

# Writing for Professional Publication: Three Road Signs for Writing Success

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In the first edition of *Writing for Publication: An Organizational Paradigm* (Buttery, 2010), I recommend a model for organizing theoretical articles. The process includes seven components: title, introduction, outline/advanced organizer, headings, transitions, summary and references. This article will focus on the writing process. The strands of pre-writing, writing, and the issue of editing will be covered.

## Pre-writing

Writing for publication is exciting. The more you write, the more you are forced to think through the process, dissect the components, and then synthesize new entities. But as you are getting started first and foremost think of yourself as a professional writer. Your job is to communicate information and potentially inspire other people to act. For most writers the most difficult part of publishing is generating a good topic. Many aspiring writers share a concern regarding how to generate publishable topics. If it were known, even the most experienced of writers share this concern; in fact, some of the most prolific writers worry more about this than do novice writers.

For new writers, the dissertation represents fertile material. Chapter Two should have included valuable review of research literature. As a doctoral chairperson all my candidates developed a publication record, and this was typically their starting point. Beyond the review of literature you have the outcome of your study. Next, your teaching offers an opportunity to publish clearer material for your students use. As you gain experience you will be involved with projects that merit articulation.

Attending conferences and listening for hot topics is a good outlet. Look through the program for ideas that interest you. You will find that many journals are thematically based, and they will provide a listing of forthcoming themes. Be on the front edge of the trend wave.

Totally original ideas are few and far between. Good writers are also readers. Reading allows you to glean what others are writing, and offers the bonus of keeping you abreast of trends in your field. Don't limit your reading to your precise discipline. Consider the ability to translate work from one discipline to another. The new audience probably did not do the reading you did or see the connection that you helped to develop. The late W. Clement Stone was fond of his personal creativity formula which he entitled R2~A2. Recognize, Relate, Assimilate, and Apply Principles from everything you see hear, read and think.

Leverage your valuable reading time; pick up ideas and writing techniques, clever introductions, quotations and examples, even details of punctuation and grammar. Notice how other writers use nice phrases. You may wish to copy some of these examples on a note card for future

use. Here are some examples of key phrases that you might be able to use later.

- A kaleidoscope of viewpoints exist about ...
- A similar viewpoint is offered by ...
- Furthermore ... reports that ...
- This strategy is the inverse of ...
- ... philosophy is shared by ...
- An applicable observation by ...
- In accordance with ... presented ...
- A disparity of beliefs exist on ...
- ... takes the stand ...
- In the words of ...
- ... makes a beautiful observation with her statement that ...
- This argument is supported by ...
- This conclusion is supported by ...
- Using the lens of ...
- In fact the research evidence is not sanguine concerning...
- More recently ...
- Such findings are highly congruent with ...

### **Writing**

New writers can get so absorbed in the need to publish that they overlook important considerations. You need to determine your audience and purpose. Your purpose in writing, the reader's purpose in reading, the material you will communicate, and the language you will use. Is your article directed at getting published or are you trying to share valuable information with an interested audience. If you are intending to share your article with other college professors, then you will have one set of assumptions regarding their background information; however, if you are writing for a classroom teacher audience, then a different frame of reference from the readers might be expected. Your purpose and writing style will greatly influence the journals that will be interested in your work. We will now examine some key components to writing a quality article.

### *Avoid Lengthy Introductions*

Lengthy introductions are a kiss of death. Few readers want to wade into a manuscript four or five pages without knowing what you are going to be cover. Be logical and sequential. Use a short two or three paragraph introduction to make clear what is coming. It is not necessary to provide the entire history of a movement as groundwork. As a reader for journal articles, if I don't know where the manuscript is going by the end of the second page I generally do not recommend that manuscript for publication. As an editor this is certainly the case.

### *Style*

Consider in advance which journals might be interested in publishing your manuscript. You should not put all your chickens in one basket. Select several journals that your material might fit. However, remember to only submit to one journal at a time. In the process of considering a journal as an outlet for your ideas take careful note of the documentation style of the journal and the length of the other articles in the journal. You should attempt to craft your manuscript to match the style of the journal you are interested in publishing. Be careful to use the documentation style of referencing that exists in your desired journal.

### *Be Logical and Sequential*

Use an organization that encourages a potential audience to read the article. Remember, like you, most educators are pressed for time and their reading tends to be "catch the highlights variety". Near the end of your introductory section outline or provide an advance organizer. Using an advanced organizer lets the reader know what to anticipate from the article. For example, in a manuscript on Spirituality the writer might convey, "To investigate the concept of Spirituality, this paper will provide illustrative definitions, explain four points of tension regarding divergent

definitions, and suggest a paradigm to organize definitions according to the worldview a definition affirms.” As readers, we know the organization of the forthcoming material. An additional example of an advance organizer might be the following. “Given the importance of the teacher-student relationship for establishing a sense of achievement and commitment, teachers must first believe in themselves; secondly, sustain positive attitudes; and finally help students develop a self-perception that will assist them throughout life.” Again as readers we now know the three main points of the manuscript. One more example follows. “The subtype Attention Deficit Disorder will be the focus of this paper, and the topic will be addressed from the perspective of: characteristics, etiology, medications, teachers’ dispositions, and instructional modifications.” Readers know the material that will be covered in this article. Once you have identified your advance organizer, use the key points to provide the headings and sections of the paper. The reader will have an anticipatory set for the information, plus they will be able to skim the manuscript for particular information that they are interested in. Having identified sections will help you as a writer to stay focused and avoid rambling.

### *Simplify Vocabulary*

Avoid excessive jargon and pedagogue. Too many esoteric words tend to obfuscate passages rather than provide clarification. Simple vocabulary works best; remember you are not out to impress the reader with your vocabulary or try and astound them with ninety-five cent words that they may not know nor will they stop reading and look up. Even small terms can be simplified. For example, substitute “use” for “utilize”. Rather than “commensurate with” use “equal to”. “Pertaining to” can be condensed to “about”. Readers can quickly identify pretentious-sounding word constructions, and this generally leads to a reduction in respect for the writer. The object is to have the reader learn content or a process from your article, not to enhance their dictionary

vocabulary. Here are some fun sentences that have rather clear simplifications. See if you know each saying, then check below for the answer.

- Similar sire, similar scion.
- Tenants of vitreous abodes ought to hurl no lithodial fragments.
- It is not proper for mendicants to be indicatrous of preferences.
- Cleave gamineous matter for fodder during the period that the orb of the day is refulgent.
- It is fruitless to become lachrymous because of scattered lacteal fluid.
- Compute not your immature gallinaceans prior to their being produced.
- Every article which coruscates is not fashioned from aureate metal.
- Failure to be present causes the vital organ to become enamored.

It is much easier to read the following sentences.

- Father like son.
- Those who live in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones.
- Beggars can’t be choosers.
- Make hay while the sun shines.
- Don’t cry over spilled milk.
- All that glitters is not gold.
- Absence makes the heart grow fonder.

### *Vary Verbs*

Writers’ use of verbs also contributes to the readability of their manuscript. Alternating between Williams states and Jackson finds is rather limited. It is helpful if you have a large repertoire of terms to use. Observe how others use terms. You can keep the terms on a sheet of paper attached to a file cabinet or bulletin board above your desk. I frequently come back and change my terms after I draft a paper. Here is a starter kit of terms for you to use.

- affirms
- agrees with
- adds
- advocate for
- advises
- accents
- accentuates
- acknowledges
- admits
- agrees
- alleges
- asserts
- assertions
- attests
- argues
- articulates
- avers
- avows
- believes
- claims
- charges
- cogent
- concludes
- concurs
- confirms
- considers
- consign
- contends
- convey
- corroborate
- creates
- deems
- declares
- demonstrates
- deny
- describes
- depict
- depose
- develops
- diminish
- displays
- discusses
- emphasizes
- encourage
- endorse
- establish
- estimates
- expect
- exhibit
- explains
- explicates
- expound
- expresses
- find/found
- finds support
- focuses
- fortify
- further asserts
- grants
- helps
- holds
- hypothesizes
- highlights
- illustrates
- indicates
- informs
- insist
- impeach
- is axiomatic
- is self-evident
- justifies
- judges
- key note
- leverages
- lucid
- maintains
- manifests
- notes
- observes
- patently
- pledges
- points out
- portrays
- posits
- postulates
- present
- proclaims
- professes
- propose
- provokes
- proves
- purports
- questions
- rationalizes
- reasons
- recommends
- relegates
- reflects on
- refers
- refutes
- refutes
- regards
- reports
- resists
- reveals
- show
- states
- strengthens
- stresses
- stipulates
- suggests
- subscribes
- supports
- suspects
- swears
- tell
- toils
- traces
- thinks
- underscores
- underlines
- understands
- urges
- vague
- validates
- verifies
- vexation
- views
- vitalizes
- vouches
- wishes
- wills
- wastes
- welcomes
- yields
- yet
- zealous
- zippy

*Invite reader involvement*

Effective writing causes readers to identify themselves with the writing; one technique is to ask questions. But for heaven sake, address the answers.

*Writing Good Paragraphs*

In the early part of the last century writers frequently wrote in long elaborate paragraphs. Those were the days gone by. Today readers prefer sprints to marathons. Vary the length of your paragraph without disturbing the continuity of your message. Full page paragraphs can lose your reader. Shorter paragraphs give both the eyes and mind a quick reprieve. However, keep in mind that too many very short paragraphs in a row can be distracting.

Language arts teachers tell their students there are three key parts to a paragraph the beginning,

middle, and an end. However, given the shorter nature of paragraphs that I am advocating, think in terms of writing with *Unity* and *Consistency* of paragraphs. Unity entails having one idea per paragraph and placing that idea at the very start. This informs the reader what the paragraph is about. Consistency refers to the coherence or that the sentences in the paragraph have common DNA to use a current term. The sentences should be related, connected and provide flow. The last sentence to longer paragraphs should provide a transition into the topic of the next paragraph.

One error to avoid is abstracting literature, one paragraph about what Smith offers then one about what Jones has to offer. Where possible attempt to integrate reference material to make your point. For example: “Just what is self-concept? Myers views it as those impressions, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and values that individuals perceive as describing themselves. Simply stated Hoff explains self-concept as that which individuals believe themselves to be.”

#### *Remember Punctuation Makes a Difference*

You may be familiar with the classic example of the professor who wrote on the white board, “Woman without her man is nothing.” He then directed the students to punctuate it correctly. The men wrote: “Woman, without her man is nothing.” The women wrote: “Woman! Without her, man is nothing.” Is there a difference? You bet! Here are some other classics.

- Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
- Prepositions are not words to end sentences with.
- And don’t start a sentence with a conjunction.
- It is wrong to ever split an infinitive.
- Avoid clichés like the plague. (They’re old hat.)
- Parenthetical remarks (however, relevant) are (usually) unnecessary.
- Also too, avoid repetitive redundancies.
- No sentence fragments.

- Don’t use no double negatives.
- Proofread carefully to see if you any words out or misspelled something.

#### *Make Your Key Points Visible*

Sometimes you can help the reader with subheads, italics, boldface, or by numbering your key points. Make use of margins and if the journal does not prescribe a font size consider submitting in 12 point type for easier reading. If a journal limits the length of an article to a select number of pages, avoid trying to submit in eight-point type. Edit the material to conform to the prescribed length. The reviewers and editor will notice.

### **Editing**

Good writers generate their ideas on the computer screen and then adjust their spelling and grammar. When drafting your paper do not avoid using words or terms because you are not sure of their meaning. Once you have drafted your work you may start the clean up process. When I first started editing manuscripts I had to be careful to check for spelling errors. However, today I rarely ever find spelling errors; what I do find is incorrect words. When you mistakenly type in a real word spelled correctly, the spell check will not identify it as an error. You need to carefully read over your material for these types of errors. Another problem is that with the ease of cutting and pasting, some authors forget that they have already used a passage and repeat it in another part of the paper.

All writers have their own set of carefully cultivated bad habits. Have peers proof read each manuscript prior to submitting it for review. If you are the type that needs a pat on the back for having just written the manuscript, find that type of reviewer first. Then have someone who will point out the areas that are in need of rewriting. Beyond having them check for mechanical errors, have them assess the logic and flow of the

manuscript. Problems of logic and flow are the number one reason that I see articles rejected.

Keep in mind that when others edit your writing, they may make suggestions for changes. Ultimately, it is up to you to accept or reject the suggestions. However, do keep in mind that there are a limited number of journals available. You do not want the journal reviewers finding problems that your peers could have pointed out and you could have corrected before a rejection occurred.

### *Rewrite*

A good manuscript, like a painting, emerges gradually from conceptualization to completed product. Painters block out their work and then gradually fill in the material. If they don't like a particular color scheme they will paint over it and try a different blend. Today's word processing affords tremendous opportunities to get your ideas down and then massage them.

Check for the length of your sentences. A good rule is that a sentence over three lines should be divided. When attempting to smooth out the wording of my manuscript and create better flow, my most used tool is the thesaurus - both the book version and computer copy. Good writing requires much revision before rough edges are worn away and the material reads coherently. The time spent word smoothing or tuning an article pays high dividends when it comes to the acceptance rate.

### *Practice*

Good writing is a skill, and skills need to be cultivated like good cooking. You can read many cook books, but in the final analysis it is practice that makes you good. Writing skills that are cultivated over time never become obsolete. The transference of these skills into memo writing and letters only enhances your professionalism.

Consider it is through change that we grow, and anything worth doing is worth doing poorly until it can be done well. The famous motivational speaker Zig Ziglar is fond of saying that "your natural resources" unlike the natural resources on planet earth, will be wasted and used up only if they are never used at all.

### **References**

Buttery, T. J. (2009-2010). Writing for professional publication: An organizational paradigm. *SRATE Journal*, 19(1) 1-5.

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