



WRITE STUFF

Resources to Inspire and Enhance Your Educational Scholarship

February 2020

▶ THOUGHTS ON WRITING

I went for years not finishing anything,
because of course when you finish something,
you can be judged

Erica Jong

▶ THE MYTH THAT YOU DON'T KNOW HOW TO FINISH

It has been observed time and time again that many of us working in academic settings are perfectionists... which means for many of us, nothing is ever really finished and nothing is good enough. This creates a big problem for scholarly productivity. Peer-reviewed publications are a major component of our annual reviews and evidence of our work as a scholar. Voltaire is credited with the aphorism, *perfect is the enemy of good* and that wisdom aptly applies to scholarship too. [Paul Silvia](#) is credited with *perfectionism is paralyzing*, and again now that we are using word processors instead of typewriters, it is too easy to keep holding on to a paper that is good enough to send out. Reflecting on the papers you are working on, and how long you have been working on them can provide some insights about the extent to which perfectionism is getting in your way.

In the face of perfectionism... “there are more papers to read,” “I have one more analysis to do,” “I am not happy with the Discussion...” can slow your work to a stop. The solution is bravery and getting the paper out to your team or submitted for review. The worst that can happen is that you are asked to make changes, but who has ever had a paper accepted for publication that did not require revisions. True, revisions can be minor or major, but in truth you and your team will have another opportunity to make it better. If you can't let go and send the paper out for review, send it to someone for an informal review... someone you trust. They will come back with some suggestions and once you address them, send it out for real.

Here are some strategies for moving forward:

- Triage your work: get those papers that are closest to completion done; don't let them languish and you can work on another paper while it is out to the journal... academic writing is not a linear process...
- Triage your effort: not every task deserves your A game... your time is precious so allocate time according to importance... everything single thing you do should not require your A game....
- Ration your time: you might find data analysis to be fun and can spend hours doing it, but a better strategy is to do the analysis and allocate time to all parts of the paper, not just the fun parts... track your time...

Adapted from Chapter 5: The Myth That You Don't Know How to Finish,
in [WAG Your Work: Writing Accountability Groups](#).
Kimberly A. Skarupski, PhD MPH. (2018).

A SHORT BREAK



Formal
Writing



Informal
Writing



Emo
Writing

FROM SEMICONSCIOUS TO STRATEGIC PARAGRAPHING

Adapted from Semi-Conscious to Strategic Paragraphing by Lorelei Lingard Perspectives on Medical Education

Deep in your subcortex lives the primitive instinct to paragraph. You tap away on your laptop, periodically hitting the return key to send the cursor back to the left margin. Often this act is only semi-conscious: when your writing session ends, you find your work paragraphed. Other times, you paragraph visually, hitting return because the paragraph looks too long, or because you want to change topics. While semi-conscious paragraphing isn't necessarily wrong, it can be problematic. Paragraphs are more than structural features, they are a rhetorical device, and one of the most powerful tools for organizing and developing an argument. Not paying careful attention to paragraphing can limit the persuasiveness and clarity of your writing.

A paragraph is a single unit of thought made up of a group of related sentences. Effective paragraphs have unity and coherence. Unity refers to the single main idea, which should be readily identifiable, introduced up front, developed convincingly, and concluded. Coherence refers to the relationships among the sentences in the paragraph. Each sentence should participate in the main idea and be arranged to create the sense of a developing logic rather than a random list.

Strategic paragraphing is an advanced writing skill. There are many examples of problematic paragraphs: The *infinity* paragraph goes on forever and likely lacks both unity and coherence. The *hiccup* paragraph ends without warning and might signal a thought that is not sufficiently developed. The *blindfold* paragraph leaves readers wandering in search of the main idea. The *maze* paragraph has a clear entrance and exit but loses readers in the middle. [Read More](#)

CONCEPTUAL MODELS TO ILLUMINATE AND MAGNIFY

Adapted from Conceptual models to illuminate and magnify by Georges Bordage (2009), Medical Education v43.

CONTEXT In a recent study of the quality of reporting experimental studies in medical education, barely half the articles examined contained an explicit statement of the conceptual framework used. Conceptual frameworks represent ways of thinking about a problem or a study, or ways of representing how complex things work. They can come from theories, models or best practices. Conceptual frameworks illuminate and magnify one's work. Different frameworks will emphasize different variables and outcomes, and their inter-relatedness. Educators and researchers constantly use conceptual frameworks to guide their work, even if they themselves are not consciously aware of the frameworks.

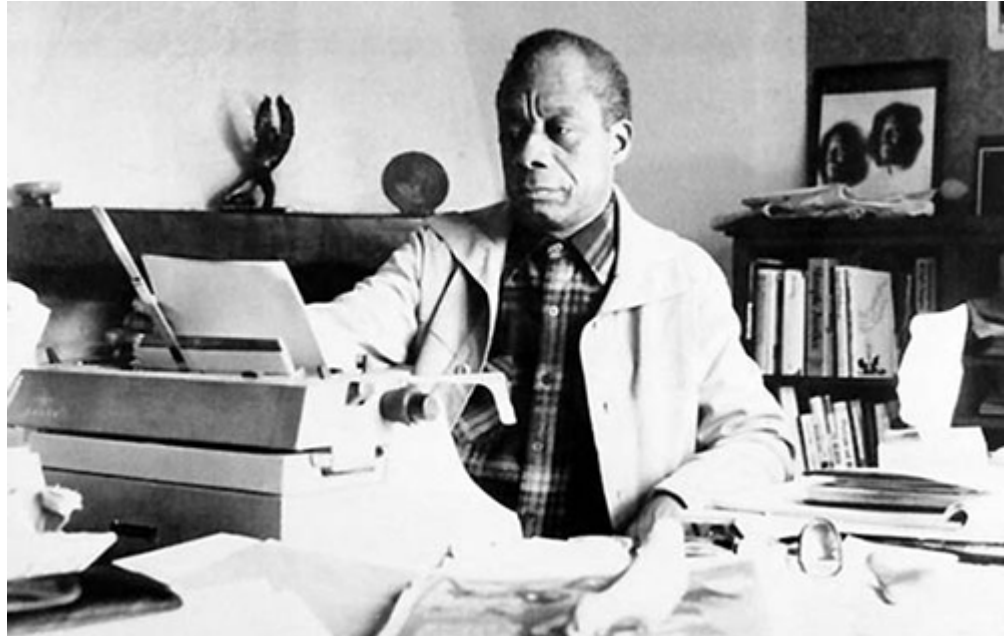
METHODS Three examples—declining attendance, poor surgical skills, learning diagnostic reasoning—are provided on how conceptual frameworks can be used to cast development and research projects in medical

education. The examples are accompanied by commentaries and a total of 13 key points about the nature and use of conceptual frameworks.

CONCLUSIONS Ultimately, scholars are responsible for making explicit the assumptions and principles contained in the conceptual framework(s) they use in their development and research projects. [Read More](#)

▶ WHERE DO YOU WRITE?

“You write in order to change the world, knowing perfectly well that you probably can't, but also knowing that literature is indispensable to the world... The world changes according to the way people see it, and if you alter, even but a millimeter the way people look at reality, then you can change it.” **James Baldwin**



▶ IN SEARCH OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS FOR SCHOLARSHIP

Adapted from Example Conceptual Frameworks to Guide Educational Scholarship by Patricia O’Sullivan and Sebastian Uijtdehaage.

Conceptual frameworks are critical in scholarly medical education work. They guide formulation of research questions and curricular activities. Yet, educators are often at a loss when it comes to awareness and applications of conceptual frameworks. They are unfamiliar with them and are not sure how to use them and where to find them. This resource was developed to provide examples of conceptual frameworks to help an educator become oriented to using frameworks and to peruse a sampling of ones often found in medical education.

Some conceptual frameworks derive from theories or are considered theories themselves. This resource provides examples of 17 frameworks organized by topic: assessment, careers, communications, curriculum development, curriculum evaluation, learning, implementation science and well-being. While not exhaustive, the examples provide guidance to educators about how to think about the conceptual underpinnings of the practical problems they frequently address in their practice and scholarship. Also included is a tips sheet about finding and using frameworks. [Read more.](#)

▶ LEARNING ABOUT LEARNING THEORIES

Learning theory has been a contested scientific field for most of its history, with conflicting contributions from many scientific disciplines, practice and policy positions. With the continuing and disruptive influence of

technology on information, knowledge and practice in all sectors of society it is no wonder that innovators, drawn to the interactive potential that computers bring to learning, are challenged by the theoretical basis for their innovations.

Even in the higher, informal and professional sectors of education, complexity of education is matched by complexity of learning outcomes which may include:

- skills development;
- knowledge acquisition;
- improvement in strategic, analytic and creative capacities;
- attainment of competence;
- establishment of attitudes and values.

Each of these societal purposes and these learning outcomes demand different approaches and understandings for the theorist and may develop at varying rates or found to be diverse in relation to context, location and culture. This learning theories map was created by Richard Millwood and organizes major theories by scientific discipline, theorist and learning paradigm. The learning theories map can be downloaded [here](#).

DIGGING DEEP: THEORETICAL VS CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

Adapted from The Distinctions Between Theory, Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Framework by Lara Varpio et al. Academic Medicine.

This paper is for real theory nerds. Health professions education (HPE) researchers are regularly asked to articulate their use of theory, theoretical frameworks, and conceptual frameworks in their research. However, all too often, these words are used interchangeably or without a clear understanding of the differences between these concepts. Further problematizing this situation is the fact that *theory*, *theoretical framework*, and *conceptual framework* are terms that are used in different ways in different research approaches. In this article, the authors set out to clarify the meaning of these terms and to describe how they are used in two approaches to research commonly used in HPE: the objectivist deductive approach (from theory to data) and the subjectivist inductive approach (from data to theory). In addition to this, given that within subjectivist inductive research *theory*, *theoretical framework*, and *conceptual framework* can be used in different ways, they describe three uses that HPE researchers frequently rely on: *fully inductive theory development*, *fully theory-informed inductive*, and *theory-informing inductive data analysis*. To read the full paper, [click here](#).

DEVELOPING SCHOLARLY PROJECTS: PRIMER FOR MEDICAL TEACHERS

Adapted from Developing Scholarly Projects in Education: A Primer for Medical Teachers by T Beckman & D Cook, in Medical Teacher (2007)

Boyer and Glassick's broad definition of and standards for assessing scholarship apply to all aspects of education. Research on the quality of published medical education studies also reveals fundamentally important elements to address. In this article a three-step approach to developing medical education projects is proposed: refine the scholarly question, identify appropriate designs and methods, and select outcomes. Refining the scholarly question requires careful attention to literature review, conceptual framework, and statements of problem and study intent. The authors emphasize statement of study intent, which is a study's focal point, and conceptual framework, which situates a project within a theoretical context and provides a means for interpreting the results. They then review study designs and methods commonly used in education projects. They conclude with outcomes, which should be distinguished from assessment methods and instruments, and are separated into Kirkpatrick's hierarchy of reaction, learning, behavior and results. To read the full paper, [click here](#).