In the context of writing studies, “genre” is understood as more than just a classification of texts; it functions as a form of social action that reflects and shapes interactions within discourse communities. Devitt, Bawarshi, and Reiff argue that genres are deeply embedded in the social contexts where they are used, shaping participants' behaviors, beliefs, and values. They note that genres “identify the linguistic ecology of discourse communities, making the notion of community more tangible”​ (542). This perspective goes beyond seeing genres as text types and, instead, recognizes them as dynamic and constitutive elements of social life that both enable and constrain communication within communities.

The relationship between genres and communities, as discussed in the research by Devitt, Bawarshi, and Reiff, highlights how genres serve as both entry points and barriers to discourse communities. Genres embody the shared knowledge and conventions of a community, making them accessible to insiders while often posing challenges to outsiders​. For example, Devitt examines the genre of jury instructions and how they are created within the legal community but used by non-specialist jurors. She observes that “specialist and nonspecialist users have different beliefs, interests, and purposes as well as levels of knowledge” (543) which can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations. This analysis shows how genre can reinforce the exclusivity of a community by reflecting its internal norms and priorities, sometimes at the expense of clarity for those outside the community. Studying genres helps us better understand how communities’ function, how knowledge is constructed and disseminated, and how social roles are maintained and negotiated. Bawarshi suggests that genres “are not just forms; they are forms of life, ways of being” (550), indicating that they shape how individuals participate in their respective communities. By analyzing genres, students and researchers can gain insight into the practices and values that define a community, providing a clearer view of how communication operates within it.

A genre of interest to me that I might study this semester is the research paper within the field of data science. This genre carries out the action of communicating new findings and methodologies to the academic and professional data science community. A brief moves analysis reveals that a typical research paper follows a structured set of moves, including the introduction (establishing the research problem and significance), literature review (situating the work within existing knowledge), methodology (detailing the processes used), results (presenting findings), discussion (interpreting findings), and conclusion (summarizing implications and future directions). These moves help the genre achieve its goal of contributing to collective knowledge while adhering to the community’s standards of rigor and clarity. The common moves within this genre reflect the values of the data science community, such as precision, transparency, and reproducibility. The structured format ensures that research findings are communicated effectively and can be built upon by others. As Reiff explains, genres serve as “rhetorical maps” that guide individuals through unfamiliar academic terrain​ (553). Additionally, the formal and technical language used in research papers reflects the community's emphasis on expertise and credibility. Studying the genre of data science research papers can provide a deeper understanding of how this community organizes and validates knowledge, as well as how new members can effectively participate in scholarly discourse.