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Writing for Publication

Transitions and Tools that Support Scholars'
Success

 Springer

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Introduction to the Book

A group of higher education faculty members from different colleges and departments were participating in a 3-day professional development institute on writing for professional publication. The pressure to publish was on at their institution, newly categorized as a university. Prior to the mid-morning break on the first day, the presenter asked the participants to write their concerns about publishing on Post-it notes and then read and categorized them before the group reconvened. The great majority of the participants were worried about their ability to fulfill the escalating expectations for faculty. Only a few had published previously and they wondered if they were capable of writing well enough to publish their work. As a way to allay their fears, the presenter offered to assess a short writing sample from each participant that evening and return it the next day. They had the choice of composing something during the afternoon, or they could submit just a few pages from an unpublished manuscript. The next morning, she announced, “Good news. All of you have achieved a level of skill that is sufficient to get you published.” The group’s response was relieved laughter and some skeptical looks so, while returning the papers with her written comments she said, “You realize, of course, that there is a huge selective bias operating in my favor here. All of you have graduate degrees and nearly all have doctorates. It’s doubtful that anyone could earn those degrees without solid writing skills. Plus, all of you volunteered to take 3 days out of your busy schedule to learn about writing for publication. This suggests that you are seeking out opportunities to learn or, at the very least, that you respond to helpful nudging from colleagues. You also were candid about your concerns and decided to meet the challenges of writing together. All of this bodes well for a successful outcome. I will do my absolute best to help you.”

Some of the concerns expressed by the participants in the professional development session are no doubt shared by readers of this book. This book’s purpose is identical to that of the presenter: to be helpful to academic writers from different backgrounds and at different levels of experience. For scholars across the experiential spectrum that ranges from a new graduate student to a professor emeritus, writing well and getting it published is a perpetually challenging, never-finished project. Two questions have guided our writing effort. The first one was: “What is the book

that we *wish* we had found when first attempting to write for publication?” and second, “What book could meet the professional development needs of both aspiring and accomplished authors while simultaneously supporting senior faculty members who teach others how to write for publication?”

Unique Features of the Book

Writing for Publication: Transitions and Tools that Support Scholars' Success has several features that distinguish it from most other books on the topic of writing for publication.

- **Practical strategies and resources.** In the absence of clear direction, academic authors may waste time figuring out how to accomplish various writing tasks. To illustrate, when authors are unfamiliar with the general structure of, expectations for, and importance of writing an abstract, they may produce an abstract that does not represent their work well. The review committees of major conferences routinely reject proposals with poorly worded abstracts, and if the abstract for a journal article does not communicate effectively, negative comments from reviewers are the predictable outcome. Many books about writing for publication tell the reader what is expected from scholarly writing; this book does more showing than telling. Each chapter is replete with visual material that helps the reader to see how academic writing tasks are structured, provides illustrative examples, leads readers to online tutorials and other resources, and offers evidence-based advice.
- **An interdisciplinary approach.** Too often, when a diverse group of doctoral students or faculty members assemble they put on their “disciplinary blinders” and assume that other scholars in their field are the only ones who can help them publish their work. While it is true that input from scholars within one’s discipline plays a key role, it is equally true that publishable scholarly writing—like effective university teaching—has dimensions of quality that transcend subject-matter boundaries. The main sections in an empirical research article, for instance, are not discipline-specific. Publications on various aspects of academic writing—such as reviewing the literature or reporting the results of qualitative research—are produced by researchers from very different disciplinary backgrounds yet have something of value for scholars in various fields. We have explored sources across the disciplines to broaden the scope of the book and make it applicable to a wider readership.
- **A “paper mentor” purpose.** The fiscal realities of many postsecondary institutions have diminished institutional support for faculty professional development. The expense of bringing in consultants capable of supporting scholars’ writing for publication—or even the travel funds to gain access to these supports at professional conferences—is very limited. Under these circumstances, many faculty members who are being urged to publish will need to teach themselves this skill

set with the help of colleagues and print/nonprint resources. This book is designed to be a “paper mentor” that guides scholars in improving their writing.

- **A transitions perspective.** The thesis of this book is that growth as an academic author relies on important transitions in writing behavior that transform aspiring authors into accomplished ones. When carefully matched to the individual, these changes increase confidence, bolster motivation, extend skill repertoires, and yield new opportunities. For example, an author may seek to write a practical article for fellow professionals advocating a practice that will improve effectiveness. This book includes a template that can be used to generate a first draft and make a successful transition from a graduate student paper to a publishable practical article (Chap 6).
- **A career-wide goal.** Even within a group of doctoral candidates enrolled in a seminar that emphasizes academic writing, writers will operate at varying levels of sophistication where scholarly publishing is concerned. One student may have collaborated with a faculty member to present at a national conference. Another may have been the newsletter editor for the local chapter of a professional organization for many years. Still another might be a graduate assistant who is collaborating with a faculty mentor on a final report for a grant project. Learning to communicate effectively through published writing spans a continuum from those first attempts to “break into print” (VanTil, 1986) all the way to books written by emeritus faculty during “retirement.” Therefore, each chapter offers support to aspiring authors as well as to experienced scholars seeking continuous professional growth as authors.

Rationale for the Book

For scholars at all levels across the disciplines, the expectation that they write well is inescapable. Whether it is writing a class paper, generating dissertation chapters, developing curriculum, producing an accreditation document, preparing a grant proposal, applying for a sabbatical leave, or publishing articles and books, scholars’ success rests on skill in written communication. There are at least five trends that make this an opportune time to produce a new type of book on writing for professional publication.

Expectations for Publication

Each successive generation of university faculty quickly becomes acquainted with the expectation that professors publish. What they may not realize is that publication is expected to occur, not after a faculty member is well established, but during doctoral study (Lee & Aitchison, 2011; Nettles & Millett, 2006). Many times, when the prospect of writing for publication is discussed with doctoral students, their

initial reaction is some version of “Wait! I haven’t even finished my degree yet!” Yet one of the most consistent recommendations from the research on scholarly writing is that doctoral students need formal coursework, mentoring opportunities, and guidance in publishing prior to the dissertation phase (Kamler, 2008; Nielsen & Rocco, 2002). One explanation for these trends is international survey data that identifies publication while still in graduate school as the single, most powerful predictor of publication later on, after they become professors (Dinham & Scott, 2001). In addition, publication during doctoral study is a common characteristic of who will become the most prolific scholar/authors (Pinheiro, Melkers & Youtie, 2014). As a result, doctoral program alumni frequently find that, when entering the higher education job market, search committees tend to give hiring preference to applicants with some evidence of academic publication (Kamler, 2008).

Despite the obvious importance of academic publishing for contemporary doctoral students, acquiring the skills of scholarly writing presents an interesting paradox. Although a record of successful publication is widely recognized as a survival skill in Academia, most doctoral programs neglect this learning in their established curricula (Lovitts, 2008; Nolan & Rocco, 2009). The problem with this “ad hoc” approach is that it is not sufficiently inclusive and systematic. If faculty responsible for delivering doctoral programs fail to teach the skills of writing for professional publication in an inclusive and systematic way, “then we help to foster an *invisible* elitism, charisma based, favouring those who ‘just know’ what the right thing to do might be—or who have family, friends and experienced or influential advisers to help them” (Morris, 1998, p. 499). Writing for publication needs to become an integral part of the doctoral curriculum for every student (Kamler & Thomson, 2006; Lee & Kamler, 2006) because:

doctoral publication is not a given. It flourishes when it receives serious institutional attention, and skilled support from knowledgeable supervisors and others who understand academic writing as complex disciplinary and identity work... Emerging scholars need to be supported in more explicit, strategic and generous ways than currently happens, so that we produce more confident graduates who know how to publish in a wide variety of contexts, including international refereed journals. (Kamler, 2008, p. 284, 292)

Yet it is not only students but also experienced faculty members who need support in writing for publication. Even at institutions with strong traditions of emphasizing effective teaching only, such as community colleges, there is a trend toward encouraging faculty to publish (Rifkin, 2016).

Increases Educational Attainment

Educational attainment—defined as the level of education achieved—has increased dramatically in the United States. By 2022, the number of positions requiring the terminal degree in the discipline—the doctorate—is expected to increase by 20% while the number of professional positions requiring a master’s degree will increase by 22% (Sommers & Franklin, 2012). Furthermore, due to the “graying of the

professoriate” in the United States, postsecondary teaching is ranked 10th on the list of occupations with the largest projected growth. A 17% increase—from 1.8 million jobs in 2010 to 2.1 million jobs in 2020—is predicted (Sommers & Franklin, 2012). First-time enrollment of international students in the US graduate programs has increased approximately 8% annually in recent years. As larger numbers of graduate students pursue the terminal degree and more postsecondary faculty are hired, the demand for skills in scholarly writing and publishing can be expected to increase accordingly.

Needs of Academic Authors

Learning to write effectively is a lifelong endeavor for scholars but can be particularly challenging for new faculty members. As one assistant professor put it, “I feel like my life is a see saw—with me at both ends always threatening to go way off balance in responding to professional or personal demands.” The challenges that newly minted PhDs confront in writing for publication are formidable. First of all, they need to recoup their energy after wrestling a dissertation into being. They typically need to prepare for several different courses that are new to them, all the while knowing that both students and colleagues will be evaluating their teaching performance. In addition, they have to contend with a steep learning curve to understand various dimensions of their role, such as student advisement, committee service, and program development. They may conclude that it is better to “figure it out for themselves” than to pester busy colleagues with questions; they also recognize that the person to whom they expose their ignorance about writing for publication today might be evaluating them tomorrow.

Under these conditions, writing for publication can sink low on the list of priorities, particularly if professors have not published previously and few institutional supports are in place. Little do these new faculty realize that misgivings about writing for publication persist, even among their most prolific colleagues, particularly when the latter encounter unfamiliar writing tasks. For example, the first time I was invited to write the Foreword for a book I realized that I did not know how to do this. I pulled at least a dozen books from my personal library to locate examples and re-read the forewords, attempting to infer the purpose and structure. Then I e-mailed the editor to gently inquire if the publisher happened to have a particularly good example of what was expected. The editor obliged by sending a scanned copy of a published foreword with her handwritten comments about the purpose and structure in the margins; it became my “textbook.” That short piece of writing was a challenge and, because I was a beginner, exceptionally time-consuming. Thus, at every stage of the academic author’s professional life, there are times when guidance and support are needed in order to initiate writing, sustain momentum, improve efficiency, and produce better manuscripts. This book was written to shepherd scholars through these important transitions.

Qualifications for Teachers of Scholarly Writing

Who is qualified to teach others how to write for scholarly publication? Some may conclude that it must be one of the most respected academic authors in their field. However, that individual may not necessarily know how (or particularly want) to guide others in writing for professional publication. Others may conclude that they should turn to a teacher of writing, such as an English professor. However, those who teach composition to freshmen, a class in creative writing, or theory in Rhetoric and Linguistics to graduate students—while possessing knowledge about ways to teach writing—are not necessarily knowledgeable about the world of academic publishing. Still others might conclude that a professional editor is the person most qualified to teach scholars to write. However, many editors employed by large publishing companies are not teachers or writers themselves; they are business people whose continued employment depends on correctly forecasting which books will sell. Ideally, those who presume to teach others scholarly writing would have:

1. Experience as a widely published scholar
2. Commitment to the professional development of adults
3. Understanding of the voice and style of academic discourse
4. Extensive and varied background in reviewing and editing
5. Skill in providing individualized feedback to authors that leads to manuscript improvement
6. A track record of reciprocally satisfying collaborative publications with students, colleagues, and scholars from different disciplines and countries

Our anecdotal impression from speaking with other faculty members who teach courses in scholarly writing is that they often find it difficult to locate suitable textbooks and tools for teaching and learning the skill set of an academic author. Some books about scholarly writing consist of advice from an eminent editor. One limitation to books of this type is that they tend to rely on personal anecdotes and helpful hints as their main claim to authority. Another drawback is that, even though these individuals have been successful, this does not mean that their personal work habits would be particularly instructive or appropriate for others. Other books on scholarly writing are limited to a single writing task, such as an empirical research article, when aspiring and experienced authors need a more expansive introduction to the many ways they might contribute to the professional literature. Still other books about writing for publication are very focused on a single discipline, rendering them less suitable for the most common teaching situation in which the backgrounds of the graduate students or faculty members interested in publishing are diverse. The overarching purpose of *Writing for Publication: Transitions and Tools that Support Scholars' Success* is to blend theory, research, and practice to support the teaching and writing efforts of diverse groups of scholars involved in academic writing.

Audience for the Work

The audience for a book on writing for publication consists of novices and experts across the disciplines. Academic authors at all levels need clear, practical, research-based guidance from author/editor experts to achieve their publication goals. The new graduate student might need to learn how to write a proposal to get on the conference program for a state-level meeting while the student who has successfully defended a dissertation needs assistance in producing a concise journal article based on the study. At the same time, a newly hired professor will need a respectable list of writing achievements to advance while a senior colleague from the same academic department might be seeking advice on how to propose and edit a volume for a book series. *Writing for Publication: Transitions and Tools that Support Scholars' Success* operates simultaneously on two different levels—as a resource for scholarly authors at various career stages as well as a resource for those who teach—informally or formally—other scholars to write.

Organization of the Book

The book has been structured to correspond to a typical semester; each of the thirteen chapters describes a key transition that needs to be accomplished in order to become a successful scholar/author. We begin with the people and the process—academic authors (Chap. 1), expectations for and ethics in scholarly writing (Chap. 2), and how to work more efficiently (Chap. 3). Chaps. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 focus on major types of writing tasks for scholars. The first is the conference proposal (Chap. 4). Then there is a section (Chaps. 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9) on major categories of professional journal articles—literature reviews, practical articles, quantitative research articles, qualitative research, and mixed-methods research articles. The third and final section of the book focuses on making the transition from novice to expert. It includes writing monographs, book chapters, scholarly books, and textbooks (Chap. 10); grants and multiple writing projects (Chap. 11); anonymous peer review and editing (Chap. 12); and co-authorship and professional development (Chap. 13).

Goals for Readers

Through this book, we aim to help academic authors as we:

- Demystify the process of writing for publication
- Provide authoritative answers to questions about scholarly publishing
- Build readers' confidence that publication is within the realm of possibility for them
- Encourage readers to initiate, sustain, and complete academic writing tasks

- Help authors to acquire the voice and style of academic discourse
- Guide writers in transitioning to the varied genre demands of scholarly publications
- Offer evidence-based advice on how to accomplish a wide range of writing projects
- Illustrate key ideas with helpful templates, examples, and activities
- Recommend print resources and online tools for writers

Writing for Publication: Transitions and Tools that Support Scholars' Success represents a capstone experience for both of us. We have invested decades of our professional lifetimes in becoming better teachers, mentors, speakers, writers, researchers, reviewers, and editors. We draw upon those practical experiences, support them with interdisciplinary theory and research, and show how to make key transitions that yield better outcomes for scholars seeking to contribute to their fields by publishing their professional writing.

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