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Writing for publication: Challenges and Delights

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How do we feel about writing?

- 'I'll just make myself a coffee'
- Anxieties – 'When will I be found out?'
- The problem of writing
- Never discussed
- The phenomenology of academic writing
- Writing to be judged
- A strange activity
- And we are never taught how to do it
- NB: Confidence will come – but a little humility is no bad thing.

Writing in one's life

- How important? Why write? (Internal pushes & external pulls)
- If it's of any importance, then regular time has to be found (& *will* be found)
- If not daily, then weekly
- Shape one's life to accommodate writing
- Take it seriously - Don't wait for the time/ space to come [It never will]
- Have a writing goal – say 500/ 1500 words a week; or say, 250 a day; OR?
- Become a writer – (a professional writer) – writing in (several) genres
- Having a (5-10 year) intellectual project (or even a lifetime's project)
- Writing becomes work – *A Will to Write*

Getting going

- Writing time
- Writing space
 - Literally – being physically comfortable in every way
 - Metaphorically – giving oneself space to write; to think; to imagine
 - To open one's mind to possibilities
- Support of others (even collaboration)

Finding/ choosing an issue

- Not too broad but ...
- Not too narrow but ...
- State of play in the literature – is there an issue unaddressed?
- Something has caught your eye – at work; in the media; in an academic paper ...

Producing an abstract

- When?
- What makes a good abstract?
- Is it important?
- What are you wanting to say?
- Avoid 'discuss'/ 'explore'/ and even 'examine'
- ***State your case in one sentence*** – what in essence have you found?
What new idea are you proposing? What new policy or pedagogy?

'Finding' a title

- Imagination
- Think 'Daily Mirror'
- How long?
- Just a title OR main title + sub-title
- Having an angle
- Think abstract
- Think literature
- Think findings
- What are you trying to say?

Choosing a/ the journal

- Pref before the writing begins
- High status or not?
- Look around
 - Do your homework (technical/ intellectual/ ideological)
 - Finding a home
- Beyond the usual suspects
- International scope

Building your paper

- Sketching it out
- Skeleton
- Sub-headings
- Structure (the tyranny of the scientific structure – lit rev, methodology, data, findings, discussion ...)
 - The ‘assemblage’ mode of paper writing – Avoid at all costs!
 - Think integration
- Have your outline/ abstract visible at all times

Don't wait

- Don't wait until you have done all the reading (*you never will*)
- Don't wait until you have marshalled/ coded/ analysed all the data (*you never will*)
- Just get going
- Avoid the 'writing up one's research' syndrome
- NO!!!
- The writing is central – the writing prompts the thinking, the theorising, the clarification of the framework

An internal dialogue

- Literature, writing, thesis, argument, findings, data interpretation, conclusions – all at once!
 - Each element stimulates the other elements
- Who said good writing is easy?
- It's like putting the pieces of the jig-saw together and designing the cover picture at the same time.
- You are trying to coax something new into the world

Literature review

- ‘On tap, not on top’
- ‘Literature review’ - ghastly phrase!
- Engaging with the literature – not just strings at the end of sentences
- Doing honour to others – but not excessively so
- Engaging critically with it
- Adding to it
- Dialogue with it and its authors
- Knowing it
- Seeing in it and around it
- Becoming intimate with it – placing the different arguments and authors.

Methodology

- If it's really necessary
- Matter of 'integrity'
- Matter of 'reproducibility'
- Matter of anonymity
- Some particular feature of it; possibly innovative
- Some particular problematic feature of it (anticipate the reviewers)
- Multi-modal – how 'triangulate'?

Data analysis

- Don't just present your data
- Each quotation – don't leave the reader to figure it out
- (NB: the interviews themselves: don't ascribe absolute validity to the interviewee – the interviewee may be mistaken ... crucial for your data interpretation.)
- Task: draw it all together: patterns, tensions, inconsistencies
- Interpretation/ explanation ... seeing into it, around it, from afar ...
- Complexity is not good enough ...
 - 'It's easy to make the simple complex; it's much more difficult to make the complex (seem) simple'.

Story – Thesis & Argument (& Argumentation)

- What is your *thesis*?
- your *central* claim (finding/ proposition/ proposal/forecast/ idea/ concept)?
 - Announce it – pump it up – its originality ... A critique of others ...?
 - It's your space – say something! Don't hide behind others
- What are the main planks in building that thesis? (Argument)
- What are the means by which you build the planks (Argumentation)
 - Metaphors – fine, but don't overegg the pudding!
 - Avoid adjectives/ adverbs
 - First person style – avoid but if you must, then heavily restrained
 - Moving from one proposition to another – being logically tight
 - Drawings/ diagrams/ pictures – *One good diagram is worth 7,000 words* (or more)
 - Resources (painter's palette)
 - Think audience ...
 - **DRAFTS** – how many?

Bits and pieces

- Bibliography – how long? (Bibliographies are fictional.)
- Keywords – think search engines
- Presentation – double-line spacing please!
- Short paragraphs please! (2.3 para breaks per page!!)
- And shortish sentences – avoid the 3-5 line strings of ideas: sort it out!
- Nice sub-headings (every 3-4 pages)
- AND good Introduction & Conclusions
- AND please number the pages!
 - Have it looking nice and accessible – think busy editor and reviewers
- And then negotiate the journal's protocols for submission
- And then wait for the reviewers' comments

Dealing with the reviewers' comments

- Do it methodically and meticulously
- Set out your responses in a table
- Make it clear where/ how you have responded and
- Where/ why you have not made changes suggested
- A balance between compliance and dialogue
 - Often, the reviewers speak across each other ...
- This response stage is not a trivial task but is a vital part of the process
- You can fall at this hurdle.

Conclusions: A writer's life

- Being published
 - Tough but incredibly rewarding
 - *(We all remember our very first paper being published)*

- Some key words:
 - Thought; imagination; clarity; courage; will; craftsmanship

- But be warned
 - Writing for publication can and it probably will change not just your life but YOU!



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