

Threshold Concept Criteria

Threshold concepts are a multi-disciplinary framework for understanding the key knowledge and activity of an academic discipline. The following seven criteria allow students and scholars to identify which concepts are most significant for learning about, engaging in, and, eventually, shaping disciplinary conversations. These criteria may be more apparent in some concepts than others, but through conversation using this framework, students and scholars may come to understand the deeper implications of concepts that may have been previously implicit, assumed, or taken for granted.

In the table below, we explain the seven criteria of the threshold concept framework using an example from the field of writing studies: *Writing addresses social situations through recognizable forms called genres*.

Criteria	Description	Example
Transformative	Once encountered, the concept shifts the learner's view of the discipline.	"There is no such thing as 'writing in general'; therefore, there is no one lesson about writing that can make writing good in all contexts" (Rose, 2016, p. 60).
Irreversible	Once learned, the concept is "unlikely to be forgotten" (Meyer and Land, 2005, p. 373).	"Some people believe that when we learn to write in one genre, we have learned to write in all; but to write in any genre, we need practice in that genre and in the conventions defining that genre" (Yancey, 2016, p. 65).
Troublesome	The concept is difficult to accept because it may seem counter-intuitive or strange.	"Readers and users of texts have as much to do with a text becoming an instance of a genre as writers do" (Hart-Davidson, 2016, p. 40).
Integrative	The concept is essential to understanding connected disciplinary concepts.	"It is through genre that we recognize the kinds of messages a document may contain ... the kinds of roles and relations of writers and readers, and the kinds of actions realized in the document" (Bazerman, 2016, p. 36).
Bounded	The concept may be demarcated by disciplinary understandings of its use in those contexts.	"In writing studies, the stabilization of formal elements by which we recognize genres is seen as the visible effects of human action, routinized to the point of habit in specific cultural conditions" (Hart-Davidson, 2016, p. 39).
Discursive	The concept is learned through language—reading, writing, listening, talking, or communicating.	"The relationship between disciplinary knowledge making and the ways writing and other communicative practices create and communicate that knowledge are at the heart of what defines particular disciplines" (Lerner, 2016, p. 40).
Reconstitutive	The concept causes "integration and reconfiguration, leading to a shift within both the learners' identity and knowledge" (Sandrone and Alavian, 2021, p. 5).	"Writers are socialized [and] changed through their writing in new environments, and these changes can have deep implications.... [Writers] enact an identity in response to social expectations for who they are and what they should be doing" (Scott, 2016, p. 49).