Genre Analysis

Genre analysis focuses on how new knowledge is made and shared in a field, and how writers participate in their disciplinary discussions as professionals and/or academics. It includes considering the processes and strategies for making new knowledge in a discipline and the processes and strategies for sharing that knowledge with others.

Process for Analyzing a Genre
1. Collect samples that represent a genre. These samples should include professional and student versions of the genre.
   - Questions to consider when collecting samples for analysis: What kinds of "texts" – articles, reviews, essays, bibliographies, commentaries, podcasts, websites, etc. – do people in this field produce?
2. Analyze the samples and identify substantive and stylistic features that are shared among them.
   - Questions to consider about substantive features (content): How do people do research in this field? What kinds of research designs do people in this field use? What kinds of things do they study? How do they study these things? What kinds of "data" do they collect? What counts as "good" data or ideas in this field? What doesn't really count as usable data in this field? What kinds of arguments do they make with their data? How do they make them?
   - Questions to consider about stylistic features (organization and style): How do people in this field write them? How do they make arguments? How do they contextualize their work within the field? How do they organize their documents? How do they write them? What is the appropriate tone? Language use and style? Length? Format? Citation system?
3. Talk to writers who produce texts in these genres and find out how they go about their work.
   - Questions to consider when talking to writers about how they work: How do writers tend do research in this field? What are the typical methods / procedures for coming up with new ideas and/or generating and collecting usable data? How do writers tend to produce texts in this genre? What are the typical processes? How do they begin? Do they write alone or with others? How do they structure / schedule / organized their working together and/or alone? What are the typical phases of the process?
4. Formulate the organizing principles of the genre. Once you are all done, you can write up a set of rules for a genre, specifying the substantive and stylistic features that define the genre, as well as the processes for creating and sharing new knowledge in the genre. Some examples:
   - "If you want to write a research report in Sociology, here's what you do…."
   - "If you want to write a literature review in Engineering, here's what you do…"
   - "If you want to write a personal essay in a Stretch English course, here's what you do…"
   - "If you want to write a research proposal in Education, here's what you do…"

A Couple of Deep Thoughts
- Genres are typical ways of doing things with texts in certain situations. Writers in similar situations (recurring situations) make similar rhetorical choices (rhetorical actions) which readers come to expect (typified). That's a genre. And we can distill the basic rules of genres using Genre Analysis.
- Genres change and evolve over time. The "rules" of a genre are always loose (the rules are not absolute), flexible (the rules can be bent, though usually not broken completely), and ever changing (they change over time). But you can see basic patterns.
- Genres both enable and constrain. They enable us to communicate in different disciplines because they set up a common set of expectations between readers and writers. You know what to expect so you can learn the expectations as a reader and a writer of a genre. They constrain because they encourage us to meet those expectations.