

Writing for Professional Publication: An Organizational Paradigm

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This article discusses motivation for writing, and a specific technique for conceptualizing how to go about composing a publishable manuscript. This approach has been entitled Formula Writing.

Writing for publication is a skill latent activity that is developed in gradients and honed with practice. For the past twenty - five years I have teamed with colleagues (most frequently, Ken Henson) in presenting workshops about professional writing at a variety of conferences for such organizations as the Association of Teacher Educators (ATE), the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE), National Technology and Social Science (NTSS), and Southeastern Regional Association of Teacher Educators (SRATE). Virtually every year someone will come up and say I was in your workshop last year and it really helped me to get published. Needless to say I am always thrilled by this feedback. As an editor of the SRATE Journal, I have noted that many less experienced writers struggle with some of the principles that are covered in the workshop. So I decided to share some of these points with our readers.

The organization of this paper will follow the style that I recommend for readers to use in their work. The focal points will be: motivation for writing and how to conceptualize and organize an article.

Motivation for Writing

Perhaps the greatest problem for new writers is “The fear of the Unknown”. What journal

should I submit material to, I don’t have the writing skills, and others will criticize my writing are common threads of concern. Others include; this is not a publishing institution it is a teaching institution, I don’t have time to write. The fear of the unknown can cause us to make a multitude of excuses for not writing.

Let’s change our mind set and view writing from a success standpoint. I view my vitae as my professional life insurance policy and victory list. What do I mean? Most of us make lists of things we need to do and check off completed tasks. Once completed we simply throw the list away. However, each time I write an article or make a presentation I add the item to my vitae. I have no idea where my task lists from ten years ago are, but the articles I wrote that year are preserved on my vitae for the life of my career.

We live in a mobile society and there are many reasons for professionals to need to make a move. Once beyond being hired with a new doctorate search committees are typically looking for accomplishment that supplements good instruction. A publication record is commonly needed to earn graduate faculty status at larger universities. The more that I have added to my vitae the more competitive I am in the search process.

How do we achieve success in writing, some say that you have to pay the price; however, the motivational expert Zig Ziegler (2000) offers us a different twist. Ziegler would prefer for us to think in terms of enjoying the fruits of success. He indicates, we pay for failure, and having helped many friends pack to move because they did not earn tenure or retention as a result of not publishing I know this adage is true.

Being a self starter is a highly desirable attribute for any professional, but particularly true in higher education. When less productive peers do not want you to write they will encourage you not to do it as well. The process can be both overt and subtle. They may say “writing just isn’t important.” “There is too much junk in journals.” Or less polemic, “let’s go for a cup of coffee,” implying that is a more enjoyable way to spend time.

Take command of your own ship. As a mentor to new faculty I often point out that their professional life is like a pie shell. They can find a variety of activities to fill-up the space and when they turn around there is no time for writing. You have classes scheduled - you need to schedule your writing time. Do you have a hectic schedule? Productive professors trade writing time if they have to, but they just do not completely skip scheduled time for this important part of their career.

I offer four key concepts for motivation about writing. The first is *Desire*. The desire to publish will force you to acquire skills that you did not previously have. It will add to your responsibility, and compel you to develop in new and interesting ways. Writing requires that you keep abreast of professional literature. In addition, it will add to your academic credibility. There can be a high transference of writing for publication and applying the same acquired skills to report writing, letter writing, and grant writing.

The second concept is *Faith*. Not in a religious sense, but rather in your own ability to achieve your goals. Believing becomes a phrase around which our thoughts revolve (Bristol 2005). When we believe we can do something we back it with behavior that results in success. This means we read material, we get online and search through material, and we contemplate how to synthesize our thoughts into productive ideas. Then we compose those ideas into a publishable format.

The third key attribute is *Persistence*. Calvin Coolidge is credited with the saying that “Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.”

The first article that I published as a new assistant professor at the University of Georgia was in the journal *Perceptual and Motor Skills*. When I first submitted the manuscript it came back with what seemed more red ink than type. Frankly I was embarrassed and rather fearful that I would not make it as a professor. I put the manuscript in a file cabinet and tried to forget about it. Then I received a great lesson and gift from Carol Ammons the editor of the journal. She wrote me that she had worked hard on the evaluation of the article and she wanted to know where the rewrite was. I quickly edited the manuscript and resubmitted it to her. The second critique was not as brutal and was done in blue ink. It took me a third effort to get the manuscript published. I learned a key lesson on persistence and to this day appreciate Carol Ammons.

Over twenty years ago while at the University of Alabama I wrote an article about working with biracial children. I submitted it to a journal for a professional organization of which I was not only a member but on their journal’s editorial

board. The editor wrote back and indicated that he did not think the manuscript would be of interest to the readership. Without changing a word I sent the manuscript on to the Kappa Delta Pi Record which accepted it and subsequently it was reprinted in four different outlets such as Education Digest. There was nothing wrong with the manuscript initially; I just had to find a correct home for it.

The final key is *Creative Thinking*. Bristol (2005) stipulates that hard work alone will not bring success; the world is filled with people who have worked hard but have little to show for it. Something more than hard work is necessary: it is creative thinking and a firm belief in your ability to execute your ideas. The successful people in history have succeeded through their thinking. Their hands were merely helpers to the brain.

The process of visualization can be very helpful. Just like batters in the on deck circle close their eyes before coming to bat and they see the bat strike the ball. Close your eyes when you start a new manuscript and think about the excitement of receiving an acceptance letter and then the printed article.

What you picture in your mind, if you picture it clearly and confidently and persistently enough, will eventually come to pass. Another adage for this concept is that we move in the direction of our dominant thoughts. Once you have your picture set you can focus your effort to bring these pictures into being. Your creative effort will have a force in direct proportion to how strongly you visualize it. Confidence and continued right mental attitude followed by consistent action will bring success.

Conceptualizing and Organizing a Manuscript

Research is difficult to do but essentially easy to write as an article. Graduate students learn in their first research course the expected

paradigm of a research manuscript. Unfortunately once we go beyond the research reporting format the organizational requirements become open ended. There are no uniform headings to guide our thought patterns. A common error of inexperienced writers is a lack of focus, the manuscripts simply ramble in dire need of direction. I have read papers that after four or five pages of generic material have not revealed where the paper is headed or what the primary purpose is in the construction of the paper. Others will submit manuscripts that lack a single heading. Still others submit papers that are 30 pages long without a single reference to a journal that typically prints manuscripts that are much shorter and filled with pertinent citations.

While working with doctoral levels students I developed a method to help them conceptualize how to write term papers and then convert those papers into manuscripts which could be submitted for publication. The thought of writing for publication was initially imposing to those students. I would emphasize that anything worth doing is worth doing poorly until it can be done well. In addition we all develop in gradients. To facilitate their conceptualizing and organizing their work I developed an approach entitled formula writing. Subsequently, I have been using this approach to help guide emergent writers at a variety of levels from undergraduate students to deans wishing to help their faculty. The approach has seven strands: title, introduction, advanced organizer, headings, transitions, summary, and references. Let's explore how this process works.

Title

There are two essential functions for your manuscripts title. The first is to help you focus your ideas and to help keep you on task. The second purpose is to help capture the reader's attention. The title should give the reader an idea about what you will be reporting or sharing. You might want to consider your purpose in writing the manuscript, the consumer's desire in

reading the material, and the journal's purpose in publishing it. Look at other titles that appear in the journal you are submitting your manuscript. Avoid titles that are too long to fit the normal table of contents.

Introduction

Writers need to pique the interest of the reader with the introductory material that helps establish the purpose of the paper. A common error of naive writers is to include a rather lengthy introduction to their papers that turns out to be dull and lacking relevance. The content used in the introduction should be germane to the topic and provide a rationale for the importance of the topic. It is frequently helpful to have a current reference cited early in the work to contemporize the topic.

Reviewer's and reader's time is important; they do not want to wade through multiple pages of oblique introduction without knowing the direction of the paper. What should be the length of a good introduction? Consider two to three paragraphs as the life space you allocate to this segment of the paper. Toward the end of the introduction is the proper time to incorporate your advanced organizer.

Advance Organizer

The advanced organizer is the key ingredient to providing direction to the paper. Just like a map to a destination provides directions, the advanced organizer serves the purpose of telling the reader what is coming – the points that you will establish in your writing. I generally recommend that you establish a range of two to five questions or points that the paper will cover. These numbers are not sacrosanct but rather establish a base line from which to work.

The hardest part of crafting a good advanced organizer is your ability to tie the elements or questions together thus having a sense of logic

and flow to the manuscript. As a writer, you want to avoid eclectically lumping disparate points together just because they are all on the same topic. Rather structure your advance organizer to help you identify cogent aspects of a topic that can be synthesized together. Just as the advanced organizer helps the reader understand what is forthcoming, it helps the writer grasp the sequence of the material to be presented and facilitates the awareness of where material belongs in the paper. In essence the advance organizer helps you avoid the two negative r's, rambling and redundancy.

Let's look at some examples. Given the importance of the teacher-student relationship for establishing a sense of achievement, (1) teachers must first believe in themselves, (2) sustain positive attitudes, and (3) finally help students develop a self-perception that will assist them throughout life. The subtype ADD will be the focus of this paper and will be examined from the perspective of: (1) characteristics, (2) etiology, (3) co-morbidity, (4) teachers' dispositions, and (5) instructional modifications.

Be on the lookout for good leads to advanced organizers in other readings that you do. Some examples of leads that you might like include the following: This paper will address how we can meet the leaning needs of preschool children by examining the following topics.... This paper examines the four strands of Viewpoints on (1)... (2)... and (3)... will be examined. As the author you now know where to put the content of your paper, and the reader now knows both the dimension and direction of the article.

Headings

Headings are the benchmarks of your manuscript; directly align them with the advanced organizer. These visual guides permit readers to skim an article and identify its organization and more readily assimilate the content presented. The headings allow the reader to find where

the information described in the advance organizer can be found in the body of the paper. Consequently, headings facilitate clarity and serve to make the manuscript more inviting. The material below the heading should be true to the heading and be crisp, clear, and relevant.

Like the advanced organizer, the headings can help both the writer and the readers. Inexperienced writers frequently have difficulty with where to place content in their manuscript and thus have a tendency to both ramble and repeat information. Both the advanced organizer and its component headings help the writer know where to place content.

An additional virtue of headings is that they aerate the paper letting it breathe with an appropriate use of white space. There are a number of graphic displays that help to bring attention to key points. Boldface, italics, bullets, and numbering can be very helpful in both organizing and accentuating material. Charts, diagrams, and other graphics can sharpen your article, but remember the intent needs to be clarification not decoration. The manuscript should make explicit use of these supplementary materials.

Transitions

Coax the reader comfortably from one element to another. Transitional sentences sustain readers' attention via alerting them to what is ahead. While not all closing sentences to paragraphs or sections need to alert the reader to new material a reasonable number of transitional sentences increases the flow of ideas and the overall coherence of the manuscript.

Less experienced writers frequently abstract information by using a series of paragraphs in which they cite the work of one researcher or team of writers in each succeeding paragraph. A better technique is to blend information from multiple sources. For example, you may

convey that "Luck (2008) posits that... Bruster and Barrett (2009) agree, and additionally perceive..." A word of caution be careful with dates and sequencing. One would not have Shutt (2007) agreeing with Stewart (2009) considering that Stewart's manuscript was not available at the time Shutt's was published.

Summary

Summary sections are optional to the manuscript. In some cases authors developed a sequence of material that does not need to be drawn back together. However, in other manuscripts the summary section helps to pull the presented information together facilitating the readers digestion of what was presented. Some writers like to use the summary section to report or share conclusions drawn by the author(s) based on the body of information they have shared.

The References

The works that you cite in your manuscript are valuable references to readers. They also are a point of credibility for you as an author. Carefully check the accuracy of your references. Be sure to match your reference style with the style used by the journal that you are submitting your work. For example, if the SRATE Journal uses the American Psychological Association (APA) style use that format in your work. When editors see a reference page containing numerous errors the quality of the work comes into question. Most editors do their work with a minimum of reassigned time from their University, they are not eager to have to correct your work. In addition, if the editors have to send your manuscript back for correction you could miss a deadline.

Check the citations in the body of the paper to be sure that they are included on the reference page, that the dates match and vice versa.

References

- Bristol, C. (2005). The magic of believing the science of setting your goal and then reaching it (Rev. ed.). New York: Simon and Shuster.
- Ziegler, Z. (2000). See you at the top (Rev. ed.). Gretna, LA: Pelican.

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