (40%) said their confidence in academic writing increased after the retreat. Eight of the 30 participants (27%) stated that their confidence increased because they were not having negative thoughts such as feeling guilty about not writing. Nine of the 30 participants (30%) said their feelings associated with writing were different and more positive after the retreat. One participant shared, “Prior, my writing process was negative and I didn’t embrace self as a writer. Now I write on a regular basis.” A few participants even found enjoyment in their writing. One stated that she looks forward to writing now: “I’m viewing writing as enjoyment and look

forward to it now. I have passion for my topic again.” Another stated that she made more progress on her writing than she had prior to the retreat: “Writing is a lot closer to enjoyable because I was actually making progress in a way that I hadn't before.” After connecting to the enjoyment of writing, one participant shared, “By organizing my thoughts for writing that day to get myself to recognize what was good about writing and it's really actually made me enjoy writing.” One participant who did not identify as a writer stated, “It definitely sparked some self-reflection that resulted in me realizing I did have to do some mental work towards writing it in order to be successful.” The discussion of identity as a writer was beneficial for those who already had a positive connection to the ascription as well as those who either had a negative view of writing or realized that writing regularly could be enjoyable.

Facilitator meeting. The facilitator of the writing retreats and director of *CSU Writes* offered an optional 20-minute individual meeting for retreat participants to ask questions about writing or their writing project. Despite the fact that this was not one of the research questions, seven of the 30 participants (23%) acknowledged the benefit of this meeting during their interview. One participant shared how the facilitator meeting provided more targeted advice for their writing, stating, “I found the one on one meeting with the facilitator really helpful for me because it gave me a chance to get into some more details with her because at the time I needed that.” Another participant shared how the facilitator meeting was calming, stating, “I liked the meeting with the facilitator, I think that the way that she is personally and her style is very calming and reassuring which helps my writing.” One participant shared how they were previously stuck but able to work through it after the facilitator meeting. She stated, “I think the consultation that [the facilitator] offers are helpful if you really are stuck and want to talk and help you get over whatever your hump is and that those are kind of a valuable resource.”

The facilitator and director of *CSU Writes* was asked, “What do you think the students are seeing as helpful in the individual meetings?” She responded,

What's most useful about the conversation is that they are individualized and students can bring any issue related to their writing. In a retreat where everything is like, this is how we do it and it's the same structure for everybody, it's a break out moment where all of the attention is on the individual student and what his/her specific challenges are.

Also, students asked about the process of putting together their literature review or about working with a faculty advisor or the student can't focus at home because they have kids. It could be that the student's writing environment that used to work, now, no longer does. I've had a number of students talk about how they had a difficult time sitting down and focusing on their own. I also talk with a number of international student who take the opportunity to have someone look at their writing; there can be a feedback moment with their writing because I have a background in composition and writing. I can take a look and give them targeted feedback.

The facilitator meeting was an optional agenda item offered to participants during the retreat at certain times of the day. At this meeting, participants could receive individualized support with their writing related obstacles. Here, students could discuss a range of challenges; many felt it supported their productive writing.

Writing session length, retreat environment, and physical writing space. As to the length of the actual writing sessions, 12 out of the 30 participants (40%) felt that two to three hours of writing at a time was the right amount of time; five out of the 30 participants (17%) stated one hour was enough, and five (17%) said anything longer than three hours was considered too long to maintain focus. One participant observed that, regarding sessions more than three hours, “I would be productive for like two or three hours of writing and then after three hours I would do some editing or work on a graph and treated it as my less productive times.”

Additional factors to support a productive writing environment at the retreats included the availability of snacks and refreshments, particularly coffee and tea. This was not one of the interview questions; however, three out of the 30 participants (10%) mentioned snacks during the

interviews, and eight out of the 132 participant retreat evaluations (6%) noted that these refreshments were a valuable factor. A participant shared that having food in the room made it easier to keep the momentum and focus because it was effortless to grab a quick snack when needed; knowing that refreshments were there and accessible was one less thing to have to plan. Three participants stated that “the retreat had the feeling of being in a coffee shop” they liked. This environment was preferred to writing in isolation, as one of the respondents stated, “At the retreat you aren’t completely disconnected, like in a coffee shop and there is enough interaction on breaks and group chats so you don’t feel isolated.”

It was helpful when the physical room itself had plenty of space in which to spread out. One participant indicated that the retreat room was preferred over other areas for writing—such as the library—that could feel stuffy and had limited space to spread out. Four of the participants (13%) commented on the physical space in regards to the inclusion of natural light and number of outlets for the computers. One participant said, “One of the rooms did not have enough outlets and it was a point of stress.” Additionally, having areas for participants to set up just outside the retreat room was appreciated; four out of 30 participants (13%) liked the structure and intensity of the retreats but desired their own space just outside the retreat room.

RQ3 summary. The data collected from research question three (RQ3) was integral to understanding why the theoretical framework of communities of practice was applicable to this study. The participants expound upon how the sense of community built through the group discussions addressing writing struggles and successes and discussions about establishing an identity as a writer all support communities of practice; the idea of these communities was essential to writing productivity for graduate students.

The design of the retreat was not unique in offering a combination of writing sessions, groups presentations, and scheduled breaks; however, what was distinct for these specific graduate student retreats was the emphatic recognition by students of productive writing as an outcome of conversing with peers and writing in groups with peers. Table 4.3 provides a summary of the design themes that the participants indicated as supportive to productive writing.

Table 4.3
Themes of Writing Retreat Design that Supported Productive Writing

Themes	Response %
Community of writers	67%
Group discussions	60%
Time to try on new writing strategies	50%
Identity as a writer	47%
Facilitator meeting	27%
Writing session length, retreat environment, and physical writing space	6%-40%

RQ4: Why do participants experience obstacles to writing during the retreat and afterwards? While the responses to obstacles at the retreat were limited, a few were provided. One obstacle that impacted productivity was when the participants were inadequately prepared to write at the retreat. Another obstacle was when participants were distracted by writing with others, and the third obstacle was when the reason the participant attended the retreat was not voluntary. The interview questions used for this research question were “What was most impactful for your writing project at the retreat and what was most challenging?,” “What was the reason for attending the retreat?,” “How has social writing or writing in groups impacted your writing?,” “What was surprising?,” and “Would you suggest this to others and if so, what would you say?”

Retreat preparation. While participants were informed before the retreat of the importance of being prepared to write for the duration of the retreat, 12 of the 30 participants (40%) stated that their preparation, organization of materials, and having enough to work on during the retreat had a direct impact in the outcome of their productivity. One response was, “I didn't realize how much material I needed to be prepared for in advance.” Another participant shared how the preparation impacted what could be accomplished: “If I do this again, I know to prepare more because I think that I could actually get done what I set out to do.” Another participant commented on the importance of the organization of material and deciding on a project prior to the retreat, stating, “I would go into the retreat prepared to write and to really use the time to write, having the literature organized and at least having a project in mind to work on.” All of these responses emphasized the influence that preparation had on productivity.

Additional responses related to the importance of preparation were provided from the question “How would you explain the retreat to others?” One participant suggested to not only be prepared with material, but also be prepared to write. She said, “I would tell them to make sure they have plenty of material there to write about and be prepared to write. That it's really, really helpful, and keep going to as many retreats as you can.” Another participant agreed that being ready to write at the retreat was important: “I would recommend the retreat and to be ready to write. If they're not in that place, they want to get prepared and realizing it's just not about quantity.” Lack of preparation as an obstacle was further highlighted in the interview with the facilitator and director of *CSU Writes* when asked, “What have you seen as the biggest challenge with student progress on their writing project at the writing retreat?” She responded:

“I would say being able to determine what they really want to work on and prepare what they really need to bring in order to write. For a lot of students, this is a problem. They don't bring enough material to work on, and they often need to then

go and read more. I think it takes practice to develop an understanding of what it takes to be able to write for long periods of time at a retreat.”

One participant shared his experience at the retreat of recognizing the amount of time it takes to write, which was not known prior to the retreat. He stated:

“I thought I would accomplish more, but I think what it did, it made me realize how long it's actually going to take to write and how I need to allocate more time, it was a good wake-up call.”

This response provided a different perspective of acknowledging that if participants underestimated the time it takes to write, it could lead to disappointment if retreat goals were not achieved.

While not being prepared could be an obstacle, the retreat could be used as a way to becoming prepared to write. Six participants (20%) stated that they used the retreat time to get organized and create a writing plan because it had been a while since they worked on their writing project and they needed time to figure out where they left off. Consequently, using the time at the retreat to get organized let them set up for more productive writing after the retreat.

Distractions. A retreat setting can be perceived as too distracting for participants to write; however, participants were surprised by how easy it was to stay focused at the retreat. Participant responses revealed 14 of the 30 participants (47%) said the retreat was distraction-free. Thirteen out of the 30 participants (43%) said they were concerned the noise would be distracting but that was not the case. Eight respondents (27%) said they used their ear phones when they wrote anyway, which drowned the noise. Lastly, three participants (10%) were surprised at how once they started writing they did not notice any noise. One participant stated, “Once I got into the writing session, I didn’t really know people were around,” and another participant stated, “This is not the ideal (to write with others), but it's not too bad because everyone is working.” Others,

however, felt distracted at the retreat; one participant felt writing with others was an obstacle for them and stated, “I get distracted writing in a group—it makes me anxious. I don’t like the noise of others getting up for coffee or leaving the room.”

Compared to those who felt the retreat was distraction-free, this data point has limited validation. Additionally, some individuals may simply never feel comfortable writing alongside others. Doing so is a small obstacle when compared to the writing results the participants experienced, which is shared in the question RQ5. Figure 4.1 provides a summary of the participants’ experiences with distractions at the retreat.

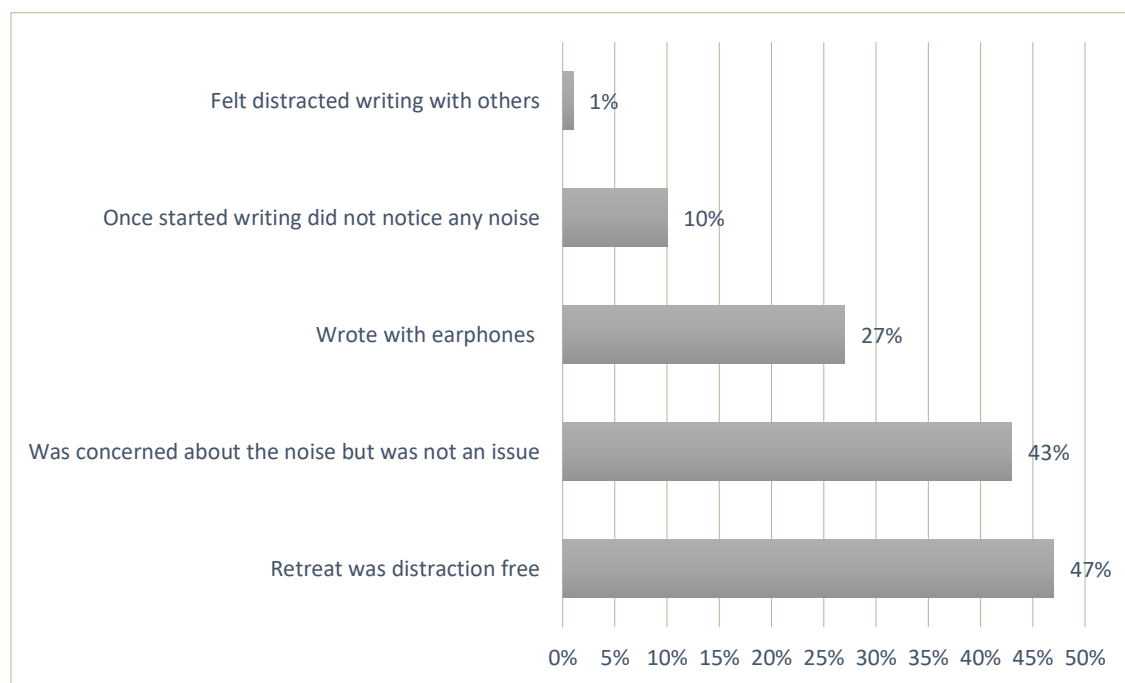


Figure 4.1: Participants’ experiences with distractions at the retreat.

The facilitator and director of *CSU Writes* was asked whether she noticed struggles with distractions from other students, or if she noticed students losing focus at the writing retreat. She stated, “I don’t remember anybody commenting on evaluations anything like ‘the student next to me was distracting and I couldn’t focus on point to get things done.’ Most graduate students do respect the ‘no cell phone, no email’ in the room expectation.” While the collaborative nature of

writing retreats might appear to be a disturbance for those who get distracted easily, on the contrary, most participants found the retreat to be free of distraction.

Involuntary attendance or retreat purpose. Of the 30 participants, all respondents stated the retreat was productive for them except for one individual. This student was told by their advisor to attend the retreat; hence, the retreat was involuntary for this student. Furthermore, during the retreat this participant was pulled out of the retreat for issues at a clinic and was not able to have a distraction-free writing experience. Additionally, this participant is a Veterinary student who was not writing a traditional dissertation and did not feel the purpose of the retreat was applicable. This participant stated,

I attended this because my advisor said I needed this—she doesn't like my writing. I'm an ESL student. I have a negative view about the retreat because I have to go versus wanting to go. I would want to attend a retreat on writing for publication because that is what we do. We don't write a dissertation in my program and I need help with writing quality versus time management.

Another student shared that they were productive at the retreat even though they had previously attended two retreats looking for support on how to write their literature review, which was not the purpose of the retreat. Participants who attend the retreat seeking specific instruction such as how to write a dissertation chapter, access library resources, or how to improve grammar had limited support for these foci and were more likely to experience this as an obstacle at the retreat. One participant stated:

The focus at the retreat is amazing and having no distractions for 2 ½ days. I learned a lot but still struggling with how to write my literature review. The retreats help with motivation, writing with others is good, no distractions and blocks of time to write. Anxiety lessons after writing. I still have insecurities about my writing and analysis. Students need support with this and the literature review, we are expected to go at it alone. Also, library citation and software support is needed.

Another student was looking for support with grammar and his literature review, but had a different perspective after attending the retreat. The participant stated:

Things like the writing strategies are actually more important at the retreat than my own mechanical issues that I have to work on, such as grammar or the literature review. After I went to the 2nd retreat and thought about it more, I really think the “how to” on figuring out how to structure your writing time and some of the other strategies is important at the retreat than the “how to” do a literature review.

To emphasize this further, the facilitator and director of CSU *Writes* was asked if she had come across situations where the writing retreat was not the right fit. She stated:

Yes, a couple of groups. One group is the international students who are really looking for writing instruction. Another group are those students who are looking to share and exchange writing for feedback. I purposely left the exchange of writing out of the writing retreats because I didn't want to include a tutorial process the Writing Center's offers, and the retreat focus is on getting writing done, not organizing writing feedback and/or instruction for graduate students.

The writing retreat may not have fulfilled the expectation of what a student intended; however, if the students chose to write during the sessions, it resulted in productive writing, and, for one student, a different perspective on what was valuable at the retreat.

Sustaining the new writing behaviors after the retreat. The question “Do you anticipate barriers to your writing after the retreat?” gathered interesting responses. Students who planned on staying in academia were very interested in this, while those who did not plan on doing much writing after they graduated were less interested. Nineteen out of the 30 participants (63%) stated they would attend another retreat because it was productive for them. Twenty-one respondents (70%) said they expected to encounter obstacles to writing after the retreat. The main obstacle of concern was not prioritizing their writing time or schedule and letting other conflicts get in the way of their writing. Thirteen respondents (43%) stated they were concerned about their limited available time and that other priorities would interfere with their writing. One participant stated, “I'm just really trying to dedicate time to working on solid writing. It's one of the things like, I'm working 60 hours a week and between teaching and taking classes it's difficult.” Another student occasionally missed her morning writing session, so she added an evening session when needed.

She said, “Prioritizing the time is still hard, as other work in the lab takes over some mornings or sleeping is needed, so I built in a PM [evening] writing time as well.” Another participant shared how the schedule was a regular challenge by sharing, “I need another retreat when anticipating or dealing with when the writing scheduling seems to be the constant battle that I fight, scheduling the timing and making sure that I continually writing.” One participant agreed that time was the challenge: “One of the big obstacles I have is the time.” Because time and schedules were recognized as challenges to productive writing, the following participant shared that in order to overcome the time challenge, he would do a little bit of work every day so as to not lose momentum:

I think the hardest thing going forward is going to be just keeping up with a routine of visiting what I have been working on at least a little bit every day so that doesn't take so long to get into it every time I sit down to write.

Some participants prioritized their writing time by creating a writing schedule and prohibiting other conflicts that could get in the way of writing; of these participants, six (20%) felt procrastination and writer’s block would be their main obstacle to sustaining their writing and two (7%) felt writing alone would be their obstacle.

In order to sustain writing habits and behaviors and to overcome obstacles, participants said they would use the following interventions:

- Nineteen participants (63%) stated they would attend additional writing retreat(s).
- Twelve participants (40%) will join a writing group.
- Seven participants (23%) will attend CSU *Writes* “Show Up and Write” sessions.
- Five participants (17%) will prioritize their writing schedule.
- Three participants (10%) will set up dedicated writing space.

- Two (7%) will try different writing strategies until they learn what works for them.
- Two (7%) will duplicate the retreat setting at home or at a hotel.

RQ4 summary. Research question four (RQ4) provided data informing of the obstacles to productive retreats. A key obstacle that could easily be overlooked was the need to prepare for large amounts of writing. Participants not only commented on how important this was, but they also acknowledged that they learned how much time it actually took to meet their writing goals. The data from this research question also brought out that writing in groups was not a distraction, but, in fact, led to productive writing.

To further support the push of graduate students towards writing in groups, the interventions participants reported they would use to sustain their new writing behaviors and overcome writing obstacles all support the idea of group writing. These interventions were: attend another retreat, join a writing group, and attend CSU *Writes* “Show Up and Write” sessions, which are all forms of writing in groups. This upheld the importance of having a peer community for writing support and overcoming writing obstacles.

RQ5: How often were the participants’ goals achieved or not achieved? How did they achieve them or not achieve them? The interview questions used for this research questions were “What was the reason for attending the retreat?,” “What were and the main benefits of attending the retreat?,” and “How would you explain the experience at the retreat to other students?” Before providing the results of the participants’ goals at the retreat, it was helpful to understand why graduate students attended the writing retreat in the first place. This research question expounded on the reasons why the retreat was attended, the results of the participants writing goals, and how the goals were achieved.

Reasons why graduate students attended the retreat. The top four reasons why students attended the writing retreat were: they were seeking structured writing time for a specific writing project related to their ability to graduate, they thought it would make them use the time to write, their writing was at a standstill and they needed something different to get started, and, finally, that they were struggling to overcome emotions around writing.

Seeking structured writing time for a specific writing project related to their ability to graduate. Twenty-one of 30 participants (70%) stated that they attended the retreat to complete writing related to graduation. Specifically, 14 participants of the 21 respondents (67%) wanted to finish their thesis or dissertation and graduate, three (14%) wanted to make progress on a chapter or paper related to their dissertation or thesis, two (9%) had a paper for class to finish so they could get back to their dissertation or thesis, one (5%) had a grant proposal to complete before continuing their dissertation research, and one (5%) had a preliminary exam to complete.

Making the participants use the time to write. Five of the 30 participants (17%) stated they needed an intervention to support productive writing. Five (17%) stated they needed dedicated uninterrupted time to write. Two participants (7%) explained that they chose the writing retreat to allot significant time for writing, especially over a time such as the weekend when they typically did not write. The following participant response shows the strong feelings associated with the desire to attend the retreat:

I needed to make significant progress that wasn't completely painful for me, so I thought of the writing retreat as a way block off significant time and be around other people and make a lot of progress.

Another participant also expressed the need for time to write, saying, "I just needed this like really big, just like, to hold me accountable and the space designated for writing time to knock out these last couple things."

Two respondents attended the retreat to learn writing strategies to help with writing efficiency and tips. One participant shared, “I was hoping that it will both motivate me and be more efficient to give me some strategies to help make that happen.” Another participant was exposed to writing productivity at a CSU *Writes* workshop and wanted to learn more: “I went to one [CSU *Writes* workshop] last semester and after going to that, I realized I got so many tips out of a one hour session that I probably would gain a lot from a weekend retreat.” The retreat was an intervention that students saw as a way to set aside dedicated time for writing.

Writing was at a standstill and the writer needed something different to get started. Ten out of 30 participants (33%) stated that their writing was stalled or stuck. Nine of the 30 participants (30%) said they did not know where to start so they attended the retreat seeking ideas on or support for moving forward. These participants said attending the retreat created a reset and/or gave them a jumpstart on their writing. One participant shared, “The timing of this full dedicated weekend provided a great opportunity for me to kick start my writing again and be more disciplined about it and move forward now.” Not only did the retreat time allow students to start writing, but it also provided momentum for another participant: “I heard good things about it and I needed to kick start my writing and reading and gain momentum.” Another participant was able to prioritize the writing, stating, “I like to think about it as sort of the reset button to reprioritize what was really important, and the early morning writing sessions I introduced after the retreat have become important.” For one student, the retreat was more than simply learning new writing strategies or setting aside time to write. This participant had a compelling reason to attend the retreat related to their program funding:

I found it to be very effective for me personally, especially with writing. I've been struggling for weeks to write a sentence and this retreat was my last resort. If I didn't do this, it's bad because I won't get this proposal in on time and can lose Ph.D. funding. |

One participant shared that attending a previous retreat garnered great results, and he decided to attend second retreat to reignite his writing again: “I attended one retreat over the summer and got a lot of my dissertation done and hit the reset button, so I came to another retreat to get restarted again.” For another participant, the feeling of accomplishment at the retreat was exciting:

I can’t remember exactly the words used to describe a good writing retreat, it was like you know that idea of patting yourself on the back, because like you actually did accomplish a lot over the writing retreat.

Participants found the retreat to be exactly what they needed if they were at a point in their writing where they were either struggling to write or not writing at all.

Struggling to overcome emotions around writing. Eighteen of the 30 participants (60%) stated they attended the retreat because they were struggling with different emotions related to their writing. Specifically:

- Six respondents of 18 (20%) said the dissertation or thesis was a very lonely process for them.
- Three respondents of 18 (10%) said they were overwhelmed with their writing project.
- Three respondents of 18 (10%) said they were burnt out.
- Three respondents of 18 (10%) said they were completely unmotivated.
- Three respondents of 18 (10%) said they felt unsupported from their advisor.

One participant stated, “The retreat helped get me get over a mental block and it provided me the motivation to reframe it and rewrite it after receiving feedback from my advisor that left me unmotivated.” The emotions participants felt about writing prior to the retreat were addressed

through writing alongside peers, learning writing strategies they could incorporate immediately, and, ultimately, starting to write again.

Results of writing retreat goals. Twenty-six of the participants (87%) reported they either met or exceeded their goals, and four participants (13%) reported that they did not. The following results were reported in a few different ways; participants set their goals as number of pages written, progress against their writing project, or development of new writing behaviors and strategies. Eight participants reported results by the number of pages they completed: two completed 10 pages, three completed 16-20 pages, one completed 30 pages, and one completed 60 pages (this was over two weekend retreats). Ten participants reported results in terms of their overall project status: one completed their dissertation, one graduated, one completed a dissertation chapter, one completed half of a dissertation chapter, three completed research papers, and three completed proposals.

Some participants reported their results by what they accomplished by using the writing strategies or new writing behaviors. One shared, “I organized my paper so I can write going forward.” Another participant shared that more routine writing was the result: “Now I have a writing schedule and practice to write regularly. Two participants claimed that uninterrupted writing was the outcome: “I learned how to write without distractions,” and “I’m able to sit and write now.” One participant believed the result of the retreat that led to productivity was writing again without blocks: “The writing blocks that I had are kind of gone.” The results for the retreat varied by actual pages written, a status change such as graduation, and being organized; in conclusion, all of the goal accomplishments were important to the students.

On the other hand, four participants did not meet their goals. Three participants stated that they did not meet their goals because they were not adequately prepared for the retreat. One participant did not meet their goal because they were pulled out of the retreat for work at a clinic.

How writing goals were achieved. The participants who met or exceeded their writing goals were asked how they accomplished this. The top five themes for how goals were achieved from the 26 participants were using the writing strategies (77%), overcoming emotional obstacles (27%), writing in groups (23%), preparedness to write for the retreat (11%), and experiencing a writing behavior shift (5%).

These five themes fit into the model discussed in the literature review Four areas of academic writing retreat model. The only theme that was not identified in the model was the need for preparation in order to foster productive writing at the retreat. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

RQ5 summary. Research question five (RQ5) reported that all but one participant met or exceeded their goals. This study used self-reported goals and outcomes from participants, and the main purpose was to uncover why and how the goals were met. The primary theme was learning and using the writing strategies; this supports the data discovered in RQ1 as to what the participants perceived to have occurred at the retreat.

The participants also acknowledged that they met their goals by being motivated to write at the retreat, which then moved them past writing blocks. Also, the supportive sense of community they experienced when writing in groups was expounded as an influential element of the retreat that supported students in meeting their goal. Figure 4.2 provides the five themes on how the writing goals were achieved and the sub categories with examples provided by participants for each of the five themes.



Figure 4.2: Top trends on how writing goals were achieved at the retreat.

RQ6: How is writing as a group different from writing alone? Twenty eight of the 30 participants (93%) responded in favor of writing in groups for productive writing with the key explanations broken down into five overarching themes: the positive feelings experienced when writing in groups, writing in a group with respected peers who have a goal to achieve, creating a commitment or dedication to writing by writing in groups, the feelings of encouragement created by knowing others are in the same position with writing and learning that others writers also need support to be productive, and, finally, a level of accountability associated with guilt or embarrassment if a participant is not writing at the retreat. The interview questions used for this research question were “How has social writing or writing in groups impacted your writing?” and “How were the writing strategies helpful?”

Positive feelings experienced when writing in a group. The data point related to why writing at the retreat was productive or beneficial and the positive feelings participants experienced was prompted by feelings associated with writing in a group. Twenty out of the 30 participants (67%) shared the specific feelings they experienced from writing in a group:

energetic, a vibe or buzz, motivating, a mindset, being connected, a sync, an intensity, and that it was easier to write.

More specifically, the feelings the participants experienced were detailed with descriptions. A flow or connection was expressed as “like rowing together; it’s a sync or rhythm,” “it’s a different vibe or buzz to be a part of,” “being part of that group is encouraging,” “feels like we are working on a project together, but collectively we had individual goals to finish our project,” “of in the same mindset,” and “a bunch people trying to accomplish the same thing, like when getting together for charity to build homes.” The experiences at the retreat were described as “kind of can pick up on a little bit of energy and motivation from the group,” “we feed off each other’s energy,” “has an energy while still quiet,” and “definitely get energy from others and the large room.”

Other participants felt it was easier to write at the retreat in a group stating, “It’s easier to sit down and write than by myself,” and “makes the time productive versus writing alone.” Some participants shared what writing with others felt like: “Definitely writing with other people is motivating and holds me accountable,” “I always work well in a space with other people,” “I don’t need to talk to them but I like having people working adjacent to me,” “It’s motivating, I think it’s just being connected to other people doing the same thing,” “Just knowing others are there who have the same feelings towards writing and are working towards goals is motivating” and “It was motivated having that group aspects and energy.”

Some participants noticed they liked writing with a committed group that displayed focus and intensity: “I like being surrounded by folks who are also focused,” “the intensity that you get when you’re surrounded by the people doing the same thing,” “The group commits to just writing and people actually commit to that.” One participant shared that writing in a group looked

different from how it felt; she stated, “The retreat looks terribly boring but it’s really exciting to be in a room with all these other academics, especially other academic women.”

The participants’ feelings associated with writing in a group may not necessarily be known if someone had not previously participated in social or group writing. However, this theme supports comments from students who were able to move past writing block and write at the retreat after being stuck or stalled in their writing previously.

Writing in a group with respected peers who have a goal to achieve. The second theme viewed as beneficial was writing alongside a group of peers who had goals to achieve compared to writing alone. Sixteen out of the 30 participants (53%) recognized this and had the following varied responses. One participant shared that she felt encouraged to write by being around others: “Just knowing one or two other people are going to be there sitting with me just makes it feel like I can do it.” Another participant claimed he wanted to maintain the caliber of writing at which others were working. He said, “If you’re around peers that you respect, you want to live up to that standard.” The fellowship was encouraging for another participant: “I like the camaraderie of the graduate students at the retreat.” Another participant shared how the environment of working alone yet together was beneficial, and responded, “Even though we all working independently, it felt like we were all working on something together.” One participant stated that the environment created when writing in groups was unique and supported thinking: “When you’re with other people you know are there for the same thing, it creates a very unique environment, and it’s the entire collection of being together, like when students are together in the classroom—it’s the groupthink.” Another participant was surprised by how much she liked writing in a group, stating, “I generally prefer working by myself, but I’m surprised how much I like working by myself in a group.” One participant felt that if he had left, it could have impacted

the group. He said, “It’s a sense of wanting to uphold the community or mission. It's also that awareness, if I were to leave, it might negatively influence them to do the same.” The participants’ responses explained why writing with peers was not only productive but also effective.

Creating a commitment or dedication to writing by writing in groups. Fourteen of 30 participants (47%) responded that a commitment or dedication to writing was created at the retreat. One participant said, “At the retreat are people who are working really hard and trying to accomplish actual hard work, and I think there's just that level of accountability.” Another participant supported the accountability established when writing in groups and went on further to share how he felt committed to his writing and the group: “I have to show up and I feel committed to the group and to the writing.” Another participant agreed that there was more commitment involved when writing in groups, and said, “Since it was not at my house, there is a commitment to it. I made the commitment to write and to everybody else. It’s really easy to talk yourself out of it when alone.” Two participants shared how writing in groups was productive and motivating. One stated, “At the retreat, we are with other people who are really focusing on writing and being productive—it’s helpful to have that motivation around.” The other said, “Everybody else in the room was also aggressively writing so that helps you, and I just convince myself that I just need to type away, so that keeps me motivated.” Another participant shared that he does not like writing with others, but it kept him focused and dedicated to the group: “I don't personally like writing in a room full of other people but it’s a good way to practice staying in that kind of focused mode.” Essentially, writing in groups created an environment that participants believed kept them committed to the group and their writing.

Feeling encouraged knowing others also need support to be productive writers.

Participants were encouraged by knowing that other students experienced obstacles to productive writing and were comforted by knowing they were not the only ones feeling this way: 11 of the 30 participants (37%) shared this sentiment. One participant said, “It was nice to know the group is there and welcoming and all in the same boat.” A second participant shared how knowing others were challenged with writing productivity was conducive to their writing: “Having others besides myself going through the same thing is helpful.” Another participant felt encouraged in learning she was not the only one struggling with productive writing and said, “I learned I wasn't the only person struggling.” One participant expressed how she enjoyed writing with others who felt the same way: “I enjoy writing around people in the same situation.” Two participants stated that writing with others who had the same challenge made the writing easier. One explained, “A piece is being in the room with everyone else writing and nothing else to do,” and the second participant said, “I found that if I have to do something that I don't want to do, having to do it with other people who also are doing it, makes it a lot easier; there is something about it.” Writing with others allowed the participants to learn of the challenges experienced by other participants; this knowledge helped them to stay productive.

The perspective of what the challenges were and sharing the common ground of facing writing challenges was very encouraging for the participants, and the facilitator and director of *CSU Writes* observed this as well. She stated:

I think this view is healing or at least healthy. The research and teacher approach to writing stereotypically is that other people write or other people are known to be writers. Academics often fail to think of themselves writers, and yet they have to do writing in order to be able to do the other things that they want to do. For many academics, writing ends up being a tool or a product but doesn't wind up being a practice, and if you're not producing and you're not using your “tool” correctly, so to speak. There are a lot of unhealthy relationships with writing on campus, so I think the retreat provides a kind of

healthy way of seeing that you're not alone, and there are other ways to work with writing and understand writing.

Feeling guilt, embarrassment, or peer pressure if they were not writing at the retreat.

The fifth theme was a level of guilt, embarrassment, or peer pressure if the participant was not writing or if they felt distracted easily: this sentiment was shared by 10 of 30 participants (33%). One participant said, "I don't want to be embarrassed being on Facebook while others are writing—it's a respect for each other by writing." Another participant shared how the retreat kept them from distraction: "If I wasn't at the retreat and by myself, I would take breaks or surf the Internet." One participant detailed the awareness that other participants would know if he was not writing, which was motivating for him:

Knowing folks have a view of my screen helps me stay on task for myself. I'd notice if someone is taking long breaks or distracted by social media. The idea of people seeing that is motivating for me to keep writing.

Another participant supported the idea that it was motivating if others knew he was not writing:

You know there's shame if you're on the Internet or messing around and not writing. Everybody in the room can see your computer so there is some kind of shame and I'm not wanting to be that person, so that's motivating for me to write.

One participant referred to the feeling as peer pressure, stating, "It's the peer pressure factor. You just have to stay there. You know you can't get up and go." Another participant shared it was easiest to write if others will know you are not, writing, "You don't want to be the person just sitting there. I think it's something about having other people around that makes it a lot easier to keep writing." Knowing that others would know she was not writing kept this participant from losing focus: "I can lose focus easily. I know that people said they felt guilty when not writing there, so you keep going with the writing." For one participant, it was just keeping her phone off and respecting the group expectations: "Having to keep my phone off, that just helps to be more stringent."

Writing in groups contributed to productive writing at the retreat. The interview with the facilitator and director of *CSU Writes*, moreover, informs of how significantly the repeat retreaters contribute to the experience of the group, especially regarding accountability. She said:

People who repeat retreats come with enthusiasm for the retreat process. As a retreat leader I can improvise with, or work with, or draw out to help others who may be nervous. The first-timers maybe wonder if they can sit and write for two to three days in a row in a room of other writers. Maybe they are introverts or get nervous around others, which is not uncommon for academics who like the low time and to be in a room or space with upwards of 30 or so other people could be daunting.

I think what repeat retreaters help with most is around issues of writing vulnerability. People often experience guilt and feel vulnerable about their writing practice or product. They may not feel they are “writers” and so to sit in a group of people and doing something they are uncertain about can make them feel vulnerable, so it’s nice to have repeat people who are like, “I’ve done this before,” and it’s great, so it smooths over some of that.

RQ6 summary. The five themes in research question six (RQ6) expound on an insightful overview of different aspects and feelings participants experienced when writing in groups. The data collected explains the difference between writing alone and writing in a group: this phenomenon continues to suggest that graduate students benefited from writing alongside a community of peers. The themes for graduate student retreats concluded not only that a focused and committed environment made it easier to write, but also that being among peers provided a sense of support, camaraderie, and dedication to their writing.

The retreat setting provided students a unique opportunity to be part of a peer community, gain an intensity to their writing, learn they are not alone in their writing challenges, and observe students returning for additional retreats because it was an effective intervention for writing productivity. The following table delineates the five themes provided by participants on how writing as a group differed from writing alone.

Table 4.4

Themes of How Writing as a Group is Different from Writing Alone

Themes	Response % Per Theme
Positive feelings experienced when writing in a group	67%
Writing in a group with respected peers who have a goal to achieve	53%
Creating a commitment or dedication to writing by writing in groups	47%
Feeling encouraged knowing others also need support to be productive writers	37%
Feeling guilt, embarrassment, or peer pressure if participants were not writing at the retreat	33%

Document Review: CSU *Writes* Participant Evaluations

CSU *Writes* participants completed an evaluation at the end of each retreat. For this study, 132 evaluations from seven CSU *Writes* graduate writing retreats were included in the review and coding. The evaluation (Appendix D) includes two sections. One section is a Likert-type scale with seven questions and one additional question added to the last three retreat evaluations. One question, Q7, was directed toward CSU *Writes* feedback and included in this analysis to avoid confusion. The second section has four open-ended questions and two questions supported this research study. The two questions are “I attended this retreat because...” and “What did you find most valuable among the retreat offerings?” The other two questions in the second section were also directed toward CSU *Writes* feedback but not coded or included.

Table 4.5

Likert Scale Responses from the 132 Participant Evaluations

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Dis-Agree	Strongly Disagree
Q1. The retreat addressed many of my writing concerns	75	53	4		
Q2. The presenter(s) managed time well	104	27	1		
Q3. The presentations/lessons were interesting	87	38	7		

Q4. This retreat met or exceeded my expectations	92	37	4		
Q5. I'm leaving this retreat feeling I have a good start/made progress on my semesters writing	105	25	2		
Q6. I would recommend this retreat to other graduate students	118	13	1		
Q7. I feel CSU <i>Writes</i> offers me valuable support for my academic writing	107	19	6		
Q8. The retreat room(s) suited my writing needs (this question was added to 3 retreats and answered in 57 participant responses)	38	8	11		

The Likert Scale (see Table 4.5) displays the participants' responses to the closed-ended questions on the retreat evaluation, and the results show that all participants selected a level of agreement as either *Strongly Agree*, *Agree*, or *Neutral*, and no one *Disagreed* or *Strongly Disagreed*. The following provides the correlation by evaluation question of the responses from the interviews analyzing if and how this data supported or opposed the responses from the interviews.

Q1 in the participant evaluation resulted in 97% stating they *Strongly Agree* or *Agree* that the retreat addressed many writing concerns. This supports the responses to the first research question (RQ1) of how participants perceived what occurred at the writing retreat. The top interview response showed that 19 out of the 30 participants (57%) stated they learned writing strategies to support new writing behaviors, which could be understood as addressing writing concerns.

Regarding Q2 in the evaluation, 99% of the participants responded *Strongly Agree* or *Agree* that the presenter(s) managed time well. This question does not correlate closely to one of the six research questions, although it provided new insight into RQ3 of how the design of the retreat supported or didn't support productive writing. The participant interviews provided responses

about the length of the writing sessions but not on the overall management of the retreat time. This evaluation response did not suggest the presenters' time management supported productive writing; however, the high percentage result on the evaluation indicated the retreats were managed well.

Q3 in the evaluation (The presentations/lessons were interesting) had a response of *Strongly Agreed* or *Agreed* from 95% of participants. The interviews show 60% of the participants reported that the group discussions were beneficial in RQ3, "How the design of the retreat supported or didn't support productive writing." The presentations included group discussions, so presentations and group discussions may be a similar point of reference in this scenario but this cannot be assumed.

Q4 (This retreat met or exceeded my expectations) had a response of *Strongly Agreed* or *Agreed* from 98% of participants. This response correlates with RQ5, "How often were the participants' goals achieved or not achieved and how did they achieve them or not achieve them?" Twenty-six participants (87%) reported in the interviews that they met or exceed their goals, which led to the conclusion that they met their writing project expectations.

Q5 (I'm leaving this retreat feeling I have a good start/made progress on my semesters writing) elicited a response of *Strongly Agreed* or *Agreed* from 98% of participants. This response provided an answer for the reason why participants joined the retreat. RQ5, "How often were the participants' goals achieved or not achieved and how did they achieve them or not achieve them?" also addressed why participants attended a retreat. Thirty-three percent of the interview responders indicated that writing was at a standstill and they needed something to get started. The evaluation results may imply that many participants were able to get past their stalled writing.

Q6 in the evaluation (I would recommend this retreat to other graduate students) had a response of *Strongly Agreed* or *Agreed* from 99% of the participants, which is supported by the interview responses. Twenty-two out of 30 participants (73%) stated they would attend another retreat in the interview; however, this not an entirely accurate number. The number could be higher as some students said they were not attending another retreat because they were graduating.

Q7 in the evaluation (I feel CSU Writes offers me valuable support for my academic writing) had a response of *Strongly Agreed* or *Agreed* from 95% of the participants. This research study does not address this question, as CSU *Writes* offers many workshops outside of the retreats investigated in this study.

Q8 in the evaluation (The retreat room(s) suited my writing needs) was added to three retreats for a total of 57 participant responses and had a response of *Strongly Agreed* or *Agreed* from 81% of the participants. In RQ3, “How the design of the retreat supported or didn’t support productive writing informed the physical writing space needed plenty of space to spread out,” participants responded that natural light, plenty of outlets to charge electronics, and the retreat rooms themselves improved over time to adequately meet these needs.

The results from the closed-ended questions not only yielded high positive response percentages, but also provided insight or supported the participant responses collected from the interviews. The following results are from the two open-ended questions of why the participants attended and what they found most valuable at the retreat. Both questions were reviewed, coded, and analyzed into themes.

The first question of why the participants attended the retreat was coded into seven top themes: make progress on a writing project (i.e., dissertation, thesis, preliminary exam, grant, or related paper), establish new or better productive and healthy writing habits, the need to be around

others for motivation or accountability, a desire for dedicated and uninterrupted time without distractions to write, writing was stalled and needed a way to start, kick-start, or jump-start their project, participants were experiencing emotions that were getting in their way of writing such as feeling stuck or overwhelmed or having fears or frustration, and the participant attended a prior retreat and experienced productive writing so they attended this retreat to continue that momentum.

Figure 4.3 illustrates the seven themes by the number of responses.

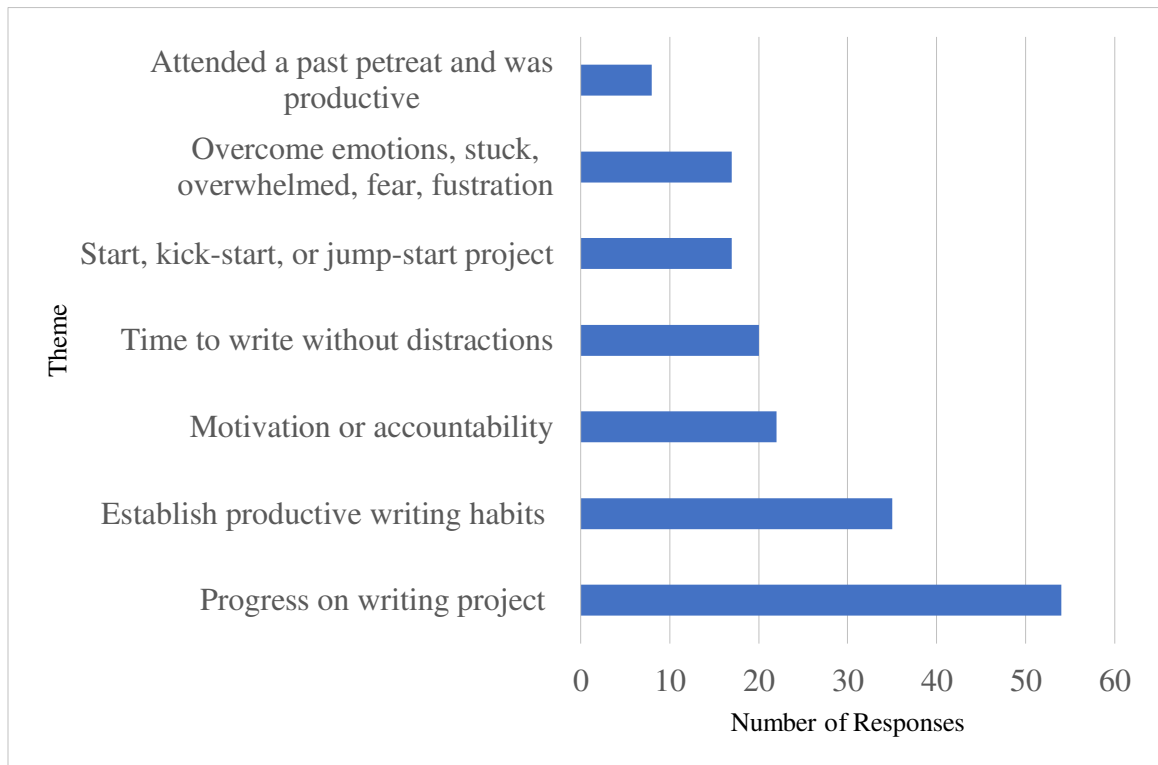


Figure 4.3: Top reasons why participants attended a retreat.

RQ5, “How often were the participants’ goals achieved or not achieved?” also provided data from the participant interviews as to why the participants attended the retreat. The responses from the interviews were verbalized differently but demonstrated similar intent. For example, the interview expounded on how the participants wanted structured writing time for a specific project related to graduating, which could be correlated with “progress on a writing project,” “establishing productive writing habits,” and “motivation or accountability from the evaluations.” Participants

also stated that the retreat made them use time to write, which associated clearly with “time to write without distractions” from the evaluations. “Writing was at a standstill and needed something different to get started” was stated in the interviews and correlated to “needing to start, kick-start, or jump-start a project.” “Struggling to overcome emotions around writing” was shared in the interviews, and participants wrote on the evaluations that they attended the retreat to “overcome emotions such as feeling stuck, overwhelmed, fear and frustration.” The responses from the evaluation further supported the participant responses collected from the interviews.

The second open-ended question, “What did you find most valuable at the retreat?” was coded into five themes: writing strategies and time management, writing retreat setting, dedicated time to write that is structured and distraction-free, comfort established by learning peers felt the same way about their writing habits and knowing others were in the same situation, and being able to sustain their writing habits by being informed of the opportunity to join a writing group. Figure 4.4 provides the five themes by the number of responses.

The five trends include examples from the participants via written response. The highest trend, “Writing strategies and time management: productive writing times, writing habits, goals, etc.,” provided the following participant responses: they figured out their most productive writing times in the day, established healthy writing habits such as incremental writing sessions with breaks, used the POM technique, prioritized or protected their writing, set up a regular or routine writing schedule, tracked where they left off between writing sessions so they did not lose time, created a project box to contain all related documents, and set manageable goals to keep focused during each writing session. These responses were reinforced in the interviews and included in RQ1 and RQ2 results.

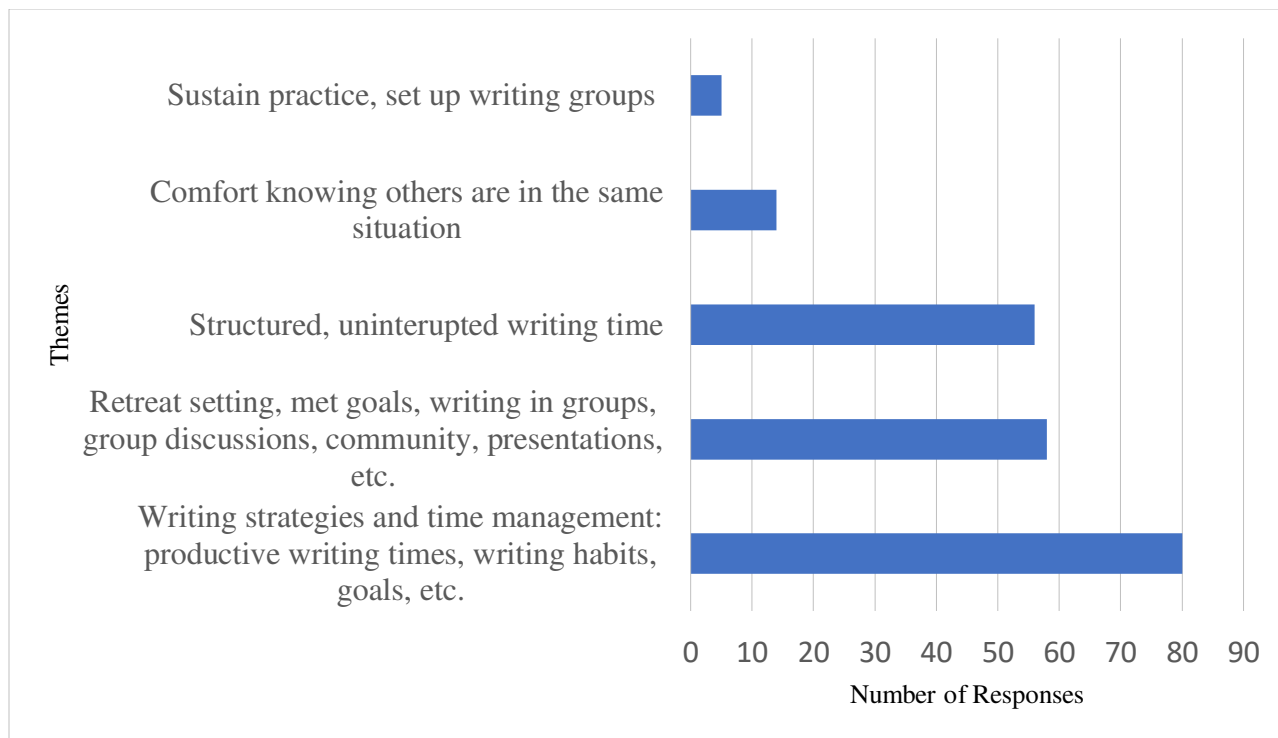


Figure 4.4: What participants found most valuable at the retreat.

The second highest trend, “The writing retreat setting, met goals, writing in groups, group discussions, community, presentations, etc.,” provided the following participant responses: the group discussions during a presentation or at the end of a writing session, snacks and coffee available in the retreat room, being part of a writing group made them feel accountable to a group, trying the writing strategies at the retreat, helpful presentations, supportive writing community, meeting their goals, and writing with others in a group. These responses were also provided in the interviews and included in RQ3, RQ6 and RQ5 results.

The last three trends do not have as many provided examples as the first two trends. For the third trend, “Structured uninterrupted writing time,” the example noted to be most valuable was having dedicated time to write that was structured and distraction-free. For the fourth trend, “Comfort knowing others are in the same situation,” the example provided was how it brought “comfort in knowing others were in the same situation.” The last trend, “Sustaining practice and

setting up writing groups,” revealed that participants liked the option of joining a writing group at the retreat. These responses were also provided in the interviews and included in RQ1, RQ4 and RQ6 results. The results from the open-ended questions were all captured in the interviews and therefore further supported the participant responses collected from the interviews.

Observation Field Notes

The observer made the observation field notes. The participants knew I was an observer as well as a presenter of material on establishing writing routines and rituals. I also formed relationships and started conversations with participants during the breaks. I initiated conversations with the participants, anticipating they would be more open to scheduling an interview if they were comfortable with me. During observation examination, three themes were revealed: room space, layout, supplies, and tools; activities or presentations; and time per writing session and time of the week.

Room space, layout, supplies, and tools. Observations concluded that the actual room and desks/tables impacted the writing experience. All of the CSU *Writes* retreats were held on campus and at different locations based on availability of rooms. As a result, some of the rooms reserved left participants sitting at individual desks with limited space to spread out. Not only did participants verbally express on breaks how this particular room set up was difficult for sufficient writing space, but the room also had limited outlets, which gave some participants anxiety about their laptop running out of battery, and, therefore, not being able to write.

One of the rooms had a low-level buzz sound. Many participants said the buzz was similar to a white noise and they liked it; other participants said they wore headphones to drown out any noise. The participants I spoke with stated the space did not negatively impact their productivity, it just was not ideal to be in a room that lacked enough space to spread out. This

room was used only for the early retreats, and *CSU Writes* stopped using it after the participant feedback. The picture in Figure 4.5 is a clear representation of the look and feel of a writing retreat in its focused writing, the wearing of earphones, and the generally distraction-free environment. One participant described the retreat environment as, “it feels like detention or study hall, no one is talking. It looks terribly boring but it’s really exciting to be in a room with all these other academics.”



Figure 4.5: Writing retreat preferred room space, layout, and natural lighting.

Participants also noted sufficient natural light was preferred when writing at the retreats. Natural lighting was present in all of the writing retreat rooms except the room used early on in *CSU Writes* that was described above and no longer used. The other retreat space preferred by the participants was small tables or places to work just outside the large retreat room. The participants liked that they could work close to the retreat group in case they wanted a change in environment. Most participants stayed in the retreat room and appeared to be focused on and committed to their writing.

A key factor utilized throughout the retreat and noted by participants as helpful was access to snacks, coffee, tea, and water. This enabled the participants to fill up their coffee mug and stay focused until the next group break without losing momentum because they were not distracted by the need to make or purchase food and refreshments. This picture (Figure 4.6) is the refreshment table first thing in the morning; it is a mix of sugary snacks, healthy snacks, gluten-free snacks, and lots of coffee. By the end of the day, the food and drink supplies were depleted. One participant response explained that the easy access to food facilitated ease of focus: “you can get a bite to eat quickly so stay focused.”



Figure 4.6: Easy access to refreshments.

In the interview with the facilitator and director of *CSU Writes*, she shared her observation that the refreshments were important to the participants and stated,

I was surprised that participants like the food so much, and, for me, it was almost a secondary consideration because was I so caught up in the philosophical and practical elements of the retreat—scheduling, content, materials, discuss topics, and the PowerPoint. Really when it comes down to it, you can just put people in a room together with food and they write and get done what they need to get done.

Participants responded that recording where they left off before ending the writing session supported their productive writing. A tool participants received from CSU *Writes* at the retreat was a sticky note pad (Figure 4.7) to write down where they left off between sessions. The front page of the pad provided a checklist of reminders for a productive writing session. One participant commented on why he used the sticky note: “I noticed where [I] left off because a lot of times I start by reading what I did and what I should do, but was not a good way to keep fluidity in my writing.”



Figure 4.7: Sticky note to record progress before ending writing sessions.

Another tool recommended for productive and organized writing that was discussed at the retreat was a project box. Jensen (2017), in her recent book *Write No Matter What*, suggested a project box as a taming technique to keep files in smaller manageable sections; Jensen expounded, “Scholarly projects tend to expand and mutate.” The project box could also be set up electronically with a different username on the computer as disorganized electronic files can be daunting and take time away from writing. Figure 4.8 is pictures of students’ project boxes they created. One participant shared her experience with the project box: “I have a project box now,

it organized my stuff for me and surprising how helpful closing the box is at the end of the writing day.”



Figure 4.8: Project box examples.

Activities or presentations. The retreat commenced with participants introducing themselves and sharing why they attended the retreat; this group activity had a lot of energy at each retreat as participants relished the opportunity to share something they may never have shared before and learn that writing challenges and struggles are common. After the introductions, the writing strategies were presented; hence, participants could try out these writing strategies at the retreat to learn what works best for them. During this portion of the presentation, some participants chose to write instead of engaging in the group activity. This choice did not appear to disrupt other participants. Another activity was a focused discussion of the identity of a writer. Participants broke out into small interactive groups of three or four and shared feelings associated with writing and feelings associated with not writing; all participants

engaged in the activity. Some of the comments included, “it was definitely a label that I felt I don't deserve,” “I'm going to have to change my relationship to this,” “I think I don't identify as a writer very much right now,” and “I kind of liked listening to the topic, it brought in that self-reflective nature.” After the activity, the facilitator ended the group discussions as the participants had become significantly immersed in the exercise and discussion.

At the conclusion of each writing day, the facilitator led an open-group discussion by asking, “How did the writing session go?” and “What did you notice?” These discussions elicited comments that were insightful and helpful for the group. Participants liked to know others shared similar ease, struggles, or experiences with their writing. These group discussions were not highly expressive or energetic, which was a surprise to the researcher; the participants commented that they were tired from the writing, especially during the last day of the retreat.

Time per writing session and time of the week. The writing sessions ranged in length from as short as 90 minutes to as long as three hours. The writing sessions that were 90 minutes tended to be too short for some; many continued to write as the facilitator brought the group back together to wrap up the session. Also, the 90-minute sessions were on the first day of the writing retreat when the retreat still felt new and exciting. The two-hour sessions tended to be the most productive; the participants appeared to be ready to wrap up yet still had energy for the group discussions. The three-hour session resulted in more individual breaks and many participants moved to research or reading within the three hours. Breaks could be taken at any time during the retreat, and official group breaks were predetermined and built into the agenda.

When comparing the morning sessions to the afternoon, the morning sessions had fewer individual breaks than the afternoon sessions even though many participants allowed as how they did not like to write in the morning. The participants who attended prior retreats had more energy

to move through each writing session than those who were attending their first retreat. This followed the premise of the building of writing resistance as a developed practice.

Most of the retreats observed during this research period were over weekends and started on Friday afternoons and ended late on Sunday afternoons. One observation was of the energy and intensity during a two-day spring break retreat. Some participants who attended prior retreats acknowledged this difference and felt it was because of one of two reasons; either they had the weekend off, so they were not moving directly from the work week into a retreat without a break, or they had the rest of the week off for spring break and realized they had made considerable progress on their writing by the second day of their break.

In the interview with the facilitator and director of CSU *Writes*, she shared that she observed how the timing of the retreat is important to consider:

I need to make sure that people are not only going to want to attend but that the timing is good and that the retreat is set at a good time in the academic calendar when people are going to be most prepared

Conclusion

The study was conducted to create deeper understanding of how graduate academic writing retreats have been designed to increase writing productivity. The data from this study was collected at CSU *Writes* graduate writing retreats, which offers workshops, retreats, and writing groups to facilitate academic writing productivity. Data regarding participants' experiences at the writing retreat was collected, analyzed, and delineated in this chapter, and the data expounds that academic writing retreats increase productivity. Although it is true that the retreats have been valuable for writing productivity, the reasons of why and how they were effective were further detailed in the evidence of participants' progress on their writing projects.

The participants' initial reasons for attending a writing retreat and their experiences there varied. In examining their experiences, they not only discovered new writing strategies that

complemented their professional and personal writing routines, but also established connections to writing communities and defined their own writing purposes or identities. The data also illuminates how graduate students found that the opportunity to write in a dedicated, uninterrupted writing environment significantly supported writing productivity; they learned that writing with others could foster motivation to keep going when otherwise tempted by distractions. For some, writing with others was viewed as a distraction; consequently, the opposite effect was noted with these writing retreats.

Many participants interviewed stated that they contributed to this study because they supported the topic of research due to the value of the retreat. They valued sharing these benefits with other students. Additionally, during the interview they could reflect on what was most effective for them from their writing experience, which in turn helped them sustain their new writing routine after the retreat.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This chapter expands upon the results and analysis from Chapter 4 by interpreting the findings, establishing comparison to the themes of the four areas of academic writing retreats model in the literature review, and explicating overall reflections and learning. It explores how The Four Areas of Academic Writing Retreats model supports a real graduate writing retreat and retreat design practices. This chapter also discusses the limitations of the study and recommendations for future studies or research.

Findings Related to Literature

The results in Chapter 4 were defined developments based on a thorough examination of graduate student academic writing retreats that was recorded and reported as a case study. The results of the retreats were considered productive as the participants reported their results on their writing project and writing behaviors. The participants' views of productive writing were gleaned not only from their actual written results, but also from the written and oral descriptions of their feelings about getting past writing blocks, being able to sit and write for two hours without distractions, and establishing a regular writing schedule after the retreat concluded.

Because the writing retreats demonstrated productive writing, the other part of the study investigated how and why writing retreats were productive and whether there were different implications for graduate students than faculty. The four areas of academic writing retreats model proposed in the literature review was created based on the literature that expands upon how writing retreats are productive. However, the majority of the research was on faculty and the literature lacked an empirical study on graduate student writing retreats. This section took the original four areas of academic writing retreats model and compared it against the study findings

to see what supported the model, what deviated from the model, and then introduced a revised model.

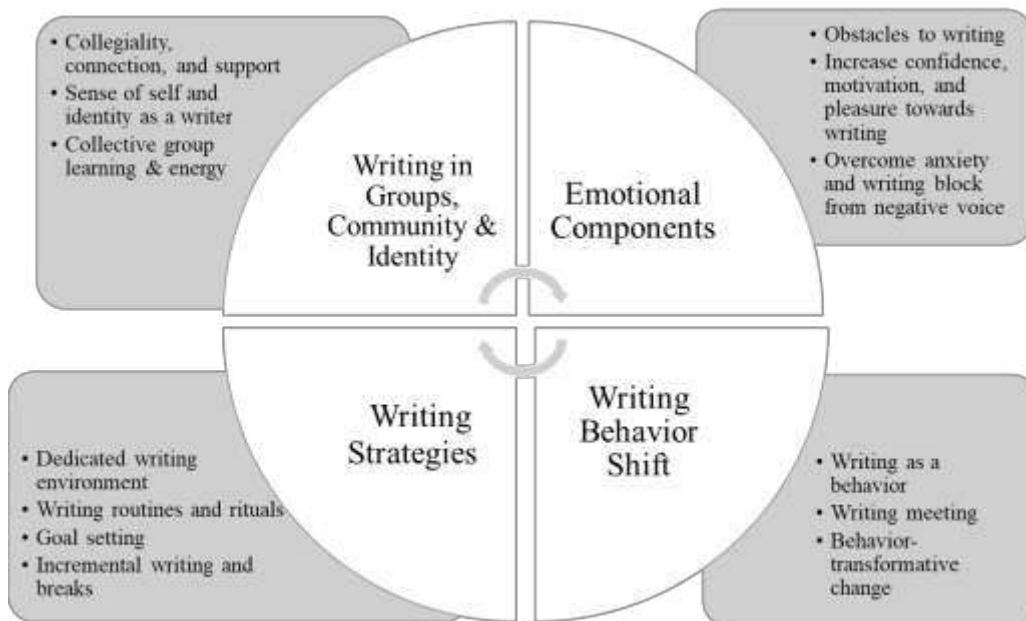


Figure 5.1. Four areas of academic writing retreats model (original model from Chapter 2).

Writing in Groups, Community, and Group Learning and Energy (Identity)

The original model created from the current literature included “identity as a writer” in this quadrant, but the research revealed that connecting with the identity of a writer resulted in a behavioral change. Consequently, identity was moved to the Writing Behavior Shift quadrant. In addition, the title of this quadrant was updated to recognize the focus on learning and energy that emerged in the data.

The literature showed that some of the faculty writing retreats supported collegiate support and connection through providing peer feedback, peer reviews, and peer editing (Grant, 2008; Grant & Knowles, 2000; Swaggerty et al., 2001). Even though these activities were not part of the writing retreats in this study, the participants felt strongly that a community of peer

writers was established. This connection was developed through the feeling of a supportive community, which stemmed from the group discussions and writing together as a group.

Each retreat started off with the participants introducing themselves and sharing their writing concerns; this alone started to bring the group together as they realized everyone experienced writing obstacles. It also affirmed that there were different ways to approach writing and writing behaviors, a discussion that often continued during breaks. Specifically, one participant shared how helpful the group-shares were because “There is a lot of kindness and empathizing that helps [and] it’s like we are all in this together.” Another participant stated the group discussions were supportive, stating, “It’s nice to have a chance to talk with peers and get the helpful support.”

Because group discussions were an integral component to the establishment of academic community and connection, the responses about writing in groups or social writing were most significant. The literature described the effects of writing in groups as an energy, flow, buzz, and feeling of being in a zone (Garside et al., 2015). The effect was also defined as a collective group energy that resulted in motivation to write, commitment to the writing process, and continued writing (Casey, Barron, & Gordon, 2013). This CSU *Writes* study revealed similar results and further detailed how the results developed via group writing.

This research study focused specifically on graduate students found that 93% participants favor writing in groups versus writing alone, which may relate to the idea that many students find the dissertation process to be a particularly lonely one. Participants experienced many positive feelings when writing in groups such as a flow or connection and a feeling of being in sync, in a rhythm, or figuratively in a boat rowing together. One participant described it as “working on a project together and collectively everyone has their own goals.” Group writing

also created an energy that retreat participants felt; one participant stated, “It made it easier to sit down and write than when alone.” Writing in groups was not only motivating, but it also provided focus. One participant stated, “It’s motivating, holds them accountable and they don’t need to talk, and it’s just nice having people working adjacent to me.” Writing in groups fostered an intensity that helped keep participants focused.

In addition to the positive feelings created by writing in groups such as a flow, sync, or rhythm and an energy, motivation, or focus that made it easier to write, participants also liked writing among peers with similar goals. In general, participants stated that such an experience created a desire to live up to a standard. One participant shared that he “wanted to uphold the community or mission and there is an awareness that if he were to leave, his absence might negatively influence others to do the same.” The group conferred the idea that writing alongside this respected community resulted in maintaining and continuing the momentum and support.

Writing in groups also lends itself to a feeling of commitment or responsibility to writing throughout the retreat; as one participant stated, “When writing at home, there isn’t any accountability to anyone,” but at the retreat, “I made a commitment to write throughout the retreat and to everyone else.” Another participant stated:

I have to show up and I feel committed to the group and to the writing. After getting to know a community of writers and everyone there is committed to writing, it created a dedication to their own writing.

An interesting dynamic that appeared was the encouragement participants felt after learning that others share in the experience of writing obstacles. One participant stated, “Just knowing others in the room are going through the same thing was helpful.” As the dissertation process is generally done alone, an awareness of common dilemmas in writing and strategies to overcome these feelings reassured retreat participants that they could complete their writing. Finally, the guilt or embarrassment associated with surfing the internet when one was to be

writing and the awareness that others could see if one was surfing the internet was considered to be a motivating factor in sustained writing.

This study supports the literature on the subject of writing in groups in that it is considered helpful for productive writing; it proceeds to provide reasons why. Additionally, all of the outcomes of writing in groups support the collective consciousness phenomenon, which fosters awareness of writing challenges and learning of different writing approaches. Bache (2008) explained how groups take on a shared set of beliefs and goals, which results in action such as continuing to write when one would otherwise become distracted or not be motivated to continue. Levi (2003) went on to share how collective resonance occurs in groups and feels like an energy, flow, or rhythm that positively influences an outcome; by extension, collective resonance supports how and why productive group writing occurs at writing retreats. The literature and the participant responses on this phenomenon show that collective group learning and energy are reinforced at writing retreats.

Writing Strategies

Literature points out that the top reason for productivity at writing retreats is due to the writing strategies taught (Moore, 2003; Petrova & Coughlin, 2012). The importance of writing strategies was evidenced in this study through the interviews and the CSU *Writes* evaluations. The element of teaching writing strategies, though simple in some sense, was identified by many areas of the study as a fundamental basis for a successful writing retreat. The current literature and results from this study both demonstrate how strategies support productive writing at retreats, specifically the strategies of uninterrupted dedicated writing sessions, writing during productive times of the day, setting goals for the retreat, using bulks of time to write or

incremental writing sessions, and taking regular breaks throughout the retreat or specifically using the POM technique.

These strategies, also referred to as routines and rituals, establish an individual's personal writing behavior or approach to writing success. In the recently published book *Air & Light & Time & Space*, Sword (2017) surveyed over 1200 academics to understand how successful academics write. The research suggests discovering one's own "rhythms and rituals" to facilitate successful writing (p. 42). Two additional routines or strategies the participants recognized as helpful were also expounded in Sword's research: recording or tracking progress so momentum is easily continued between breaks and separating the writing from the editing process. Goodson (2016) also recommends writing quickly and editing slowly.

The writing strategies learned and practiced by retreat participants not only functioned as the backbone of a successful writing retreat, but the participants also believed the organization and time management tools were ultimately the links necessary to becoming better writers. This perspective and experience support the idea that as one writes, he or she feels creative and successful (Singh, 2012). Therefore, participants saw writing as joyful and viewed themselves as writers (Kerna, et al., 2014), which could have been a catalyst for continued and productive writing. In addition to this, retreats were found to be a desirable place to establish understanding of writing challenges as the retreats created an environment in which participants could learn and apply new writing strategies (Casey et al., 2016; Garside et al., 2015).

Emotional Components and Obstacles to Writing

The current literature states that for Ph.D. students, the obstacles to writing are heavy workloads, teaching responsibilities, and research (Singh, 2012). Additionally, some writing projects are not even started due to lack of confidence (Moore, 2003) and fear of rejection or

critique (Cable et al., 2013), with anxiety causing a significantly negative impact on motivation to write, which can then lead to writing blocks (Silva, 2007). The emotions discussed in the literature lines up accordingly with the reasons why participants of this study decided to attend a writing retreat.

The participant interviews summarized four themes regarding why participants attended the retreat, and the participant evaluations further supported these four themes. The four themes were; the need for structured writing time without distraction in order to either make significant writing progress or to graduate, the need to create time to write with motivation or accountability, the need to re-start writing as the writing had previously ceased, and the need to overcome overwhelming emotions such as fear and frustration around writing. The literature expounds (Farr et al., 2009) that those who struggled with emotional obstacles experienced productive writing at retreats. Additionally, the literature review also concluded that improved confidence and reduced anxiety were the results of participants meeting their goals by using the structured writing format (Singh, 2012).

The actual results from this study support the current literature that shows participants may have decided to attend the writing retreat due to overwhelming emotions such as fear and frustration around writing. According to participants, these emotions were replaced with a feeling of writing success as 87% of the participants stated they met or exceeded their goals. In addition, one of the top responses to the question, “What occurred at the retreat?” was “ending procrastination and negativity towards writing;” this included getting past mental blocks. The participants stated that this occurred because the retreat was motivating and moved them out of their day-to-day environments and into periods of time set aside for writing, which then helped push them past their writing blocks.

Writing Behavior Shift

Writing is a behavior that requires a change in order for new habits to occur or current practices to improve (Murray, 2014b). One result of attending a writing retreat was new writing behavior, which led to increased writing productivity. At the retreat, participants had a chance to try new writing approaches and strategies and learn what was effective for them in order to facilitate this conscious movement and improvement. In short, attending a writing retreat was an acknowledgement of the need or desire for a change to their current approach to writing. In the literature, Murray (2014b) shared a counseling or coaching method called motivational interview (MI), which she introduced in writing meetings at retreats to support change in writing behaviors. This approach was introduced in the initial group meetings, then explained, and then resulted in early awareness of writing behavior changes.

To explain MI, an example of a study for weight loss was shared in the literature review. In the review, the facilitator focused on what participants wanted versus the reasons participants needed to change their actions (Smith et al., 1997). For an awareness to emerge, as with MI, participants connected to the concept of why a change was needed by asking what they wanted to achieve and what concerns they had. Along the same lines, the writing retreats started with participant introductions including their goals, what they wanted to achieve, and their writing concerns. This introductory format was similar to Murray's (2014b) MI writing meeting as retreat facilitators focus on what participants wanted (goals) and their concerns in achieving them.

Additionally, many participants commented on how helpful the group discussions were because it was there that they learned how other participants felt and discovered it was a shared experience, or they learned what others have tried already and how others dealt with similar

challenges; this then created a feeling of association. This approach established an awareness of behavior change in participants at the onset of the retreat and then continued throughout the retreat during group discussions at the end of writing sessions.

Furthermore, the environment at the retreat was ideal for a behavior change as participants learned new writing strategies and then immediately applied them. Participants stated that the strategies were the top reason for their increased writing productivity. One of the key precipitants to a writing behavior change was making writing a priority versus merely trying to fit it in among other responsibilities. Designating writing as a priority was defined by participants as one of the top themes in response to the question, “What occurred at the writing retreat?” and a response as a top theme to the question of “How will they sustain new writing behaviors after the retreat?” Murray (2008) found that academic writers needed to explore their beliefs on the importance of writing as opposed to their perceived available time in order for a behavior change to occur. One retreat participant commented that “Being at the retreat shifted them back to staying connected with what they needed to do, which was write.”

In the four areas of academic writing retreats model, the concept of “identity as a writer” was originally in the “Writing in groups, community, and identity” quadrant. “Identity as a writer” was moved to “Writing behavior shift” because participants shared how their identity as a writer shaped their perspective on writing and therefore resulted in a behavior change. Responses that support this behavior change included: “Identifying as a writer was transformative—how it affected my approach to writing and the personal relationship with writing.” Another participant shared, “Identifying as a writer, how I approach writing now is different” as it was intentionally planned rather than random. Another participant stated, “I think identifying as a writer really changed how I view writing, and a writing relationship lowered my stress and anxiety by

gathering more info on how to approach writing.” Not only did identifying as a writer change the participants’ views on writing, but it also resulted in increased writing productivity.

In addition to the association between identity and productivity, the group discussion about identifying as a writer resulted in increased confidence in academic writing. It increased positive thoughts associated with writing and reduced participants’ negative thoughts when not writing. The literature supports this, as Grant (2000) illuminated how one’s identity as a writer influences their writing confidence. Farr et al. (2009) and Petrova and Coughlin (2012) further support this in their findings at writing retreats that an identity as a writer had a profound change when the paradigm of what defines a writer shifted.

The findings of this research have important consequence for productive writing. If establishing writing habits, making writing a priority, and forming an identity as a writer were positively reinforced at writing retreats and there was a behavior change for the participant, the participants were then interested in means of sustaining their new approach to writing. Consequently, many participants attended additional retreats or plan to attend another retreat in order to sustain the writing behavior changes they crafted and to again be part of a productive environment.

A revised model of the four areas of academic writing retreats model is illustrated in Figure 5.2 in order to support the findings from this study.

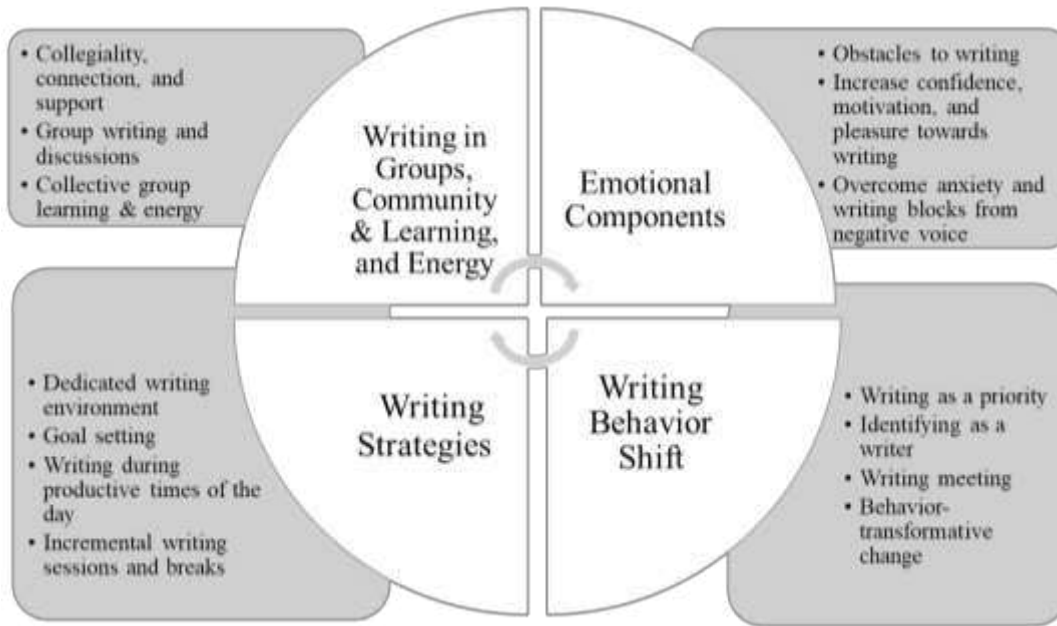


Figure 5.2. Four areas of academic writing retreats model, revised.

Retreat Design Practices

The literature review outlined the three stages of a successful retreat design: the planning stage, the actual agenda, and the closing of the retreat. The CSU *Writes* graduate writing retreats had many similarities to the stages outlined in the literature, so this section will discuss the significant pieces that were identified from the research in comparison to the literature review.

Planning						
Logistics (dates, times, meals, length, location, size, facilitator, advertise)	Purpose-Outcome of Retreat	Target Group for Retreat	Funding-Cost (University and Participant)	Participants Apply	Participant Selection	Pre-Work, Goals, Meeting Prior to Retreat

Figure 5.3. Planning stage for writing retreats.

Planning Stage. The planning stage outlines the actual event and what needs to occur before the retreat. Starting with the length of the retreat, the literature suggested that a two-day retreat made it difficult to fully settle in while and a three- to five-day retreat was ideal (Grant, 2008). This study took place during a research period that consisted of primarily two-and-a-half-day retreats held over a weekend. While these retreats did not fit exactly into a two- or three-day model, they were productive for the participants. The half-day started on Friday afternoon and helped prepare participants for writing on Saturday and Sunday; the extra half-day most likely made a difference in getting participants settled into writing for the next two days. On the other hand, the two-day retreat was also productive. This particular two-day retreat was held during the week over spring break on Monday and Tuesday. If the two-day retreat was held over the weekend, the results may have been different as participants may have been tired from the work week.

Another recommended element of the planning stage was providing a purpose for the retreat. This research was conducted at CSU *Writes* graduate student writing retreats with the intended purpose to support students towards graduating. Some students joined the retreat for other writing projects ultimately related to graduation and were satisfied with their writing results. Along the same lines, one participant did not feel the purpose of writing for a thesis/dissertation was helpful for their writing; this participant stated that their program writes for publication and does not include a dissertation. This student was told by their advisor to attend as opposed to other participants in this study who voluntarily choose to attend; therefore, this participant felt the purpose was not a fit for them and they did not want to be there.

The size of the retreat group was recommended to be in line with the experience of the facilitator, with 12 participants being the suggested number (Grant, 2008). By extension, the

study recommended 12 participants for retreats that included peer sharing, peer review, and/or peer feedback that added a level of complexity to the retreat. *CSU Writes* allowed up to 30 participants per retreat; the facilitator was experienced and had assistance of an intern with the organization of the retreat. No concerns were reported about the level of commitment from the participants. Consequently, 12 did not appear to be the maximum limit for number of participants in this instance.

The registration process was noted as important to evaluate as retreats become more popular. *CSU Writes* used a first-come, first-served basis in combination with a writing retreat application. It was suggested on the website that students come to the retreat at the post-proposal stage. If the number of applicants exceeded 30, those closer to graduation were chosen and the others were placed on a waiting list. As the retreat dates grew closer, many applicants realized they could not attend and the waiting list was accommodated. The literature suggested an application process for registration by random selection (Herman et al., 2013), by first come, first served basis (Moore, 2003), or by well-thought-through goals for selection (Grant, 2008), which this study acknowledged as well. Though some retreats in the literature required a small fee in order to eliminate last-minute cancellations and attrition, *CSU Writes* graduate retreats are supported and funded by the graduate school and do not require a fee. The retreats used for this study did see last-minute cancellations and attrition, and this will be further-discussed in following recommendations for future studies.

The pre-work and preparation for the retreat was identified as essential to the participants' preparation to write (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009). Participants in this study were highly encouraged during the application phase and in the preparation email to come prepared to write; however, 40% of the participants responded that a key obstacle at the retreat was not being

prepared or not having done enough preparation to write throughout the retreat. Consequently, if participants did not do enough preparation to write, they used time to complete additional research or organize their materials. Additionally, participants stated that one of the top reasons they met their goals at the retreat was because they had prepared enough material for writing. The findings from this study exposed a much larger emphasis on being prepared to write than the literature suggested. This is most likely where a difference between student and faculty retreat planning would appear, as faculty may be more accustomed to preparation as a necessary precursor to productive writing.

In the planning stage of the *CSU Writes* retreat, many of the suggestions found in the literature were justified, and, additionally, this research provides alternative ways to plan with positive outcomes; the most significant findings pertaining to students being prepared enough to write throughout the retreat.

The Agenda						
Opening the Retreat (introduction, facilitator role, ground rules, review agenda, items and times)	Writing Warm Up	Bulk Writing	Group Activities (Presentation, Workshops)	Facilitator Support, Coaching	Writing Strategies (Incremental, planning, A-B Time, outline and goals, sustain new habits)	Closing the Retreat (achievement, ceremony/gifts, evaluations)

Figure 5.4. Creating the agenda for writing retreats.

The Agenda. The literature suggested that the opening of the retreat sets the stage for the writing environment (Herman et al., 2013). In addition to introductions, the opening should

include questions, concerns, and goals. Furthermore, Garside et al. (2015) recommended that personal graduate student introductions include their own writing challenges. *CSU Writes* opened the retreats similarly to how the literature suggested, and the introductions included participants' writing challenges. This opening was supported by the literature and accordingly set the stage for writing productivity at the retreats. By the participants sharing writing challenges in their introductions, they felt like part of writing community, knowing others have similar challenges, and were encouraged by learning how others have managed such challenges.

This research study found writing in groups to be extremely favorable; 28 of the 30 participants (93%) stated this was key to their writing productivity. The literature also supported this, expounding that writing groups led to increased productivity (Casey et al., 2013). Farr et al.(2009) stated in their studies that they were surprised how productive writing with others was for their participants.

The *CSU Writes* agenda was positively recognized by the participants for exploring a balanced combination of education on writing strategies, group discussions throughout the retreat, and time to write. Including presentations and group discussions in addition to writing, was suggested by the literature as means to build a collegiate community (Grant, 2008). Participants had differing opinions regarding the ideal length of time dedicated to the writing sessions as the duration of writing sessions varied by day and length of retreat. Most participants felt that two- to three-hour writing sessions were the ideal length. Sessions less than two hours such as the 90-minute sessions were acknowledged to be too short, and sessions that lasted more than three hours left participants needing more breaks or working on something besides writing such as graphs or reading articles. Murray (2014b) scheduled both one-hour and 90-minute

writing sessions in their structured writing retreat program, although the study did not state if this was designed for productivity.

The literature suggested using a free writing exercise at the beginning of the retreat; these timed exercises introduced the practice of block writing sessions. Murray and Newton (2009) recommended graduate students free write about their identity as a writer or their goals for the retreat. Although free writing was not part of the agenda of this study, the topics of identity as a writer and goal setting for the retreat were discussed during presentations and group discussions.

The role of the facilitator was also recognized as significant in the literature (Farr et al., 2009). Not only does the facilitator coordinate the retreat, but they also need to understand the emotional components, provide writing strategies, and lead scholarly discussions (Farr et al., 2009). Facilitators establish a safe and supportive retreat environment (Petrova & Coughlin, 2012). Additionally, facilitators can act as coaches for participants and offer 15-minute writing related consults (Girardeau et al., 2014). Although the role of facilitator was not a direct question in the participant interviews of this study, participants commented on how the facilitator provided a supportive environment and writing strategies that led to increased writing productivity, and how participants appreciated that a 15- to 20-minute consult was offered at the retreat to those who voluntarily signed up.

The uninterrupted writing sessions with breaks and the writing strategies were the majority of the time on the agenda. This schedule was noted as the top reason why the participants' writing goals were achieved. These two factors have been discussed in detail in the Results and Conclusions. Not only were the goals of the participants met or exceeded, but participants also learned about new writing habits, overcame barriers to writing, and evaluated

their own reasons for prioritizing their writing time. The literature stated similar results for the writing retreats in their studies (Farr et al., 2009; Grant, 2003; Kornhaber et al., 2016).

Just as the opening of the retreat sets the tone for the writing environment, the closing of each retreat day allows participants time to reflect on what they accomplished and what they learned about writing approaches and strategies. The literature stated how a ritual or ceremony at the end of the day allows the mind and body to relax knowing the writing day has ended and was productive. Jenson (2014) recommended that if using a project box to organize files, physically closing the box at the end of the day reinforces the idea that productive writing for the day had ended. The study involved rituals of closing each day with group discussions on how the day went, and those who had a project box were able to engage in that additional rite of closing the box.

All aspects of creating an agenda designed to meet the goals of the participants are needed, such as facilitating progress on their writing project. Items not expected but just as important for a productive writing retreat include providing a safe supportive environment, teaching new approaches to writing, and building a collegiate community to which participants can relate.

Closing the Retreat				
Goal Achievement and Future Goals	Feedback on Experiences and Suggestions for Improvement	Closing the Retreat with Ceremony and Gift	New Habits and Strategies to Maintain	Writing Groups or Peer Review Groups

Figure 5.5: Closing the writing retreat.

Closing the Retreat. The agenda stage captured the significance of closing each retreat day with a ritual, and the closing out the entire retreat has its own importance and stage. This stage is recommended to include a group discussion that gathers information about the participants' experiences at the retreat, discusses how to sustain participants' writing practices, and notes the progress participants made toward their goals (Grant, 2006). Through the observation of my research and in direct contrast to previous group discussions throughout the retreats, it was found that the closing group discussion was the least expressive. In the interviews, participants stated that they were tired by the end of the retreat and therefore did not feel like talking. They indicated that they completed the retreat evaluation and researchers could get their information from these evaluations. Even though the last group discussion was quiet, the discussions throughout the retreat covered what had been working and what participants learned about their writing; therefore, it proved to be a different way to achieve the same information regarding how participants learned to sustain their writing practices.

Though few participants shared their actual results verbally as a group during the closing, most responded that they were pleased with the results or that the retreat was productive. In the interviews, 26 participants said they met or exceeded their goals at the retreat; the remaining participants said that they made progress on their writing and/or project organization, but that inadequate preparation for the retreat hindered their productivity.

Since the closing of the retreat should ideally include ways to sustain writing practice, writing groups were encouraged (Murray, 2014c), especially for those participants who discovered how writing with others led to increased productivity. CSU *Writes* organized writing groups for interested students at the end of the retreats; 40% of those interviewed joined a writing group after the retreat and 63% wanted to attend additional retreats to sustain their

writing practice. *CSU Writes* also started the practice of implementing monthly retreat boosters on Friday afternoons for retreat attendees to encourage their groups' momentum.

The retreats did not end with a gift as funding is limited, but the retreats were at no cost to the students and did include snacks and refreshments, which was acknowledged and appreciated by retreat attendees.

Findings Related to the Theoretical Framework

The literature review investigated and analyzed prior to this research described the theory of Communities of Practice (CoP) as people engaged in a similar process or challenge who understand or move past a challenge through interactions (Wenger, 2011). At writing retreats, the CoP theory was exemplified when participants wrote together, appreciated similar writing challenges, and, through the group discussions, became inspired and motivated to write. The CoP theory holds true in relation to academic writing retreats; however, a much deeper understanding was developed in the research on graduate students.

The research specifies how the heightened sense of community experienced at the retreats from graduate students not only lead to more productive writing, but also created a commitment or dedication to writing. These findings support and further advance the literature of academic writing retreats for graduate students. The current literature recognizes CoP as a theoretical framework for faculty, and the importance of building a community of academic peers to enhance relationships (Murray; 2014b) as influential for faculty. The difference for graduate students resulted in less of an impact from the actual relationships built, but the students found more significance in increased relatability and interconnection. As they related to each other's concerns, challenges, and insecurities, they found inspiration and motivation to write.

The research expounded upon how graduate students at the writing retreats experienced inward trajectories. This occurred as members increasingly identified with groups norms and challenges, formed similar expectations, and felt safe in the community environment. New members experienced inward trajectories during the group discussions. One participant stated that he benefited from the group discussions each day as they covered challenging topics while establishing support and a group connection: “[Discussing what] is difficult and what you know [and] what works well and what didn’t work. There’s a lot of kindness, empathizing at the retreat and it helps. Sharing what we are working on and we talked about what works, and the frustration and what didn’t work. It’s kind of like we are all in this together.”

The graduate writing retreats provided an environment of not feeling alone in the writing process, which supported inward trajectories. The feeling of writing alone could be experienced in the physical space in direct contrast to the feeling of emotional connection. One participant shared how the members of the community were “of the same mindset” and, because of this, it was easier to write. Participants provided varied responses regarding the outcome of group writing versus writing alone. One stated, “time is productive versus when writing alone” and another commented along the same lines, “Just knowing others are there who have the same feelings towards writing and are working towards goals is motivating.” Participants felt encouraged and wrote more when knowing others in the group also need writing support, which made writing easier for those who realized they were not alone. One said, “I found that if I have to do something that I don’t want to do, having to do it with other people who also are doing it, makes it a lot easier; there is something about it.” Writing with others allowed participants to learn the challenges other participants had, which helped them feel safe and feel like part of the community and associated norms, which fostered writing productivity.

Participants who attended more than one retreat unknowingly helped new members through inward trajectories. As the more-experienced shared their past trials and successes, it was made clearer to new members why having a graduate writing community was important. The participants who attended more than one retreat shared how their ability to improve and sustain their writing practices were advanced by attending retreats. This advancement occurred by using writing strategies and trying new writing strategies they had not used at a prior retreat; this approach was shared during the group discussions. The lived experiences shared by participants who attended previous retreats were beneficial for new members to increase feelings of safety and connection within the community. Participant feedback from those who attended more than one retreat is discussed further under Discussion and Final Reflections.

The retreat participants built relatability through the group discussions. These discussions distinguished that the challenges faced by individual graduate students were the same writing challenges their peers experienced, and participants learned how others overcame these challenges. During these discussions, emotions such as frustration were openly shared, prompting the group to respond with empathy and support, which then lead to increased motivation to write. The discussion about “identity as a writer” also was pivotal for many students. Grant (2000) recognized that one result of writing retreats was writers identifying with their sense of self and, furthermore, that one’s identity as a writer influences their writing confidence. Moreover, Murray and Newton (2009) recommended graduate students free write about their identity as a writer; this prompted CSU *Writes* graduate retreats to hold a discussion on “What is a writer?” and “What if you identified yourself as a writer?” Grant’s (2000) research concluded that one’s identity as a writer influences their writing confidence; this perspective was

supported by the participants in this study, and some even admitted that they now found writing enjoyable, which resulted in more writing.

The research also expounded that for graduate students, writing in groups led to productive writing. The group writing experience was described as an intensity, focus, and energy where everyone was connected yet individually accomplishing their goals. It was reported to be easier to write in a group, and participants felt accountable to their peers just by writing alongside them. Two earlier studies (Casey et al., 2013 & Garside et al., 2015) stated that writing in groups created an energy or buzz, which then resulted in motivation to continue to write. This research study supported the phenomenon from Casey et al. (2013) and Grant et al. (2015), and went on further to discover that graduate students writing success and productivity were direct results of learning their peers shared similar writing challenges, identifying as a writer, and writing alongside a committed group of peers with similar goals to achieve. Participants also reported that they felt a level of guilt or shame if they were distracted on social media instead of writing, which kept them focused.

The outcomes of this research show that writing retreats for graduate students offer much more than writing, although writing productivity was a significant outcome. The participant interviews expand upon how a sense of community and shared learning among the members at the retreats illustrate the theoretical framework of Communities of Practice in greater detail.

Discussion and Final Reflections

This case study combined the informed experiences of retreat participants with a validated model that provided key factors to be considered when hosting a graduate retreat. This next discussion describes the overall reflections and learnings that led to productive writing and knowledge advancing this topic.

Four areas of academic writing retreats model

The researcher developed this model prior to collecting data by synthesizing the literature and having personal experience with writing retreats. The interview questions were based off of this model; consequently, the responses confirmed the model in addition to establishing context for why and how this model presents a process for writing retreats. Although the data collection informed or confirmed what was already delineated in the literature and captured in the model, it proceeds to further acknowledge writing retreats as effective interventions for graduate students seeking ways to generate productive writing. Writing retreats, however, were only one intervention, and this study was implemented at just one university. Even though the results showed that 87% of the participants met or exceeded their writing goals, this intervention did not solve the writing challenges and needs of every student. For example, this retreat introduced writing behaviors and emotive components. It did not present process-based techniques described in Figure 1 such as outline, flow, style, and language or intellectual elements such as organization of thoughts and synthesis of literature. Of these four key writing aptitudes provided in Figure 1, writing strategies and emotive components are perhaps more likely to be impacted by a weekend retreat as opposed to learning technical and analytical research methods, which may require a semester of instruction.

Lack of criticism in the research

The outcome of limited criticism resulted in a review of researcher bias; yet, when checking validity, the evaluations provided similar feedback to the interviews. The following interview questions were included to capture obstacles and concerns: “Has anything surprised you?”, “Was anything missing from the format of the retreat?”, “How was the writing room and space?”, “How would you explain this experience to others?”, and “Will you join a writing group or

attend other retreats?” The research question RQ4 (Why do participants experience obstacles to writing during the retreat and afterwards) informed researchers of the challenges experienced by participants. The obstacles discussed and explained in detail in Chapter 4 were: not being prepared to write for the duration of the retreat, perceived distractions, attending the retreat involuntarily, and the ability to sustain behaviors after the retreat. Indeed, the researcher expected more criticism than received, which led to the next reflection.

Lack of feedback from participant attrition

Each retreat experienced attrition from participants who left the retreat on breaks or at the end of the day and did not return. This attrition did not include those who became ill during the retreat or informed the facilitator in advance of their early departure. Attrition data is not tracked at this time by CSU *Writes* and is discussed in the recommendations. The researcher was not able to interview those who did not complete the retreat as the interviews occurred at the end of the retreat so participants could provide commentary on their full experience and results. Participants who did not complete the retreat but signed a consent form were included in an email sent by the researcher to retreat participants at the end of the retreat inquiring about setting up an interview. Unfortunately, none of these individuals subsequently signed up for an interview. Due to the lack of feedback in these instances, this study is uninformed on important data from those who did not complete the retreat.

Writing in groups limits distraction

The students’ positive responses to writing in groups and the reasons why they supported them were compelling enough to warrant further acknowledgement. Writing in a group can appear to be a distraction; however, 93% of the participants stated that it led to more productive writing. As presented in Chapter 1, writing is generally considered to be an individual activity

and engaging in the writing process alone has many benefits such as self-reflection and critical thinking. On the other hand, participants found the writing retreats offered something they weren't experiencing elsewhere even for those in a cohort or working alongside colleagues in a lab; they now had a connection with an academic peer group associated with writing goals. This association led to the development of more motivation inspired by the groups' energy, focus, and intensity, and, at the same time, they respected their peer's commitment and dedication to their own writing. In addition to motivation and respect, an expectation of accountability was created through positive peer pressure to continue writing when participants would typically have been tempted to stop writing. The literature also suggested that writing in groups was productive for similar reasons, specifically, an energy or flow, a motivation to write and continue writing, a commitment to the group, and focused writing. It appears to be the case that the notion of writing in groups often has an unfavorable view and is assumed to be distracting, whereas retreats provided distraction free writing. These results were substantiated in this study.

Learning transfer

The phenomenon of learning transfer at the retreat was recognized through the researcher's professional background in HRD. In the workplace, learning transfer took place when new knowledge, skills, or perspectives were learned either on the job or from formal training and applied to a worker's role, position, or approach (Enos, Kehrhahn, and Bell, 2003; Holton, Bates, Seyler, & Garvalho, 1997). Transfer of learning also occurred when current problems or challenges were influenced differently and replaced with new approaches through experience and/or reflection (Bulterfield & Nelson, 1989).

The retreat participant responses suggested a transfer of learning occurred that led to a shift in writing results. One participant explained, "These workshops actually have helped me

form new habits and its due to the fact that you have time to actually practice the habit.” A few participants shared similar perspectives: “Its most helpful when you learn them [writing strategies] and try them [out],” “Getting a chance to practice and start to apply it” and “you learn about strategies and process [them] while you're actually going through it.” One participant summarized it, stating, “You have some time to try and use the techniques, then come back and reflect on the technique, how you learn the technique and you got to practice it right there, and try new behaviors out that work for you.” Fifteen participants (50%) acknowledged this phenomenon as a valuable aspect of the retreat.

Participants attended two or more retreats

Of the 30 interviewees, seven participants attended two or more retreats, which provided additional insightful perspectives. The difference between attending one retreat and attending more than one retreat was described by one participant as, “it supported a way to gain and build on the momentum.” Another participant explained how as she continued to attend retreats, she could sustain energy to write longer which resulted in being more productive. The main benefit from attending multiple retreats that was defined by participants was having the opportunity to try out different strategies and create a writing routine and practice that was sustainable.

Participants attended additional retreats because it was productive and a good use of time. One participant referred to the retreats as being “low cost and high rewards.” He went on further to share how he initially attended a writing retreat seeking support for grammar and writing a literature review. After the first retreat, he realized that the retreat fostered intensity and helped to structure his writing in a way that was previously lacking. He also shared how improving grammar and learning how to write a literature review needed a different intervention; for example, he subscribed to [grammarly.com](https://www.grammarly.com) and it provided tools to improve his grammar.

Participants also stated that they attended additional retreats because, as one participant stated, “life takes over” and they are learning how to balance school, life, work, and families with their writing routine. Another common reason participants attended an additional retreat was inadequate writing space at home, they could not write a lot with young kids at home, or their writing space was not set up.

Summary and Significance of the Results

Writing in groups may not be a preferred approach for everyone. What stood out was how students can experiment with different interventions to support their writing and complete their thesis or dissertation. Both the interviews and evaluations affirmed that the top reason why students attended the retreats was to make progress on their writing project; this emphasized the need to develop management of time and making the time to prioritize writing. Additionally, the participant interviews and evaluations expound upon how structured, uninterrupted, bulk session writing was the key precipitating factor to productive writing in addition to trying and applying new writing strategies. These key reasons for success were experienced at the retreat setting and explain the valid results.

Limitations

This qualitative case study design was chosen because of its flexible research approach to conducting semi-structured interviews with retreat participants. Yin (2014) explained that interviews are one of the most important sources of case study evidence. Although 30 participants were interviewed for this study, the participants who volunteered to be interviewed may have had bias; some stated that they wanted to be interviewed to support the retreats being offered at CSU. Due to this, participants who interviewed had a positive experience at the retreat, which may have led to responses of an overly-supportive view. There was one participant who

volunteered to be interviewed who did not have a positive experience, but that was a small percentage when compared to the sample size.

The other limitation from the interviews was that they were based on participants' memories of what occurred, Yin (2014) expounded that one weakness of interviews is inaccurate responses due to poor recollection, thus resulting in the interviewee telling the interviewer what they think the interviewer wants to hear. Also, the interviews occurred at either the retreat towards the end or after the retreat on the phone. Participants grew tired towards the end of the retreat, so the responses from the interviews conducted on-site may have been less contemplative, as phone interviews held after the retreat tended to be longer.

The retreats mostly involved writing. Approximately 30 to 45 minutes of conversation occurred each day, and the first day had longer presentations, so the conversation went a bit longer. The participants did not verbally share much during the group discussions; therefore, the observations in this study focused primarily on providing evidence of the retreat environment. This lack of sharing may have been due the known presence of an observer in the room. In this setting, reflexivity can be a limitation. Yin (2014) explained how the actions of participants may have proceeded differently when knowing an observer was in the retreat room. The lack of sharing may also be due to the fact that participants were focused on their work and processing thoughts during the discussions, and/or they were fatigued from the intensity of writing.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for further research of academic writing retreats would be to attempt to understand how participants of retreats sustained new writing behaviors. Participants stated in the interviews what they intended to do in order to sustain their newly established writing routines. Some interviewees had attended more than one retreat and so were able to share what

they were already doing, but it would be advantageous for researchers to discover if their intentions changed over time from what they originally stated in their interviews. Additionally, if they did sustain their new habits, it would be beneficial to know precisely how long the new habits were sustained.

Also, this study did not receive criticism of the retreat. This lack of criticism may be captured via the participants who started the retreat but did not complete the retreat. Understanding why attrition occurred during the retreat and some selective factors that may have contributed to why the attrition occurred, such as whether the student was pursuing a master's or Ph.D., gender, ESL status, or ethnicity, would be important. This approach would require a means of gathering and tracking these categories; outside of the graduate degree the participant was obtaining, *CSU Writes* did not collect information regarding other factors. These factors could be voluntarily requested during the initial online registration. Also, a pilot could be conducted to include a small fee from the participants to see if the fee would reduce or eliminate attrition.

Lastly, the role of the facilitator could be a future study as both the literature and participants acknowledged and emphasized the importance of this role even though it was not a direct interview question. This led to the postulation that understanding the significance of this role is integral to a successful retreat.

Conclusion

This empirical study explored the academic writing intervention of writing retreats, specifically for graduate students. The literature primarily addressed faculty writing retreats; therefore, the research on graduate student writing retreats was limited. Given the need for graduate students to complete the writing of a thesis or dissertation to graduate, means of

providing writing interventions for students to learn approaches to productive writing is crucial. The actual writing results of this study were impressive, and the benefits from the retreats include: getting past writing blocks, understanding that writing is a priority, enjoying writing in groups, building a community, and experiencing a transformation of worldview perspective on writing by identifying as a writer. These benefits were both motivating and sustaining.

From the literature, it appeared as though not many universities offer writing retreats as an intervention for graduate students. Writing retreats are more commonly known as a practice for non-academic writers. Therefore, the benefits of academic writing retreats are important for academia to acknowledge and, in some instances, for which to provide funding. Because results were conclusive, this research can spearhead academic institutions to offer retreats to their students and place parallel attention on writing interventions as on other aspects of academe such as training and support for teaching. To sum up the impact of writing retreats, Sword (2017) expounded upon the fact that academics who have attended a well-run retreat value how the effects on their writing practice can be transformative.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

The researcher introduces themselves and asks the participants for consent to digitally record the conversation. The consent to record the interview will be discussed prior to the interview; although, a review of the consent information will take place before the recording begins. The recorder position and sound level will be checked before fully proceeding with the interview. The researcher will proceed with the recorder turned “on” and participants will choose an alias for the study. Upon the initial interview, the topic of discussion will be introduced, Academic Writing Retreat Design For Graduate Students and the semi-structured, open-ended interview will commence.

The following questions will be recorded on notecards and may be provided to the participant to encourage a continuous discussion of the topic. If the participant stays on topic, the note cards will not be used. Potential questions include:

- Are you a PHD or MS student?
- Is this your first retreat? If not, how many have you attended?
- What was your reason for attending the retreat?
- What was the main benefit from attending the retreat?
- What has been most helpful for your writing project at this writing retreat? What has been most challenging?
- The Four Areas of Academic Writing Retreats:
 1. How have the writing strategies and design of the retreat been most helpful: e.g., dedicated writing environment, writing routines and rituals, goal setting, and incremental writing and breaks?
 2. How has social writing or writing in groups impacted your writing?
 - Has an academic community and identity as a writer connected with your writing differently? If so, how?
 3. At this retreat, how has your obstacles to writing changed? For example, a stalled project, lack of time to write, or writers block?
 4. Motivational Interview questions from Murray et al. (2008) writing meeting:
 - Do you anticipate barriers to sustaining your writing after the retreat?
 - If so, how will you overcome them?
 - What are your realistic short-term goals?

- Has anything surprised you?
- Was anything missing from the format of the retreat?
- How was the writing room and space?
- How would you explain this experience to others?
- Will you join a writing group or attend other retreats?

APPENDIX B:

Interviewee Consent Form

**Consent to Participate In a Research Study
Colorado State University**

TITLE OF STUDY: Writing Retreat Design For Graduate Students: A Qualitative Case Study

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Gene Gloeckner, Ph.D.

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Cyndi Stewart

**CONTACT NAME, PHONE NUMBER, AND E-MAIL ADDRESS
FOR QUESTIONS/PROBLEMS**

Cyndi Stewart, 720-227-4667 or cyndis@rams.colostate.edu

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You are being asked to participate in this study because the researchers believe you are in a position to provide information that is valuable in understanding the nature, structure, impact, and experience of an academic writing retreat for graduate student at *CSU Writes*. Given the nature of this case study, the researchers need to hear directly from the retreat participants about their experiences from the actual writing retreat, in addition to the retreat facilitators who oversee the writing retreat. Those being asked to participate in this study can impact the continuation of retreats being offered by *CSU Writes* so more students can attend a writing retreat.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?

The interviews, group discussion at the end of the retreat, review of retreat evaluations and observation will be conducted by the Co-PI, Cyndi Stewart with oversight from the PI Gene Gloeckner, Ph.D.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

Given the vital role that productive writing plays within the ability for academe, particularly the thesis or dissertation for graduate students, it is critical that empirical data is collected and analyzed to understand how writing retreats contribute to productive writing and how the retreat design supports the success of the retreat. With this study, I plan to conduct a case study examination of a graduate student *CSU Writes* retreat. The study will focus on a single case site and will include an evaluation of the retreat evaluation documents, individual interviews and a group discussion with retreat participants, interviews with the retreat facilitators, and observations of the group activities and flow of the retreat design. My primary interest is to understand how academic writing retreats are designed to increase writing productivity.

CSU#: 250-17H (Exempt)
APPROVED: 10/21/2016 * EXPIRES: 10/20/2019

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

This study will last approximately two–three months and will take place at the CSU *Writes* retreat on CSU’s main campus facilities. Individual interviews will be offered to be conducted in person at the retreat or interviews will take place after the retreat in person or over the telephone. The group discussions and observation will take place at the retreat. The document review of the evaluations will take place after the event.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?

You will be individually interviewed up to two times and each interview should last between 20 and 30 minutes. The interview at the retreat will be no longer than 20 minutes; the in-person or telephone interviews after the retreat will be no longer than 30 minutes. The facilitator interviews will be no longer than 45 minutes. The group discussions are part of the retreat agenda and occur at the close of each day; the researcher will be taking notes during these discussions and recording the discussions. Participants are asked to complete a program evaluation at the end of the retreat; the researcher will review the evaluation. The researcher will be observing the retreat and taking field notes.

During the interviews, you will be asked to share your thoughts, experiences, or observations about the CSU *Writes* retreat as a participant attending the graduate writing retreat. During the group discussion at the close of each day, you will be asked to discuss your thoughts on your writing progress at the retreat, share any changes or suggestions that you would recommend to make the retreat better going forward, and share any additional experiences or insight related to your writing since the time of the retreat started. To ensure that your thoughts and experiences are accurately recorded, the researcher will take notes and audio recording (for the group discussion, audio recordings will occur only if all consent forms are signed) and transcribe all interviews and the group discussion session.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

All students who participated in the CSU *Writes* retreat have thoughts and experiences to support this study on investigating how writing retreats contribute to productive writing and how the retreat design supports the success of the retreat.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

There are no known risks to you in participating in this study. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There are no direct benefits to you as participants; however, this research may support the continuation of CSU *Writes* retreats in the future so more students can attend or students who attended a CSU *Writes* retreat can attend other. Lessons learned from this study may suggest improvements to the writing retreats and other writing interventions.

CSU#: 250-17H (Exempt)
APPROVED: 10/21/2016 * EXPIRES:

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE? We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. For example, your name will be kept separate from your research records and these two things will be stored in different places under lock and key.

You will be given a pseudonym which will be used on interview transcripts, session notes, and in the final write-up of the study in place of your real name. The file linking your name with your pseudonym, along with audio of interviews and group discussion sessions will be kept in a secure location in the researcher's home. Following the completion of the study, audio tapes will be destroyed. Transcripts and the participant pseudonym file will be maintained by the principle investigator for three years after the study.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I AM INJURED BECAUSE OF THE RESEARCH?

The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Cyndi Stewart at 720-227-4667. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact IRB Social Behavioral and Educational Research IRB coordinator Evelyn Swiss, at 970-491-1655. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

CSU#: 250-17H (Exempt)
APPROVED: 10/21/2016 * EXPIRES: 10/20/2019

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?

For retreat participants, please note below your willingness to participate in the individual interviews, group discussion, program evaluation review, and observation by initialing one of the two choices. Participation is voluntary and there is no penalty for non-participation. Please note that we cannot ensure confidentiality of information discussed in this open forum.

I am interested in participating in the individual interview.

I do not wish to be included in the individual interview.

I am interested in participating in the group discussion sessions.

I do not wish to be included in the group discussion sessions.

I am interested in participating in retreat observation.

I do not wish to be included in the retreat observation.

I am interested in participating in the program evaluation.

I do not wish to be included in the program evaluation.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 4 pages.

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

Date

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

Signature of Research Staff

CSU#: 250-17H (Exempt)
APPROVED: 10/21/2016 * EXPIRES: 10/20/2019

APPENDIX C

Release Form for Use of Photograph/Videotape

Academic Writing Retreat Design for Graduate Students: A Qualitative Case Study: Release Form for Use of Photograph/Videotape

Cyndi Stewart
Gene Gloeckner, Dissertation Advisor
School of Education- OLPC
720-227-4667
cyndipstewart@gmail.com

Please print:

Name of Participant: _____

Address: _____

I am 18 years of age or older and hereby give my permission to [your name] to use any photos or videotape material taken of myself during [his or her] research on [title of project]. The photos and videotape material will only be used for research purposes and for the presentation of the research. My name will not be used in any publication. I will make no monetary or other claim against CSU for the use of the photograph(s)/video. As with all research consent, I may at any time withdraw permission for photos or video footage of me to be used in this research project.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

If Participant is under 18 years old, consent must be provided by the parent or legal guardian:

Printed Name:

Date:

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

IRB No.: 250-17H
Date of IRB Approval: 4/7/2017

APPENDIX D

CSU *Writes* Evaluation/Graduate School
 Intensive Writing Retreat, Week 2
 May 23-27, 2016

Please use this survey to evaluate the retreat. Your written comments will help me make improvements for future retreats and workshops. *Feel free to use the back for additional comments.* Thank you!

Are you working on your PhD or Masters or Other

Have you successfully completed your proposal? Yes No

I anticipate completing my thesis/dissertation by (date): _____

1. Please rate your level of agreement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The retreat addressed many of my writing concerns.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
The presenter(s) managed time well.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
The presentations/lessons were interesting. Comments:	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
This retreat met or exceeded my expectations.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I am leaving this retreat feeling I have a good start/made progress on my semester's writing.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I would recommend this retreat to other graduate students.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
I feel CSU <i>Writes</i> offers me valuable support for my academic writing needs	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1

2. I attended this retreat because:

3. What did you find most valuable among the retreat offerings?

4. Did you attend a writing consultation with Dr. Quynn /Dr. Holland (circle which one)? In what ways was the consultation useful? How do you anticipate your writing practice will benefit?

5. I would like to see future workshops on (topics):