RHETORICAL STRUCTURE ANALYSIS OF DISCUSSION SECTIONS IN UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL ARTICLES

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Abstract: The rhetorical structure describes the interconnectedness between parts of a text to provide a coherent and logical presentation of arguments. In writing journal articles, students need to understand this concept, as it is important for clarifying the delivery of clear, logical, and convincing arguments, especially in the discussion section, where interpretation and articulation of scientific contributions are essential. However, previous studies have rarely focused on the rhetorical structure of undergraduate journal articles, especially in the academic field. This study aims to analyze the rhetorical structure of the discussion sections in journal articles written by undergraduate students, particularly those published in SINTA 3-accredited journals. The research was conducted at the University of the Riau Islands using a qualitative content analysis and thematic interpretation analysis. It breaks down the discussion section into six main moves and their accompanying sub-moves. The researcher analyzed ten undergraduate journal articles using documentation techniques and analytical coding sheets. The results of this study show that Move 2 (Reporting Results) and Move 4 (Commenting on Results) are the most used, whereas Move 5 (Drawing Conclusions) and Move 6 (Suggesting Future Research) appear infrequently. These findings suggest that students tend to focus more on presenting results but lack deeper interpretation and explicit articulation of their scientific contributions. Therefore, the author recommends that students use the rhetorical structure model as a reference to develop a more systematic, critical, and scholarly discussion section in their articles.

Keywords: discussion section, rhetorical structure, student writing

INTRODUCTION

The discussion section serves as the backbone of a scientific article and is regarded as one of its most essential components (Kumar, 2022). However, many articles written by students in Indonesia lack a clear and systematic rhetorical structure in the section that discusses the problem (Lubis, 2020; Warsito et al., 2017). Academic

writing at the undergraduate level often faces this issue because students tend to present results descriptively without engaging in more critical or analytical discussion (Rakhmawati, 2014). Poor understanding of the function and purpose of each step in the rhetorical structure of the discussion section is the main cause (Irawati et al., 2018; Arsyad et al., 2020). As a result, not all elements of the complete rhetorical structure are presented comprehensively. Consequently, the discussion becomes underdeveloped and fragmented.

The arrangement of components in academic texts, such as research articles, is known as rhetorical structure, and it can be examined to provide readers a better understanding of the text's organization (Parodi, 2010). According to Nikpei (2016), rhetorical structure can indicate the purpose and ideas that the author wants to convey. Using rhetorical structure guidelines can help students in writing discussion sections so that the parts can be conveyed. However, a lot of students still have trouble structuring the discussion portion using the proper rhetorical devices (Syafryadin et al., 2022). This is evidenced by the fact that students often fail to articulate the main objectives of their research or provide clear recommendations for future research directions (Haryanti et al., 2025; Suherdi et al., 2020).

Mastery of a strong rhetorical structure can help students in writing discussion sections even better, as noted by Wadison and Robert (2020) and Dinniaty et al. (2024). Several rhetorical structures can be used as guidelines for writing discussion sections, one of which is the model

Ruiying and Allison (2003). According to research by Hilmi et al. (2021) and Haryati et al. (2025), the Ruiying and Allison model is more suitable because the focus is more specific on the discussion section, and the move-sub move structure is more detailed and easier to understand compared to the Swales model (1990), which focuses more on the introduction section, and the models proposed by Farnia and Barati (2017), Mosquera and Tulud (2021), and Musa et al. (2015), which are designed for the method section.

In scientific writing, research on rhetorical structure has developed rapidly. The movement-based rhetorical model developed by Ruiying and Allison (2003) is a widely used approach. The Ruiying and Allison (2003) claim that the model serves as a useful structure for analyzing and understanding how parts of a discussion are organized rhetorically (Ulya, 2022), while Wadison and Robert (2022) found that using this model can also help students improve the structure and quality of their writing, especially in terms of results and discussion. This is because Ruiying and Allison's model (2003) is comprehensive, relevant to the Indonesian academic context, and specifically designed for the discussion section. The moves in this model consistently appear in academic texts and help authors connect recent research findings with previous studies. Additionally, this model is considered the most appropriate framework for analyzing rhetorical structure in the discussion section (Basturkmen, 2012; Zalicha et al., 2021).

The ability to write effective journal articles requires not only mastery of the material but also a deep understanding of academic conventions and rhetorical strategies to support statements with strong data and to position research within the context of relevant literature (Jourdan et al., 2023; Rochma, 2025). The discussion section in scientific articles is essential for conveying research findings, making an in-depth understanding of the structure and characteristics of the discussion genre crucial in supporting the teaching of academic writing skills (Ajaka, 2020; Moreti, 2019). Writing in the discussion section presents a challenge for students because it requires the correct structure, as shown in structural changes such as "research impacts and obstacles." (Al-Shujairi, 2021).

Analyzing the discussion section in journal articles written by students helps future writers avoid the weaknesses identified in previous works (Nejad & Mahfoodh, 2023; Suherdi et al., 2020). In addition, there is little research that examines the rhetorical structure of the discussion section, as most studies tend to focus on the introduction or abstract sections (Chen & Cheng, 2018; Li & Wharton, 2012). Furthermore, there is little concrete evidence to show which rhetorical models undergraduate students effectively use when writing the discussion section of a journal article (Fahim & Khojasteh, 2020; Kwan & Chan, 2014). However, at the graduate level, the rhetorical model developed by Ruiying and Allison (2003) has been shown to provide a clear framework for writing discussion sections (Adel & Okhovati, 2016).

This highlights the need for new approaches, such as applying Ruiying and Allison's (2003) rhetorical structure theory to the discussion sections of journal articles written by undergraduate students (Ulya, 2022; Wadison & Robert, 2022). To address this gap, this study analyzed the Rhetorical Structure of Discussion Sections in Undergraduate Student-Written Journal Articles. Therefore, the research questions to guide this research are, "What rhetorical moves and strategies are employed in the discussion sections of journal articles written by undergraduate students?"

METHODOLOGY

The rhetorical structure of the discussion section of journal articles written by undergraduate students was analyzed in this study, which was conducted using a qualitative research design. The interpretive paradigm, which emphasizes understanding meaning and context in text-based research, is the reason for choosing a qualitative approach to enable a more in-depth analysis of documents (Tracy, 2013). Ruiying and Allison (2003) created a movement-based rhetorical model, which divides the discussion section into six main rhetorical movements and their sub-moves. This model was chosen because it is specifically designed to analyze the discussion section, offers detailed categorization, and is widely recognized in genre-based discourse analysis.

Table 1
Model Ruiying & Allison (2003)

Move	Move (Sub-move)	Example Sentences / Quotes
Move 1: Background	Stating the research purpose	"This study aims to explore..."
	Providing context or rationale	"Previous research has shown that..."
Move 2: Reporting Results	Presenting main findings	"The data revealed a significant increase in..."
	Reporting statistical results	"A t-test showed that..."
Move 3: Summarizing Study	Summarizing key results	"In summary, the findings suggest..."
Move 4: Commenting Results	Interpreting findings	"This indicates that participants were motivated because..."
	Compared with prior studies	"These results are consistent with Smith (2015)..."
Move 5: Drawing Conclusions	Drawing conclusions	"Therefore, it can be concluded that..."
Move 6: Suggesting Future	Recommending further research	"Future studies should investigate..."

Source: Adopted from Ruiying & Allison (2003)

In this study, ten journal articles were deliberately selected from journals indexed in SINTA 3, a scientific journal indexing and accreditation system. The selection of SINTA 3 journals was based on several considerations. First, the articles were written by undergraduate students from the University of Riau Islands and published in SINTA 3-accredited journals, because journals with higher rankings (e.g., SINTA 1 or 2) tend to publish works by experienced researchers or graduate students, which can cause bias in style and rhetorical structure. Second, the selected articles were published between 2020 and 2024. Third, each

article contains a discussion section that provides at least some level of analysis or interpretation related to the research findings, even if not fully developed. Finally, the sample size was limited to ten articles, a relatively small number that allowed for a more focused, accurate, and in-depth analysis.

Table 2
Demographic Information of the Data

	Mixed-method	2
	Thematic Analysis	3
Method	Experimental	2
	Quasi-experimental	1
	Correlation	2

The discussion section of each article is divided into functional units, usually sentences or clauses, and organized using six movements and sub-movements proposed by Ruiying and Allison (2003). To detect rhetorical structure patterns, this study focuses on determining the frequency and presence of each movement. For reference, each article is given a unique code. The following research questions are answered based on the findings of the analysis: What rhetorical moves and strategies are employed in the discussion sections of journal articles written by undergraduate students, and to what extent do these reflect effective academic writing conventions? What are the common strengths and weaknesses in the rhetorical structure of these discussion sections, and how can these insights inform undergraduate students' academic writing practices?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study analyzes 10 undergraduate journal articles to investigate how rhetorical structures emerge in their discussion sections.

Using a qualitative content analysis approach, this analysis follows a six-move framework: Background, Reporting Results, Study Summary, Commenting on Results, Drawing Conclusions, and Suggestions for Future Research.

Table 3
Result Argument from Data

Move	Step (Sub-move)	Excerpts
Move 1: Background	Stating the research purpose	"The study also suggests that inferential questioning encourages metacognition, helping students reflect on their thoughts and improve their reasoning skills."
	Providing context or rationale	"This study highlights the critical role of inferential skills in students' reading comprehension."
Move 2: Reporting Results	Presenting main findings	"Students are most prominent in self-regulation at the forethought aspects."
	Reporting statistical results	"Group A (EG1) improved by an average of 33.2 points, and Group B (EG2) improved by 34.2 points."
Move 3: Summarizing Study	Summarizing key results	"The results further validate the notion that incorporating games into learning not only motivates students but also fosters critical thinking and decision-making during vocabulary tasks, as noted by Simanullang et al. (2025)."
Move 4: Commenting Results	Interpreting findings	"This corroborates Maulida et al. (2022), who also found that gamified instruction enhanced vocabulary learning."
	Comparing with prior studies	"The study by Sari & Ma (2025) also found a moderate correlation between SRL and speaking ability, but emphasized the need for teacher assistance for the performance phase."
Move 5: Drawing Conclusions	Drawing final conclusions	"The development of a more adaptive SRL model, accommodating the role of technology and social interaction in language learning, is needed."
Move 6: Suggesting Future	Recommending further research	"Future research should examine how students perceive its use in one of these domains to get a better understanding of its effectiveness."

Source: Adopted from Ruiying & Allison (2003)

Move 1 Background Stating the Research Purpose & Providing Context or Rationale

In most cases, students usually open the discussion section by providing the context or rationale for their research. Some add their research objectives, but others jump straight into the discussion without explicitly stating them. The background provided often refers to theory or field conditions. As shown in the following excerpt "The objective of this study is to ascertain the degree of correlation between students' digital literacy and their reading comprehension in the fifth semester of the English Language Education Studies Program at University of Riau Islands during the odd semester of academic year 2023/2024.", This sentence indicates the part Sub-Move Stating the Research Purpose (ART-02). "The

objective of this study is to ascertain." This phrase indicates the main objective of the research. The next section, "… to ascertain the degree of correlation between students' digital literacy and their reading comprehension …" also explains specifically what this research aims to achieve.

Meanwhile, the Sub-Move Providing Context or Rationale appears when the author provides reasons/describes the importance of the research topic. In (ART-02), the author connects the research topic with relevant theoretical concepts. This is reflected in the statement "Vocabulary, as highlighted by Nation (as cited in Al Qahtani, 2015), is a fundamental component of language proficiency, supporting success in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.". The reason that vocabulary

is very important is shown in the clause. "Vocabulary … is a fundamental component of language proficiency", then in the clause "as highlighted by Nation (as cited in Al Qahtani, 2015)" using previous research as the basis for arguments, and helps reinforce rationalization by showing how vocabulary contributes to all language skills in the phrase "supporting success in listening, speaking, reading, and writing".

Move 2: Reporting Results, Presenting Main Findings & Reporting Statistical Results

Each article presents the main findings of the research in narrative form. Although the research is mostly qualitative in nature, the authors occasionally add quantitative data to support their claims. In (ART-01), the authors state, "These findings collectively illustrate that Kahoot serves as an effective tool for enhancing both motivation and vocabulary acquisition..." This is evident in Move 2: Reporting Results, specifically in the sub-move Presenting Main Findings, where the author presents the core findings descriptively without using numerical data. Explicit markers of the research results being presented are indicated in the clause. "These findings collectively illustrate that ...", whereas in the section "Kahoot serves as an effective tool…", explaining the main findings of the study, namely the effectiveness of Kahoot, and explaining in more detail what was improved, namely motivation and vocabulary acquisition, as shown in the phrase "for enhancing both motivation and vocabulary acquisition."

Then in Sub-Move Reporting Statistical Results (ART-02), "...at a significance rate of 0.01 (2-tailed), with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.562." The author presents statistical analysis results to provide quantitative support for the research findings, as shown in the citation, which indicates a significant positive relationship between the variables studied. To indicate the significance level (p-value), statistical indicators from the hypothesis test are presented in the phrase "at a significance rate of 0.01 (2-tailed)". In contrast, phrases that can present correlation coefficient results, main statistical data forms, are "with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.562".

Move 3: Summarizing Study, Summarizing Key Results

Summarizing Key Results as a link between critical analysis and presentation of results. In the Sub-Move Summarizing Key Results (ART-09), the author explains the important role of learning media in supporting English language learning. "Overall, the findings confirm that Photomindset is a valuable tool to support English learning in junior high schools." This quote emphasizes the strategic value of Photomindset as an effective learning medium at the junior high school level. Keywords: "Overall" is a discourse marker; this word indicates that the sentence that follows is not a new detail, but rather a general conclusion. This is a distinctive feature. Move 3: Summarizing Study. Besides, the phrase "the findings confirm that …" serves to connect the research results with a concise message. The verb confirm indicates an affirmation of the findings, not a reporting of statistical

data. This indicates that the author is summarizing the core findings of the research. "Photomindset is a valuable tool to support English learning in junior high schools." This clause presents a summary of the main conclusions of the research.

Move 4 Commenting Results Interpreting Findings & Comparing with Prior Studies

Ten articles provide interpretations and comparisons of research results with previous studies to increase the validity of the research and place it in a broader research context. For example, in Sub-Move Interpreting Findings (ART-07), The author interprets the influence of inferential question design on students' cognitive engagement while enhancing their understanding of the world, as indicated by the statement *"The results suggest that questions designed with these types of inferences influence students' cognitive engagement and depth of understanding…"*, The word suggest indicates interpretation or interpretation, not just reporting of raw data as indicated in the phrase. **"The results suggest that …"** in the clause **"questions designed with these types of inferences influence students' cognitive engagement and depth of understanding."** The author concludes that certain types of questions influence students' cognitive engagement and understanding.

In Sub-Move Comparing with Prior Studies (ART-01), the author confirms the compatibility of the findings with previous research, as indicated in the citation. *"This corroborates Maulida et al. (2022), who also found that gamified instruction enhanced vocabulary*

learning." The section that connects the research results with previous studies is in the clause **"This corroborates Maulida et al. (2022)"** whereas **"who also found that gamified instruction enhanced vocabulary learning"** is the content of previous studies used as a comparison.

Move 5: Drawing Conclusions, Drawing Final Conclusions

After this step, the discussion concluded by discussing the theoretical and practical contributions of the research. As stated in Sub-Move Drawing Final Conclusions (ART-10), the author showed that metacognitive strategies not only had a positive effect on speaking skills but also helped students become more independent. *"The present study has demonstrated that the integration of metacognitive strategies into language teaching,*

particularly for beginning learners, significantly enhances speaking skills and leads to a higher level of learner independence." Phrases that can be used as strong indicators that the writer is stating a conclusion are **"The present study has demonstrated that …"** then in the section **"… significantly enhances speaking skills and leads to a higher level of learner independence."** The conclusion is that this method has been proven to improve students' speaking skills and independence.

Move 6: Suggesting Future Recommendations for Further Research

Not all articles include suggestions for future research, but those that do generally direct recommendations toward further exploration in different contexts or populations. In the Sub-Move

Recommending Further Research (ART-04), for example, the authors propose testing other gamification platforms on different populations and learning contexts, as stated, *"Future studies could examine the impact of other gamified platforms across diverse learner populations and educational settings."* A clear indicator that the discussion focuses on future research rather than current research results is found in the phrase **"Future studies,"** whereas **"could examine"** is the modal verb could and the verb examine, which indicates a recommendation rather than a statement of fact. Furthermore, in the phrase **"… the impact of other gamified platforms across diverse learner populations and educational settings."** This is the specific content of the research proposal, namely the variables and scope proposed for study.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the rhetorical structure of the discussion section in undergraduate students' scientific articles, particularly those published in SINTA 3-accredited journals. This study arises from the fact that many student articles in Indonesia still lack a clear and systematic rhetorical organization, making the discussion section largely descriptive without critical analysis or interpretation. Such conditions reflect students' limited understanding of the function of rhetorical components in discussion writing. Therefore, this research aims to provide an overview of students' writing patterns while supporting more effective pedagogical strategies to improve their academic writing. The findings show that students can apply several key moves

in their writing, particularly Move 1 (Background Information), Move 2 (Reporting Results), and Move 4 (Commenting on Results), yet Move 5 (Drawing Conclusions) and Move 6 (Suggesting Future Research) remain rarely employed.

Based on an analysis of 10 articles, the greatest strength appears to be in Move 4 (Commenting Results). Almost all authors attempted to relate their findings to previous research, as seen in 9 articles (90%) that included comparing with prior studies and 8 articles (80%) that featured interpreting findings. On the other hand, Move 2 (Reporting Results) is also quite prominent, especially in terms of presenting main findings, which is found in 7 articles (70%). However, clear weaknesses are still evident in several sections, such as Move 1 (Stating the research purpose)

and Move 2 (Reporting statistical results), which only appear in 3 articles (30%), and Move 6 (Suggesting Future Research), which is found in 4 articles (40%). This pattern shows that students are more skilled at presenting results and commenting on research findings but remain inconsistent in stating objectives, describing data details, and formulating recommendations for further research.

In general, the results of this study show that students can write backgrounds and report their research findings in a fairly structured manner. This indicates an initial understanding of the rhetorical strategies required in academic writing. However, the analysis also reveals that they still face difficulties when it comes to formulating solid conclusions and presenting clear research

recommendations. This gap indicates that students tend to stop at the stage of describing and explaining their findings, but have not yet explored deeper meanings or drawn implications for further research. Thus, there appears to be an imbalance in their mastery of rhetoric: their ability to describe and explain is relatively well developed, while their ability to evaluate and plan is still weak.

Previous studies **(**Suherdi et al., 2022; Ulya, 2022) found that mastery of the move structure in the discussion section is very important for improving the quality of students' scientific writing. However, the interpretation and conclusion (Moves 5 and 6) have not been done well. The research results also indicate that students tend to focus more on presenting data and research findings.

Under these conditions, it is difficult to understand the strategic function of these steps. This is particularly true when it comes to generating well-considered and critical final conclusions and research recommendations.

The findings also support Amnuai and Wannaruk (2012), who argue that integrating relevant literature is essential to strengthen and legitimize arguments. Without critical engagement with prior research, discussion sections risk becoming weak and unpersuasive. Hence, students need to learn to relate their findings to existing studies critically and comprehensively, which would make their arguments more credible. In addition, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study, such as the relatively small sample size and limited disciplinary

scope. Following Moustakas' (1994) guidelines, such reflection is crucial to provide transparency and guide the design of subsequent research.

Overall, this study found that the rhetorical structure model can help students create more organized discussion sections (Ruiying & Allison, 2003). Theoretically, it reinforces the relevance of the model for academic writing at the undergraduate level, while practically, it offers instructors a clear pedagogical tool to teach rhetorical strategies. The application of this model can enhance the coherence and persuasiveness of students' scientific writing and better prepare them for publication in reputable journals. Future research should therefore expand the scope of analysis across more disciplines and larger samples. Longitudinal studies would help capture how students'

mastery of rhetorical structure develops over time, while investigations into the challenges students face in applying rhetorical models would provide deeper insights into training needs.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzes the rhetorical structure in the discussion section of undergraduate students' journal articles and finds that students use reporting results and commenting on results more often, while drawing conclusions and Suggesting Future research are still rarely used. These findings indicate that students focus more on presenting data than on in-depth critical interpretation. To address this gap, students can create personal rhetorical step-by-step guides and conduct peer reviews among their peers. With this increased rhetorical

awareness, students can not only improve the depth and coherence of their critical thinking but also prepare themselves for academic publication. However, this study only covered one discipline and a small sample. Future research should involve a larger and more diverse sample and investigate the difficulties students face when applying rhetorical models to improve academic writing instruction.

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