

# Evaluating Emotional Responses to Graduate & Faculty Writing Sessions

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## Need for Research

Writing apprehension can be linked to a student's negative self-perception of scholarly writing and the research process (Onwuegbuzie, 1997, 1999). Academic procrastination and writing apprehension have been found to delay academic progress in graduate students due to fear of failure and task avoidance (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2001). New programming at TTU established research and writing "Jam Sessions" for graduate students and faculty members to provide a collaborative environment and assist students with writing apprehension. The purpose of this study is to understand the affective impact and response to structured programming focused on writing and research collaborations among graduate students and faculty in an agricultural department. Jam Sessions are informal meetings for idea collaboration, writing workshops and presentations, and offer an opportunity to write research proposals, class projects, or thesis/dissertation documents.

## Theoretical Framework

A community of practice framework (Lave & Wenger, 1991) allows for the implementation of a shared activity, such as student/faculty writing and research sessions, and encapsulates a common purpose that fosters trust among its members through collective discussions and mutual engagement to support learning (Wenger, 1999). The idea allows students and faculty the opportunity to be involved in a common activity and establishes a shared identity creating a shared sense of community and a space for learning (deChambeau, 2017). Previous studies have shown that connecting an individual's emotional response to the learning process in the agricultural sector does have positive impacts and creates opportunities for future success and skill development (Yapp, et al, 2017; Zins, et al, 2017). It was imperative to capture the emotions that graduate students and faculty members alike had about the writing process to verify that these sessions were making an impact. The Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) is an emotional response instrument used to study an individual's affective state through 20 different emotions, with 10 positive affective responses [determined, interested, enthusiastic, etc.] and 10 negative responses [distressed, scared, afraid, etc.] and asks individuals to record the extent to which they experienced those emotions in each frame (Watson, et al, 1988; Tuccillo, et al, 2010). The emotions are rated on a 5-point scale varying from (1) very slightly to not at all to (5) extremely (Bye, et al, 2007).

References & PANAS Resources



## Methodology

A phenomenological study examined the way that graduate students and faculty responded to a bi-monthly writing and research session. Participants were asked to use the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) scale to evaluate the range of emotions they experienced pre- and post-jam sessions related to the writing and research process. Each week, graduate students and faculty were asked to consider the emotions they felt related to writing and research at the beginning of the workshop and at the conclusion of each session. Jam Sessions were three-hour sessions with time to collaboration and writing time among students and faculty. These affective responses were collected over a period of three months. There were 48 individual responses to the PANAS scale research.

Table 1: Mean Averages of Positive and Negative Emotions

Week	Positive Emotions	Negative Emotions
1 Pre-Test	97	11
1 Post-Test	100	30
2 Pre-Test	130	36
2 Post-Test	151	36
3 Pre-Test	100	121
3 Post-Test	144	36
4 Pre-Test	107	87
4 Post-Test	104	105
5 Pre-Test	108	102
5 Post-Test	109	36
Mean	117.5 (Std. Dev. 19.4) (Pre-Test)	61.4 (Std. Dev. 27.4) (Pre-Test)

## Implications

Jam Sessions are a recommended way to build a community of practice among agricultural education, leadership, and communications departments for graduate students and faculty members. These types of programs help ease the anxiety that graduate students face when it comes to writing and engaging with the research and writing process. These sessions also allow students to collaborate with one another and faculty, as well as get feedback on the projects they are working on in a relaxed and more cohesive environment. From this data, graduate students feel more optimistic and determined when it comes to the writing process.

## Results

The PANAS scale revealed that Jam Session participants (N=48) reported more positive emotions about the writing process than negative responses. The overall ratio of positive emotions to negative emotions was 1570- to -758. The mean averages show more positive emotions exhibited in the post-test, which also showed slightly higher averages of negative emotions. The mean averages show the development of positive emotions. The themes from written feedback included positive benefits of peer interaction, collaboration space, and an engaged understanding of the writing process. One student noted, "I believe that they [jam sessions] are helpful when I am writing research proposals... Getting feedback from others is great and this is a good place to do it." Faculty members mentioned how graduate students are more open to feedback and discussion regarding their writing, in turn inspiring other faculty members to do the same. Table 1 shows the means across the positive and negative variables.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the reported emotions and feedback suggests that graduate student feelings towards writing are optimistic and improved by attending the AEC 300 writing sessions. Feedback from participants also confirms that the jam sessions are providing a space for writing and collaboration and students state that they are seeing results.