

Academic literacy

An **ethnographic survey** of the literature on writing scientific research articles revealed five key criteria (see Table 1) that need to be developed to enable researchers to draft articles that adhere to the **generic integrity**, i.e. expectations and conventions of the **community of practice**.

Table 1: Key criteria of academic writing

Type	Description
Accuracy	Factual and language errors
Brevity	using too many words
Clarity	using vague or ambiguous terms
Objectivity	using terms that appear subjective
Formality	using abbreviation, contractions, and informal terms

Case study

Participants

Xavier Blake (**mentee**) & John Blake (**mentor**)

Project

Drafting **short research article** entitled:

“Statistics for scientists: Incorporating data-driven decision making in the publishing process.”

Duration

March 2013 – October 2013

Process

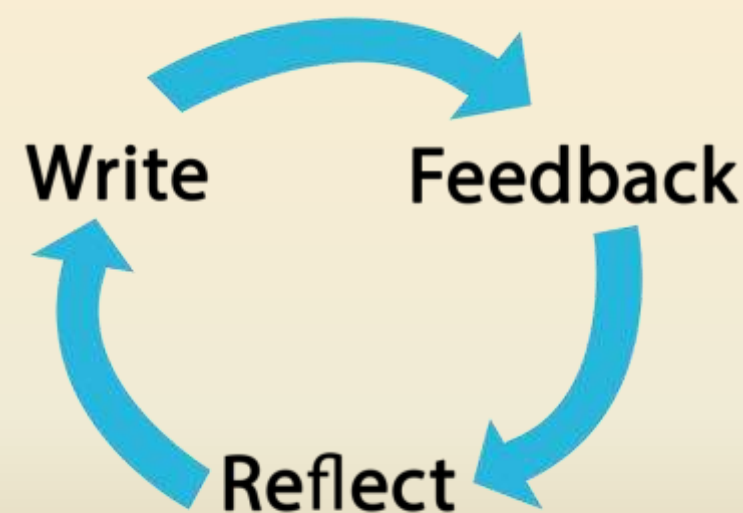
Mentee submitted 12 draft articles.

Mentor gave feedback on each draft article.

Mentee View

The mentee was required to:

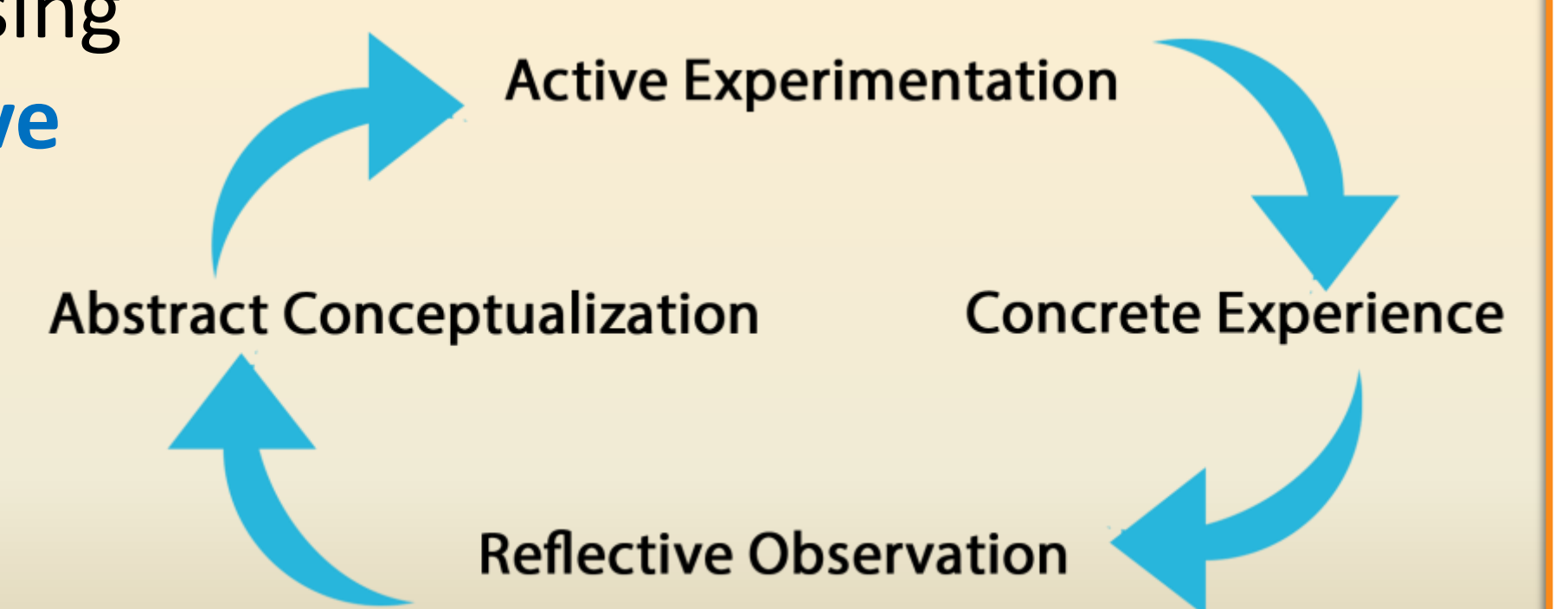
- **read** relevant research articles
- **learn** about the subject content
- **improve** grammatical ability
- **follow** and **learn** from feedback



An **iterative heuristic process** using **guided readings** and **constructive feedback** to enable mentees to progress through the **Kolb learning cycle**.

Kolb D.A. (1984). *Experiential Learning: Experience as a Source of Learning and Development*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Mentor View



Reflection and analysis

Three types of feedback were used as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Feedback summary

Stage	Versions
Verbal	ver. 1 - 3
Pen & paper	ver. 4 - 7
Digital	ver. 8 - 12

Verbal feedback

Mentor used questions to raise awareness of key issues. Mentee summarised key points and then applied the knowledge to later versions of the draft.

Pen & paper feedback

Mentor wrote feedback to encourage mentee to describe research in more detail. Mentee had difficulty deciphering handwriting.

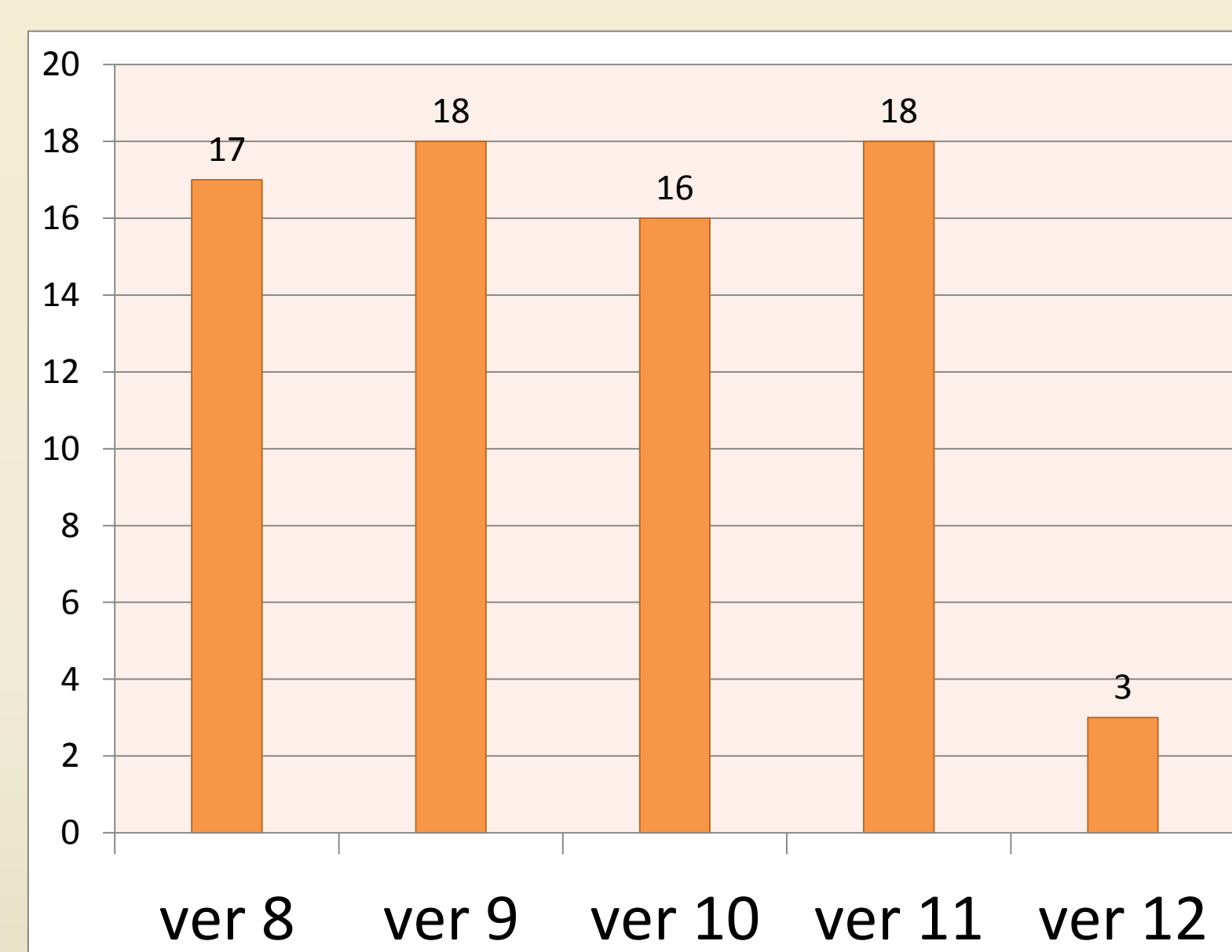
Digital feedback

Mentor used track changes and insert comment features of MS Word to provide advice. Digital errors were counted and categorised (see Tables 3 & 4). Mentee did not understand the reasons for 14 suggestions.

Table 3: Types of feedback in digital feedback

Type	No.
Accuracy	21
Brevity	22
Clarity	12
Objectivity	0
Formality	17

Table 4: Number of feedback comments by version



Reflection

It is essential that opportunities to discuss feedback are scheduled. The mentee must invest time to understand and be able to discuss all concepts used in the particular field of research.

Suggestions

Seven actions are suggested to improve the efficacy of the process of mentoring.

1. Conduct an **initial assumption audit** to identify mentee views
2. Set **objectives**
3. Provide **psycho-social support** (Waters *et al.*, 2002)
4. Contact mentee frequently (Ehrich *et al.*, 2004; Waters *et al.*, 2002)
5. Allocate **specific times** for mentoring (Ehrich *et al.*, 2004)
6. Use **positive reinforcement** and **constructive criticism** (Ehrich *et al.*, 2004)
7. Exhibit a personality that complements the mentee (Ehrich *et al.*, 2004; Ragins & Kram, 2007)

Ehrich, L. C., Hansford, B., & Tennent, L. (2004). Formal mentoring programs in education and other professions: A review of the literature. *Educational administration quarterly*, 40(4), 518-540.

Ragins, B. R., & Kram, K. E. (2007). *The handbook of mentoring at work: Theory, research, and practice*. Sage Publications.

Waters, L., McCabe, M., Kiellerup, D., & Kiellerup, S. (2002). The role of formal mentoring on business success and self-esteem in participants of a new business start-up program. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 17(1), 107-121.