



PART ONE

BECOMING A PUBLISHED SCHOLAR

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CHAPTER 1

REASONS TO WRITE, WRITING OPPORTUNITIES, AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

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Neither my life experiences nor my academic experiences prepared me for scholarly writing and publication. When as a doctoral student I asked faculty how to write for publication, the response was vague. This set me on a path to learn how to write and publish. I continue to improve my writing by learning about writing and publishing. I do this by observing good writers, listening to authors talk about how they write, and finding colleagues to write with who are good at the craft. In this chapter, I discuss reasons to write, creating writing opportunities, learning to write, writing tips, and helping others write.

Reasons to Write

Writing can be a miserable chore, a difficult undertaking, and a challenge that produces growth and satisfaction—all at the same time. Hours, days, and sometimes months are spent just getting started. Scholars write for different professional and personal reasons, such as financial rewards, advancement, and joy. New assistant professors work at writing to keep their positions, to earn promotions, and sometimes to receive merit increases based on productivity. This might translate into the type of profit suggested in this quotation that a doctoral

student shared with me (Nielson & Rocco, 2002): “An article published in a major journal early in a career could be worth about \$25,000 in pay and benefits. A quality article in an important journal can mean a better job, higher pay over a long career with increased retirement and other benefits. . . . In hard cash, the average scholarly publication could be worth about \$200 a year for every year you work” (Phillips, 1982, p. 95). Although I question whether an article is worth this now or whether one publication—even in a significant journal—is sufficient for an increase in salary, a consistent publication record does have rewards. A well-placed and well-received article can generate other opportunities with a financial benefit, such as being invited to speak at a conference or other professional event, expenses paid.

An example of a publication providing monetary awards occurred with two students who were taking an adult learning course with me as an elective in their health education master’s program. This course has an assignment to write a paper following the guidelines for a local conference in hopes that students may want to submit the paper after they complete the course. My feedback on these papers is extensive and designed to increase the publishability of the paper. This pair of students revised the paper using my feedback, submitted it to the conference, and, using feedback from the discussion at the conference, revised the manuscript and submitted it to a professional journal. The paper was published and won the journal’s award for best paper. At a professional conference they attended, they were greeted as celebrities and offered positions as instructors for continuing education courses on weekends around the country. They made good extra money doing this and got a weekend getaway too. They have continued writing for publication. One of them successfully competed for a slot as a plenary speaker and an all-expenses-paid trip to a health conference in South Africa. They do not have doctorates. They teach at a community college, work in a health profession, and have become scholar practitioners. Students at all academic levels should be exposed to the techniques useful for publishing work so that they can contribute in their own way to their professions and society.

For me, the purpose of writing was first to secure a faculty position, then tenure, and then promotion. After that was accomplished, I engaged in writing projects to clarify ideas, explore areas, and contribute to the profession. While financial reward and professional advancement are reasons to write, most write to join the professional conversation (Rankin, 2001); others write because they “enjoy the power they derive from writing and the power derived from subsequent publication” (Henson, 1995, p. 3) to clarify ideas, explore new areas, contribute to the knowledge base, and foster professional relationships. While I can imagine some writers feel a sense of power or increased self-importance after publishing, there is also a sense of sheer joy and awe at seeing their name in print. Money, power, and joy are simply the emotional end products after the task of writing is completed.

Many people have something to contribute to the knowledge base, professional practice, or some insight others would benefit from knowing. Knowledge is lost because potential authors do not know how to join the conversation, do not know the rules for writing, and may be intimidated by the process.

Creating Writing Opportunities

Often writers write or otherwise create alone. I prefer to write with others; an opportunity to work with other scholars or practitioner scholars and learn from them or stretch myself because of the partnership is an important reason to write. Opportunities to write with others have to be created, developed, and sustained.

As a graduate student, I knew publishing was important, but I had no idea how one went about doing this. So I made it known to the faculty members in my program area that I wanted to learn how to write for publication. During my second year as a doctoral student, a professor invited me and another student to join him in an investigation of older adults and volunteering (Boggs, Rocco, & Spangler, 1995). This paper was presented at a conference where participants encouraged us to write about the unusual data collection method we used (Rocco, Spangler, & Boggs, 1998). These two articles set the stage for future opportunities to write with other faculty about older workers while still a student (Stein, Rocco, & Goldenetz, 2000) and collaborations with others later.

Faculty members are busy with many competing demands, such as writing and research projects, teaching responsibilities, service commitments, and work and advisement of other students. Creating writing opportunities as a graduate student is not as simple as just making it known to faculty and colleagues that writing for publication is important to you. Students should meet with potential collaborators to discuss ideas, share rough drafts, and invite participation, or ask to assist a faculty member with a project. Once a faculty member extends an invitation, the student needs to persist and in many cases proactively set up meetings to discuss the progress of the paper, come to the meetings with an agenda, and take notes. If the notes and agenda are filled with details in addition to keeping the project participants on track, they can become useful in preparing the outline, keeping track of research design, and becoming an initial draft of the manuscript.

Writing opportunities can be created by listening to speakers and making connections. Phyllis Cunningham, a matriarch of adult education, sat on a stage and told the audience loudly that white men needed to deconstruct their privilege. This statement resonated with me and with another student, and we began to contemplate privilege beyond race and gender. This resulted in a writing project that won the best graduate student paper award at a conference and was published as an article (Rocco & West, 1998).

Networking at conferences is another way to identify and create writing opportunities. Networking can occur in regular sessions, in the hallways, or in special sessions such as a preconference, a small, often intimate gathering of scholars meeting to discuss a single topic for an extended period of time. The nature of a preconference creates an atmosphere where collegial relationships and, in time, real friendships and writing partnerships can develop. Sometimes engaging a colleague on an issue in a paper he or she wrote is a way of forming a writing partnership to work on another paper where that issue becomes the focal point. Jasper van Loo, an economist, and I met at a preconference on continuing professional education (CPE). He was using human capital theory to understand CPE; during the discussion, I maintained that CPE and training are different and that I thought that human capital theory was being used inappropriately (van Loo & Rocco, 2006). This discussion resulted in our first coauthored article, a friendship, and other collaborations.

Other opportunities come in the form of a call for papers for special issues of journals or books. A call contains information about the project's purpose and what manuscripts should address in order to fit the purpose and be considered. Calls have due dates, and although the manuscript may go through a peer review process, acceptance rates for authors who produce a well-written manuscript that fits the purpose and is accepted for review are higher than for manuscripts submitted for consideration in a regular issue of a journal. The length of time to publication is generally shorter too.

Opportunities can come from having a manuscript rejected. If an author lets his or her ego get in the way, becomes angry, and sets the manuscript aside, the rejected manuscript may never be published. However, after the author overcomes his or her emotional reaction to the decision, careful consideration of the feedback can improve the manuscript. And the manuscript can be revised for submission to another journal or to fit a call for papers for a special issue of a journal or book. Sometimes, though, the original authors may need fresh eyes to revise the manuscript and invite a colleague to join the project. If a colleague is invited to assist with revising a manuscript, the same considerations that need to be made before starting a new project need to be discussed in this situation as well, such as author order, a work plan, and where the manuscript will be submitted.

Learning to Write

For most authors, writing is a process that is never perfected and never ends. Authors should strive to produce their best work, even though revisiting a manuscript after a period of time will always produce areas of improvement. If you

accept this, then you can work to improve your writing and produce manuscripts that require fewer and fewer revisions. Learning to write involves reading about writing, critically reflecting on what you read, discussing writing with others, and listening to authors talk about the writing process. Reading about writing can include books on writing for publication (Casanave & Vandrick, 2003; Huff, 1998; Kupfersmid & Wonderly, 1994) or about a specific part of a paper such as a literature review (Hart, 1998; Pan, 2004). Style guides such as the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (American Psychological Association, 2010) are rich with information on the technical aspects of writing. Articles and books read for content can also be read for style. The way authors organize text, sentence structure, and paragraph flow and develop an argument should be examined. If you find an author's work compelling or distracting to read, critically reflect on the style and techniques used to produce both good and bad work. Think about using the techniques of the good paper and eliminate the techniques of the bad paper from your own writing.

Writing discussions can occur when working on a project with a colleague as a natural part of the work. Discussions can also occur when people intentionally come together to discuss writing (Rankin, 2001). For several years, I have facilitated a discussion group at my university. Speakers engage the group on some aspect of writing, such as how to get publications from the dissertation (see Chapters Two, Three, and Six), how to write meaningful titles, finding voice (see Chapter Eight), or how to deal with rejection (see Chapter Eighteen). Group members also submit manuscripts to the group to review and discuss. No matter what field members come from, they can read for clarity, focus, and organization. Also, many useful suggestions for articles and books that could enhance a manuscript have been shared by colleagues from other fields. Anyone can start such a group, and anyone can benefit from the discussion. Making space to discuss writing can be as simple as a regular breakfast or lunch meeting with a colleague or two.

Listening to authors discuss writing can be done through a writing group on scholarly writing issues. Other sources are listening to interviews of best-selling fiction writers such as John Grisham or Stephen King, who talk freely about their writing habits, problems, and difficulties getting published. Both have shared that they have regular writing times and places where they like to write, one in an office at 4:00 A.M. and the other in a coffee shop. Others talk about how they conduct research, work out difficult plot lines, and create conceptual maps to keep the story moving. These skills are useful for improving any kind of writing, including scholarly nonfiction writing.

Working with coauthors, I have learned tips on using computer programs or tools on standard programs more efficiently. One learning experience came when a senior scholar asked two junior faculty to join her in responding to a call for

a special issue on inclusive education (Landorf, Rocco, & Nevin, 2007) because we were all concerned with social justice but from different perspectives. During the first meeting, we discussed the call for submissions, specifically what the editors meant by the language in the call and how we would address what the editors were looking for in a novel way. One coauthor captured as much of the discussion as she could by typing quickly on the computer. The document was almost ten pages when she sent it to us for comments. As it happened, we all opened our e-mail at different times during the day. The author who started work early in the morning inserted a purpose, advance organizer, and headings and added text using track changes. The next author built on the first revised manuscript, and the next author worked on the revision. Each draft was named using the date and version number. This pattern continued until the manuscript was finished in a month. We met together two other times to read through a version or discuss specific issues. The editors accepted the manuscript and requested very few revisions.

Writing Tips

Writing opportunities do not become publications without follow-through and a commitment to the project. Often deadlines are difficult to meet because of all the competing demands on our time. For example, communicating with coauthors and editors when there is a problem or providing regular updates on progress is time-consuming but required and appreciated by authors. Being on time is an even more appreciated behavior. Try to keep your commitments.

To-do lists are one way to organize projects and prioritize. My to-do list is now on an Excel spreadsheet with different pages representing long-term projects. For instance, one sheet contains information on each chapter of this book. Another contains all of the chapters, manuscripts, and conference papers I am working on under different category headings, such as “in process,” “in review,” “revise and resubmit,” “accepted with revisions,” and “in press.” As projects move through these stages, I move them into the different categories. I keep track of coauthors, who is doing what, when the project will require my attention, where we plan to submit, and due dates if there are any. I keep track of all the manuscripts I am asked to review on another sheet.

When I was starting out as a graduate student and later as an assistant professor, I used to keep an idea list using the outline function in Microsoft Word and could store much information about the idea in one place. Often we get good ideas but do not write them up or file them away when we get them. Some

writers carry an idea notebook with them everywhere, and when an idea comes, they write as much as they can in the notebook. A lot of time is wasted trying to remember that brilliant idea you failed to write down. Organizing your work and your ideas by having a system saves time and energy. A system where projects are organized provides information when making decisions about additional projects or when updating colleagues.

Once an idea has been generated and development has started, identify at least one journal to submit it. Thoroughly read the guidelines for submission and the information for authors sections, which are frequently published on the back pages of the journal or on the journal's Web site. Then search the journal for articles already published that are relevant to the manuscript you will submit. Review these articles for content that informs your work, and incorporate meaningful material into your manuscript, citing and quoting material appropriately. Also review these articles for style. For example, do the authors place the purpose of the article in the first paragraph or on the second page at the conclusion of a problem statement? Does the literature supporting the study come after the purpose or somewhere else? Do the articles use a lot of figures or tables? How is the research design described? Are the headings used traditional ones, such as "Findings," or more descriptive and related to the purpose and title? If you are concerned about inconsistencies in the flow and organization of the articles, ask the journal editor what article he or she considers excellent or which won an award.

If a journal rejects your manuscript, this does not have to be the end of the project. Incorporate the reviewers' and editors' feedback into the next draft. Often one of the reviewers will suggest another journal to consider submitting the manuscript to. Do not let your emotional response to being rejected stop your progress. Examine the suggested journal, read the guidelines for authors, and locate relevant articles to incorporate in your next draft. Every chapter author in this book has had a manuscript rejected, and most of us have revised that manuscript, publishing it in another journal or as a chapter in a book. Never discard or forget about a reviewed and rejected manuscript.

The organization and flow of a manuscript are enhanced when the title mirrors the purpose, and important concepts from the manuscript are used as headings. Headings should guide readers through the argument or keep them focused on the purpose. Sometimes I begin a writing project with an outline or by taking notes while I read, and other times I pull the headings out of the manuscript and put them in a document to ensure proper heading level (refer to the guidelines for manuscript submission and the style guide used by the intended journal on levels of headings), good organization and flow, and that they are worded in a

parallel manner. Authors need to pay attention to the organization and flow of the manuscript. Returning to a manuscript after it is finished to ensure that the text flows from one sentence to the next, that paragraphs build on each other and move readers forward, and that there are no puzzling sentences will improve the odds of acceptance for publication.

Crafting a manuscript takes time and patience. Slapping something together and calling it done increases the odds of a rejection decision and lengthens the time to publication. After several drafts and getting the manuscript to the point that I think it is done, I set it aside for a time and work on something else to clear my head. If I am writing alone, I read the manuscript page by page slowly and out loud. When I do this, I am paying attention to word choice, the relationship of words, and whether the words used are all necessary and add value. Reading aloud carefully can take an hour to read a few pages. When I have made fewer than a dozen minor revisions to a draft, I consider it ready to send to readers. I often send a manuscript to three people for feedback when I am writing alone. Different people who read my work catch different things.

When I write with colleagues, we come together when the draft is finished and take turns reading the paper out loud. We stop each other when something does not sound right. This can take twelve or more hours to do. Once we are done with the editing, the lead author usually checks the citations in text against the reference list and then the reference list against the citations in text. Another author then does the same check. At the end of this process, the manuscript is likely ready to submit, though sometimes we send it to a friendly reader. Reviewers can devote more time to providing feedback on substantive issues that improves the quality of the manuscript when they do not have to take time to provide feedback on technical issues such as a lack of focus, organization, and grammatical errors. The more polished the manuscript is when submitted, the more likely the authors are to receive a revise-and-resubmit decision or even an acceptance after the first review.

The review and publication process is naturally a long one. The only way to shorten the time to publication is to submit a manuscript that is well done. Although I always strive to submit a professional manuscript, reviewers nevertheless find areas that lack clarity, terms that should be defined, and connections that were not sufficiently developed. A revise-and-resubmit is good news. And time should be set aside to address the feedback from the editors and reviewers quickly.

Concluding Remarks

Writing projects are not just about reporting empirical research; some projects grow out of a commitment to a field or to help others. This book project began for me when I was a graduate student trying to learn how to write and out of a desire to

teach students this skill. When Tim and I got together, it was because of a problem in our field with the quality of manuscript submissions from novice scholars. We found that some programs were insisting on a manuscript submission from a dissertation, yet it was obvious that committee members had not provided feedback or guidance on the manuscript. Or the author took whole chunks from the dissertation or a class paper without any attention to the journal submission guidelines or what the journal published. Many journal editors in different fields share this concern with manuscript submissions that lack focus, attention to detail, adequate research design descriptions, and meaningful problem statements. We do not want to discourage such submissions; we simply want to improve the quality.

The goal of this book is to assist students, practitioner scholars, and all other scholars in improving their writing. If the quality of the manuscripts submitted to journals is improved, then editors and reviewers can focus on substantive issues in a manuscript, which can help raise the standards for all authors. Poorly constructed and executed manuscripts put additional stress on the system, making the submission-to-publication time line longer, hastening burnout of editors and reviewers, and perpetuating the inaccurate assumption that journal editors publish only well-known scholars.

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