WRITE STUFF

Resources to Inspire and Enhance Your Educational Scholarship

November-December 2019

THOUGHTS ON WRITING

A blank piece of paper
is God's way of telling us
how hard it is to be God.

Sidney Sheldon

THE MYTH THAT YOU DON'T KNOW HOW TO START

Scholarly writing is not a linear process. Few if any scholars write their papers in the order of title, introduction, methods, results, discussion and abstract. Many people start with the methodology section because you know what you did or are planning to do. You have probably already drafted the methods in order to get human subjects approval for your study, so often it is the easiest place to start. Why not start there? If you have results, then that is a good next step. If you are still collecting data, then start on the introduction and keep notes about ideas you want to address in the discussion section: these can be related to your research questions or sparked by studies you are citing in your introduction.

For some, the key to starting is overcoming the seeming immensity of the task. Thinking about all the pieces, the back-and-forth with collaborators, formatting, references and the manuscript submission website can be exhausting if not unnerving. Some of us are so focused on the parts of the paper we least like writing, that it keeps us from writing anything at all. For others, starting is a challenge because the you are not sure what to write about… the story isn't clear. While that is indeed a problem, getting something down gives you and others something to react to and likely the story will eventually become clearer. And there are some of us who can't start writing until all of the pieces are in place: the project is done and the data are analyzed. Referring back to the opening paragraph, there is always something you can write.

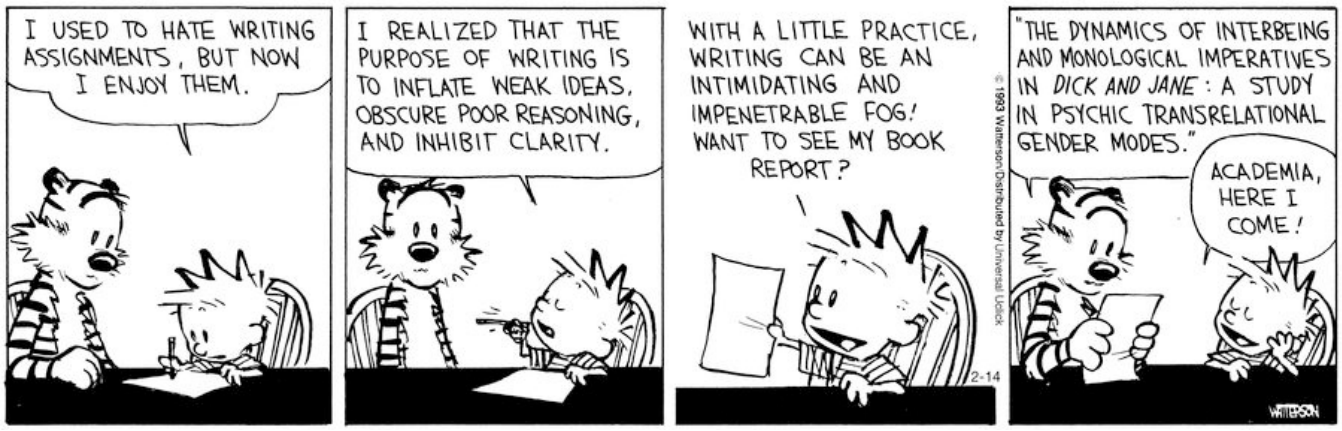
In the end, paper-writing paralysis is more a state of mind or personal preferences. Pual Silvia writes, "Writer's block is nothing more than the behavior of not writing. Saying you can't write bcause of writer's block is merely saying that you can't write because you aren't writing…. The cure is writing. (2007)"

What are some strategies for successful writing:

- Think recipe or template—find a good paper that resonated with you and use it as a model
- Delegate—if you have colaborators/coauthors, engage them to draft parts of the manuscript
- Use a checklist to break it down into manageable parts—how do you eat an elepant? One bite at a time.

Adapted from Chapter 3: The Myth That You Don't Know Where to Start,
in ***WAG Your Work: Writing Accountability Groups***.
Kimberly A. Skarupski, PhD MPH. (2018).

A SHORT BREAK



WHAT IS IN A NAME: BONFIRE RED TITLES

A title is like a front door: it serves as advertising for what's inside your research paper. Have a look at the last title you wrote for an academic manuscript. Is it a red door or a white one? Does it draw readers into your work or encourage them to walk by? Titles must achieve two goals: quickly grab the reader and faithfully describe the paper. This likely explains our (over) reliance on the "colon title", in which what precedes the colon is meant to be catchy and what follows is meant to be descriptive.

In qualitative papers, an iconic quote can create an effective variant of the "colon title": "You learn better under the gun": Intimidation and harassment in surgical education". By leading with the voice of a study participant, this title brings the reader into the world of surgical training. But the "colon title" can just as easily let us down. The structure often lures us to write titles loaded with abstractions and jargon. Specialized jargon abounds in academic titles, suggesting that many writers believe it is necessary, perhaps to signal their membership in an expert research community. It is not uncommon to have an editor request a change of your catchy title to something more conventional. Requests such as these remind us that "catchy" and "nuanced" are difficult to achieve simultaneously, and the writer must balance them artfully.

How do you know when a catchy title will work, and when it will not? One approach is to attend not only to the title's text (what is said), but also to its paratext and subtext (what is implied). Paratext is any extra-textual matter that accompanies and influences the meaning of a title. For papers published in journals, this includes author names and affiliations, journal name, perhaps the topic of a special issue. Read more.

WRITING RESOURCE: WHO TO INCLUDE AS AN AUTHOR?

Defining the Role of Authors and Contributors

The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) is a small working group of general medical journal editors whose participants meet annually to develop and revise their Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals.

One of the areas of focus for the ICMJE is around authorship. Decisions around authorship are important and sometimes tricky: authorship confers credit and has important academic, social, and financial implications. Authorship also implies responsibility and accountability for published work. The ICMJE authorship recommendations are intended to ensure that contributors who have made substantive intellectual contributions to a paper are given credit as authors, but also that contributors credited as authors understand their role in taking responsibility and being accountable for what is published. The ICMJE has developed criteria for authorship that can be used by all journals, including those that distinguish authors from other contributors.

The ICMJE recommends that authorship be based on the following four criteria:

- Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work; AND
- Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND
- Final approval of the version to be published; AND
- Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

Despite these criteria, in practice many challenges remain for investigators when determining who qualifies for authorship. Recent studies in medical education highlight the challenges around authorship decisions. To read more about the ICMJE authorship criteria and their practical significance, click here.

WHERE DO YOU WRITE?

"When I write a recipe; I'm not really interested in writing a formula. It's conversational because I feel it is a conversation. I am talking. It is my voice. Words are an ingredient and I like that."

Nigella Lawson

SIT DOWN AND WRITE: USING THE SPEED WRITING TOOL

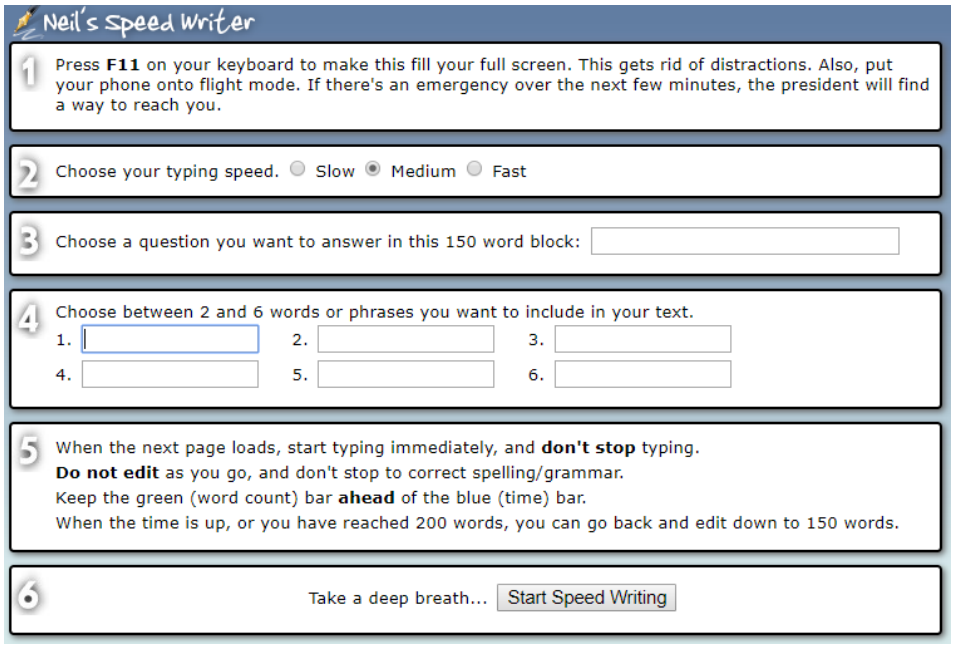
Neil's Toolbox is an online resource not unlike that embarrassing drawer in your house where you have all sorts of odds and ends stashed. One of the tools in Neil's Toolbox is the Speed Writing tool. It is a relative of another writing approach, the Pomodoro Technique, which uses a kitchen timer to mark a focused, uninterrupted block of time for writing. Neil's Speed Writing tool take this a step further by giving ongoing feedback. There are two bars at the top of the webpage, and they race against each other as you type. This race is very motivating. The time bar marks the time progression for the writing session, and you can set it to accommodate your typing speed. The word bar increases as you type more words. Your task is to keep the word bar moving ahead of the time bar and reach 200 words before the time runs out.

Writing is a complex iterative four-stage process:

- *Planning* or *pre-writing:* you think about the study you want to describe or the perspective you want to share
- *Drafting:* your thoughts come to life as words on the screen

- *Revising:* this is where your writing becomes more reader-focused, and you consider the effectiveness of how your paper is organized, where definitions might be needed or the logic or progression of your presentation.
- *Editing:* here is where your writing is polished in terms of grammar, spelling, reference checking and the other details that complete the paper.

Speed Writing focuses primarily on the *drafting* stage and is designed to help you get some words down. Before the timer begins, you are prompted to consider your pre-writing by choosing a question you want to answer and providing some key phrases that you want to include in your text (as shown below). But other than that, once you start speed writing you type and type and type without editing or correcting as you go.



PHYSICS PAPER SETS RECORD WITH MORE THAN 5,000 AUTHORS

A physics paper with 5,154 authors holds the record for the largest number of contributors to a single research article. Only the first nine pages in the 33-page article, published on 14 May 2015 in *Physical Review Letters,* describe the research itself — including references. The other 24 pages list the authors and their institutions.

The article is the first joint paper from the two teams that operate ATLAS and CMS, two massive detectors at the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) at CERN, Europe's particle-physics lab near Geneva, Switzerland. Each team is a sprawling collaboration. Robert Garisto, an editor of *Physical Review Letters*, says that publishing the paper presented challenges above and beyond the already Sisyphean task of dealing with teams that have thousands of members. "The biggest problem was merging the author lists from two collaborations with their own slightly different styles," Garisto says. "I was impressed at how well the pair of huge collaborations worked together in responding to referee and editorial comments," he adds.

Too big to print? Every author name will appeared in the print version of the *Physical Review Letters* paper, says Garisto. By contrast, the 2,700-odd author list for a *Nature* paper on rare particle decays published that same week did not appear in the June print version, but was only available online.

Some biologists were upset about a genomics paper with more than 1,000 authors, but physicists have long been accustomed to "hyperauthorship" (a term credited to information scientist Blaise Cronin at Indiana University Bloomington). In 2018, *nature index* presented data on the rise of hyperauthorship.

An article published in 2008 about the CMS experiment at the LHC, before the machine started colliding protons, became the first paper to top 3,000 authors, according to Christopher King, editorial manager

of Thomson Reuters *ScienceWatch*. The paper that announced the ATLAS team's observation of the Higgs particle in 2012 had 2,932 authors, of whom 21 were listed as deceased. (Source: Nature, 15MAY2015).

EDUCATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP IN THE DIGITAL AGE: A SCOPING REVIEW

Boyer's framework of scholarship was published before significant growth in digital technology. As more digital products are produced by medical educators, determining their scholarly value is of increasing importance. This scoping systematic review developed a taxonomy of digital products and determined their fit within Boyer's framework of scholarship.

We conducted a broad literature search for descriptions of digital products in the medical literature in July 2013 using Medline, EMBASE, ERIC, PSYCHinfo, and Google Scholar. A framework analysis categorized each product using Boyer's model of scholarship, while a thematic analysis defined a taxonomy of digital products.

7422 abstracts were found and 524 met inclusion criteria. Digital products mapped primarily to the scholarship of teaching (85.4%) followed by integration (7.6%), application (5.5%), and discovery (1.5%). A taxonomy of 19 categories was defined. Web-based or computer assisted learning (41%) was described most frequently.

We found that digital products are well described in medical literature and fit into Boyer's framework of scholarship and proposed a taxonomy of digital products that parallel traditional forms of the scholarship of teaching and learning. This research should inform the development of tools to examine the impact and quality of digital products. (Read more)

KeyLIME: Key Literature in Medical Education
This paper also discussed in a KeyLIME podcast Feb 17, 2015.
You can listen to the podcast (*19:50 minutes*) by clicking here.

UPDATED ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY NOW AVAILABLE

Annotated Bibliography of Journals for Educational Scholarship (July 2019)

An updated edition of this important resource was recently made available. This annotated bibliography was created by a team of librarians and educators from multiple medical schools. It provides information for over 70 journals that publish health professions scholarship and lists both print and electronic journals including reputable open access publications. For each entry, the bibliography provides a description of the journal, topics covered in the publication, the types of manuscripts accepted and the audience. There also is information about two peer-reviewed repositories for educational resources: CES4Health and MedEdPortal.

This bibliography is free of charge from the Association of American Medical Colleges Group on Educational Affairs (GEA). To download this PDF document, **click here**.