Mapping the Rhetorical Moves in Self-Help Books: A Genre-Based Comparison of Expert and Non-Expert Authors

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Abstract

This study dives deeply into rhetorical move-step structures across 20 bestselling self-help books, thoughtfully comparing texts authored by experts and non-experts from the 1980s to the 2020s. Using Swales' (1990, 2004) genre analysis framework integrated with Koay's (2015) approach, the research carefully examines obligatory, typical, and optional rhetorical moves within 265 body chapters. Findings reveal key differences between expert and non-expert authors, particularly highlighting moves related to establishing credibility, engaging readers, and practical applicability. Moreover, the diachronic analysis offers intriguing insights into how rhetorical patterns have evolved over these decades. By applying genre analysis, this study enhances the understanding of rhetorical structures within the self-help genre by explicitly mapping new rhetorical moves and steps across expert and non-expert-authored texts from the 1980s through the 2020s. It identifies distinct changes over time, highlighting how specific moves related to credibility-building, reader engagement, and practical application evolve differently depending on authorship. This structured analysis refines existing genre frameworks (Swales, 2004; Koay, 2015) and provides a systematic basis for future examinations of self-help discourse.

Keywords: Self-Help Books, Genre Analysis, Rhetorical Moves and Steps, Expert vs. Non-Expert Authors, Evolution of Self-Help discourse

مستخلص البحث:

تستكشف هذه الدراسة الأساليب الخطابية في كتب المساعدة الذاتية الأكثر مبيعًا، حيث تقارن بين هذه الكتب وفقًا لهوية مؤلفيها، سواء كانوا خبراء في مجالات علم النفس، مثل علم النفس الإكلينيكي أو العلاج النفسي، أو كانوا غير متخصصين، مثل الصحفيين، والمتحدثين العامين، أو المؤثرين في وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، وذلك خلال الفترة من الثمانينيات إلى العشرينيات من القرن الحادي والعشرين. وتعتمد الدراسة على إطار تحليل النوع الخطابي لسويليس (١٩٩٠، ٢٠٠٤) ونهج كوي (٢٠١٥) لفحص ٢٦٥ فصلًا، مع التركيز على الحركات البلاغية الأساسية والمميزة. ومن ثم، تكشف النتائج عن اختلافات واضحة في أساليب بناء المصداقية، وطرق جذب القارئ، واستراتيجيات تقديم محتوى عملي. كما توضح كيف تغيرت هذه الأساليب على مر الزمن. وبناءً على ذلك، فإن هذه الدراسة تقدم فهمًا أعمق للأنماط الخطابية في كتب المساعدة الذاتية وفقًا لهوية مؤلفيها، سواء كانوا خبراء أو كانوا غير خبراء . وعلاوة على ذلك، لا تكتفي الدراسة بتبني نهج كوي (٢٠١٥)، بل تبني عليه وتوسّع نطاقه، مما يوفر أساسًا أكثر تطورًا يمكن الاعتماد عليه في الدراسات المستقبلية حول الخطاب في كتب المساعدة الذاتية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: كتب المساعدة الذاتية، تحليل النوع الخطابي، الحركات والخطوات البلاغية، الفروق بين المؤلفين المتخصصين وغير المتخصصين، تطور خطاب المساعدة الذاتية

1. Introduction

This study examines how self-help books have changed over the last five decades (1980s-2020s) by analysing 20 best-selling books—ten by experts and ten by non-experts. The books were chosen because they are widely read and influential, making them representative of how the self-help genre has evolved diachronically. By comparing expert and non-expert authors, the study provides insights into the structural organization of these books.

Self-help books have long been a popular form of literature. Unlike conventional books, which just tell stories or offer information, self-help books seek to transform people's lives. They provide practical guidance, inspiring ideas, and personal stories to help readers better all aspects of their lives. However, not all self-help books are the same. Some are written by specialists who base their advice on scientific research, while others are published by laypeople who share their personal experiences and lessons. Despite their differing backgrounds, both types of authors aim to connect with readers—though they do so in their own unique ways.

2. Significance and Scope of the Research Paper

This study is significant because it examines how self-help books are structured and how different authors establish credibility. Since the self-help genre is widely read and influential, understanding how various authors use different rhetorical strategies helps reveal how these books communicate their messages and guide readers effectively. To build on existing research, this study combines Swales' genre analysis (1990, 2004) with Koay's move framework (2015). As a result, it offers a clearer view of self-help books

as a structured yet flexible genre. More specifically, it strengthens existing models by showing how rhetorical moves and steps shape reader engagement and persuasion. Remarkably, this research can be considered a game-changer for writers, educators, and linguists, as it offers a clear, structured way to explore self-help books on a larger scale. Additionally, it opens doors for future studies on the evolution of self-help discourse, particularly in digital and multimodal formats. Overall, this research supports new self-help writers in crafting books with the potential to become bestsellers by providing insights into the genre's structure and evolution.

3. Research Questions

The research attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How do expert-authored and non-expert-authored self-help books differ in their rhetorical move structures within body chapters, based on statistical analysis of their occurrences and normalized frequencies?
2. What are the obligatory, typical, and optional rhetorical moves in expert-authored and non-expert-authored self-help books?
3. How can Koay's move framework, combined with Swales' genre analysis, explain the differences between expert and non-expert self-help books, be extended / refined to include new moves and steps?

4. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a genre analysis approach rooted in Swales' (1990, 2004) move-step framework, building on the adapted model in Koay's (2015) thesis on self-improvement books. The study is grounded in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which focuses on identifying rhetorical moves and steps in specific genres, and also integrates insights from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to examine the lexicogrammatical realization of these moves and steps. By merging these two analytical perspectives, this research aims to provide a comprehensive exploration of the rhetorical structure of self-help books, comparing those authored by experts and non-experts across different decades.

4.1 Genre Analysis and the Move-Step Framework

Swales (1990, 2004) defines genre as a category of communicative events sharing common purposes. His move-step framework is widely applied in discourse analysis to examine how texts are structured to achieve communicative goals. A move functions as a discourse unit contributing to the overall communicative intent, while steps serve as the strategic means through which that move is realized (Bhatia, 1993; Martín & León Pérez, 2014). Building on Koay's (2015) adaptation of Swales' framework—specifically designed for self-improvement books—this study refines the move-step classification to capture the interpersonal metafunction, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of how authors establish credibility, engage with readers, and persuade them.

4.2 Genre Theory

A genre is more than just a way to classify texts—it is a framework that helps us understand how texts share common characteristics based on their social, cultural, and communicative contexts. Each genre has specific features, such as structure, style, and content, which shape how it is written. However, genres are not just about how texts look or sound; they also reflect their purpose and audience. For example, a self-help book is different from a scientific research paper not only in structure but also in how it connects with its readers.

Rather than just sorting texts into categories, genre analysis focuses on identifying what makes a genre unique and how it functions in communication. Swales (1990) argues that the main defining feature of a genre is its purpose. In other words, texts within a genre are grouped together not just because they look alike but because they serve the same function. Other scholars support this idea—Miller (1984) describes genres as social actions, while Martin (1985) emphasizes their role in fulfilling shared social needs. These perspectives highlight that genres are not static; instead, they evolve as societies and communication practices change.

4.3 Genres as Social Actions

Genres are not just about language; they are responses to social needs. According to Miller (1984), every genre exists because people use it to respond to recurring situations. For example, a job application letter is written in a certain way because it serves the purpose of convincing an employer. Similarly, self-help books guide readers through personal transformation by offering advice, reassurance, and motivation. Moreover, Martin (1985) and Eggins and Martin (1997) explain that genres also serve specific social purposes.

Even if a genre does not have a clear communicative goal, it still has a function in society. For example, a diary may not always communicate a message to others, but it serves the social purpose of self-reflection. This means that genres are not just about words on a page—they are shaped by the needs and expectations of the people who use them.

4.4 Genre Variation

While genres share common purposes, individual writers may adapt them for personal reasons (Askehave & Swales, 2001). A shopping list, for example, is normally used to remember items to buy, but some people might also use it to track spending habits or leave messages for others. These personal intentions do not change the genre itself, but they show that genres are flexible and adaptable.

Swales (1990) and Bawarshi & Reiff (2010) introduce the idea of prototypicality, which means that texts within a genre share common features, but they can still vary. Some texts follow genre conventions very closely, while others introduce new elements. This balance between following the rules and innovating allows genres to stay relevant over time. For example, modern self-help books now incorporate scientific research and interactive exercises, which were not common in earlier books in the genre.

Genre theory is also useful in education and writing. Scholars like Martin (1985) and Swales (2001) suggest that understanding how genres work can help writers create clear and effective texts. Similarly, Hyland (2004) explains that good writing is not just about putting words together—it is about using the right style, tone, and structure for the intended audience.

4.5 Applying Genre Theory to Self-Help Books

In this study, genre theory provides the foundation for analysing self-help books, which are unique because they mix practical advice with emotional engagement. Koay (2015) describes self-help books as having a transformative purpose, meaning that they guide readers toward personal growth. This study explores how self-help books achieve their goals by looking at their structure, rhetorical strategies, and linguistic features. It also examines how the genre evolves over time, adapting to cultural and societal changes.

Koay's suggested framework on the moves and steps in self-help books are represented in the following table:

Table 1:

Moves & Steps in Body Chapters (adapted by Koay, 2015, p.142, table 8)

Move	Liang's Framework (L)
Move 1: Indicating the Chapter	S1: Using a heading S2: Using bigger font size S3: Using boldface S4: Using centred formatting S5: Using capital letters for the first letter of every lexical word S6: Using italics
Move 2: Indicating Content of the Section	S1: Using a sub-heading S2: Using bigger font size S3: Using boldface S4: Using capital letters for every letter S5: Using different font style S6: Using centred formatting
Move 3: Presenting the Problem	S1: Stating the problem S2: Explaining the problem

Move	Liang's Framework (L)
	S3: Using aphorisms
Move 4: Presenting the Message	S1: Stating the message S2: Explaining the message S3: Explaining the terms S4: Restating the message S5: Soliciting agreement S6: Supporting author's claims of effectiveness S7: Using aphorisms S8: Using pull-quote
Move 5: Encouraging Readers to Apply the Message	S1: Listing reasons to apply the message S2: Identifying potential challenges in applying the message S3: Placing responsibility on readers
Move 6: Recommending Practical Application	Authors use this move at the end of body chapters to present a list of practical applications based on the message they teach. Authors usually present the list of practical applications in bullet points. **No steps identified**

5. Literature Review

Swales' (1990, 2004) Create-A-Research-Space (CARS) model established a foundational framework for analysing these structures, demonstrating how texts follow specific rhetorical patterns to achieve communicative goals. Subsequent studies have expanded this framework across different genres, particularly in academic writing and self-help texts.

5.1 Move-Step Analysis of Research Articles (RAs)

Research on research articles (RAs) has extensively applied Swales' model to examine how move-step structures vary across disciplines and cultural contexts. There are many key studies that highlight these variations across languages, disciplines and cultures. For example, cross-cultural studies reveal differences in move usage. One such study is Geçikli (2013), who compared PhD thesis introductions in Turkish and English, showing that English introductions align more closely with Swales' model. Similarly, Rahimi and Farnia (2017) found that while both Persian and English dentistry RAs use Move 1 (establishing a territory), Persian writers are less explicit in Move 2 (establishing a niche).

In addition, discipline-specific studies further emphasize differences in rhetorical complexity. For instance, Kanoksilapatham (2005) identifies a 15-move structure in biochemistry RAs, while Snodgrass (2011) found that citation patterns differ across disciplines, reflecting field-specific rhetorical norms. Additionally, challenges for non-native writers highlight difficulties in structuring moves. To illustrate, Duruk (2014) finds that Turkish scholars in education struggle with move sequencing, while Alamri (2017) showed that Saudi researchers in applied linguistics tend to deviate from international move conventions, particularly in methods and results sections. These studies confirm that while Swales' model is widely applicable, its realization varies depending on linguistic, cultural, and disciplinary factors.

5.2 Move-Step Analysis of Self-Help Books

Although genre analysis has been widely applied to academic writing, self-help books remain underexplored at the macro level. However, a few studies offer initial insights into their move-step structures. A significant example of that is Koay (2015)'s thesis as it provided a provisional overall analysis of self-improvement books identifying their distinct rhetorical moves in introductions, body chapters, and author sections. Koay's (2015) study found that self-help books strategically use engaging openings, directive steps, and credibility-building author sections. Also, Godis (2018) examined self-help book blurbs and identified a four-move structure: book description, book promotion, author information, and supplementary references. This study highlighted how self-help texts balance informational and promotional discourse. Remarkably, while these studies provide a foundation, they do not differentiate between expert-authored and non-expert-authored self-help books, nor do they offer a full-text move-step analysis.

5.3 Research Gap and Contribution

Despite significant research on move-step structures in academic writing, self-help books have not been diachronically analysed at the macro level. Additionally, distinctions between expert and non-expert authors remain unexplored. Thus, this research uniquely contributes to genre analysis by mapping rhetorical structures across decades and systematically comparing expert versus non-expert authors, addressing critical gaps identified in earlier studies (Koay, 2015; Godis, 2018).

6. Methodology

To conduct this research effectively, a clear and systematic methodology was followed. This section outlines the process, including how the corpus was selected, the analytical approach used to examine the content, and the move-analysis framework applied to understand the rhetorical strategies used in the books.

6.1 Data Selection

The study focuses on 20 best-selling self-help books, carefully chosen to balance two categories of authorship. The first group consists of expert-authored books, written by psychologists, researchers, or professionals, while the second group includes non-expert-authored books, written by influencers, entrepreneurs, or individuals sharing personal experiences. The key selection criterion was commercial success—only books with strong sales records and a large readership were included to ensure their impact. By incorporating both expert and non-expert authors, the study creates a balanced comparison, enabling a deeper exploration of how rhetorical strategies vary across different types of authors.

Once the books were selected, the next step was to analyse their body chapters, focusing on how authors structure their arguments and persuade readers. To achieve this, a move analysis approach was employed, breaking down the texts into functional sections. This method combined Swales' move-step model with Koay's framework, while also incorporating additional moves and steps identified during a pilot study. This integrated approach provides a comprehensive examination of the genre's rhetorical structure, shedding light on its evolution over time and the differences between expert and non-expert authors.

6.2 Criteria for Move-Step Classification

The study started by identifying and categorizing the rhetorical moves, looking for patterns in how ideas were presented. These moves were grouped into three categories: obligatory, typical, and optional. Following genre analysis conventions (Swales, 1990, 2004; Koay, 2015), the classification was based on how frequently each move appeared across the texts:

1. **Obligatory moves/steps**: Found in 100% of the texts, these are essential to the genre and help maintain consistency in how information is structured.
2. **Typical moves/steps**: Appearing in 70–99% of texts, these are common strategies used to engage readers.
3. **Optional moves/steps**: Seen in fewer than 70% of texts, these reflect individual stylistic choices or themes that vary from author to author.

This approach helps to show how self-help authors construct their body chapters and highlights the evolving nature of rhetorical strategies across different authorial backgrounds.

6.3 Statistical Analysis

Finally, a comparative analysis was conducted between expert and non-expert body chapters to examine the normalised frequencies of moves and steps varied between the two groups. This comparison specifically focused on differences in argumentation, credibility-building, and engagement strategies. By analysing these moves, the research provides valuable insights into how self-help books guide, motivate, and persuade their readers, offering a clearer understanding of the rhetorical techniques used by both expert and non-expert authors.

7. Discussion and Results

To gain a deeper understanding of how self-help books are structured, this section takes a close look at the rhetorical moves and steps found across 265 body chapters, carefully distinguishing between those used by expert and non-expert authors. Building on Swales' (1990, 2004) genre analysis framework and Koay's (2015) move-step approach, this study not only applies existing classifications but also uncovers new rhetorical moves and steps that emerge directly from the data.

The discussion begins by introducing the newly identified moves and steps (i.e., the following subsections), providing real examples from the corpus to illustrate their role in shaping self-help writing. Once these additions to the move-step framework are established, the analysis then quantifies their presence across the dataset, distinguishing between those that are obligatory, typical, or optional. This structured approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of how rhetorical moves shape the communicative strategies of expert and non-expert self-help authors and how these strategies have evolved over time to meet the changing expectations of readers.

7.1 Newly Proposed Moves and Steps

The following details the newly proposed moves and steps, accompanied by explanatory examples from the analysed books:

M2.S7: Introducing the Chapter's Main Idea or Purpose

This step introduces the chapter's main theme, goal, or objective, providing context or rationale for the following discussion. It may set a motivational tone, outline practical aims, or establish a conceptual foundation to engage the

reader and prepare them for the content. It is like giving readers a roadmap, so they know what to expect.

Application Across Examples:

1. Expert-Authored Self-Help Books:

"The aim of this chapter is not to rid ourselves of all responsibility, but to find ways to lessen our reaction to pressures in our lives and develop coping strategies to get us through busy, stressful times..." (Cotton, 2024, p. 26).

2. Non-Expert-Authored Self-Help Books:

"The purpose of this chapter is to tell you that you can think, you can figure things out, and you can make decisions—good, healthy decisions." (Beattie, 1986, p. 164).

M3.S4: Framing a Universal or Relatable Challenge (to Present the Problem)

This step introduces the problem by framing it as a universal or relatable challenge that many people face. It emphasizes shared experiences while acknowledging that individuals may experience or respond to the challenge differently. The goal is to make the problem both recognizable and engaging for the reader.

Application Across Examples:

1. Expert-Authored Self-Help Books:

This example explains the universal experience of stress and highlights individual variability in how people respond to shared challenges.

> Stress in our culture, now that we have perhaps more choices than ever in the history of the human race, is both universal to all of us and increasingly particular to each of us. In spite of our modern comforts and buffers, we're all still threatened by pain, fatigue, isolation, illness,

> violence, and death. Yet we vary widely in how we respond to these universal threats. (Wulsin, 2024, p. 22)

2. Non-Expert-Authored Self-Help Books:

This example discusses universal tendencies (adopting personal "rules" to navigate negativity) while emphasizing individual variations based on beliefs and perceptions.

> We all adopt our own set of rules – like a silent guidebook each of us has for getting through life, which we believe will keep us safe in the face of negativity. So if you believe you're unlovable, you might have a rule about not letting anyone see the 'real you', or if you believe that others are cruel, you might have a rule in your mind about keeping everyone at arm's length to protect yourself. (Howell, 2021, p. 140)

M5.S4: Using Examples or Success Stories to Inspire Application

This step uses examples, personal stories, or success narratives to illustrate the message and encourage readers to apply it in their own lives. By showing rather than telling, it bridges abstract concepts with real-life relevance, fostering understanding, relatability, and emotional connection. Stories ignite empathy, inspire belief in achievable outcomes, and motivate readers to take action.

Application Across Examples:

1. **Expert-Authored Self-Help Books:**

> In one study, 43 chronic back-pain volunteers either participated in an eight-week course in

the loving-kindness meditation or received standard care for their back pain. At the end of the study, the volunteers who did the meditation had significantly less pain. (Hamilton, 2015, p.133)

2. Non-Expert-Authored Self-Help Books:

I heard some wisdom on detachment out of the mouths of babes— my babies. Sometimes, my youngest son, Shane, hangs on too tightly and too long after a hug. He starts tipping me over. I lose my balance, and become impatient for him to stop hugging me. I begin to resist him. Perhaps he does it to keep me close to him a little longer. Maybe it's a form of control over me. I don't know. One night when he did this my daughter watched until even she became frustrated and impatient. "Shane," she said, "there comes a time to let go." For each of us, there comes a time to let go. You will know when that time has come. When you have done all that you can do, it is time to detach. (Beattie, 1986, p.82)

M6.S1: Listing Structured Guidance

This step uses structured formats, such as numbered lists, step-by-step instructions, or bullet points, to organize and present information clearly. Whether for explaining concepts or providing actionable steps, this format simplifies complex ideas, making them easier to understand, follow, and apply. By incorporating numerated lists, it effectively breaks down processes or categorizes information for better clarity and logical flow. Remarkably, this integrated step captures the dual purpose of organizing information for clarity (explanation) and accessibility (guidance), ensuring it is broad yet precise for practical application in Move 6.

Application Across Examples:

1. **Expert-Authored Self-Help Books: (a) in a numbered explanation/ actionable steps**

The following figure below illustrates the stoplight method, a structured approach to impulse control that categorizes six actionable steps under red, yellow, and green light stages, providing a visually guided framework for thoughtful decision-making and self-regulation.

„. For impulse control, there is a "stoplight" poster displayed prominently, with six steps:

Red light	1. Stop, calm down, and think before you act.
Yellow light	2. Say the problem and how you feel.
	3. Set a positive goal.
	4. Think of lots of solutions.
	5. Think ahead to the consequences.
Green Light	6. Go ahead and try the best plan.

Figure 1:

A structured, step-by-step guide for impulse control using a stoplight metaphor, facilitating self-regulation through a visually organized framework. (Goleman, 1995, p. 298).

The following figure presents a five-step strategy for actionable steps in managing negative self-talk, guiding individuals through relaxation, self-reflection, thought identification, and cognitive restructuring to reduce anxiety.

. Now it's your turn. During the next two weeks, monitor the times when you feel anxious or panicky. Each time you do, use the following five steps to work with negative self-talk:

1. **Step 1:** If you're feeling anxious or upset, do something to relax, such as abdominal breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, or meditation. It's easier to notice your internal dialogue when you take time to slow down and relax.
2. **Step 2:** After you get somewhat relaxed, ask yourself, "What was I telling myself that made me anxious?" or "What was going through my mind?" Remember to separate thoughts from feelings. For example, "I felt terrified" describes a feeling, while "This panic will never end" is an overestimating thought that might have led you to feel terrified.
3. **Step 3:** Identify the three basic types of distortions among your anxious self-talk. Sort out *overestimating thoughts, catastrophic thoughts,* and *thoughts that underestimate your ability to cope.*
4. **Step 4:** When you've identified your anxious, distorted thoughts, challenge them with appropriate questions.
   - *For overestimating thoughts:* "What are the realistic odds that this feared outcome would actually happen?"
   - *For catastrophic thoughts:* "If the feared outcome actually did occur, how terrible would it be? Is it really true that I would go to

Figure 2:

A five-step approach to managing negative self-talk. (Bourne, 2005, pp. 256–257).

2. Expert-Authored Self-Help Books: (b) in a bullet format or a stacked format:

The following figure provides a structured stress–illness log presented in a bullet format to guide individuals in monitoring stress and its impact on health.

The Stress–Illness Log

- Before deciding that stress plays a role in an illness, try keeping a stress–illness log for a month or two.
- Choose one or two types of stress (arguments, paying bills) that happen frequently and can be measured simply (mild–moderate–severe, or 0 to 10 scale).
- Choose one or two illness measures that vary with time and reflect the severity of the illness such as levels of pain (0–10), resting heart rate, or severity of depressive symptoms.
- Use a calendar, journal, or app to log daily ratings.
- Share these data with the people who help you manage the illness; look for patterns.
- Consider what other factors you did not measure that might affect the patterns. Can you improve your log for next month?

Figure 3:

A stress–illness log outlining key steps for systematically tracking stress levels and their impact on health. (Wulsin, 2024, p. 113).
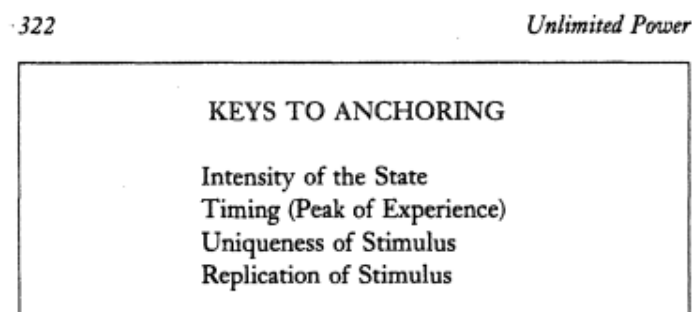
3. Non-Expert-Authored Self-Help Books: (a) in a numbered explanation/ actionable steps

This example breaks down reasons into a numbered explanation, making the concept easier to grasp.

"Changing our habits is challenging for two reasons: (1) we try to change the wrong thing and (2) we try to change our habits in the wrong way." (Clear, 2018, p.17).

4. Non-Expert-Authored Self-Help Books: (b) in a bullet format or a stacked format:

Displayed below is an example demonstrating how non-expert-authored books use not only bulleted formats but also boxed text to emphasize key concepts, enhancing visibility and accessibility. The following figure presents the keys to anchoring, structured in a stacked format rather than traditional bullet points to highlight essential principles effectively.

·322   *Unlimited Power*

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                                             │
│            KEYS TO ANCHORING                │
│                                             │
│        Intensity of the State               │
│        Timing (Peak of Experience)          │
│        Uniqueness of Stimulus               │
│        Replication of Stimulus              │
│                                             │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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Figure 4:

A boxed summary outlining the key principles of anchoring in a non-expert-authored self-help book, using a stacked format for emphasis. (Robbins, 1986, p. 322).

M6.S2: Presenting Scientifically-Backed Techniques

This step involves citing scientific studies, expert collaborations, or well-known research tools to establish credibility and reinforce the validity of concepts or techniques. It is used to ground arguments in evidence, making the content more persuasive and trustworthy for readers.

Application Across Examples:

1. Expert-Authored Self-Help Books:

      Scientific findings are presented in the following excerpt to highlight the relationship between posture and confidence.

> New research studies continue to reinforce the idea that body posture significantly influences our emotions and performance. A 2014 study conducted by scientists at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, examined this relationship by asking 74 participants to sit in either an upright or slumped position. To maintain consistency, their backs were strapped with physiotherapy tape. Participants were then given a stressful task in which they had to convince a panel that they were the best candidate for a fictitious dream job, with only five minutes to prepare. The findings revealed that those who sat upright reported higher self-esteem, more positive moods, and lower levels of fear compared to those who sat slumped. Additionally, the researchers observed that upright participants used more positive words and were overall more effective in their task performance. This study underscores the powerful impact of posture on confidence, emotional state, and effectiveness in high-pressure situations. (Hamilton, 2015, p.51)

2. Non-Expert-Authored Self-Help Books:

This example references a respected psychological tool to support the idea of thin-slicing in personality judgment.

> Sure enough, as the psychologist Samuel Gosling has shown, judging people's personalities is a really good example of how surprisingly effective thin-slicing can be. Gosling began his experiment by doing a personality workup on eighty college students. For this, he used what is called the Big Five Inventory, a highly respected, multi-item questionnaire that measures people across five dimensions:
>
> 1. Extraversion. Are you sociable or retiring? Fun-loving or reserved?
>
> 2. Agreeableness. Are you trusting or suspicious? Helpful or uncooperative?
>
> 3. Conscientiousness. Are you organized or disorganized? Self-disciplined or weak-willed?
>
> 4. Emotional stability. Are you worried or calm? Insecure or secure?
>
> 5. Openness to new experiences. Are you imaginative or down-to-earth? Independent or conforming? (Gladwell, 2005, pp. 22–23)

The quote below exemplifies how a non-expert author emphasizes expert collaboration to validate the advice provided in the book.

> I'm not an expert, I'm just the guy with the laptop and a story. When anyone starts giving advice about mental health, you should be sure

you can trust what they are saying. I have written this book in consultation with an experienced Clinical Psychologist – Dr Heather Bolton. All this content has been thoroughly reviewed and approved (even if I wrote ten pages and had to delete it all, much to my horror) – so trust that what made it onto these pages is thoroughly fact-checked, and hopefully entertaining. (Howell, 2021, p. 12).

M6.S3: Recommending Anecdotal or Personal Strategies

This step recommends practical strategies by using personal anecdotes, real-life stories, or historical examples to encourage readers to apply the message in their own lives. By embedding advice within engaging narratives, this approach makes strategies feel more relatable, authentic, and actionable rather than purely instructional or research-based.

Application Across Examples:

1. **Expert-Authored Self-Help Books:**

The following exemplifies how the author recommends visualization as a strategy, supporting it with an anecdote of an Olympic athlete rather than research.

I did a corporate talk recently and I spoke after Sally Gunnell, who won the Olympic gold medal in the 400-metre hurdles at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. She explained that about 70 per cent of winning gold was mental. After failing to win the world championship gold in 1991, she'd hired a sports psychologist. Soon she was visualizing every day. She did lots of visualization. She practised running and hurdling in her mind. Importantly, she did a lot

of practice on how she'd respond when something went against the plan – when someone overtook her, for instance, or when she had the thought that she wasn't going to win, or when she felt tired. These are the kinds of things that many people forget to do with visualization, but they are just as important as seeing yourself being the best you can be. Using visualization to improve life performance is exactly the same as using visualization to improve sports performance. You can use it to become an Olympic self-worth champion. I had to use it myself some years ago in a difficult situation. (Hamilton, 2015, p. 60)

2. Non-Expert-Authored Self-Help Books:

Here, the author shares a personal experience of journaling to recommend it as a strategy for readers.

I didn't write this book in five minutes, but you bet your butt that once I started I somehow found myself typing five hours later. Even if your task is huge and long and painful, say to yourself that you will do the most ridiculously inconsequential amount of work on it, just the tip, and you may find that you accidentally tackled the whole thing. If not, then that's okay. After all, you gave yourself permission to stop. (Howell, 2021, pp. 57–58)

M6.S4: Providing Hands-On Application

This step incorporates interactive exercises, self-assessments, or fill-in-the-blank activities within the body of the chapter to engage readers in actively applying the message. Unlike general reflection, these exercises require immediate participation, prompting readers to write down thoughts, evaluate personal experiences, or complete structured activities as they engage with the content rather than at the end of the chapter.

What makes this step unique is that it places interactive exercises within the body of the chapter to ensure immediate engagement as part of the reading process rather than a separate, end-of-chapter section. Remarkably, this step allows readers to apply what they learn in real-time, making the experience more experiential than purely reflective.

Application Across Examples:

1. Expert-Authored Self-Help Books:

The example below is a clear demonstration of how expert-authored body chapters provide immediate self-assessment within the chapter, rather than waiting until the chapter's end.

Mistaken Beliefs Questionnaire

How much does each of these unconstructive beliefs influence your feelings and behavior? Take your time to reflect about each belief.

1 = not at all 3 = strongly/frequently 2 = somewhat/sometimes 4 = very strongly

Place the appropriate number after each statement:

1. I feel powerless or helpless.
2. Often I feel like a victim of outside circumstances.
3. I don't have the money to do what I really want.
4. There is seldom enough time to do what I want.
5. Life is very difficult—it's a struggle.
6. If things are going well, watch out!
7. I feel unworthy. I feel that I'm not good enough.
8. Often I feel that I don't deserve to be successful or happy.
9. Often I feel a sense of defeat and resignation, a sense of "Why bother?"

You may have noticed that some of the beliefs on the questionnaire fall into specific groups, each of which reflects a very basic belief or attitude toward life.* Go back over your answers and see how you scored with respect to each of the groups of beliefs listed below.

Add up your scores for each of the following subgroups of beliefs. If your total score on the items in a particular subgroup exceeds the criterion value, then this is likely to be a problem area for you. It's important that you give this subgroup special attention when you begin to work with affirmations to start changing your mistaken beliefs.

Figure 5:

An example of an immediate self-assessment within the chapter to identify limiting beliefs, rather than waiting until the chapter's end. (Bourne, 2005, pp. 270–273)

2. Non-Expert-Authored Self-Help Books:

The figure below is an example of an interactive exercise that is provided to prompts readers to identify limiting beliefs and replace them with positive ones through a structured fill-in-the-blank format.

. What are some of the beliefs you have about who you are and what you're capable of? Please take a moment and jot down five key beliefs that have limited you in the past.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Now, make a list of at least five positive beliefs that can now serve to support you in achieving your highest goals.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Figure 6:

An example of an interactive exercise prompting readers to reflect on their self-beliefs by filling in responses. (Robbins, 1986, pp. 62–63)

Move 7: Closing with Reflection and Action

This move ensures the chapter ends with meaningful takeaways and motivates readers to act.

M7.S1: Summarizing Key Takeaways to Reinforce the Message

This step presents a concise summary of the chapter's main ideas, reinforcing key insights for readers. It distils complex concepts into digestible points, often appearing as a paragraph or bullet-point list, to ensure that readers retain and internalize the core lessons.

Application Across Examples:

1. **Expert-Authored Self-Help Books:**

This example provides a brief reflective summary emphasizing the chapter's core message about self-love and taking action.

> In summary… Action is a hugely important part of self-love. We're always taking action, whether we realize it or not. It's important to act in a way that says, 'I am enough.' Often, this involves stepping out of our comfort zone, but happiness, fulfilment and connection usually lie just beyond it. (Hamilton, 2015, p. 167)

The figure below uses a numbered format to provide a clear list of actionable steps that guide the reader in implementing real-life desensitization strategies.

Summary of Things to Do

1. Decide on those phobias for which you're ready to undertake real-life desensitization.
2. Establish a hierarchy with at least eight steps for each phobia you wish to work on. If you haven't yet constructed any hierarchies for your phobias, use the examples in this chapter and in appendix 2 as models.
3. Review the section "Basic Procedure for Exposure" so that you're thoroughly familiar with the correct procedure for real-life desensitization.
4. Practice exposure 3 to 5 days per week. Monitor your progress by indicating the date you complete each step in your hierarchy on your hierarchy worksheet. Regular practice is the best way to ensure your success.

Figure 7:

A structured summary of key actions and principles, presented in a list format to enhance clarity and reinforce practical application (Bourne, 2005, p. 221)

2. Non-Expert-Authored Self-Help Books:

The following figure uses bullet points to summarize key concepts, making the information easy to scan and recall.

Chapter Summary

- There are three levels of change: outcome change, process change, and identity change.
- The most effective way to change your habits is to focus not on what you want to achieve, but on who you wish to become.
- Your identity emerges out of your habits. Every action is a vote for the type of person you wish to become.
- Becoming the best version of yourself requires you to continuously edit your beliefs, and to upgrade and expand your identity.
- The real reason habits matter is not because they can get you better results (although they can do that), but because they can change your beliefs about yourself.

Figure 8:

A structured summary of key actions and principles, presented in a list format to enhance clarity and reinforce practical application. (Clear, 2018, p. 41).

M7.S2: Encouraging Reflection Through Rhetorical or Thought-Provoking Questions at the End of the Chapter

This step closes a chapter with rhetorical or thought-provoking questions, prompting readers to reflect on the material and consider its real-world implications. These questions do not require written responses but are meant to engage readers in deeper contemplation, reinforcing the chapter's message and encouraging them to internalize its significance.

Application Across Examples:

1. **Expert-Authored Self-Help Books:**

- The example below ends the chapter with a broad, philosophical question that encourages the reader to reflect on *Emotional Intelligence*'s societal impact.
  "The question is, how can we bring intelligence to our emotions—and civility to our streets and caring to our communal life?" (Goleman, 1995, p. 15).

- The following example uses rhetorical questions to push readers to consider the urgency of implementing emotional education.
  "Shouldn't we be teaching these most essential skills for life to every child—now more than ever? And if not now, when?" (Goleman, 1995, p. 309).

2. Non-Expert-Authored Self-Help Books:

This example employs a series of "What if" questions to spark curiosity and mentally engage, encouraging active reflection before introducing a new concept.

> What if there was a way to take action that accelerated the learning process? What if I could show you how to learn the precise lessons that people of excellence have already learned? What if you could learn in minutes what someone took years to perfect? The way to do this is through modelling, a way to reproduce precisely the excellence of others. What do they do that sets them apart from those who only dream of success? (Robbins, 1986, p. 21)

M7.S3: Engaging Readers in Self-Assessment and Reflective Exercises

This step provides structured self-assessment tools, guided exercises, or reflective prompts that require the reader's active participation. These exercises often involve answering specific questions, writing reflections, or completing a guided activity to promote self-awareness and deeper engagement with the book's message. They help readers evaluate their thoughts, emotions, behaviours, or beliefs in alignment with the chapter's message. Unlike rhetorical reflection (M7.S2), this step involves direct action—such as filling out a form, answering written questions, or completing a guided activity—ensuring deeper personal engagement and application.

Application Across Examples:

1. **Expert-Authored Self-Help Books:**

The figure below presents a guided self-exploration exercise, encouraging readers to apply the chapter's ideas in a personal context. It features a structured list of affirmations designed to counter negative beliefs, serving as a self-assessment tool. Notably, the numbered format (M6.S1) enhances clarity and ease of application, ensuring the content is both structured and actionable.

Examples of Affirmations

Below are examples of affirmations you can use to counter statements from the *Mistaken Beliefs Questionnaire*. Use any that feel right to you, or use them as guidelines for making up your own.

1. I'm responsible and in control of my life.
2. Circumstances are what they are, but I can choose my attitude toward them.
3. I am becoming prosperous. I am creating the financial resources I need.
4. I am setting priorities and making time for what is important.
5. Life has its challenges and its satisfactions—I enjoy the adventure of life. Every challenge that comes along is an opportunity to learn and grow.
6. I accept the natural ups and downs of life.

Figure 9:

A structured list of affirmations designed to counter negative beliefs, serving as a self-assessment tool to encourage positive mindset shifts. (Bourne, 2005, p. 284).

2. Non-Expert-Authored Self-Help Books:

This example Requires active engagement by prompting the reader to define concepts and engage in deep, personal reflection.

Activity

1. How would you define codependency?

2. Do you know anybody who has significantly affected your life, somebody whom you worry about and wish you could change? Who? Write several paragraphs about that person and your relationship. Later, read what you wrote. What are your feelings?

Figure 10:

A reflective activity encouraging self-assessment and introspection through guided questions (Beattie, 1986, p. 47)

Analysis of Rhetorical Moves and Steps

To address the evolving rhetorical moves and steps observed in expert-authored and non-expert-authored self-help works, the following table outlines newly suggested moves and steps to expand existing frameworks, specifically those proposed by Swales (2004) and Koay (2015). These additions aim to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamic strategies utilized in both categories. By extending these frameworks, the analysis accommodates the distinct approaches and techniques that differentiate expert and non-expert authors in engaging, informing, and persuading their audiences effectively.

Table 2:

Proposed Extensions to Swales' (2004) and Koay's (2015) Frameworks for Rhetorical Moves and Steps in Self-Help Literature

Newly Proposed Moves and Steps
M2.S7: Introducing the Chapter's Main Idea or Purpose
M3.S4: Framing a Universal or Relatable Challenge (to Present the Problem)
M5.S4: Using Examples or Success Stories to Inspire Application
M6.S1: Listing Structured Guidance
M6.S2: Presenting Scientifically-Backed Techniques
M6.S3: Recommending Anecdotal or Personal Strategies
M6.S4: Providing Hands-On Application
Move 7: Closing with Reflection and Action
M7.S1: Summarizing Key Takeaways to Reinforce the Message
M7.S2: Encouraging Reflection Through Rhetorical or Thought-Provoking Questions at the End of the Chapter
M7.S3: Engaging Readers in Self-Assessment and Reflective Exercises
M7.S3: Prompting self-assessment/ Providing a Form-Assessment to be filled/ an Exercise to be answered/done

7.2 Move Analysis: Expert vs. Non-Expert-Authored Body Chapters Across Categories

This analysis examines the differences in how expert-authored and non-expert-authored books structure their body chapters. By analysing 142 expert-authored body

chapters and 123 non-expert-authored body chapters, the findings reveal a clear and organized structure, incorporating specific rhetorical moves and steps that contribute to achieving their communicative objectives. Furthermore, seven moves, including Koay's adapted moves along with their steps, were identified, each exhibiting varying degrees of obligatory and typical features. To ensure a comprehensive understanding, a detailed explanation of each move and its corresponding steps is presented below.

Move 1: Indicating the Chapter within Their Body Chapters

In expert-authored texts, all elements of this move are obligatory, reflecting a structured and consistent formatting style. Specifically, these texts follow strict guidelines, incorporating boldface, specific font styles, and precise chapter indicators to maintain a professional and polished appearance. On the other hand, non-expert-authored books demonstrate more flexibility in their formatting choices. While headings and boldface are obligatory, elements such as using a bigger font size (S2) and capitalizing the first letter of every word (S5) are only typical, appearing in (90.24%) of cases. This suggests a slightly less consistent approach to formatting compared to expert-authored texts. Ultimately, the key difference lies in the level of adherence to detailed formatting. Whereas expert-authored books consistently follow precise conventions to establish a professional tone, non-expert-authored books exhibit greater variability, particularly in font size and capitalization. As a result, their presentation appears more informal and approachable.

Move 2: Indicating the Content of the Section

In expert-authored books, all elements of this move are either obligatory or typical, reflecting a highly structured approach to content organization. Notably, sub-headings (S1) and boldface (S3) are particularly emphasized, with a near-universal application rate of (99.29%). This consistent use of visual and structural cues ensures clarity and establishes a strong visual hierarchy, effectively guiding the reader through the text. By contrast, non-expert-authored books treat this move as typical overall, with an application rate of (90.24%). While boldface (S3) is marked as typical, the use of capital letters (S4) is considered optional, indicating a less consistent emphasis on formatting. As a result, this reflects a more flexible and less precise approach to visual organization. Ultimately, the key difference lies in the prioritization of visual and structural elements. Whereas expert-authored texts rely heavily on clear sub-headings and boldface to enhance clarity and structure, non-expert-authored texts place less emphasis on such formatting precision, instead opting for a simpler and more approachable style.

Move 3: Presenting the Problem

In expert-authored books, most steps within this move are obligatory, ensuring a comprehensive and detailed exploration of the problem. Notably, using aphorisms (S3) is typical, with a high application rate of (99.29%). This reflects a balance between professional insight and relatable storytelling, allowing experts to provide depth while also establishing a connection with readers on a personal level. Conversely, non-expert-authored books treat using aphorisms (S3) as obligatory, with a (100%) application rate. This indicates a strong preference for relatable, story-driven explanations rather than an in-depth, formal exploration. By

prioritizing aphorisms, non-expert authors aim to create a more engaging and accessible reading experience. The key distinction lies in the emphasis placed on aphorisms. Whereas non-expert authors rely heavily on them as a primary method of engaging readers, expert authors incorporate aphorisms as part of a broader approach that combines thorough problem analysis with professional insight.

Move 4: Presenting the Message

In expert-authored books, most steps within this move are obligatory, emphasizing clarity, thorough explanation, and evidence-based support. By prioritizing structured delivery, these authors ensure that the message remains both convincing and professional. However, using aphorisms (S7) and pull-quotes (S8) is less common and considered optional, reflecting a preference for substance over stylistic embellishments. In contrast, non-expert-authored books adopt a more flexible approach. Notably, steps such as explaining the message (S2), restating it (S4), and soliciting agreement (S5) are typical rather than obligatory, indicating a less rigid structure. Furthermore, non-expert authors use pull-quotes (S8) more frequently (48.78%) than experts (33.80%), which suggests a stronger inclination toward visually engaging elements to capture attention and reinforce key points. The key distinction lies in how messages are conveyed. Whereas expert-authored books emphasize detailed explanations and empirical support to build credibility, non-expert-authored books favour pull-quotes and a less structured format, resulting in a more informal and visually dynamic presentation.

Move 5: Encouraging Readers to Apply the Message

In expert-authored books, there is a strong emphasis on practical examples to help readers apply the message. Notably, using examples or success stories (S4) is typical, with a high application rate of (97.18%). This demonstrates the expert authors' commitment to providing concrete, relatable scenarios that illustrate how the message can be implemented effectively in real-life situations. On the other hand, non-expert-authored books treat this step as optional, with only (65.85%) incorporating examples or success stories. This suggests a lower reliance on practical illustrations, implying that non-expert authors may prefer other motivational strategies, such as emotional appeals or generalized advice, to encourage readers to act on the message. The key distinction lies in the use of concrete examples. Whereas expert-authored books prioritize detailed, real-life applications to ensure readers gain clear, actionable insights, non-expert-authored books may focus on less tangible or more flexible approaches to motivate their audience.

Move 6: Recommending Practical Application

In expert-authored books, presenting scientifically-backed techniques (S2) is obligatory, with a (100%) application rate. This underscores the structured and evidence-based nature of expert recommendations, ensuring both credibility and practical value. Furthermore, hands-on application (S4) is typical (84.51%), reinforcing the emphasis on actionable, real-world implementation of the advice. Conversely, non-expert-authored books treat scientifically-backed techniques (S2) as typical, with a slightly lower application rate of (78.05%). Likewise, hands-on application (S4) remains typical but is less frequent (76.42%). Moreover,

step-by-step actions (S1), which provide detailed guidance, are only optional (69.11%), suggesting a more flexible and less methodical approach to practical recommendations. The key distinction lies in the approach to practicality and structure. While expert-authored books prioritize scientifically-supported, step-by-step methods to ensure reliability and effectiveness, non-expert-authored books, in contrast, lean toward relatable and accessible strategies, placing less emphasis on methodical, structured techniques.

Move 7: Closing with Reflection and Action

In expert-authored books, providing reflective questions (S2) is more frequent, with an occurrence rate of (35.21%). This highlights a deliberate effort by expert authors to engage readers critically, encouraging deeper contemplation of the material and its application. Moreover, this focus on reflection aligns with the structured and purposeful approach observed throughout expert-authored texts. Conversely, non-expert-authored books rarely incorporate reflective questions, with an application rate of only 8.94%. Similarly, self-assessment (S3) is considered optional, appearing in just (22.76%) of cases. This suggests a less structured and introspective approach to concluding chapters, with a greater focus on simplicity and accessibility. The key distinction lies in the emphasis on reflection and critical engagement. Whereas expert-authored books actively encourage readers to think deeply about the content and its implications, non-expert-authored books, by contrast, place less focus on introspection, instead prioritizing a more straightforward and accessible closing style.

Overall Key Observations

Expert-authored chapters demonstrate a commitment to stricter and more detailed formatting conventions, which reflects a professional tone and ensures consistency throughout. In contrast, non-expert-authored chapters exhibit greater variability in visual and structural elements. This flexibility and informality suggest a more casual approach that prioritizes accessibility over uniformity. Regarding content delivery, expert authors emphasize scientifically-backed techniques, thorough explanations, and actionable guidance. This methodical approach provides readers with clear, evidence-based solutions designed to comprehensively address their needs. On the other hand, non-expert authors often rely on relatable storytelling, engaging pull-quotes, and aphorisms. These elements serve to simplify the content and connect with readers on a personal level, making the material feel more approachable and easier to digest.

Furthermore, reader engagement highlights key differences between these two types of authorship. While expert-authored chapters foster deeper engagement by encouraging reflection and self-assessment, promoting critical thinking, and facilitating practical application, non-expert-authored chapters, conversely, tend to close with a less introspective tone. Instead, they favour straightforward approaches that prioritize accessibility and relatability over critical analysis. Ultimately, these distinctions reveal the methodical, evidence-based strategies characteristic of expert-authored books, while also highlighting the narrative-driven and relatable style that defines non-expert-authored texts. Together, these differences illustrate the contrasting

priorities in how each group seeks to inform, connect with, and engage their readers.

The analysis of moves and steps employed in expert-authored and non-expert-authored body chapters is detailed in the table below.

Table 3:

Comparative Move Analysis of Expert and Non-Expert-Authored Body Chapters Across Categories

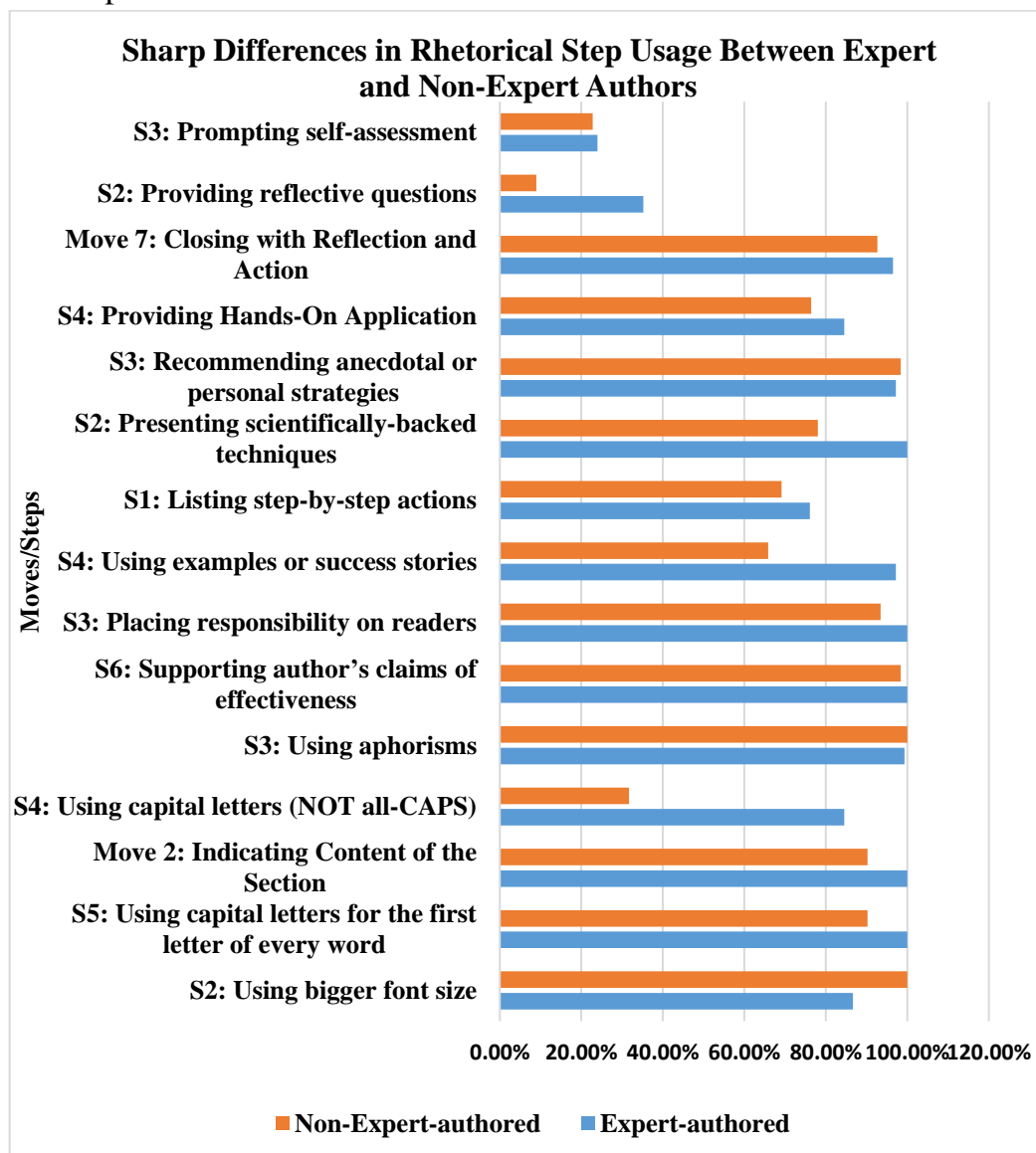| Move/Step	Expert-authored		Non-Expert-authored	
	Typicality	Percentage %	Typicality	Percentage %
Move 1: Indicating the Chapter	Obligatory	100.00%	Obligatory	100.00%
S1: Using a heading	Obligatory	100.00%	Obligatory	100.00%
S2: Using bigger font size	Typical	86.62%	Obligatory	100.00%
S3: Using boldface	Obligatory	100.00%	Obligatory	100.00%
S4: Using centred formatting	Typical	95.07%	Typical	76.42%
S5: Using capital letters for the first letter of every word	Obligatory	100.00%	Typical	90.24%
S6: Using italics	Optional	4.93%	Optional	0.00%
Move 2: Indicating Content of the Section	Obligatory	100.00%	Typical	90.24%
S1: Using a sub-heading	Typical	99.29%	Typical	90.24%

Move/Step	Expert-authored		Non-Expert-authored	
	Typicality	Percentage %	Typicality	Percentage %
S2: Using bigger font size	Typical	84.51%	Typical	76.42%
S3: Using boldface	Typical	99.29%	Typical	72.36%
S4: Using capital letters (NOT all-CAPS)	Typical	84.51%	Optional	31.71%
S5: Using different font style	Optional	57.04%	Optional	18.62%
S6: Using centred formatting	Optional	57.75%	Optional	35.77%
S7: Introducing the Chapter's Main Idea or Purpose	Optional	67.61%	Optional	60.98%
Move 3: Presenting the Problem	Obligatory	100.00%	Obligatory	100.00%
S1: Stating the problem	Obligatory	100.00%	Obligatory	100.00%
S2: Explaining the problem (& its consequences)	Obligatory	100.00%	Obligatory	100.00%
S3: Using aphorisms	Typical	99.29%	Obligatory	100.00%
S4: Framing a Universal or Relatable Challenge (to Present the Problem)	Obligatory	100.00%	Typical	98.37%
Move 4: Presenting the Message	Obligatory	100.00%	Obligatory	100.00%
S1: Stating the message	Obligatory	100.00%	Obligatory	100.00%

Move/Step	Expert-authored		Non-Expert-authored	
	Typicality	Percentage %	Typicality	Percentage %
S2: Explaining the message	Obligatory	100.00%	Typical	99.19%
S3: Explaining the terms	Obligatory	100.00%	Typical	92.68%
S4: Restating the message	Obligatory	100.00%	Typical	99.19%
S5: Soliciting agreement	Obligatory	100.00%	Typical	99.19%
S6: Supporting author's claims of effectiveness	Obligatory	100.00%	Typical	98.37%
S7: Using aphorisms	Typical	99.29%	Obligatory	100.00%
S8: Using pull-quotes	Optional	33.80%	Optional	48.78%
Move 5: Encouraging Readers to Apply the Message	Obligatory	100.00%	Obligatory	100.00%
S1: Listing reasons to apply the message	Obligatory	100.00%	Obligatory	100.00%
S2: Identifying potential challenges	Obligatory	100.00%	Typical	99.19%
S3: Placing responsibility on readers	Obligatory	100.00%	Typical	93.41%
S4: Using Examples or Success Stories to Inspire Application	Typical	97.18%	Optional	65.85%
Move 6: Recommending Practical Application	Obligatory	100.00%	Typical	99.19%

Move/Step	Expert-authored		Non-Expert-authored	
	Typicality	Percentage %	Typicality	Percentage %
S1: Listing Structured Guidance	Typical	76.06%	Optional	69.11%
S2: Presenting Scientifically-Backed Techniques	Obligatory	100.00%	Typical	78.05%
S3: Recommending Anecdotal or Personal Strategies	Typical	97.18%	Typical	98.37%
S4: Providing Hands-On Application	Typical	84.51%	Typical	76.42%
Move 7: Closing with Reflection and Action	Typical	96.48%	Typical	92.68%
S1: Summarizing Key Takeaways to Reinforce the Message	Typical	91.55%	Typical	91.87%
S2: Encouraging Reflection Through Rhetorical or Thought-Provoking Questions at the End of the Chapter	Optional	35.21%	Optional	8.94%
S3: Engaging Readers in Self-Assessment and Reflective Exercises	Optional	23.94%	Optional	22.76%

Here's the visualization focusing on selected steps where there are differences between expert and non-expert authors. The chart compares how often specific rhetorical

steps are employed by each type of authorship, highlighting distinct disparities, such as the use of capital letters and the approach to presenting scientifically-backed techniques. This graphical representation aids in easily identifying where authorial decisions differ significantly between expert and non-expert-authored texts.

Figure 11:

Sharp Differences in Rhetorical Step Usage Between Expert and Non-Expert Authors

7.3 Evolution of Rhetorical Moves in Expert-Authored vs. Non-Expert-Authored Self-Help Books

The diachronic analysis of expert- and non-expert-authored self-help books reveals notable shifts in rhetorical strategies, formatting choices, and methods of engaging readers. Over the decades, these books have undergone significant transformations, reflecting changing audience expectations and evolving stylistic preferences. The following observations highlight how these rhetorical moves have developed across time, showcasing the distinct priorities of expert and non-expert authors in structuring their body chapters.

Move 1: Indicating the Chapter

Expert-authored books have maintained a strict and highly consistent formatting style, with elements such as headings, boldface, and capitalization consistently applied at 100% across all decades. However, certain stylistic choices have evolved, particularly the use of italics, which appeared briefly in the 1990s (26.9%) but disappeared thereafter. Additionally, bigger font size, which was previously optional, became an essential feature from the 1990s onward. In contrast, non-expert-authored books have demonstrated a more flexible approach. While centred formatting increased significantly from 48.8% in the 1980s to 100% in the 2010s and 2020s, the use of capitalized first letters of every lexical word fluctuated, dropping dramatically in the 1990s (36.8%) before stabilizing at 100%. These shifts suggest that while expert-authored books prioritize professional consistency,

non-experts have gradually embraced clearer and more structured formatting to enhance readability.

Move 2: Indicating Content of the Section

When it comes to structuring content, expert-authored books have remained highly consistent in their use of sub-headings (96.6–100%) and boldface (100%). However, one major shift has been the declining use of capital letters for every letter, which dropped sharply from 100% in the 1990s to just 44% in the 2020s. This indicates a movement away from all-caps emphasis in favour of more modern and visually balanced formatting. Similarly, non-expert-authored books have adapted their approach over time. While sub-headings and boldface have become standard (100% in the 2010s and 2020s), elements like capitalization and font variations remain inconsistent. For instance, capitalization peaked in the 1990s (57.9%) but dropped significantly in later decades (24%), suggesting a shift toward more natural and fluid formatting styles.

Move 3: Presenting the Problem

Despite various shifts in formatting, the presentation of the problem has remained a core rhetorical move in both expert and non-expert-authored books. Across all decades, this move has been consistently applied at 100%, underscoring its central role in structuring self-help literature. However, a key difference emerges in how authors frame the problem. In expert-authored books, the use of aphorisms increased from 96.6% in the 1980s to 100% from the 1990s onward, indicating a growing preference for integrating engaging, relatable expressions alongside professional insights. Non-expert-authored books, on the other hand, have always relied on aphorisms (100%), reinforcing their

tendency to prioritize motivational and emotionally resonant storytelling.

Move 4: Presenting the Message

The presentation of the message remains a vital rhetorical move, but its execution differs between expert and non-expert authors. In expert-authored books, stating, explaining, and reinforcing the message (100%) has been consistently applied over time. However, the use of pull-quotes fluctuated, disappearing in the 2000s (0%) before reappearing in the 2010s (100%), only to decline again in the 2020s (44%). Conversely, non-expert-authored books have moved away from using pull-quotes entirely after the 1990s, favouring a more direct and straightforward way of presenting information. Despite this, soliciting agreement (100%) has remained a universal strategy, reinforcing the inherently persuasive nature of non-expert-authored texts. This suggests that while expert-authored books balance structured explanations with occasional stylistic enhancements, non-expert-authored books focus more on immediate audience engagement.

Move 5: Encouraging Readers to Apply the Message

One of the most notable shifts in expert-authored books is the increasing emphasis on examples and success stories. While these were included in 86.2% of expert-authored books in the 1980s, they became universally applied in the 1990s (100%). This suggests a growing awareness of the importance of relatable, real-world illustrations in reinforcing practical advice. In contrast, non-expert-authored books show a different pattern. The use of examples and success stories peaked at 100% in the 2000s and 2010s but then declined significantly to 24% in the 2020s. This shift

suggests that while early non-expert-authored books relied heavily on concrete examples, recent editions favour alternative motivational strategies, such as emotional appeals or direct calls to action.

Move 6: Recommending Practical Application

The evolution of practical recommendations in self-help books reveals distinct trends in expert- and non-expert-authored works. Expert-authored books initially emphasized hands-on application, peaking at 100% in the 2000s and 2010s, but later declined to 64% in the 2020s, signalling a move toward less rigid structures in practical guidance. In contrast, non-expert-authored books followed an opposite trajectory, with structured guidance (S1) steadily increasing and reaching 100% in the 2020s, reflecting a preference for clear, step-by-step instructional content that enhances accessibility and usability.

Interestingly, this shift reflects how both categories adapt to reader engagement strategies. Expert-authored books have traditionally favoured logical organization and research-backed explanations, often presenting information through charts and diagrams rather than simple bulleted lists. For instance, Grant (2021) utilizes circle and pie charts to break down complex ideas, reinforcing an academic, data-driven approach. However, as these books evolved, they gradually moved away from rigid hands-on applications, favouring a more flexible and interpretative approach to guidance. On the other hand, non-expert-authored books have increasingly prioritized readability and user-friendly design. Cotton (2024) exemplifies this shift by incorporating decorative elements, bold formatting, and structured lists, making the reading experience more visually appealing and engaging. Unlike expert-authored books, which emphasize analytical

depth, non-expert books highlight bolded key actions and motivational reinforcement, ensuring that guidance is straightforward and immediately applicable. Overall, while expert-authored books are moving toward a more adaptable approach, non-expert-authored books are embracing structured, visually engaging instructional content. This evolution underscores how each category adjusts to changing reader expectations, balancing depth, clarity, and accessibility in self-help literature.
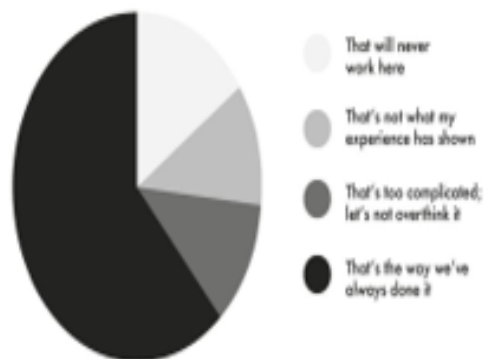
Figures 12 to 14 show how expert- and non-expert-authored self-help books have changed in the 2020s. For instance, Figure 12 and figure 13 (Grant, 2021) illustrate how expert authors use structured visuals like circle charts to offer clear, analytical information. On the other hand, Figure 6.7 (Cotton, 2024) demonstrates how non-expert authors focus on making content more visually appealing and easy to follow, with key points highlighted for quick action. These figures highlight the different ways authors engage readers today—experts prioritize detailed, organized content, while non-experts focus on accessibility and reader-friendliness.
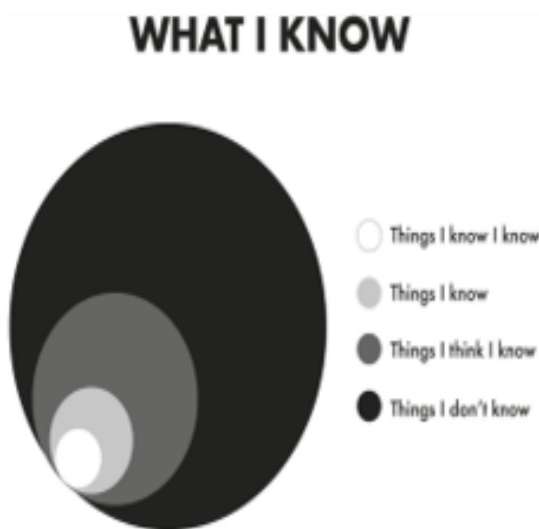
Figure 12

"What I Know" Circle Chart (Grant, 2021, p.45)

Figure 13

"The Most Annoying Things People Say" Pie Chart (Grant, 2021, p.34)

Little things to reduce pressure

❀ **Make a schedule for yourself to work to.** It could be a colour-coded list, sticky notes, or a spreadsheet.

❀ **Plan together with your child to go for a walk to create small breaks amongst the revision.** Even a twenty-minute walk could help reset the nervous system, so you both feel less stressed and physically less tense.

❀ **Wake up an hour earlier and finish revising earlier.** Having time at the end of the day to properly unwind can aid better sleep and lessen stress.

Often it's the tiny, incremental steps that help lessen the stress rather than huge changes: the little things.

Figure 14

A visually structured list incorporating decorative elements for enhanced readability and engagement (Cotton, 2024, p. 35)

Move 7: Closing with Reflection and Action

A significant divergence emerges in how authors conclude their chapters. In expert-authored books, encouraging reflection through rhetorical questions declined sharply (62.1% in 1980s → 4.8% in 2010s, before rising to 28% in 2020s). This suggests that while reflection remains valuable, expert authors are using it more selectively. In contrast, non-expert-authored books have consistently downplayed reflective elements, with self-assessment peaking in the 1980s (41.5%) before dropping to just 24% in the 2020s. This indicates a preference for simpler, more direct

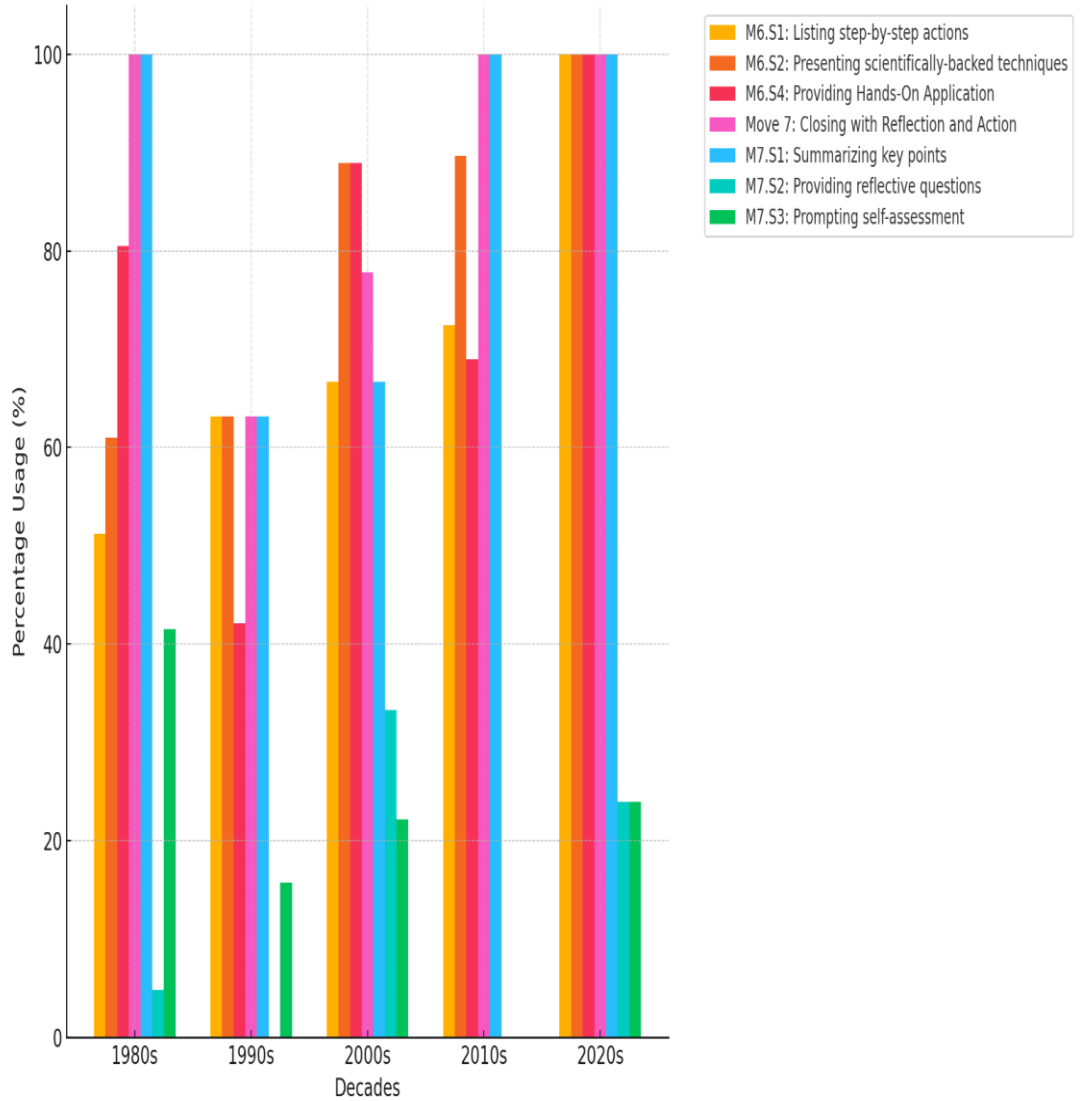Sharp Differences in Rhetorical Moves and Steps Across Decades in Expert-Authored Chapters
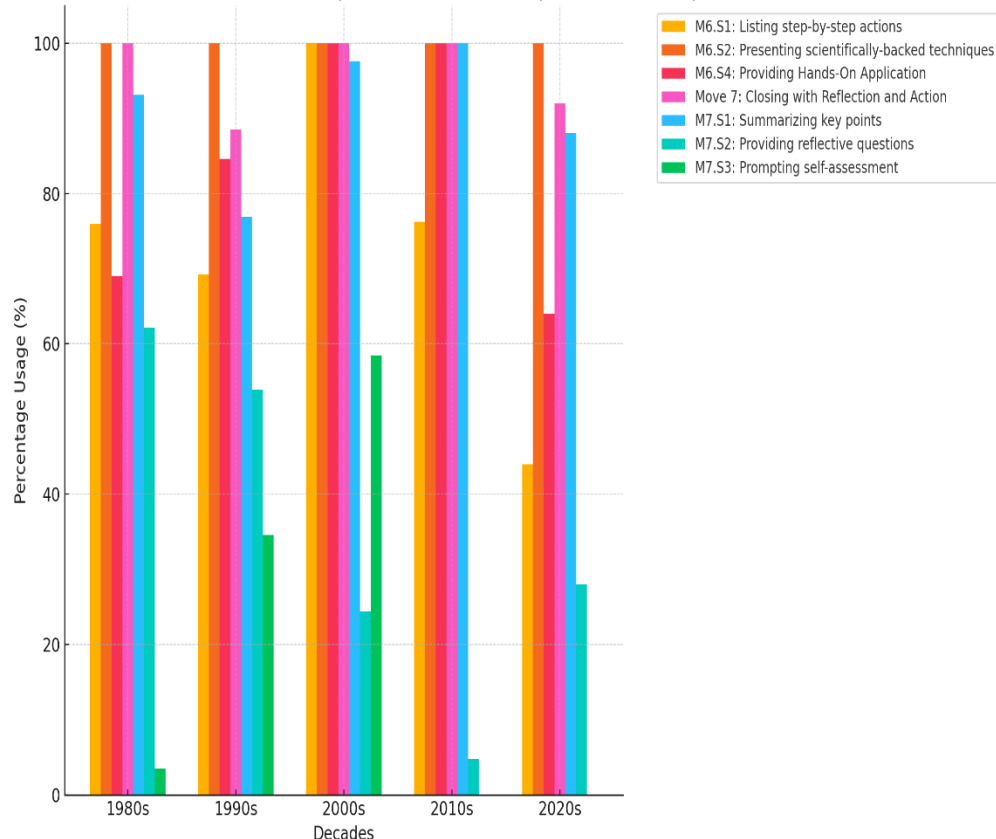
strategies. However, expert-authored books tend to rely on scientific support and structured methodologies, whereas non-expert-authored books focus on narrative-driven engagement and accessibility. Ultimately, these trends highlight how self-help literature has evolved across decades, adapting to shifting reader expectations and the changing landscape of personal development writing.

Figure 15:

Sharp Differences in Rhetorical Moves and Steps Across Decades in Expert-Authored Chapters

This chart highlights the evolution of expert-authored content, showing how these authors have balanced rigorous techniques with evolving strategies for reader engagement over time.

Sharp Differences in Rhetorical Moves and Steps Across Decades in Non-Expert-Authored Chapters

Figure 16:

Sharp Differences in Rhetorical Moves and Steps Across Decades in Non-Expert-Authored Chapters

The visualization above shows the evolving patterns in rhetorical moves and steps across five decades in non-expert-authored body chapters. There are some notable trends that have emerged over time. For example, M6.S1 (Listing step-by-step actions) saw a steady increase, ultimately reaching 100% in the 2020s. M6.S2 (Scientifically-backed techniques) also experienced significant growth, becoming a staple by the 2020s. As for M6.S4 (Hands-on application), this move fluctuated over the years but stabilized in the 2020s, highlighting a consistent push towards practical advice. Move 7 (Reflection and Action) remained a consistent feature throughout, though there was a brief dip in the 1990s. The importance of M7.S1 (Summarizing key points) was evident, especially in the 1980s and after 2010, showing that summarization has always been a core aspect of non-expert authored body chapters. M7.S2 (Reflective questions) were less common, though there was a slight uptick in the 2020s, and M7.S3 (Prompting self-assessment) remained inconsistent, reflecting fluctuating engagement priorities. Overall, these trends illustrate how non-expert authors have adapted their strategies to meet the evolving expectations of readers, with a clear shift towards more structured, practical, and scientifically grounded content.

8. Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive exploration of the rhetorical structures shaping bestselling self-help books, offering key insights into how expert and non-expert authors craft their messages across different decades. By analysing

265 body chapters through an integrated framework of Swales' (1990, 2004) genre analysis and Koay's (2015) move-step approach, the research systematically maps the rhetorical strategies employed within the genre. The findings reveal fundamental differences in how expert-authored books establish credibility, structure arguments, and support claims through research-driven discourse, while non-expert-authored books rely more on personal narratives, emotional appeal, and accessible engagement techniques.

Beyond identifying these distinctions, the study traces the diachronic evolution of self-help rhetoric, showing how credibility-building, reader engagement, and practical application have shifted over time. Notably, while expert-authored books have maintained a structured and research-backed foundation, non-expert-authored books have adapted to reader preferences, increasingly incorporating persuasive techniques and interactive elements to enhance relatability. These observations refine existing genre frameworks, expanding Swales' (2004) and Koay's (2015) models by introducing newly identified rhetorical moves and steps that capture the evolving landscape of self-help literature. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the self-help genre as a hybrid discourse balancing instructional, persuasive, and motivational elements. Its findings have practical implications for aspiring self-help authors, genre analysts, and educators seeking to understand how self-help books communicate guidance and inspiration effectively.

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