Research Article

Cover Letters as a Tool to Elicit Peer Feedback Within Doctoral Writing Groups

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Scopus Abstract

Doctoral students in Nordic universities are often required to publish research articles in English, which presents rhetorical and linguistic challenges, particularly for students writing in English as an additional language. While genre-based instruction (e.g., IMRaD) can help students understand research article conventions, translating this knowledge into peer feedback often yields generic or misaligned comments. Instructor-offered rubrics may reinforce these limitations, failing to promote rhetorical agency or task-specific revision. This study investigates how cover letters (CLs) used within doctoral writing groups function as a boundary tool to scaffold student agency, enhance peer feedback, and promote self-regulated learning. CLs allow authors to communicate affect, contextualize their draft, and specify feedback expectations. We extend prior research by developing a rhetorical model of desirable CL features (DCL Model) grounded in writing group practice. Using a mixed-methods design, we analyzed 46 CLs, associated peer feedback, student reflections, and expert practitioner ratings. In *Method 1*, feedback comments were coded for traits like specificity, globality, and responsiveness. *Method 2* involved thematic analysis of expert rater discussions and student CL reflections. *Method 3* categorized the most effective CLs by rhetorical function and feature frequency. Grounded theory was used to triangulate findings across methods within the Community of Inquiry framework. Results show that CLs promote cognitive and teaching presence, elicit more targeted and useful feedback, and support doctoral students in asserting rhetorical control over their writing process. The resulting DCL Model offers a transferable framework for integrating agency-enhancing peer feedback practices into doctoral and multilingual writing instruction.

Structured Abstract

- **Exigency for the Study:** Doctoral candidates at Nordic universities are often required to publish at least one peer-reviewed article in English to complete their degree. For students writing in English as an additional language, this adds considerable cognitive and linguistic demand. Genre-based instruction, particularly of the IMRaD structure, is widely used to support doctoral writers and sometimes serves as a partial replacement for instructor-designed rubrics. However, teaching IMRaD alone does not always provide sufficient scaffolding for rhetorical decision making or peer engagement. Despite exposure to canonical rhetorical models for individual sections (e.g., Swales's (2014) Create A Research Space model for introductions), doctoral writers often struggle to elicit useful, personalized feedback from peers, especially in multilingual/multidisciplinary writing groups. Recent research points to cover letters (CLs)—where authors communicate their goals and feedback expectations to peers—as a promising tool for improving feedback specificity and authorial agency within writing groups.
- **Review of Relevant Literature:** Prior studies have established that peer review in doctoral writing groups offers both affective and instructional value, especially when situated in constructivist pedagogies. At the same time, peer feedback can fall short when reviewers lack sufficient information about the author's intentions. CLs have emerged as a potential boundary tool that allows authors to shape the feedback they receive by signaling their rhetorical goals and uncertainties. Preliminary research has shown that CLs are appreciated by both reviewers and authors, promote community building, and may enhance feedback quality. Yet, few studies have systematically examined the rhetorical structure and pedagogical value of CLs in situated doctoral writing practice.
- **Research Questions**:
    1. Can CLs prompt desirable features in asynchronous written feedback comments?
    2. How do students and experts perceive social and teaching presences within CLs?
    3. How do social and teaching presences appear in the CLs that experts consider effective?
    4. In CLs that experts consider effective, what is the distribution of desirable features across the Community of Inquiry framework dimensions?
    5. How do CLs relate to agency within writing groups?
- **Research Methodology:** This mixed-methods case study draws on student-generated artifacts (46 CLs, corresponding peer reviews, and

CL reflections) and experts' written transcripts and ratings. The study was situated within a semester-long doctoral writing-for-publication course at an Estonian research university in Fall 2022. Peer feedback was exchanged asynchronously and discussed synchronously across four writing group rounds.

  - **Method 1** involved coding 143 peer feedback comments for specificity, globality, and alignment with CL requests.
  - **Method 2** included expert rating of CL effectiveness and thematic analysis of expert discussions and student reflections.
  - **Method 3** examined the rhetorical structure of 17 effective CLs, categorizing their content into *Context*, *Instruction*, and *SocialPresence* moves using a modified taxonomy (Yallop & Leijen, 2021).

  Grounded theory supported triangulation across methods, and the CoI model informed interpretation of social, teaching, and cognitive presences.
- **Results:** CLs prompted high rates of desirable feedback traits—especially specificity and alignment with authorial goals. Expert-rated "effective" CLs exhibited consistent rhetorical moves related to social presence (e.g., affective tone, relationship-building) and teaching presence (e.g., contextualization, clear instructions). Students described CLs as useful tools for requesting feedback and developing rhetorical awareness. The resulting desirable CL (DCL) Model categorizes rhetorical features of CLs and their relative prevalence across the dataset.
- **Discussion:** CLs serve as pedagogical scaffolds that integrate self-, co-, and shared regulation into the writing process. They make rhetorical goals explicit, enhance feedback relevance, and cultivate a sense of authorial control. Within the CoI framework, CLs can distribute presence across group members, supporting mutual responsibility and deeper learning. The DCL Model operationalizes these insights for instructional use, offering a practical heuristic for training doctoral writers in feedback literacy and peer engagement.
- **Conclusions:** CLs offer a promising, low-tech intervention for enhancing feedback quality and authorial agency in doctoral writing groups. When integrated into genre-based writing instruction, CLs help students co-construct rhetorical expectations and develop peer dialogue grounded in purpose, rather than prescription.
- **Directions for Further Research:** Future studies could test the DCL Model in larger or cross-institutional samples, examine longitudinal development of CLs over time, and assess the role of CLs in asynchronous-only peer review environments. Additionally, further exploration of CLs' impact on writers' confidence and revision behaviors may inform inclusive writing pedagogies at scale.

Keywords*: graduate students, IMRaD, peer feedback, rhetorical analysis, writing groups, writing rubrics,*

Abbreviations

- CL cover letter
- CoI community of inquiry
- FC feedback comment
- TU thematic unit

1.0 Introduction

At Nordic universities, PhD candidates typically earn their degree by authoring a collection of peer-reviewed research articles. Publishing a research article can be a daunting task even for an experienced researcher; for junior researchers internationally, this task is even more challenging (Castelló & Bubare, 2023; Indrayadi, 2023; Lee & Kamler, 2008; Lonka et al., 2019; Xu & Grant, 2020), especially when candidates are expected to publish their research in English as their second language (L2) and conform to Anglo-American writing conventions (Leijen, 2017; Leijen & Leontjeva, 2012; Ma, 2021). Across the disciplines, most research articles follow, to some extent, the canonical IMRaD structure as the rhetorical model (Lin & Evans, 2012; Meo, 2018; Moskovitz et al., 2024). Thus, the IMRaD rhetorical model is often the main teaching input at universities that offer scientific publication courses (Colton & Surasinghe, 2014; Levis & Levis, 2003; Tabuena, 2020).

Within the IMRaD structure, established rhetorical models exist that demonstrate how to write the abstract (Can et al., 2016; Dos Santos, 1996; Hyland, 2004, p. 67; Li & Jiao, 2022), introduction (Cortes, 2013; Swales, 1990; 2014, pp. 6-8), methods (Cotos et al., 2017), results and/or discussion (Cotos et al., 2016; Ruiying & Allison, 2003) sections. Using these models, doctoral students can learn to conduct rhetorical and genre analysis on research articles in their specific disciplines and then apply this new knowledge to their own writing. These rhetorical models can then serve as writing assessment criteria instead of instructor-devised rubrics.

Often, when peer review is elicited from traditional rubrics and prompts, the resulting feedback can be "unsophisticated" (Grimm, 1986, Holt, 1992, & Nilson, 2003 as cited in Huang, 2023, p.65), voiceless, generic, and impersonal (Huang, 2023; Yallop & Leijen, 2021). Writing groups may help support the process of authors co-constructing their own assessment criteria within a constructivist learning environment (Garrison et al., 2010) by means of a cover letter (CL).[1] A CL is the

[1] This term originates from Mickelson's (2010, p. 18) concept of a cover letter in asynchronous written feedback contexts within Danish writing groups.

vehicle by which authors communicate their feedback expectations directly to their reviewers (Yallop & Leijen, 2021).

CLs are appreciated by both authors and reviewers, and they typically contain affective language, contextual content, and authorial feedback requests (Yallop & Leijen, 2021; Yallop et al., 2021). Within doctoral writing groups, they can promote self-revision, build and sustain a sense of writing community, and elicit feedback that is both personal and useful (Yallop & Leijen, 2021; Yallop et al., 2021). CLs have emerged as a useful pedagogical tool to elicit feedback that meets the author's expectations (Heise, 2023; Wymann, 2020, pp. 67-69).

Self-regulated learning (SRL) is the "self-directive process by which learners transform their mental abilities into academic skills" (Zimmerman, 2002, p. 65). CLs may also promote SRL by injecting author agency centrally into writing groups. Consequently, this project adds to previous research by developing a rhetorical model of desirable CL features (DCL Model) through the examination of written artifacts (CLs, peer reviews, and student CL perceptions) produced in situated practice by eight doctoral writing groups over one semester.

Utilizing student-generated written artifacts collected in situated practice during a doctoral-level writing-for-publication course, this case study employs a mixed-methods approach. Within the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework (Garrison et al, 2010), the results are triangulated using grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2014) to develop a rhetorical DCL Model that can be used as a pedagogical framework to inject student agency into their writing process.

2.0 Research Questions

The research questions examined in this study are the following:

1. Can CLs prompt desirable features in asynchronous written feedback comments?
2. How do students and experts perceive social and teaching presences within CLs?
3. How do social and teaching presences appear in the CLs that experts consider effective?
4. In CLs that experts consider effective, what is the distribution of desirable features across the Community of Inquiry framework dimensions?
5. How do CLs relate to agency within writing groups?

3.0 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Peer Feedback within Writing Groups

Within a socio-constructivist framework (Vygotsky, 1980), writing groups offer both affective (Beasy et al., 2020; Bergen et al., 2020; Cahusac de Caux et al., 2017; Haas, 2014) and effective (Aitchison, 2009; Lassig et al., 2010; Patria & Laili, 2021) benefits, improving writing quality (Yang & Polin, 2023), and skills in writing (Cahusac de Caux & Pretorious, 2024) and reviewing (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). They are especially valuable in resource-limited higher education institutions

(Aitchison & Lee, 2006). Peer review in these settings may take the form of asynchronous written commentary (Cui & Schunn, 2024; Shulgina et al., 2024), synchronous oral feedback (Sippel & Martin, 2024; Zhao et al., 2024), or a blended approach combining both (Bhadri & Patil, 2022; Cui et al., 2022).

Asynchronous feedback allows time for thoughtful engagement with the draft, while synchronous dialogue supports clarification and elaboration. Both modes have documented effectiveness (Khan & Abid, 2021; Leijen & Leontjeva, 2012; Nelson & Schunn, 2009; Yallop et al., 2021), particularly when reviewers are guided by high-quality instructional design. In turn, the quality of feedback comments (FCs) has measurable effects on revision outcomes (van der Pol et al., 2008).

CLs further enhance the peer review process by enabling authors to direct reviewers' attention to specific aspects of their drafts. As "the means by which authors can communicate to their reviewers about how their draft should be assessed" (Yallop & Leijen, 2021, p.17), CLs provide the contextual information that helps reviewers tailor their feedback and, ultimately, support more effective revisions.

3.2 Peer Feedback as a Structure for Agency and Regulation

Peer feedback frameworks have traditionally relied on instructor-devised prompts and rubrics (e.g., Basmenj, 2020; En-Chong, 2022; López-Pellisa et al., 2021), but this can limit authorial agency. Involving students in shaping the criteria for feedback—such as through co-created rubrics or reflective prompts—has been shown to enhance student agency and self-regulated learning (Fraile et al., 2017; Particelli, 2020; Yan, 2024). When well designed, peer feedback can promote both engagement (Nieminen et al., 2022; Wood, 2023) and metacognitive awareness of one's own and others' writing processes (Panadero et al., 2017; Zong et al., 2022; Zong et al., 2023). However, its effectiveness depends on contextual factors such as task structure, social dynamics, and learners' prior experiences (Beasy et al., 2020; He et al., 2024; Kerman et al., 2023).

From the perspective of cognitive writing models (e.g., Hayes, 2012) and self-regulated learning theory (e.g., Zimmerman, 2002), peer feedback in writing groups supports both individual and collective learning. Self-, co-, and shared regulation practices help participants manage their writing and feedback interactions while externalizing their thinking (Järvelä et al., 2021 as cited in Shea et al., 2022). In this study, CLs are positioned as a peer feedback scaffold that enhances these regulatory functions, offering students a mechanism for asserting rhetorical agency and making their feedback expectations visible within collaborative writing environments.

3.3 The Community of Inquiry Framework and Cover Letters

The Community of Inquiry (CoI) model, rooted in socio-constructivist learning theory, conceptualizes deep learning as emerging from the dynamic interaction of three core presences: social, teaching, and cognitive (Garrison et al., 2010). In blended and asynchronous settings, these presences shape how learners engage in inquiry and collaborative meaning-making. Prior research has adapted the CoI model to writing feedback environments (Chen & Gao, 2024; Yallop, 2016; Yallop et al., 2021), including peer review.

In this study, CLs are treated as pedagogical instruments that reflect and activate these presences. Social presence (SP) is evident in affective and relational language—personal disclosures, hedging, encouragement—that fosters trust and connection among reviewers (Beldarrain, 2006; Hyland & Hyland, 2001). Teaching presence (TP) appears in the instructional content of the CL: how the author contextualizes the draft and signals specific areas for critique (Cho et al., 2006; Yallop & Leijen, 2021). These authorial cues, in turn, trigger reviewer cognitive presence (CP), expressed through global, text-specific, and content-specific feedback comments (Ferris, 1997; Liu & Sadler, 2003; Wu & Schunn, 2020). Studies show that requested FCs are more likely to prompt revision (Patchan et al., 2016), particularly when authors provide detailed CLs (Yallop & Leijen, 2018).

CLs also support the development of metacognition. As students compose CLs and interpret peer feedback, they engage in self-, co-, and shared regulatory processes that influence both writing and reviewing (Panadero et al., 2017; Shea et al., 2022). Garrison (2022) argues that metacognition is embedded in the interaction between TP and CP, while others advocate for its conceptualization as a distinct "learning presence" to more fully capture the regulation of inquiry (e.g., ElSayad, 2023; Shea et al., 2022). In this study, CLs serve as boundary tools that mediate distributed agency: authors externalize their rhetorical and learning goals while reviewers respond with individualized, text-sensitive critique.

Taken together, this framework provides the basis for a grounded theory investigation of how doctoral students enact rhetorical agency in writing groups through CL creation, interpretation, and response. The constructs of social, teaching, and cognitive presence—and their regulation through metacognition—guide both the coding of student written artifacts and the interpretation of writing group dynamics.

3.4 Grounded Theory and Situated Analysis

To examine how these presences are enacted in real-time writing group contexts, this study draws on grounded theory as a complementary methodological orientation. Grounded theory enables inductive analysis of participant artifacts and interactions, allowing patterns of SP, TP, and CP to emerge from the data itself (Charmaz, 2014). It supports close attention to context and meaning making, especially in collaborative pedagogical settings like doctoral writing groups. The constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2014) provides a systematic means to refine and relate emergent categories through iterative coding and memoing. Together, these approaches make it possible to explore how rhetorical agency and feedback practices are co-constructed through CL drafting, reviewing, and revision.

3.5 Synthesis: Sinking Theory to Design

These theoretical strands offer a strong foundation for this study's research design. The CoI framework provides the overarching lens, clarifying how SP and TP—as expressed through affective language, contextualization, and instructional cues in CLs—mediate reviewer CP in the creation of written feedback. Metacognition, viewed as a cross-cutting presence that encompasses self-, co-, and shared regulation, further explains how CL creation and interpretation foster deeper inquiry and distributed responsibility. The integration of cognitive writing models (Hayes, 2012;

Kellogg, 2008), self-regulated learning theory (Panadero et al., 2017), and CoI adaptations (Garrison, 2022; Shea et al., 2022) situates CLs as boundary tools that enable authors and reviewers to enact rhetorical agency. Grounded theory supports the empirical exploration of these constructs in situated practice. Consequently, this work links multiple areas of writing research—including feedback theory, doctoral writing pedagogy, and peer learning—while extending prior research on doctoral writing groups and the rhetorical function of CLs.

4.0 Methods

4.1 Ethics and Study Context

This study was approved by the university's institutional review board [368/T-18]. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and all non-participant data were excluded. With participant permission, excerpts of pseudonymized data are reported using fictitious names. Estonian/English dual-language CLs were translated and reviewed for accuracy.

The research took place in Fall 2022 within a semester-long doctoral writing course at an Estonian research university. Most doctoral students are required to publish at least one research article, and the course—offered each semester—is open to students from diverse disciplines. Students are placed in small, discipline-specific (or adjacent) writing groups and guided through the process of drafting a research article.

Across four rounds, students write and revise sections of a research article—typically following the IMRaD structure—with each round focusing on one section (introduction, methods, results, discussion). Each round includes the following steps: (1) instruction in rhetorical strategies (e.g., Swales's (2014) Create a Research Space model for introductions), (2) drafting a section and accompanying CL, (3) asynchronous peer feedback exchange, (4) synchronous writing group meetings to discuss drafts, and (5) revision. Students are evaluated solely on their participation in this peer review cycle.

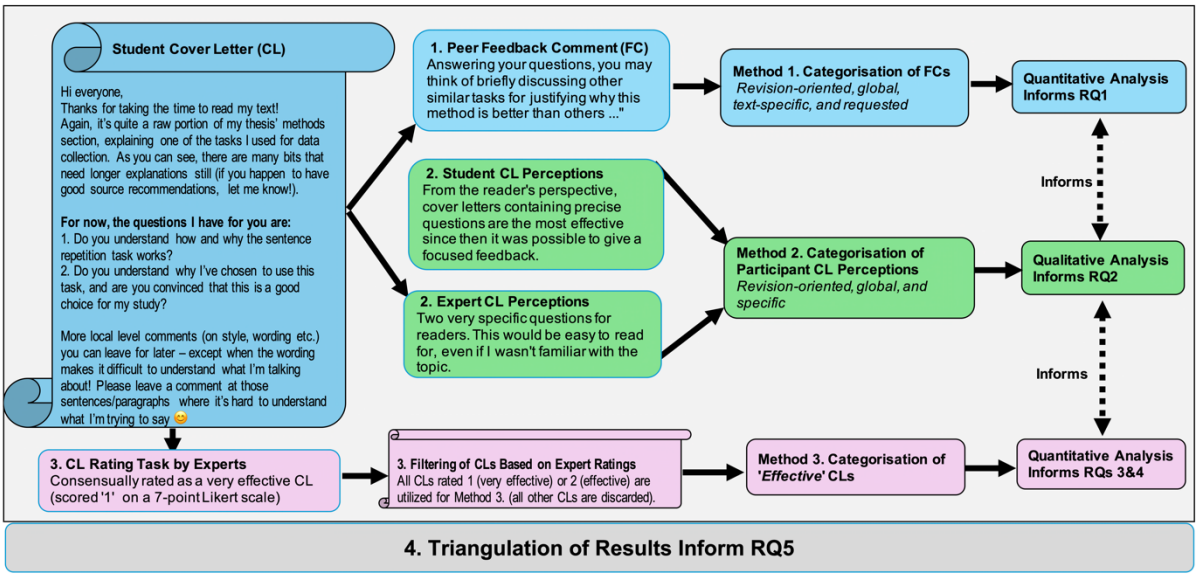
A constructivist pedagogy underpins the course design, emphasizing self-regulated learning and student agency. While a core peer feedback model is provided, students are encouraged to adapt it to meet their disciplinary and rhetorical needs.

4.2 Overview

This mixed-methods study examined how doctoral student authors use CLs to shape peer feedback processes within writing groups. Drawing on the CoI framework and grounded theory, three methods were used to analyze student and expert-generated data. These included thematic and statistical analyses of feedback comments, CLs, and participant reflections. Datasets and coding procedures were reviewed collaboratively by multiple raters using a consensual assessment approach. The results were triangulated to inform the study's overarching research question to develop a rhetorical model of desirable CL features and their proportion (DCL Model) (see Figure 1 for overview of research design).

Figure 1

Overview of Research Design



4.3 Data Collection

The cohort was divided into eight small writing groups (three in the soft sciences, five in the hard sciences), composed mainly of multilingual participants who wrote in English as their L2. Approximately half the cohort were Estonian, and half were from other European and Asian countries, with slightly more females than males. One writing group wrote mostly in Estonian (8 out of 10 CLs); the other groups wrote in English only. Half of the cohort gave informed consent (participants); half of the cohort did not (non-participants). Figure 2 summarizes the number of CLs, peer reviews, student CL perceptions, and expert rating sessions associated with each writing group.

Figure 2

Number of CLs, Student CL Perceptions, and Expert CL Rating Tasks by Writing Group

Writing Group (WG)	Working Language	Students (n) (Participants, Non-participants)	Participants (Non-participants) (n) Cover Letters (CLs) (n) by Feedback Round FR1	FR2	FR3 [1]	Total	Peer Reviews	Group CL Perceptions	Rating Batch (Number of CLs)
Soft Sciences 1	*L2 English*	**6 (4,2)**	4 (2)	3 (2)	4 (2)	**11 (17)**		Yes	Batch 1 (11 CLs)[2]
Soft Sciences 2	*L1 Estonian*	**3 (2,1)**	2 (3)	2 (3)	6 (9)	**10 (15)**	38 (53)	Yes	Batch 2 (10 CLs)
Soft Sciences 3	*L2 English*	**4 (3,1)**	3 (4)	0 (1)	1 (2)	**4 (7)**		No	
Hard Science 1	*L2 English*	**6 (2,4)**	2 (3)	1 (2)	2 (3)	**5 (8)**		Yes	Batch 3 (12 CLs)
Hard Science 2	*L2 English*	**4 (1,3)**	1 (4)	1 (3)	1 (2)	**3 (9)**		No	
Hard Science 3	*L2 English*	**4 (2,2)**	2 (4)	2 (3)	2 (3)	**6 (10)**	9 (78)	Yes	
Hard Science 4	*L2 English*	**5 (4,1)**	4 (5)	1 (2)	0 (0)	**5 (7)**		Yes	Batch 4 (13 CLs)
Hard Science 5	*L2 English*	**5 (1,4)**	1 (5)	1 (5)	0 (4)	**2 (14)**		No	
Total	Not applicable	**38 (19, 19)**	**19 (34)**	**11 (24)**	**16 (29)**	**46 (87)**	**47 (131)**	**5 (8)**	**46 CL assessments**

1 For simplicity, feedback round 3 also includes number of cover letters produced in later feedback rounds (i.e., FR4 and FR5).

[2] Rating batch includes cover letters written in Estonian and rated by L1 Estonian assessors.

4.4 Datasets

This study leveraged all available student data generated during a doctoral-level writing-for-publication course in Fall 2022. Low participation rates (50%) due to the rigorous informed consent procedures did not allow for sufficiently large enough datasets for inferential statistical analyses (including population samples). Instead, we adopted a mixed-methods approach where the results of the quantitative analysis were substantiated by the qualitative analysis (and vice-versa).

4.4.1 Student Artifacts

Three student-generated datasets were collected in situated practice: StudentDataset_PRs 47 peer reviews (10,557 words); StudentDataset_CLs 46 CLs (5,948 words); and StudentDataset_WGPerceptions 5 writing group CL perceptions (1,198 words)

The student CLs and resulting peer reviews (PRs) spanned over four peer review rounds over a 14-week semester. Each round followed a structured sequence: CL drafting, peer review, synchronous meeting, and revision.

The writing group (WG) perceptions were collected after the first feedback round. Each writing group discussed a CL reflective prompt during a course workshop and then posted their collaborative response on the course's asynchronous communication platform (see Appendix A for prompt).

4.4.2 Expert Artifacts

Two expert-generated datasets were collected post-course through a rating task:

ExpertDataset_QualitativeCLRatings 4 transcriptions of synchronous rating task meetings (12,951 words) and 43 (out of 46) qualitative CL written perceptions (606 words); and ExpertDataset_QuantitativeCLRatings 46 quantitative written ratings on 46 CLs (numerical data).

4.4.3 Rating Task

The 46 CLs were divided into four rating batches (three in English, one mainly in Estonian) by writing group and language and assessed for quality in pairs by different combinations of four expert writing assessors (experts).[2] Each expert rated two batches collaborating with a different assessor per task. The Estonian experts rated the Estonian CLs.

4.5 Procedure

The rating procedure comprised two tasks: an individual rating task followed by a collaborative rating task.

[2] Expert assessors are defined as writing practitioners holding PhDs and having over five years of teaching experience.

4.5.1 Individual Rating Task

The experts were given background information and CLs from each writing group and asked to give their CL assessments from the perspective of a group member. First, the expert ranked the order of CL usefulness from the most to the least useful, noting their reasoning and observations. Then, they provided a quantitative assessment of each CL based on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = very effective CL; 2 = effective ... 6 = very ineffective, 7 = harmful CL). Finally, they recorded their CL qualitative and quantitative assessments.

4.5.2 Joint Rating Task

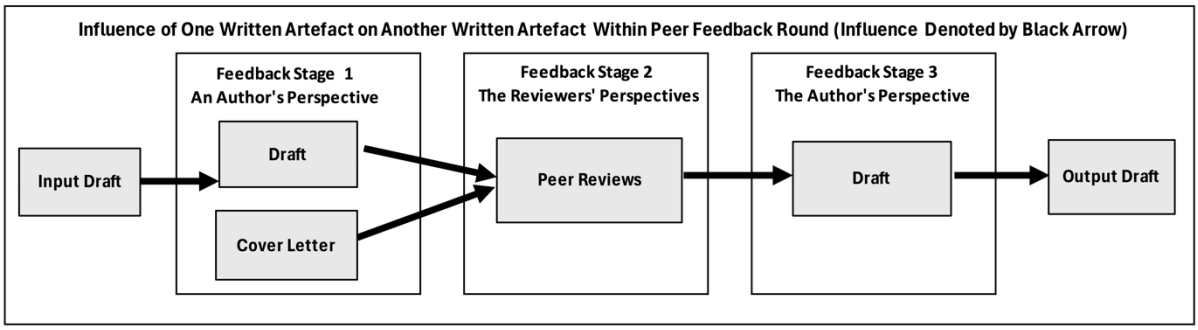
Repeating the individual rating task procedure, the two experts negotiated a joint consensus in their CL assessments over a recorded 30-minute Zoom meeting. As written output, they recorded the quality of each of the 46 CLs by giving their joint numerical ratings and rankings, substantiated in most instances with qualitative oral and written evidence (see Appendix B for example). The four collaborative CL rating tasks were transcribed (146 minutes of speech; 27-49 minutes/interview) according to McLellan et al.'s (2003, pp.77-80) transcription protocol.

4.5.3 Coding Procedure (Cover Letters and Peer Reviews)

CLs are segmented into different types of thematic units according to their possible affect and/or effect (influence) on their reviewers' feedback comments, and reviewers' feedback comments are segmented into different types of thematic units according to their possible influence on the author's subsequent draft text (see Figure 3; see Yallop, 2020, pp. 85-95 for concise treatment).

Figure 3

The Indirect Influence of the Author's CL on Their Draft (Yallop, 2020, p.94)



Thus, the CL and feedback comment coding schemes described below as methods 1 and 3 are based on the type of possible influence or combination thereof (i.e., direct effect, indirect effect, and/or holistic affect) that the thematic units can have on each subsequent artifact.

4.5.4 Method 1: Categorization of Feedback Comments

Following the protocol outlined in Yallop et al. (2021), the 46 peer reviews (*Student_Dataset_PRs*) were segmented into thematic units according to whether the

feedback comment could have a direct and visible (*Instruction_Visible*) or invisible (*Instruction_Nonvisible*) effect on one textual aspect, or a holistic affect only (*SocialPresence*). For simplicity, only *Instruction_Visible* units (332 TUs) were used in the analysis (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Abridged Coding Book for Feedback Comment Themes (adapted from Yallop et al., 2021, pp. 587-588)

Theme	*Thematic Units (n)*	Definition	Participant Examples (Full or Abridged)
Instruction_ Visible	*332*	A thematic unit (TU) that explicitly states or clearly implies that the author may need to make a specific change to one aspect or *idea unit* of their text (Liu & Sadler, 2003; Nelson & Schunn, 2009).	"This is repetition."; "Is this important?"
Instruction_ Nonvisible	*121*	A TU that explicitly states or clearly implies that the author should not make a specific change to one aspect or *idea unit* of his/her text; or one that refers the author to a connecting feedback comment.	"In response to your cover letter, I would leave this as it is."; "I marked the place in the text and added a comment as well."
Social Presence	*68*	A TU that can have only a holistic affect. These are typically affective in nature and only contain indicators of social presence (Yallop & Leijen, 2018).	"All the best, Ann."; "Sorry for the late feedback."

Notes. *For simplicity, TUs of Instruction_Nonvisible and SocialPresence were discarded in the analysis thereafter.*

To address RQ1, the 332 *Instruction_Visible* units were coded for:

- Globality (global vs. local focus)
- Specificity (text-specific vs. generic)
- Alignment with CL requests (requested vs. unrequested)

Coding frameworks were adapted from Ferris (1997), Liu and Sadler (2003), Patchan et al. (2016), and Wu and Schunn (2020). (See Appendix C for coding book).

4.5.5 Method 2: Categorization of Student and Expert CL Perceptions

To address RQ2, *StudentDataset_WGPerceptions* and *ExpertDataset_QualitativeCLRatings* were thematically analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2006) within the CoI Framework. Starting from the preconceived CL coding themes (*Context*, *Instruction*, and *SocialPresence*), the qualitative artifacts were segmented into four additional themes: (i) *CoverLetter_Holistic* (i.e., length of CL), (ii) *CoverLetter_Purpose* (i.e., communicates author feedback expectations), (iii) *CoverLetter_Drafting* (i.e., promotes author self-revision), and (iv) *WritingStage* (i.e., authors' writing stage, developing or developed). Each theme was sorted into two dimensions: desirable (e.g., "It thanks the reviewer for giving time and contribution.") or undesirable (e.g., "Waaaaay tooooooo long."). The results from both datasets are amalgamated and presented in the results section.

4.5.6 Method 3: Categorization of CLs Rated Effective by the Experts

Following an adapted protocol from Yallop & Leijen (2021), the CLs (*StudentDataset_*CL) were segmented into three themes distinguishing (i) *Context* moves (e.g., draft stage, research framing), (ii) *Instruction* moves (e.g., requested

feedback areas and rationale), and (iii) *SocialPresence* moves (e.g., openings and closures and expressing gratitude). Each move was further segmented into subcategories by clarity, alignment, tone, and justification (see Figure 5 for theme coding scheme and frequencies; see Appendix D for detailed coding scheme for cover letters, see Appendices E and F for detailed coding books and frequencies for subthemes of *Context*, *Instruction*, and *SocialPresence*).

Figure 5

Abridged Coding Book and Frequencies for CL Themes (adapted from Yallop & Leijen, 2021, pp. 24-28)

Theme / *SubTheme* [1]	Thematic Units (n)	Reviewer Impact	Definition of Cover Letter Comment	Participant Examples (Full or Abridged)
Instruction	**197**	The theme can have a direct effect on subsequent feedback comments.	***See Definitions Below:***	***See Examples Below:***
Instruction Response	*139*	The subtheme can have a **direct and observable effect** on one textual aspect.	The author asks for **a reviewer response** on one textual aspect.	*"Can you understand this?"*
Instruction Action	*58*	The subtheme can have an unobservable **effect** on one or more textual aspects.	The author expresses **a reviewer action** or **non-action** is required on one or more textual aspects.	*"There is no point in reading it in detail."*
Context	**190**	The theme can have an indirect and unobservable effect on subsequent feedback comments.	The author provides one piece of background information about oneself, the draft, or the target audience.	*"I am focusing on the Post-Soviet period."; "This is my current version of the methods section."*
Social Presence	**151**	The theme can only have a holistic affect on the reviewing process.	The author uses one indicator of social presence (see Yallop & Leijen, 2018) that is affective in nature.	*"Thank you for the feedback."; "Dear Writing Group, ..."*

Notes. [1] *For simplicity, the subthemes Instruction_Action and Instruction_Response are treated as separate themes hereinafter.*

The ExpertDataset_QuantitativeCLRatings was used to filter the CLs experts rated as 1 or 2 on a seven-point Likert scale (effective CLs) with the CLs rated lower (see Appendix G for expert consensual CL ratings). Previous studies suggest that effective CLs are more likely to elicit desirable FC traits than their less effective counterparts (Yallop & Leijen, 2018, pp. 267-268; Yallop & Leijen, 2021, pp. 37-38). As this study is interested in desirable CL features, only the analysis of the effective CLs (17 out of 42 CLs) is reported to address RQ3 and RQ4.

4.5.7 Triangulation

The three methods allowed for triangulation across data types: peer-generated feedback, expert judgments, and participant perceptions. Grounded theory provided the analytic scaffolding for this integration, enabling emergent patterns to be iteratively refined and aligned with the constructs of social, teaching, and cognitive presences (Charmaz, 2014). The constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2014) was used to relate coded themes across datasets and surface patterns of rhetorical agency. Triangulation also enhanced analytic rigor by enabling convergence and divergence across datasets, allowing for robustness checks and explanatory depth in theory-building.

4.5.8 Robustness Considerations

As the quantitative datasets were relatively small, inter-rater reliability statistics were not calculated. Instead, Author 1 used an iterative process of machine coding (using

recurring keywords) and manual coding to segment all available CLs (StudentDataset_CLs) and their respective peer reviews (StudentDataset_PRs) (see Appendix D for detailed machine coding; see Appendix H for full data distribution).[3] All datasets were coded collaboratively using a consensual assessment approach (Göpferich & Neumann, 2016, p.119). In this approach, Author 1 developed the coding book and conducted the first coding. Author 2 or 3 reviewed the first coding on approximately 10% of the data. Then, the coders discussed any discrepancies and adjusted the coding accordingly. This process was repeated iteratively until both second coders reached consensus on the data as a whole.

5.0 Results and Discussion

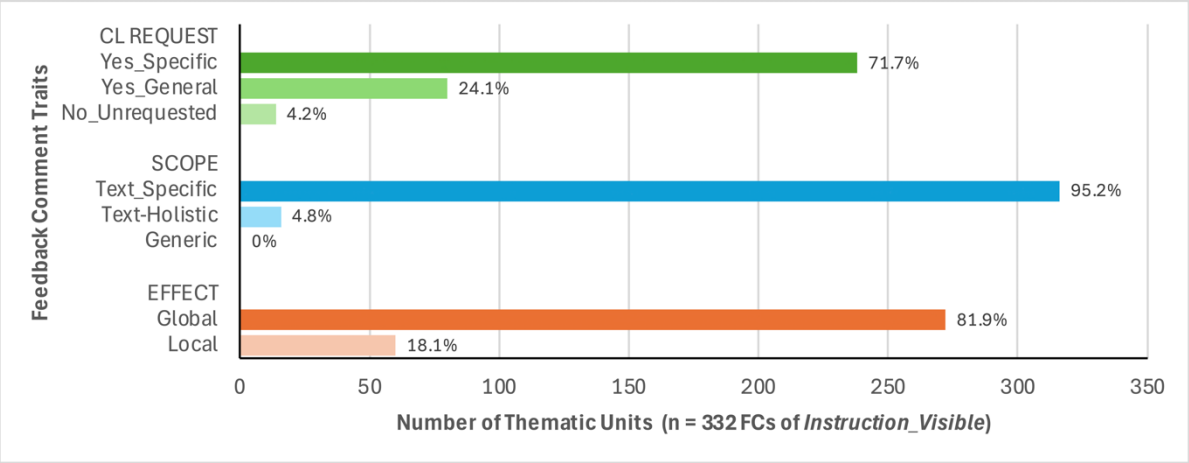
5.1 RQ1. Can CLs Prompt Desirable Features in Asynchronous Written Feedback Comments?

Application of the coding scheme for traits within segmented feedback comments of *Instruction_Visible* revealed that the vast majority of units could be characterized as follows: specific (71.7%) or general (24.1%) CL request (in green), text-specific (in blue, 95.2%), and global (in orange; 81.9%) (see Figure 6).

[3] After machine coding and consensual assessment, Authors 1 and 2 discussed the full coding results. This resulted in an adjustment of 1.56% of the previously coded data (44 adjustments out of a possible 2,832 coding discrepancies).

Figure 6

Distribution (%) of Traits within Feedback Comments of Instruction_Visible



The high proportion of requested feedback comments of *Instruction_Visible* (95.8%) is similar to that reported in a comparable teaching context (92%) (Yallop et al., 2021).[4] In addition to being requested, most *Instruction_Visible* feedback comments contain the desirable traits of text-specificness (Ferris, 1997) and globalness (Liu & Sadler, 2003). Thus, and in response to RQ1, CLs can elicit desirable features of asynchronous written feedback comments.

5.2 RQ2. How Do Students and Experts Perceive Social and Teaching Presences within CLs?

The coding book from the expert assessors and writing groups' qualitative data revealed their perceptions of desirable and undesirable CL features (see Figure 7).

The results suggest that a well-crafted CL takes a reader perspective to communicate author feedback expectations clearly, concisely, and politely. This well-crafted CL, in turn, expediates the reviewing process and results in requested feedback. To foster desirable CL traits, a CL contains four main inter-related themes—C*ontext*, *InstructionAction*, *InstructionResponse*, and *SocialPresence*—and their respective subthemes. Desirable subthemes of *Context* (i) explain what the draft is (*genre&section*, and *status*), (ii) who the draft is for (*audience*), (iii) what the draft contains (*content&ideas*), (iv) how the draft is structured (*textualorganization*), and (v) what the draft does (*rhetoricalmoves*). The two desirable subthemes of *InstructionAction* involve stating affective and effective reviewing criteria (*revieweraction*) and urgency (*reviewerpriority*). The scope and theme of desirable questions (*InstructionResponse*) depend on the writing stage. At the process start, one or two holistic questions about textual organization and/or draft clarity are useful because "the writer wants to know whether it all makes sense at this beginning writing stage." (abridged, expert assessor). At later stages, and, in addition to a holistic question, the results suggest that a reasonable number of (typically around

[4] In this previous study, feedback comments of both Instruction_Visible (e.g., "Your title is too long.") and Instruction_Nonvisible (e.g., "Your title is the right length.") were coded for CL request and their results combined.

three) specific questions within the subthemes of (i) *content&ideas*, (ii) *languageinuse*, (iii) *rhetoricalmoves*, and (iv) *textualorganization* are desirable. Although *SocialPresence* is discussed less frequently, desirable CLs are polite (but not overly polite), friendly, inviting, and include comments of gratitude and apologies (but are not overly apologetic). As "writing a cover letter [can] help to formulate the aims and structure of the text" (student perspective), evidence exists that CLs may trigger author self-revision, as also suggested previously (Yallop et al., 2021).

5.3 RQ3: How Do Social and Teaching Presences Appear in the CLs that Experts Consider Effective?

The 17 CLs rated effective from the expert quantitative ratings were selected for the subsequent quantitative analysis. As *Context* and *Instruction* aim to provide effective teaching input for the reviewers, they are equivalent to thematic units of teaching presence. Similarly, affective input is provided by units of *SocialPresence.* Participant quotes (abridged, reformulated, or full) are denoted by double quotation marks.

5.3.1 Distribution by Theme

Analysis of 17 effective cover letters revealed 310 thematic units, averaging 18.24 units per letter. The most frequent theme was *Context* (26.8%), followed by *InstructionResponse* (20.3%) and *SocialPresence* (19.3%). Dual-coded *SocialPresence* subthemes—*SP_AuthorDoubt* (13.9%) and SP_Affect (11.0%)—were also common, while *InstructionAction* appeared least often (8.7%) (see Figure 8).

Figure 7

Desirable and Undesirable CL Features

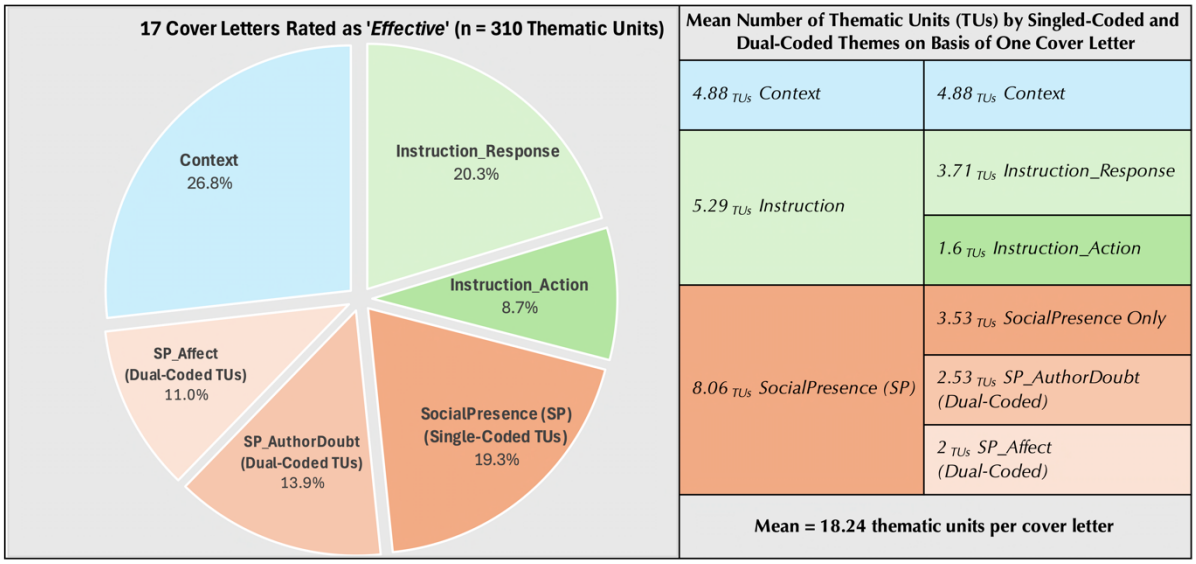
Theme	Mentioned Desirable Characteristics The cover letter (is) …	Mentioned Undesirable Characteristics The cover letter (is) …	Participant Examples (Full or Abridged)[1] *Desirable Example First; Undesirable Example Second*
Purpose	Takes a reader perspective to communicate author feedback expectations that expediates the reviewing process and tends to elicit requested feedback.	Takes an author's perspective and does not consider their reviewers' time.	*"Cover letter is a helpful tool to view your own draft through reviewers eyes." (Writing Group Perception (WG_P);[1] "Writer assumes too much." (Assessor's oral perception (A_OP).[1]*
Drafting	Promotes author-self revision on textual and rhetorical organisation.	Not mentioned	*"Writing a cover letter helps to formulate the aims and structure of the text." (WG_P).*
CoverLetter	Clear, concrete, simple, specific, short and is polite (*SocialPresence*) and contains background information about the submitted text and project (*Context*), and what to review (*Instruction_Response*), or what not to review (*Instruction_Action*).	Irrelevant, routine, too general, too long or too short, impolite and contains missing, redundant and/or repetitious information within each of the four themes.	*"Informative, short, relevant background, questions." (Assessors' joint written perception (A_WP);[1] "It requires too much memory." (A_OP)."*
WritingStage	**See Desirable Characteristics Below:**	**See Undesirable Characteristics Below:**	**See Participant Examples Below:**
Developing	Contains 1-2 holistic questions on clarity (i.e. *InstructionResponse_ideas&issues*) and *textualorganisation*.	Generic questions	*"The cover letter allowed us to frame and share out texts on their different stages, starting from raw to almost ready drafts." (WG_P); "It became almost a look at everything." (A_OP).*
Developed	Contains 2-4 specific questions; may also include 1-2 holistic questions on clarity and textual organisation.		
Context	Well-crafted, sufficient, informative, relevant, useful, specified and gives a brief summary of the project and submitted text.	Insufficient, missing, or too long, and irrelevant.	*"A good cover letter should give a quick insight into the topic area." (WG_P) … "[and] give a clear roadmap" (A_OP); "[Without], it makes it more difficult to position myself as a reader." (A_OR).*
Subthemes mentioned	*Audience*, *genresection*, *ideas&issues* (including submission title), *rhetoricalmoves*, *draftstatus*, *draftstatus &SocialPresence*.	Not mentioned	*"I worked on this for so long that I can't tell what I'm doing [quoting from participant CL] was appreciated." (A_WP); "It didn't have information about the genre." (A_OP).*
InstructionAction	Specifies what to review, or not to review; including affective allowances and honesty (*Reviewer_Action*), and which textual passages to focus on, or not (*Reviewer_Priority*)	Not mentioned	*"It's useful that it says what to focus on that, and what not to read." (A_OP)"No instructions whatsoever." (A_WP).*
Subthemes mentioned	*Reviewer_Action*; *Reviewer_Priority*	Not mentioned	*"I like the honesty" (A_OP); "and some essential points about our content. Particularly in which part we expect more suggestions from the reviewers." (WG_P).*
InstructionResponse	Clear, simple, short questions that are presented in a reader-friendly format (e.g., bullet points).	Unclear, unspecified, irrelevant with missing, too few or too many questions.	*"There are two specific questions very appropriate to the task." (A_OP); "Waaaaay tooooooo long, too many questions." (A_WP)*
Subthemes mentioned	*Ideas&issues*, *languageinuse*, *rhetoricalmoves*, *textualorganisation*.	*Ideas&issues* when considered too discipline-specific for the peer reviewers.	*"Pointing out grammar errors and typos is welcome when the author asks for it." (WG_P); "Not really answerable by a non-specialized audience." (A_WP)*
SocialPresence	Polite, friendly, and has an inviting tone.	Rude or overly polite, apologetic, and boring.	*"Friendly at first- friendly greeting." (A_OP); "The way that the feedback is asked for is not very nice." (A_WP).*
Subthemes mentioned	*Personalfeelings* (shows author personality), *opencommunication* (apologies & motivational comments), *writtennorms* (openings, closures, and gratitude).	Personalfeelings (overly polite) and opencommunication (over apologetic).	*"The cover letter demonstrates that we are excited to share our writing." (WG_P); "Not much for readers to use--more apology than actual info about the draft." (A_WP)*

Key. *[1] Brackets after example denotes perception source: WG_P = writing group perception; A_OP = expert assessor's oral perception; A_WP = expert assessors' written joint perception.*

Based on this average of 18.24 units per letter, a prototypical cover letter would include approximately 4.9 units of *Context,* 5.3 units of Instruction, and 8.06 units of *SocialPresence.* Within *SocialPresence*, 3.53 units are single-coded and 4.53 units are dual-coded (2.53 units of *SP_AuthorDoubt* and 2 units of *SP_Affect*). We use this prototypical breakdown to illustrate the relative frequency of thematic units within the subthemes of *Context*, *Instruction*, and *SocialPresence* (see Figures 9–11).

Figure 8

Distribution (%) of Themes Across 17 Effective CLs (Left) and Estimated Number of Thematic Units per Theme in a Prototypical Cover Letter Based on This Sample (Right)



The results from the qualitative analysis and one previous study (Yallop & Leijen, 2021) suggest that *effective* CLs contain four themes: *Context*, *InstructionAction*, *InstructionResponse*, and *SocialPresence*. These four themes inform the crux of the CL: *Context* helps the reader obtain "a quick insight into the topic area" (student perspective) and "a clear roadmap" (individual expert perspective) that makes it easier "to position oneself as a reader" (consensual expert perspective). *InstructionAction* helps the reviewer "to focus on what to read and what not to read" (individual expert perspective). *InstructionResponse* helps the reviewer give "focused feedback" (student perspective). *SocialPresence* helps writing groups develop and sustain a sense of community (Cahusac de Caux & Pretorius, 2024) as, for example, "the cover letter demonstrates that we are excited to share our writing" (student perspective). The quantitative evidence shows that an effective CL contains a mean of 18.24 thematic units distributed in appreciable quantities between the four themes. Many indicators of teaching presence exist in the form of *Context* (4.88 TUs) and *InstructionResponse* (3.71 TUs), and these themes inform the teaching presence in *InstructionResponse* (3.71 TUs). Holistically, many indicators of *SocialPresence* are present in all four themes throughout the CL (8.06 TUs).

Ideally, when reviewers read their author's feedback requests (positive effect), they have already been provided with clear contextualization and guidance on how to give their comments (positive effect), and they also have developed a strong sense of writing community (positive affect). Within the CoI model (Garrison et al., 2010), positive affect (social presence) and positive effect (teaching presence) mediate reviewer critical thinking (cognitive presence), and reviewer critical thinking leads to

feedback comments. Thus, the triangulated results support the expert and student perceptions on what constitutes desirable thematic CL features and their proportional usage.

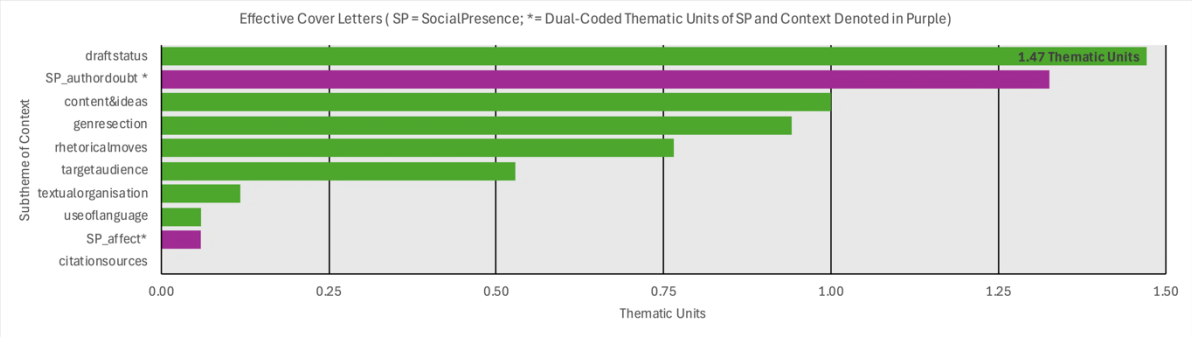
In the following subsections, thematic units of *Context* (green), Instruction (blue), and *SocialPresence* (orange) were sorted into their respective subthemes based on one effective CL. Thematic units that contain hedging devices (*SP_AuthorDoubt*) or emotive punctuation (*SP_Affect*) are dual coded as a thematic unit of *SocialPresence* and their superordinate theme (purple) (see Figures 9, 10, and 11 respectively).

5.3.2 Subthemes for Context

Context acts as teaching input for *InstructionResponse*. Regarding proportional usage of subthemes, *draftstatus* (1.47 TUs) and *SP_authordoubt* (1.33 TUs) are the most frequent, and they are present in almost all CLs. *Content&ideas* (1 TU), *genresection* (0.94 TUs), and, to a lesser extent, *targetaudience* (0.53 TUs) are frequent and generally present in most CLs. *Textualorganization* (0.12 TUs), *SP_affect* (0.06 TUs), and *useoflanguage* (0.06 TUs) are infrequent, and *citation&sources* is absent (see Figure 9).

Figure 9

Number of Thematic Units for Context Subthemes in a Prototypical Cover Letter



Several desirable subthemes of *Context* were revealed through student and expert analysis. These included audience, highlighted by student comments such as "who the intended audience is" and expert suggestions like "where the author plans to publish"; *genresection*, reflected in student calls for "information about the genre"; and content-related subthemes such as *ideas&issues* and *rhetoricalmoves*, which experts described as "what the project is" and "what the text does," respectively. Another key subtheme was *draftstatus*, which, as one student explained, "allows us to frame and share our texts at different stages, from raw to almost-ready drafts." Students also emphasized *SP_authordoubt*, noting that "the author can express their concerns and insecurities about the article, and this, in return, will provide a constructive review." The remaining subthemes—*citation&sources*, *useoflanguage*, *textualorganization*, and *SP_affect*—were discussed infrequently, if at all.

The quantitative evidence supports these qualitative perceptions as an effective CL contains a mean of 6.27 thematic units of *Context* distributed in appreciable quantities in the subthemes of *audience*, *genresection, ideas*&issues, *rhetoricalmoves, draft status*, and *SP_authordoubt (*6.03 TUs), and infrequently distributed in the remaining subthemes (0.18 TUs).

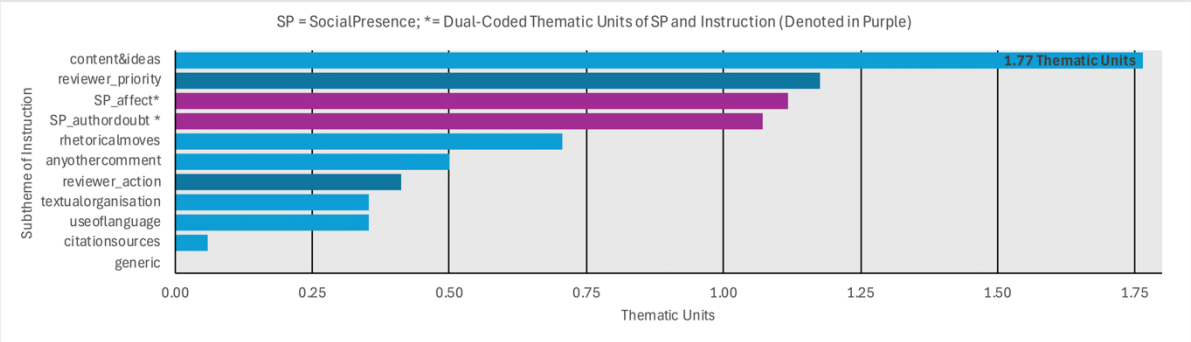
Thus, the triangulated results support the expert and student perceptions on what constitutes desirable features of *Context,* as well as their proportional usage.

5.3.3 Subthemes for Instruction

Content&ideas (1.77 TU) is, by far, the most frequent subtheme, and is present in all the CLs. *Reviewerpriority* (1.18 TUs), *SP_affect* (1.12 TUs) and *SP_authordoubt* (1.08 TUs) are frequent, and they are present in almost all CLs. *Rhetoricalmoves* (0.71 TUs) is frequent and generally present in most CLs. *Anyothercomment* (0.5 TUs), *revieweraction* (0.41 TUs), *textualorganization* (0.35 TUs), and *useoflanguage* (0.35 TUs) are less frequent and generally present in some CLs. *Citation&sources* (0.06 TUs) and generic requests are absent (see Figure 10).

Figure 10

Number of Thematic Units for Instruction Subthemes in a Prototypical Cover Letter



Regarding the qualitative perceptions, desirable thematic units of *InstructionAction* can "save the reviewer's time" (student) by "highlighting the parts [where] the authors expect more suggestions from the reviewers" (student; *reviewerpriority*) or fewer suggestions, as this expert explains: "I make a lot of typos also, [so the comment] '*please do not comment on typos'* makes sense to me." (expert; *revieweraction).* Student discussions focused on specific examples of desirable thematic units of *InstructionResponse*, such as "Does this word/sentence/paragraph make sense?" (*content&ideas*). Expert discussions, meanwhile, focused on negative and positive influences of how discrete thematic units of *InstructionResponse* were connected to the four induced qualitative themes of *Purpose*, *Drafting*, *CoverLetter_Holistic*, and *WritingStage* and, to a lesser extent, on comparative assessments of discrete questions as illustrated in the following examples:

- "If it's a rough draft and will be improved, what's the point on commenting on clarity?" (*writingstage* and *textualorganization,* negative perception)
- "Basically, there is only one aspect [among others] that's useful for the reviewer, and it's whether the subject is understandable." (*ideas&issues*, mixed perception)
- "Two specific questions seemingly appropriate to the task." (*content&ideas* and *rhetoricalmoves,* positive perception)

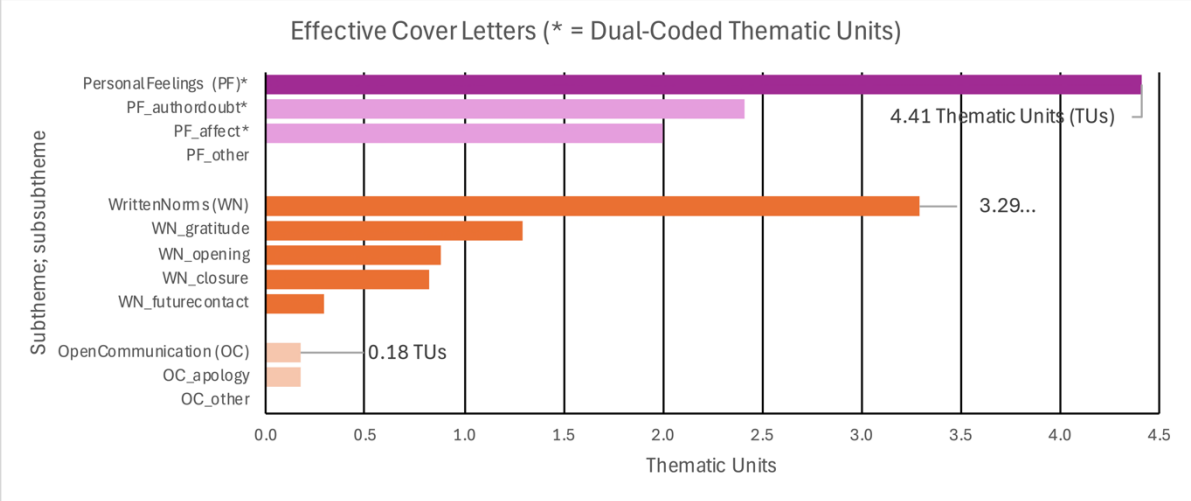
Thus, these results largely support perceptions of what constitutes desirable *subthematic* features of Instruction and their proportional usage in CLs.

5.3.4 Subthemes for SocialPresence

The subthemes *personalfeelings* (4.41 TUs) and *writtennorms* (3.29 TUs) are used the most, and they are generally present in multiple instances in all CLs in large quantities. *Opencommunication* (0.18 TUs) is used rarely and was occasionally present in CLs. By *subsubtheme*, *PF_authordoubt* (2.41 TUs), *PF_affect* (2 TUs), and *SN_gratitude* (1.29 TUs) are the most frequently used, and they are present in almost all CLs. *SN_opening* (0.88 TUs) and *SN_closure* (0.82 TUs) are frequently used and generally present in most CLs. *SN_futurecontact* (0.29 TUs) and *OC_apology* (0.18 TUs) are less frequently used and generally present in some CLs. There were no other (*PF_other* and *OC_other*) indicators of *SocialPresence* used (e.g., motivational comments) (see Figure 11).

Figure 11

Number of Thematic Units for Social Presence Subthemes and Subsubthemes in a Prototypical Cover Letter



Desirable thematic units of *SocialPresence* are more challenging to assess. Both students and experts generally agree that desirable CL features include politeness, friendliness, respectfulness, and honesty. Based on one CL, participants seemed to value affective language, using many indicators of *SocialPresence* (8.06 TUs) both as single-coded units expressing written norms (3.29 TUs) and as dual-coded units of *affect* (2 TUs) and *authordoubt* (2.41 TUs). Thematic units of *opencommunication* are much less frequent (0.18 TUs) and include only apologies for late submissions or perceived low-quality submissions. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies (Yallop, 2016; Yallop & Leijen, 2021). CL authors used many thematic units of *gratitude*, *referencestofuturecontact*, and *openings&closures* within the subtheme *writtennorms. Writtennorms* are known to build and sustain group commitment (Shea et al., 2010). Under the subtheme *personalfeelings*, the authors used many thematic units of emotive punctuation (*SP_affect*) to express positive affect as well as hedging devices (*SP_authordoubt*) to communicate the true status (warts and all) of their draft text. *Personalfeelings* can help the author identify with their community (Rourke et al., 1999). Creating and sustaining a harmonious learning environment (i.e., social presence) within writing groups (Cahusac de Caux et al., 2017) mediates teaching and cognitive presences. Consequently, the high number of *SocialPresence*

indicators present in effective CLs shows the writers displayed a strong sense of writing community.

Although, socio-cultural (e.g., Grothaus, 2022) and individual self-regulated learning (e.g., Shea & Bidjerano, 2012; Zhang et al, 2022) differences can influence the quantity and type of *SocialPresence* indicators, these findings give an indicator of what constitutes desirable subthematic and subsubthematic features of *SocialPresence*, and their proportional usage.

5.3.5 Comparisons across Themes

When comparing the shared themes of *Context* and *InstructionResponse*, two interesting phenomena were revealed that warrant further investigation. First, and based on one prototypical CL, there is a huge difference in the use of emotive punctuation (SP_affect) in *InstructionResponse* (1.12 TUs) compared to its use in *Context* (0.06 TUs). This trend is also repeated, but to a much smaller extent, for the subthemes *textualorganization* and *useoflanguage*. Second, the use of *citatation&sources* is almost non-existent in the student CLs.

5.3.6 Further Triangulation of Results

The qualitative findings revealed the following measurable and inter-dependent variables of CL effectiveness, which were further supported by results of the quantitative analysis:

- CL length. The standard distribution of word count per CL using the probability mass function reveals a standard deviation of 55 words and a mean length of 164.8 words with a range of 87-346 words.
- Number of thematic units of *InstructionResponse*. The standard distribution of *InstructionResponse* (questions) thematic units per CL using the probability mass function reveals a standard deviation of one question and a mean number of 3.65 questions with a range of one to six questions.
- CL traits. Six out of 17 CLs invited comments on "anything else that comes to mind," which was coded as *InstructionResponse_anyothercomment*. Excluding these thematic units, the questions are predominantly global (92.7%) rather than local (7.3%), and the majority are text-specific (62.3%) rather than text-holistic (37.7%). Thematic units of *Context* by their nature are text-specific (100%) as they refer specifically to the author's draft.

The qualitative evidence further suggests that these variables may be strongly dependent on the writing stage. This is logical as, for example, a paper's contextual background may need much more explanation at the start than toward the end of the peer feedback process when the writing group becomes more familiar with each other's writing content and needs. The reverse trend may be applicable regarding *InstructionResponse* as the author seeks more help on specific textual aspects as the writing becomes more developed.

The writing stage can also influence scope. A relatively high percentage of text-holistic features of *InstructionResponse* were deemed effective (37.7%); as one expert explained, for example, "Asking about the general clarity of the text is fine at this [early writing] stage as this is perhaps what the writer wants to know." Nevertheless, CLs exhibit similar desirable traits as feedback comments regarding

their scope (Ferris, 1997; Wu & Schunn, 2020) and effect (Liu & Sadler, 2003). As thematic units of *Context* are text-specific (100%) by their sheer nature and they act as teaching input for *InstructionResponse*, they may trigger specificity in the resulting feedback comments. Within the CLs deemed effective, most thematic units of *InstructionResponse* are text-specific (71.2%) and global (91.5%), and the vast majority of corresponding feedback comments of *Instruction_Visible* are requested (95.6%). Out of these requested thematic units, the vast majority are text-specific (96.9%) and most are global (80.5%). Thus, both specific and holistic thematic units of *InstructionAction* seem to elicit text-specific feedback comments of *Instruction_Visible*. As students often ask one further question inviting comments on anything else not specified that could be coded as either text-holistic or generic depending on interpretation, a desirable balance of text-specificness and text-holisticness seems to exist, and this balance is influenced by the writing stage.

However, analyzing data across different writing stages was impractical and would warrant a separate study. Nevertheless, approximating the mean values of the identified variables provides an indication of desirable CL length (164.8 words) and number of questions (3.65), an approximation is supported by the expert comparative assessments (e.g., "Personally I like cover letter AAA more because is shorter as compared to cover letter BBB that has too many questions."). Regarding scope, the data was obtained at different feedback stages. Given the study's scope, the sample was treated as representative of doctoral students at varying stages of writing development (e.g., developing and developed drafts).

5.3.7 RQs 1-3: Summary of Triangulated Results

According to the participants and supported, where possible, by the current quantitative analysis of student artifacts and previous studies (Yallop, 2016; Yallop & Leijen, 2018, 2021; Yallop et al., 2021), a well-crafted CL contains four main sections: *Context*, *InstructionAction*, *InstructionResponse,* and *SocialPresence*. *Context* explains what the text is, what the text contains, and what the text does. *InstructionAction* communicates the author's reviewing criteria and their reviewing priorities. *InstructionResponse* asks for global and specific and/or holistic help on textual content and ideas, and on the textual and rhetorical organization of this content. The authors should also consider time limitations and skill sets by asking a reasonable number of clear and concise questions (ideally presented as list items or bullet points) within their reviewers' spheres of competencies. The type, scope, and number of questions depend on the writing process stage with specificity increasing as the writing progresses. Authors may also give permission for comments they did not state explicitly. *SocialPresence* is the means by which authors communicate their affect either implicitly (e.g., through hedging devices and smileys) or explicitly (e.g., through expressing gratitude). Within the CoI framework, participants' qualitative CL perceptions suggest that positive affect mediates both teaching and cognitive presences, and their perceptions are substantiated by the large number of social presence indicators in the students' effective CLs.

5.4 RQ4: In CLs that experts consider effective, what is the distribution of desirable features across the Community of Inquiry framework dimensions?

This subsection summarizes the mean number of desirable thematic units in effective CLs by theme along with their respective subthemes and traits where applicable. As previously noted, these proportions are dependent also on naturalistic variables (e.g.,

individual affective differences) and instructional variables (e.g., writing stage) that fall outside the scope of this study. Accordingly, what is presented below is intended as guidelines for the proportion of desirable CL features across the CoI dimensions that can be used as a framework in similar and dissimilar teaching and socio-cultural contexts.

5.4.1 Context (4.9 TUs)

This theme consists of a description of the writing content and conceptual ideas (*content&ideas* 1.0 TUs), an honest appraisal of the current draft and type of writing submission (*draftstatus* 1.5 TUs and *genresection* 0.9 TUs), the intended readers (audience 0.5 TUs), the purpose (*rhetoricalmoves* 0.8 TUs), and how the writing is organized (*textualorganization* 0.1 TUs). To express vulnerabilities, the author uses hedging devices (*authordoubt* 1.3 TUs) to communicate the truthful state of the submitted draft.

5.4.2 InstructionAction (1.6 TUs)

This theme consists of an explanation regarding which requests for help and textual parts of the CL reviewers should focus their attention on (*reviewerpriority* 1.2 TUs), the allowable degree of directness and honesty of reviewers' feedback comments, and instructions on what aspects of the writing to comment on or not (*revieweraction* 0.4 TUs).

5.4.3 ReviewerResponse (3.7 TUs)

This theme contains no generic requests for reviewer help (generic 0%). Instead, it consists of a reasonable number of both text-specific (62.3%) and text-holistic (37.7%) questions focused on global content and conceptual ideas (*content&ideas* 1.8 TUs) rather than on local issues (*languageinuse* 0.4 TUs) and sources (*citation&sources* 0.1TU). Questions are focused more on rhetorical organization *(rhetoricalmoves* 0.7 TUs) than textual organization (t*extualorganization* 0.4 TUs). Instruction specificity may increase as the writing develops.

5.4.4. SocialPresence (8.1 TUs)

This theme is the glue that holds everything together and is ubiquitous. *SocialPresence* is the largest CL component. It is expressed both explicitly (*SocialPresence* 3.5 TUs) and implicitly throughout (*personalfeelings* 4.4 TUs). In concurrence with Garrison et al. (1999, p.94), social presence allows the author to exert their unique personality by expressing their vulnerabilities through hedging devices (*personalfeelings_authordoubt* 2.4 TUs); expressing their emotions, feelings, and mood through the use of smileys and exclamations (*personaldoubt_affect* 2.0 TUs), building group cohesion through writing norms (*openings&closures* 1.7 TU; gratitude 1.3 TUs; *referencetofuturecontact* 0.3 TUs), and engaging in purposeful communication (*opencommunication_apologizing* 0.2 TUs).

5.5 RQ5: How Do CLs Relate to Agency within Writing Groups?

Based on this and prior CL studies (Yallop, 2016; Yallop & Leijen, 2018, 2021; Yallop et al., 2021), CLs within doctoral writing groups can foster self-, co- and shared regulated learning through a combination of direct CL instruction and

asynchronous author-reviewer written interactions. Self-regulated learning is appropriately situated at the intersection of teaching and cognitive presences within the CoI framework, as it relates to metacognition within the individual's private world (Garrison, 2022). Within collaborative learning communities (e.g., writing groups), shared regulated learning (e.g., group feedback exchanges) and co-regulated learning (e.g., dyadic feedback exchanges) are largely mediated by the high degree of social presence included in participants' CLs. Evidence demonstrates that authors develop deeper insights into their own and their peers' writing through reviewing each other's drafts (Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996). Similarly, students imitate their peers' CLs (Yallop et al., 2021) and, in tandem with desirable CL instruction, these instructional inputs (teaching presence) may also help the community develop insights into each other's feedback practices. Regarding co-regulated learning, this study shows that CL content can greatly influence reviewers' feedback comments. Thus, providing students with direct instruction on desirable CL practices (i.e., teaching presence mediated by shared-regulated learning), as identified in RQ3 and RQ4, and creating a trusting and safe learning environment for dyadic and group interactions (social presence mediated by co- and shared-regulated learning) mediate the creation of desirable CLs (authorial cognitive presence via self-regulated learning) and desirable peer reviews (reviewer cognitive presence via self-regulated learning).

Under this premise, and consistent with Shea (2022), a strong case exists to create a fourth presence—learning presence—to account for the dynamic influences of the various regulated learning mechanisms. While this study demonstrates that learning presence is an influential component of individual learning, it does not provide sufficient evidence on how it should be integrated into the CoI framework. Nevertheless, applying new insights on beneficial affective and effective desirable CL features (RQ3) together with their desirable proportions (RQ4) within the CoI framework (Garrison et al., 2010) yields a pedagogical model of desirable CL features (*DCL model*).

6.0 Limitations

The stringent informed consent process resulted in datasets too small for inferential statistical analysis. However, the qualitative findings align with the quantitative findings and corroborate similar studies (Yallop, 2016; Yallop & Leijen, 2021; Yallop et al., 2021). A larger, purely quantitative study is needed to validate the DCL model; meanwhile, our findings provide guidelines on how to more fully harness the full pedagogical potential of the CL.

7.0 Conclusion

Nearly all revision-oriented feedback comments (95.8%) were requested and exhibited a high proportion of the desirable traits, including text-specificness (95.2%) and globalness (81.9%), indicating that CLs can effectively elicit desirable feedback.

Effective CLs generally contain three distinct sections, as supported by evidence from expert and student participants. *Context* describes what the text is, what the text contains, and what the text does. *Instruction* defines the feedback criteria, what to review, and in what order to review. *SocialPresence* allows authors to build group dynamics, and express positive affect and writing vulnerabilities. Well-crafted CLs are concise and precise, adopt a reader's perspective, and include a reasonable

number of questions tailored to the reviewers' expertise. Question type and scope may also depend on the writing stage. Quantitative analysis of participant artifacts (CLs and peer reviews) supports the qualitative evidence provided by students and experts. The subthemes for *Context*, *Instruction*, and *SocialPresence,* present in meaningful proportions, exhibit desirable CL features. Our findings indicate the proportion of how these themes and subthemes are used in effective CLs within doctoral writing groups. Notably, these findings indicated that CLs may foster self-regulated learning. Accordingly, a rhetorical model of desirable CL features (DCL model) is proposed.

The DCL model demonstrates how CLs offer a promising, low-tech intervention for enhancing feedback quality and authorial agency in doctoral writing groups. Although untested, the DCL model has potential pedagogical value for supporting student feedback and writing processes across diverse teaching and socio-cultural contexts. For example, CLs can help novice and intermediate writers adopt multiple audience perspectives and enable expert writers to address reviewers' comments during the publication process.

8.0 Future Directions

Future studies could test the DCL model in larger or cross-institutional samples, examine longitudinal development of CLs over time, and assess the role of CLs in asynchronous-only peer review environments. Additionally, further exploration of CLs' impact on both L1 and L2 writers' confidence and revision behaviors may inform inclusive writing pedagogies at scale.

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Appendix A: Cover Letter Reflective Prompt

The following reflective prompt was discussed by each writing group at a synchronous workshop at the end of the first feedback round.

1. Feedback cover letters **(please click here for instructional video on cover letters)**

It is very important that you write a clear and concise cover letter so that your group knows exactly how to assess your text. This will ensure that you receive relevant and useful feedback.

Please spend a little time thinking about how your group's feedback cover letters helped you evaluate their text and discuss the following:

- What types of comments in the cover letters helped you give effective feedback? Why?
- If you had no cover letter to help your review, what did you give feedback on?

Now look back at the cover letter you wrote and share your thoughts (if you wish) with your group:

- Did you get the feedback you asked for in your cover letter? Why? Why not?
- If you were reviewing your own draft text, would you find your cover letter helpful? Why? Why not?

As a group, agree on what makes a good cover letter? Please share your thoughts on Discord (about 3-5 sentences).

Appendix B: Expert Collaborative Materials

Table B-1

Example of Expert Collaborative Rating Task Sheet

Participant (Code)	Ranking of CLs 1= Most Useful 13= Least Useful	Features of Cover Letter and Other Observations	Quality of CLs 1 = Very Effective 7 = Harmful
AA …		… …	
AA3	12	Not much for readers to use--more apology than actual info about the draft. Writer assumes much. Fairly formal in tone.	4
AA4	7	More reader focused than first writer, but very little info about the text. Request for opinions and insights	3
AA7	1	More details here--title, summary of text, and 4 questions to readers. Still formal.	1
AA12	2	Good prelude to requests (what is offered, who the audience is), asks for structure and general reading feedback	2
AA …		… …	
Other Observations			

Table B-2

Transcription Excerpt from Synchronous Negotiated Oral Discussion (utilizing ExpertDataset_QualitativeCLRatings)

ID	RT	Speaker	Comment
483	4	Expert1	So do we want to start by reading off our rankings to each other so we can see how close we are or not to begin with? If you want, I can read mine off and then you read yours off.
484	4	Expert2	Yep. Do we want to to put them in the table already.
485	4	Expert1	I'm noting them in my ... your table here. So we'll have a place that I would just do the same. I moved Roger's table into Excel because it was much easier to work with than Word.
486	4	Expert2	Okay. So you'll take the notes then?
487	4	Expert1	Yes. Be happy to. Okay. Good. So, so yeah, I'll read you my rankings. First I'll just go down the order of the letters from A to G. So in order, I had twelve, eleven, ten, seven, nine, eight, one, five, four, thirteen, six, two, three.
488	4	Expert2	Right. And now my ratings. In the same order.
489	4	Expert2	13, 12, eight, six, 11, five, seven, four, nine, 10, three, one, and two.
490	4	Expert1	Okay. Well, it looks like certainly we are very close on A1 and A2 because I'm 11 and 12, you're 12 and 13. Let's see. The places we diverge, it looks like C1 and F1 are the larger divergences. E1. C, E1, and probably, yeah. So why don't we start with those? Because clearly figuring out, figuring out why we diverge so much on C1 is key, I think here.
491	4	Expert2	Yes. Yeah, it's interesting. You have the best one. Yeah.
492	4	Expert1	So what, I mean, the reasons I chose that is, it talks about, it gives, a title, intended audience, brief summary of the, of the project, and then some direct questions to the audience. And if we look at what you, G1, which I liked, you know, very much as well. So what helped me understand why G1 is your number one versus C1?
493	4	Expert2	The reason I, well, in general, the C1 has all the essential features like background information, target audience, specific questions, but what I didn't like and what was annoying for me is the second paragraph where content information is given, but I would rather prefer to read this in the draft itself. So I don't want to spend my time reading it in the cover letter and spend so much time so much time reading the cover letter, whereas I would rather want to spend time reading the draft itself. And if the text is not able to explain all this information clearly to me, then why should an author include the information somewhere else? So let the draft do its job, would be my, what I would think. And I don't like long cover letters, because I'm always short of time. But then again, it's okay. A bit too many questions. I think it's a bit difficult to remember all four of them, so perhaps a bit too much. But then again, these are rather general questions. So I would say the cover letter is okay, just that the others were better.
494	4	Expert1	Okay. Well, I would say that, I mean, I, given that this is a multidisciplinary writing group, I, I want the second paragraph. Because I want the author to tell me in their words what they're writing about because many of well the things if if we look at the A topics the which we put a generally A1 and A2 at almost the complete bottom there's nothing about the draft excepting A2 they give us a title which doesn't tell me a whole lot and there's no information especially to get started with in the first cover letter so anything that has questions although he rated F1 and D1 slightly higher than i did and i looked at that and said i don't know if either of those authors wrote their own cover letter or copied from a template ...
495	4	Expert 2	True yeah i had the same impression.

Appendix C: Coding Book for Traits in Feedback Comments and Cover Letter Comments (utilizing StudentDataset_CLs and StudentDataset_PRs)

Trait	*Definition of Thematic Unit (TU) of Instruction_Response (Cover Letter) or Instruction_Visible (Feedback Comment) Where Applicable*	Participant Examples (Full or Abridged)	
		Cover Letter Comment (CLC)	**Feedback Comment (FC)**
CL Request [1]	The resulting feedback comment is (Author 1, 20xx) is …	***See Participant Examples Below:***	***See Participant Examples Below:***
Specific Request	**A response** to a specific cover letter TU of *Instruction_visible*. [1]	*"My main question is whether we need to separate the part discussing our object …"*	*"I assume this is the object of the article, as mentioned in your feedback recipe?"*
General Request	**A response** to a holistic cover letter of TU of *Instruction_visible*.[1]	*"Please comment on my general structure."*	*"I would combine these two sentences or structure them differently, because they are now a bit repetitive …"*
Unrequested	Is **not a response** to a TU of *Instruction_visible*.	Context-dependent	Context-dependent
Effect	If the TU of *Instruction* is followed (adapted from Faigley & Witte, 1984), there will be …	***See Participant Examples Below:***	***See Participant Examples Below:***
Global	**A change** of textual meaning in the resulting written artefact (peer review or author's subsequent draft).	*"Are the aims of the isotop clear?"*	*"I'm a great fan of bringing out the RQs as clearly as you have done it."*
Local	**No change** of textual meaning in the resulting written artefact (peer review or author's subsequent draft).	*"Please point out any grammar mistakes."*	*"Some random comma here."*
Scope	**The TU of *Instruction*** (adapted from Ferris, 1997 and Wu & Schunn, 2020) **contains** …	***See Participant Examples Below:***	***See Participant Examples Below:***
Specific [3]	One **text-specific** thematic aspect at the micro- or mesa-level.	*"What else should I explain to sell the idea of the importance of what I do?"*	*"I think 'heritage' language needs to be explained somewhere."* [4]
Holistic	One **text-holistic** thematic aspect at the macro-level; including all TUs of *Instruction_Response* (CLs only) coded as '*any other comment*'.	*"Please comment on the general structure."*	*The structure of your introduction is clear."*
Generic	**No contextual or referential content**; includes all TUs of *Instruction* coded as *generic*.	*"Please comment on anything."*	*Not applicable for this study ["That's a great text."]*

Notes. By their sheer nature …

[1] *Feedback comments (FCs) of* Instruction_Response *that are written in the author's cover letter are coded as* ***a specific request.***

[2] *Cover letter comments of Context* ***, AND*** *segmented FCs written 'in-text' within the author's draft are* ***text-specific.***

[3] *FCs of Instruction_Response cannot be generic as they refer to a specific textual aspect. Please note that generic FCs are affective in nature, and they are coded as TUs of SocialPresence. Thus, the trait of generic in FCs of Instruction_Response was not coded for in this study.*

Appendix D: Coding Scheme for Cover Letters

Section 1. Background

We present below the rationale and procedures employed to develop a comprehensive cover letter taxonomy based on Yallop & Leijen's (2021) cover letter coding scheme. The premise is that beneficial cover letter comments (CLCs) are more likely to elicit beneficial feedback comments (FCs), and beneficial FCs are more likely to promote beneficial author revisions to their subsequent draft. To ensure coding reliability, two coders conducted the coding procedure iteratively. They met regularly to discuss discrepancies and adjusted the coding scheme accordingly throughout the coding process. After the coding had been completed, the two coders repeated the whole process systematically over a five-hour meeting. This resulted in revisions being made to approximately 2.5% of the segmented thematic units. The whole iterative coding process was completed over a three-month period.

Section 2. Coding Scheme

The diagram is generally designed to be read from the middle outward starting at the purple box entitled Influence. It is divided into five frames:

A. Themes;

B. Dualthemes;

C. Subthemes;

D. Subsubthemes;

E. Traits.

Within each of the five frames are numbered boxes. Each box is color-coded according to their connected theme as follows:

(i) *InstructionAction* (red)

(ii) *InstructionResponse* (green)

(iii) *Context* (blue)

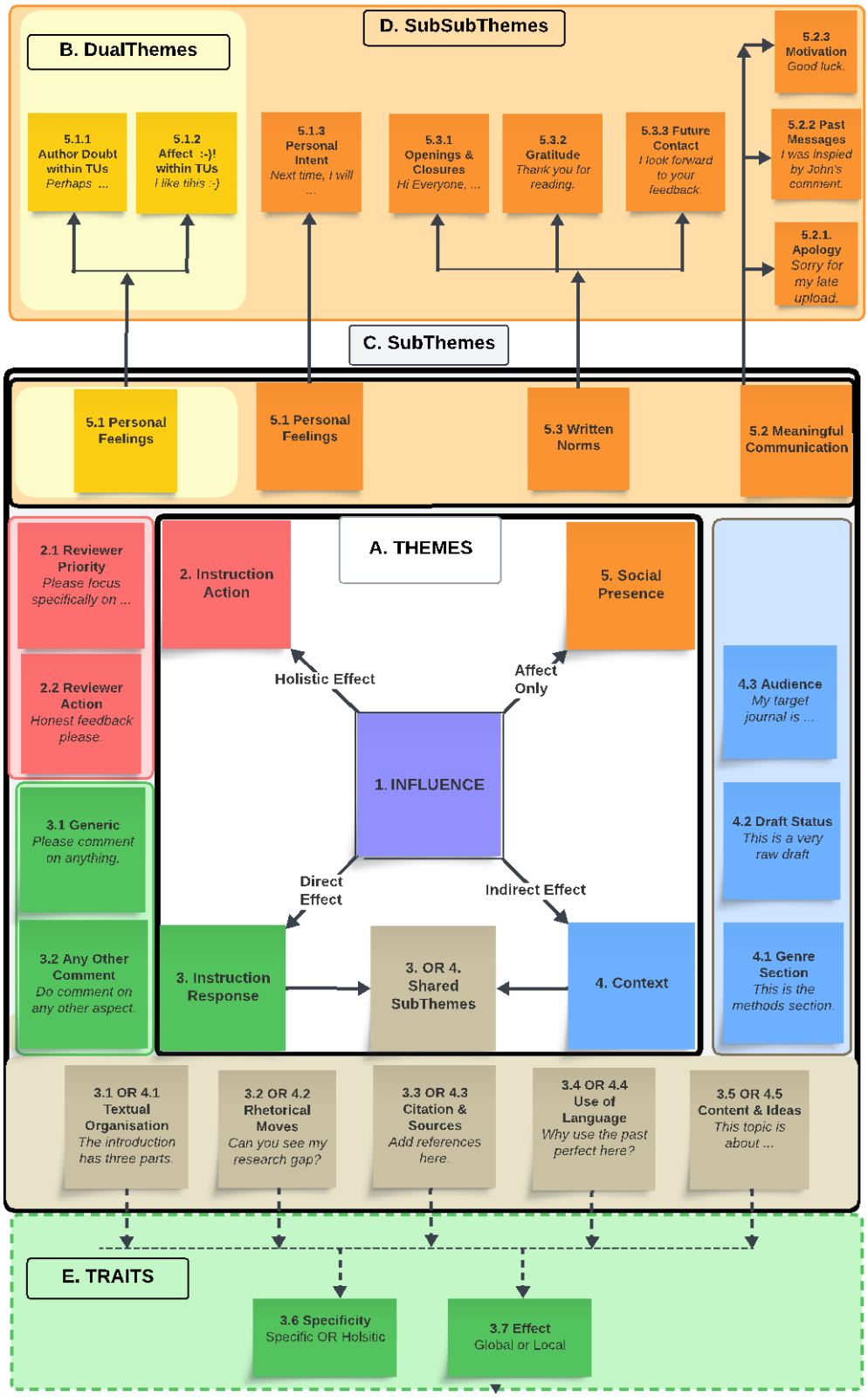
(iv) *SocialPresence* (orange)

(v) Dual-Coded Themes (yellow).

Each frame is designed to be read in numerical order from the top left-hand corner going anti-clockwise (for themes and subthemes) or from left to right (for subsubthemes, including dual-coded themes, and traits). Black arrows denote the direction of the hierarchical categorization of the cover letter. Grey boxes denote subthemes shared by the themes *InstructionResponse* and *Context*. The dotted arrows from these grey boxes indicate that these instructional subthemes (*useoflanguage*, *content&ideas*, *textualorganization*, *rhetoricalstructure*, and *citation&sources*) are also coded for the traits of *specificity* and *effect* (see Figure D-1).

Figure D-1

Graphical Depiction of Cover Letter Coding Scheme

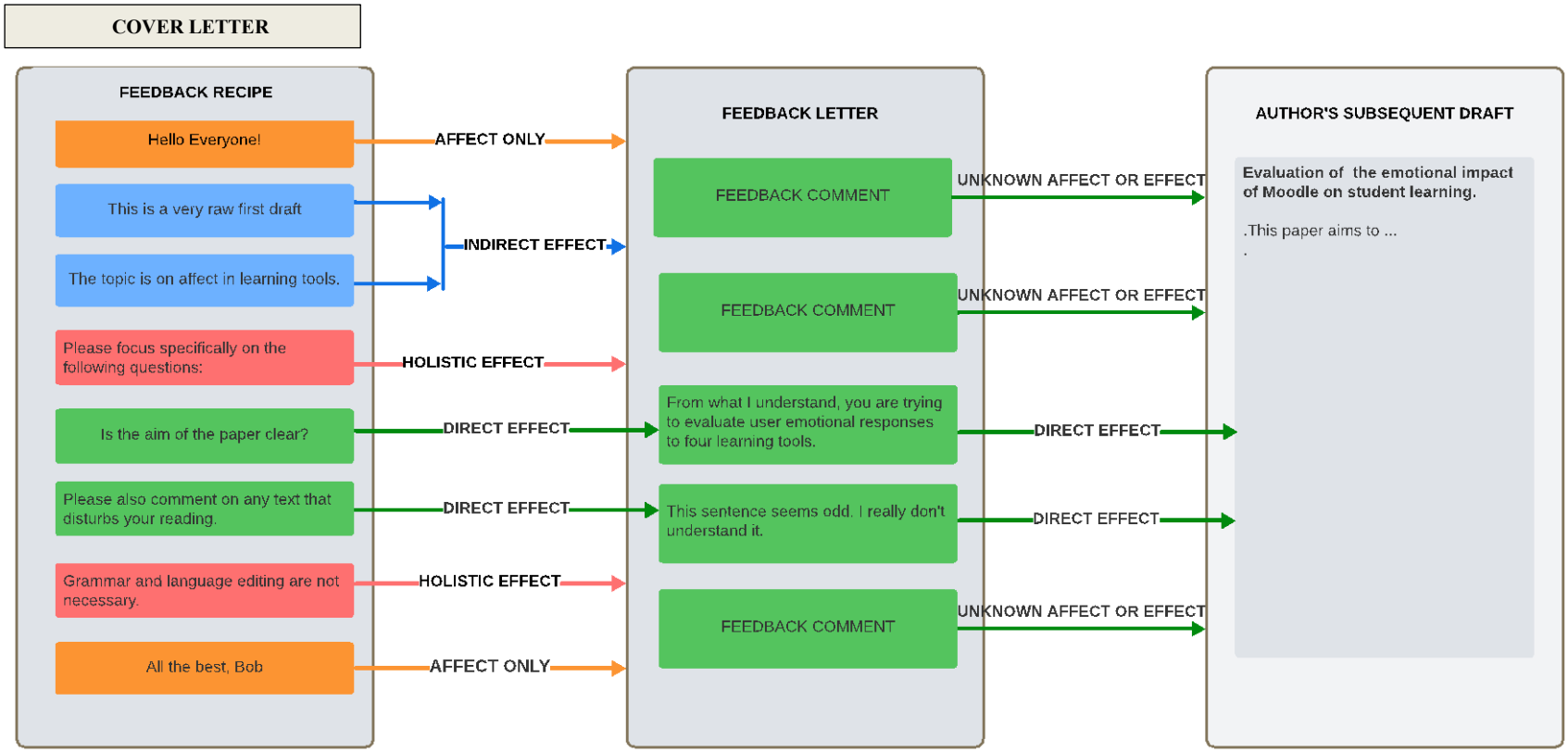


Section 3. Segmentation of Data into Four Themes *(InstructionResponse, InstructionAction, Context*, and *SocialPresence)*

The author's cover letter can influence the content of reviewers' feedback letters, and reviewers' feedback letters can influence the content of the same author's subsequent draft. Thus, cover letters can indirectly influence the writing process (see Figure D-2).

Figure D-2

The Affect and Effect of the Cover Letter on the Reviewing and Writing Processes



Section 4. Coding Process

The cover letters are manually segmented into thematic units based on how their main idea unit (Nelson & Schunn, 2009) could effect and/or affect the reviewing process. For the initial segmentation process, we used the following guiding questions and logic:

Question 1. Direct effect (denoted by green arrows in Figure D-2)

- Can the segmented thematic unit (TU) elicit a feedback comment that requests the author to make one textual change (e.g., critical comments such as "This sentence seems odd. I really don't understand it.") or consciously to not make a textual change (e.g., FCs of justified praise such as "The aim of your paper is very clearly expressed because of ..."); including summaries that may, or may not, invoke a textual change depending on the author's interpretation (e.g., "From what I can understand, you are trying to evaluate user emotional responses ...")?

If answer = Yes, code as *InstructionResponse*, THEN go to Section 8 and code for respective subthemes; Otherwise go to Question 2.

Question 2. Holistic effect (denoted by red arrows)

- Does the segmented TU require one reviewer action (e.g. "Grammar and language editing is not needed."); including location references to TUs of *InstructionResponse* (e.g., "Please focus specifically on the following questions.") that may have a holistic effect on the elicited FCs?

If Yes, code as *InstructionAction*, THEN go to Section 6, Question 7 and code for subthemes; OTHERWISE go to Question 3.

Question 3. Indirect effect (denoted by blue arrows)

- Indirect effect. Can the segmented TU have a cumulative indirect effect, but in themselves have no direct effect, on the elicited FCs (i.e., by contextualising the TUs of *InstructionResponse* such as "This topic is on affect in learning tools.")?

If Yes, code as *Context*, THEN go to Section 8 and code for respective subthemes; OTHERWISE go to Question 4.

Question 4. Affect only (denoted by orange arrows)

- Affect only. Does the segmented TU have no possible effect (indirect, holistic, and/or direct) effect on elicited FCs (i.e., the TU is affective in nature, such as "I look forward to your feedback.")?

If Yes, code as *SocialPresence* THEN go to Section 7 and code for respective subthemes and subsubthemes; OTHERWISE go back to Question 1 and repeat coding process.

Section 5. Dual Coding (*SocialPresence* within *Context* or *Instruction*)

We use the following guiding questions to code at the micro level for affective language contained within segmented thematic units.

Question 5. SocialPresence_AuthorDoubt AND respective theme (see yellow box 5.1.1 in Figure D-1)

- Does the TU of *Context*, *InstructionAction*, or *InstructionResponse* contain one or more hedging device of uncertainty according to Salager-Meyer's (1994) hedging taxonomy?

If Yes, dual code the thematic unit as *SocialPresence* and respective theme (*Context*, *InstructionAction*, or *InstructionResponse*); OTHERWISE do not code for *AuthorDoubt* within the segmented TU- END.

Explanatory text. Segmented TUs can contain hedging devices likely expressing author uncertainty (*hedging devices*).[5] If one or more hedging devices are contained within a TU of *InstructionAction*, *InstructionResponse*, or *Context,* the segment is dual coded as both *SocialPresence* and their respective theme.[6] For coding, we adopted the following procedure:

1. The segmented TUs were machine coded using the following keywords: begin, believe, feel, first (draft), hope, idea, may, mess, might, not sure, opinion, perhaps, possible, preliminary, probably, raw, rough, seem, think, try, view, and discrete phrases (e.g., a pinch of salt).
2. The TUs were manually inspected to determine whether the TUs containing the machine-coded keyword express author doubt. For example, TUs containing hedging devices expressing author uncertainty in the literature (e.g., "Recent studies have suggested that TOPIC may be related to …") are not coded as *AuthorDoubt*.
3. Simultaneously during the manual inspection, the data was tagged for hedging devices not on the initial keyword list (e.g., *nitpicking*).
4. This process was repeated iteratively throughout the coding procedure.
5. Additional keywords signaling author doubt that emerged include not put anything down, not ready, not yet obtained significant results, ongoing, really/still beginning, sparse, still in progress, very draft form, weakest section, work more on this text.

Question 6. SocialPresence_Affect AND respective theme (see yellow box 5.1.2)

- Does the TU of *InstructionAction, InstructionResponse, Context,* or *SocialPresence* contain one or more of the punctuation markers of smileys ('☺') or exclamations ('!')?

If Yes, dual code as *SocialPresence_Affect* and respective theme (*Context*/*Instruction*); OTHERWISE do not code *Affect* within the segmented TU-END.

---

5 We use Salager-Meyer's (1994, p.7) categories of hedges of (i) shields, (ii) expressions that express author self-doubt and involvement, and (iii) emotionally charged intensifiers such as "extremely difficult" where logical.

6 As one example, the TU "Perhaps comment on readability?" is coded as both SocialPresence_AuthorDoubt and InstructionResponse. Note that we do not dual code for hedging devices within thematic units of SocialPresence as the affective idea of author vulnerability is usually expressed only in the SocialPresence subthemes.

Explanatory text. Segmented TUs can also contain affective punctuation of smileys and exclamations that express author emotion. Following Rourke et al.'s (1999) social presence taxonomy, TUs containing such punctuation as *Social Presence_Affect* and their respective theme (including *SocialPresence*) were also machine coded. Consequently, the segments using the following two affective punctuations: '☺' and '!' are machine coded.

Section 6. *InstructionAction* (subthemes)

The theme of *InstructionAction i*s viewed as a bridge between *Context* and *InstructionResponse.* The purpose of TUs of *InstructionResponse* is to give instructions on what to review, or not to review, and their order of reviewing importance. The following questions were used to guide the coding process:

Question 7. InstructionAction_ReviewerPriority

- Does the TU guide the reviewer to TUs of *InstructionAction* or textual aspects that need prioritizing or not prioritizing (e.g., "Please focus specifically on the following questions.")?

If Yes, code as *InstructionAction_2.1.ReviewerPriority*- END; OTHERWISE go to Question 8.

Explanatory Text. After the initial coding, common keywords emerged that include *do not (don't) waste time/ take seriously*, *following*, *I would (I'd) like/ be grateful*, *let me know*, *I have*, (*main) questions are, most important part*, *most interested*, *read only through*. For the second round of coding, the whole dataset was machine coded for these commonly occurring keywords. Then, each segment was manually inspected and coded accordingly. Additionally, any coding errors from earlier coding rounds were corrected.

Question 8. InstructionAction_ReviewerAction

- ***Holistic effect (2).*** Does the TU give instructions on a holistic textual aspect on what not to review (e.g., "Grammar and language editing is not needed."); OR give an affective instruction (e.g., "Honest feedback please")?

If Yes, code as *InstructionAction_2.2ReviewerAction*- END; OTHERWISE go back to Question 1 and repeat the coding process.

Explanatory Text. As this dataset is small (19 TUs), only one common keyword emerged: *ignore.* Consequently, for the second round of coding, the whole dataset was machine coded for the keyword *ignore*. Then, each segment was manually inspected and adjusted accordingly (that also included correcting any coding errors from previous rounds).

Section 7. *SocialPresence* (subthemes and subsubthemes)

In written feedback exchanges, a taxonomy (based on Shea et al.'s (2010) social presence taxonomy) was devised to measure *SocialPresence* in cover letters and feedback comments (see Yallop, 2016 for concise treatment). For simplicity, we did not account for differences in the following three subthemes as this was beyond the scope of this study:

1. *personalfeelings* (originally named affect)
2. *meaningfulcommunication* (originally *opencommunication)*
3. *writtennorms* (originally *groupcohesion)*

Instead, each subsubtheme (e.g., *gratitude*) is presented as a pseudo-subtheme of *SocialPresence*. The two subsubthemes of *openings* and *closures* were merged into one pseudo-subtheme (see Table D-1).

Table D-1

Coding for Subthemes and Subsubthemes of SocialPresence (adapted from Yallop & Leijen, 2021; Yallop et al., 2021)

SocialPresence Theme SubTheme	**Definition. The author (adapted from Rourke et al., 1999), …**	**Participant Examples (Full or Abridged)**	**Machine-Coding Keywords**
5.1 Personal Feelings	Expresses their emotions, feelings, and mood; including their writing vulnerabilities and intentions.	**See Participant Examples Below**	**See Keywords Below**
5.1.3 Intent	States their writing intentions.	*" I'll work to make my writing clearer."*	I'll, I will
This category is mainly concerned with psychological factors and how the individual as an author expresses their own emotions, feelings, and mood. In other words, it shows how the author in their cover letter projects their own unique personality (Yallop, 2016).			
5.2 Meaningful Communication	Uses communication that has a meaningful purpose.	**See Participant Examples Below**	**See Keywords Below**
5.2.1 Apologies	Uses an apology to acknowledge a late or non-action.	*"I am sorry this is late."*	apolog, sorry
5.2.2 Past Messages	Refers to past messages from writing group members.	*"I was inspired by John's previous comment."*	previous comments, who reviewed this
5.2.3 Motivation	*Uses encouragement and/or unjustified praise.*	*"Good Luck."*	Only used once in data.
This category is mainly concerned with the interactions between the author with their writing group, and how the author communicates purposefully (Yallop, 2016).			
5.3 Written Norms	*Conforms to the pragmatic norms of written communication.*	**See Participant Examples Below**	**See Keywords Below**
5.3.1 Opening and;	Opens the FR with a greeting or an ending.	*"Dear Ann, …"*	Dear, Hello, Hi, Name
5.3.1 Closure.	Closes the FR with an ending.	*"All the best, Bob."*	Best, Cheers, Regards, Name
5.3.2 Gratitude	Expresses gratitude to their writing group.	*"Thank you."*	thank, appreciate, grateful, invaluable
5.3.3 Future Contact	Refers to future contact with their writing group.	*"I look forward to our meeting next week."*	await, forward, see you
This category is mainly concerned with the interactions between the author with their writing group, and how the author identifies with their writing group (Yallop, 2016).			

Note. **Denotes wild characters; all segments containing keywords are manually inspected after machine-coding to ensure their overarching meaning matches the coding definition.*

Coding Procedure

After the initial segmentation, the following consensual assessment procedure (Göpferich & Neumann, 2016, p.119) was used to categorize the data:

1. A small portion of the segments (approximately 10% of the dataset) were manually coded into their respective subthemes and subsubthemes.
2. Keywords were noted for each subsubtheme (see Table D-1; right-hand column labelled “Machine-coding keywords”).
3. Using these keywords, remaining segments of *SocialPresence* were machine coded.
4. Each coded segment was manually inspected and the keywords revised accordingly.
5. The data was sorted by subsubthemes and each segment was manually inspected to verify whether the keyword corresponded to the overarching meaning of the coding definition and the coding was readjusted accordingly.

6. During this iterative process, coding discrepancies were discussed and the coding adjusted accordingly.
7. Steps 1 to 6 were repeated on different portions of the dataset until all the data had been coded.

The same procedure was repeated for the subthemes of *InstructionResponse* and *Context* (see section 8).

Section 8. InstructionResponse and Context (themes and subthemes)

We applied a similar iterative coding scheme as we conducted on *SocialPresence* (outlined in the previous section) on the five shared themes between *InstructionResponse* and *Context* (see Table D-2, on the two subthemes of *InstructionResponse* (see Table D-3), and on the three subthemes of *Context* (see Table D-4).

Table D-2

Shared Subthemes of InstructionResponse and Context (adapted from Yallop & Leijen, 2021)

Shared SubTheme	*Subtheme*	**Definition.** The thematic unit contains …	**Participant Examples (Full or Abridged)**		**Machine-Coding Keywords**
			Context	**Instruction**	
	3.1 OR 4.1 Textual Organisation	**Structuring of textual and conceptual content** about what the text contains at the macro- (whole draft), mesa- (paragraph) and micro- (e.g., word and sentence) levels.	*"The introduction is divided into three parts."*	*"Are the paragraphs sufficiently clear?"*	*combine, coherent, cohesive, connect, divide* (divided/ divides), layout, linked, move text/ somewhere else, organization/ organisation, paragraph, part, redund* (redundant /redundancy), repeat, repetitive, sentence, separate, sequence, structure, substitution, transition.*
	3.2 OR 4.2 Rhetorical Moves	**Structuring of functional content** about what the text does; typically with regards to the draft's aims, goals, focus, purpose, objective, and implications (i.e. rhetorical moves).	*"The goal of this paper is to give a new perspective about …"*	*"Have I identified the research gap in my introduction?"*	*aim, convince, entice, essential, explains what I, explore how, focus, knowledge gap, research gap, give an idea, hypothesis, importan, interest, like to continue reading, logic, new approach, novelty, object, research question, RQ, sell, step, move, why I chose , why this study, why we need.*
3. Instruction Response **4. Context**	*3.3 OR 4.3 Citation & Sources*	**Citation-based content** about author's sources, citations, and evidence.	*"The yellow highlights places I need to add a reference."*	*"If you have any good source recommendations, please let me know?"*	*Not enough data to machine-code.*
	3.4 OR 4.4 Use of Language	**Language-based content** about grammar, vocabulary and other predominantly local concerns; including instructions not to comment on language-based content.	*"I have often been told that I use too much passive voice."*	*"You can feel free to comment about the grammar."*	*comma, editing, fluency, form , grammar, language, passive, period, full-stop, preposition, spelling, strikethrough, style, tense, text-editing, typos, word .*
	3.5 OR 4.5 Content & Ideas	**Conceptual content** about author's ideas that impact on the draft's logic, flow, connectedness, and readability; **OR textual content** that is specific and locatable to one particular aspect or idea unit.	*"This topic belongs to speciality of biomedical technology."; "Is it logical?"*	*"Is it logical?"*	*add, adequate, sufficient short, long, more, less, too much, too little, missing, not much, thoroughly, approach, clarif, clarity, clear, concept, context, convoluted, define, definition, described, details, discuss, easy, complicated, elaborate, enough, example, expand, explain, explanation, extend, flow, follow, leave out, omit, to cut, logic, information, readab, sense, soundness, specify, stressed, emphasised, underline, understand.*

Table D-3

Subthemes of InstructionResponse Only (adapted from Yallop & Leijen, 2021)

Theme	*Subtheme*	**Definition.** The thematic unit contains …	**Participant Examples (Full or Abridged)**	**Machine-Coding Keywords**
3. Instruction Response Only	*3.1 Generic*	**Generic content** that is **not contextualized** and could apply to any author's cover letter or reviewer's feedback comments (Ferris, 1997).	*"Please comment on anything."*	Any*Feedback / Comment/ Suggestion
	3.2 Any Other Comment	**Holistic content** that is **contextualized** and could apply to any author's feedback recipes or reviewer's feedback comments.	*"Please comment on anything else that comes to mind."*	Other*Feedback/ Comment/ Suggestion

Table D-4

Subthemes of Context Only (adapted from Yallop & Leijen, 2021)

Theme	*Subtheme*	**Definition.** The thematic unit contains …	**Participant Examples (Full or Abridged)**	**Machine-Coding Keywords**
Context Only	*4.1 Audience*	**Audience-based content** about the target journal and intended audience of the author's draft.	*"The journal also publishes paleopathological papers."; "My audience are education scientists."*	intended, readers, journal, target (group), audience
	4.2 Genre Section	**Contextual content** about the draft's genre; including specific draft sections such as IMRaD sections (e.g., the Introduction)**.**	*"It is a conference paper."; "This is the method's section."*	article, chapter, introduction, lit review, methods, conclusion, abstract, paper, manuscript, monograph, overview, paragraph contains, last part
	4.3 Status	**Contextual content** about the draft's current version and/or status**.**	*"This is a revised version."*	(really) beginning, currently finishing, don't have, first/ second/ final/ current/ revised/ rough/ raw/ draft OR version, in progress/ process, isn't/ is not (finished), messy, not (finished/ obtained), preliminary stage/view, weakest

Section 9. Traits

Finally, the shared themes of *InstructionResponse* for the traits effect and scope were machine coded (see Table D-5).

Table D-5

Coding Scheme for Traits of InstructionResponse (excluding the subthemes of generic and anyothercomment)

Trait SharedThemes Instruction Response Only	**Definition (TU Refers to Subthematic Unit)**	**Participant Examples (Full or Abridged)**
Effect[1]	If the instructional TU is followed and/or implemented (adapted from Faigley & Witte, 1984) …	**See Participant Examples Below**
Local	There will be **no change** of textual meaning.	*"Please point out any grammar mistakes."*
Global	There will be a change of textual meaning.	*Are the aims of the isotop clear?"*
Scope	The instructional TU contains (adapted from Ferris, 1997) …	**See Participant Examples Below**
Specific[2]	One **specific** subthematic aspect at the micro- or mesa-level.	*"What else should I explain to sell the idea of the importance of what I do?"*
Holistic	One **general** subthematic aspect at the macro-level	*"Please comment on the general structure."*

Notes

*[1] The subthemes of Generic and AnyOtherComment (within the theme of Instruction) can have both **local** and **global** effects depending on the reviewer. As such, they are excluded from the analysis.*

[2] By their sheer nature, cover letter comments of
*(i) The theme of Context are coded as **specific** because the author is contextualising particular aspects of their writing assignment;*
*(ii) The subtheme of AnyOtherComments are coded as **holistic** because they have defined criteria (e.g., "Please give me feedback on anything I have not mentioned in the cover letter);*
*(iii) The subtheme of generic are coded as **generic** (not holistic) as no other instructional criteria has been given in the cover letter (e.g.," Please give me any feedback.").*

Appendix E: Coding Book with Frequencies for Cover Letter Themes of *Instruction* and *Context*, and Their Respective Subthemes

(utilizing dataset *StudentDataset*_CL)

Theme	*subtheme*	*Thematic Units (n)*	**Definition.** The thematic unit contains …	**Participant Examples (Full or Abridged)**	
				Context	***Instruction***
Context ***Instruction Response***	*textual organisation*	*31*	**Structuring of textual and conceptual content** about what the text contains at the macro- (whole draft), mesa- (paragraph) and micro- (e.g., word and sentence) levels	*"The introduction is divided into three parts."*	*"Are the paragraphs sufficiently clear?"*
	rhetorical moves	*37*	**Structuring of functional content** about what the text does; typically with regards to the draft's aims, goals, focus, purpose, objective, and implications (i.e. rhetorical moves).	*"The goal of this paper is to give a new perspective about …"*	*"Have I identified the research gap in my introduction?"*
	citation & sources	*1*	**Citation-based content** about author's sources, citations, and evidence.	*"The yellow highlights places I need to add a reference."*	*"If you have any good source recommendations, please let me know?"*
	useof language	*15*	**Language-based content** about grammar, vocabulary and other predominantly local concerns; including instructions not to comment on language-based content.	*"I have often been told that I use too much passive voice."*	*"You can feel free to comment about the grammar."*
	content & ideas	*107*	**Conceptual content** about author's ideas that impact on the draft's logic, flow, connectedness, and readability; **OR textual content** that is specific and locatable to one particular aspect or idea unit.	*"This topic belongs to speciality of biomedical technology."; "Is it logical?"*	*"Is it logical?"*
Context Only	*target audience*	*18*	**Audience-based content** about the target journal and intended audience of the author's draft.	*"The journal also publishes paleopathological papers."; "My audience are education scientists."*	NOT APPLICABLE
	genre section	*46*	**Contextual content** about the draft's genre; including specific draft sections such as IMRaD sections (e.g., the Introduction)**.**	*"It is a conference paper."; "This is the method's section."*	NOT APPLICABLE
	draftstatus	*54*	**Contextual content** about the draft's current version and/or status**.**	*"This is a revised version."*	NOT APPLICABLE
Instruction Response	*anyother comment*	*11*	**Contextualized** and **holistic content** that could apply to any theme within one specific cover letter.	NOT APPLICABLE	*"[As well as my reviewing requests above], please comment on anything else that comes to mind."*
	generic	*9*	**Uncontextualised and generic content** that could apply to any cover letter; typically the only TU of InstructionResponse.	NOT APPLICABLE	*"Please comment on anything."* [only TU of InstructionRequest]
Instruction Action	reviewer priority	*39*	**Referential content** that guides the reviewer to one or more *TUs of Instruction_Response* ; typically helps reviewers prioritise their feedback comments.	NOT APPLICABLE	*"And my main questions are : … "; "Please focus specifically on the following …"*
	reviewer action	*19*	**A criterion** that requires a reviewer action on what to review or not to review; includes degree of allowable affect.	NOT APPLICABLE	*"No grammar or language editing needed."; I would appreciate honest feedback."*

Appendix F: Coding Book for Subthemes and Subsubthemes of *SocialPresence*

Social Presence subtheme *subsubtheme*	**Definition. The author (adapted from Rourke et al., 1999)…**	**Participant Examples (Full or Abridged)**
personalfeelings	**Expresses their emotions, feelings, and mood; including their writing vulnerabilities and intentions.**	***See Participant Examples Below:***
authordoubt	Uses one or more hedging devices expressing author doubt within one TU of *Context* or *Instruction* .	*"This is a very raw draft."*
affect	Uses emoticons and/or exclamations within the TU.	*"Dear all!"; "I'd appreciate feedback :-)"*
intention	Expresses writing intention and other affective qualities.	*" I'll work to make my writing clearer."*
opencommunication	**Uses communication that has a meaningful purpose.**	***See Participant Examples Below:***
apology	Apologizes for lateness or non-action.	*"I am sorry this is late."*
pastmessage	Refers to previous writing group communication.	*No examples in dataset*
motivation	Use of expressions of encouragement, generic praise, and empathy.	*"Good luck."*
writtennorms	***Conforms to the pragmatic norms of written communication.***	***See Participant Examples Below:***
opening	Opens the cover letter with a greeting.	*"Dear Ann, ..."*
closure	Closes the cover letter with an ending.	*"All the best, Bob."*
gratitude	Expresses gratitude to their writing group.	*"Thank you."*
futurecontact	Refers to future contact with their writing group.	*"I look forward to our meeting next week."*

Key . [1] *Full (verbatim) or abridged examples of thematic units taken from the participants' cover letters (with their consent).*
[2] *For this study, a hedging device signaling author self-doubt is assessed on context and corresponds to Salager-Meyer's (1994, p.7) definitions of (i) shields (e.g., all modal verbs expressing possibility such as "may"; semi-auxiliaries like "seem"; probability adverbs such as "probably" and their derivative adjectives; epistemic verbs such as "suggest"; (ii) expressions that express author self-doubt and involvement such as "I believe"; and (iii) emotionally charged intensifiers such as "extremely difficult" where logical.*

Appendix G: Expert Rating of Student Cover Letters (utilizing ExpertDataset_QuantitativeCLRatings)

Rating	*Quality Interpretation*	*Writing Groups SS = Social Sciences; HS = Hard Sciences*								*CLs (n) by Rating Task*
		SS1	*SS2*	*SS3*	*HS1*	*HS2*	*HS3*	*HS4*	*HS5*	
1	Very Effective	7	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	**10**
2	Effective	0	1	1	0	2	0	1	2	**7**
3	Somewhat effective	3	1	2	2	0	1	2	0	**11**
4	So and so	1	2	1	3	0	5	1	0	**13**
5	Somewhat Ineffective	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	**1**
6.	Ineffective	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
7	Harmful	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
Cover letters (n) by writing group		**11**	**6***	**4**	**5**	**3**	**6**	**5**	**2**	**42***

** The 2nd and 4th highest-ranked CLs (4 CLs) from two participants in SS2 were excluded to ensure representative data.*
*** One CL was raised from a '6' (ineffective) to a '5' (somewhat ineffective) during the benchmarking process.*

Appendix H: Frequency of Themes and Subthemes in Cover Letters and Relative Distribution of Traits in Feedback Comments and Cover Letters by Comparison Groups

(utilizing *StudentDataset_CLs* and *StudentDataset_PRs*)

Effective CLs (n=17)	Number of Thematic Units (TUs)			Context SubTheme Only			Context & Instruction SubTheme					Instruction SubTheme Only						Social Presence SubThemeOnly					Total (TuUs	Affect in TUs (Dual-Coded)		Total (TUs)
	Sample	In English	In Estonian	Target Audience	Draft Status	Genre Section	Citation & Sources	Content & Ideas	Rhetorical Moves	Textual Organisation	Use of Language	Reviewer Action	Reviewer Priority	Any Comment Only	Any Other Comment	Closure	Future Contact	Gratitude	Apology	Opening	Affect Other	Motivation		Author Doubt	Affect :-)!	
Context	**83**	81	2	9	25	16	0	17	13	2	1	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	**83**	22	1	**23**
Instruction	**90**	84	6	X	X	X	1	30	12	6	6	7	20	3	5	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	**90**	17	19	**36**
Thematic Scope	**60**	X	X	X	X	X	Holistic, Specific (23, 37)					X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	**60**	X	X	**X**
Effect	**60**	X	X	X	X	X	Global, Local (54, 6)					X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	**60**	X	X	**X**
SocialPresence	**60**	58	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	14	5	22	3	15	1	0	**60**	2	14	**16**
Total (TUs)	**233**	**223**	**10**	**9**	**25**	**16**	**1**	**47**	**25**	**8**	**7**	**7**	**20**	**3**	**5**	**14**	**5**	**22**	**3**	**15**	**1**	**0**	**233**	**41**	**34**	**75**

All CLs (n=42)	Number of Thematic Units (TUs)			Context SubTheme Only			Context & Instruction SubTheme					Instruction SubTheme Only						Social Presence SubThemeOnly					Total (TuUs	Affect in TUs (Dual-Coded)		Total (TUs)
	Sample	In English	In Estonian	Target Audience	Draft Status	Genre Section	Citation & Sources	Content & Ideas	Rhetorical Moves	Textual Organisation	Use of Language	Reviewer Action	Reviewer Priority	Any Comment Only	Any Other Comment	Closure	Future Contact	Gratitude	Apology	Opening	Affect Other	Motivation		Author Doubt	Affect :-)!	
Context	**190**	185	5	18	54	46	0	37	20	13	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	**190**	**60**	1	**61**
Instruction	**197**	173	24	X	X	X	1	70	17	18	13	19	39	9	11	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	**197**	**27**	13	**40**
Thematic Scope	**119**	X	X	X	X	X	Holistic, Specific (50, 69)					X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	119	X	X	**X**
Effect	**119**	X	X	X	X	X	Global, Local (108, 11)					X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	119	X	X	**X**
SocialPresence	**151**	142	9	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	37	12	49	9	38	5	1	**151**	0	21	**21**
Total (TUs)	**538**	**500**	**38**	**18**	**54**	**46**	**1**	**107**	**37**	**31**	**15**	**19**	**39**	**9**	**11**	**37**	**12**	**49**	**9**	**38**	**5**	**1**	538	**87**	**35**	**122**

Peer Reviews (PRs)	Number of TUs			Trait (Feedback Request)			Trait (Thematic Scope)			Trait (Effect)		
	Sample	*English*	*Estonian*	*No*	*Yes*	**Total (TUs)**	*Holistic*	*Specific*	**Total (TUs)**	*Local*	*Global*	**Total (TUs)**
Effective CLs (n=18 PRs)	**134**	103	31	6	128	**134**	5	129	**134**	28	106	**134**
All data (n = 47 PRs)	**332**	284	48	80	238	**332**	16	316	**332**	60	272	**332**