

SOMETHING TO SAY: WRITING FOR PUBLICATION

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Publication, if successful, is exhilarating! Aspiring academic scholars recognize the contribution that peer-reviewed publications make to their careers. It identifies their engagement with their discipline. For students, the benefits of publishing a paper include bolstering their levels of confidence and knowledge and demonstrating to them how they can contribute to their chosen profession. However, inexperience can cause trepidations of the unknown or negative emotions when the writing and publication process goes amiss. Described in this paper is the background, structure, content, and limitations of a writing workshop the authors initiated during a recent conference. The purpose of the workshop was to aid both academic colleagues and students in publishing articles in peer-reviewed journals. It was designed as an introductory interactive session to stimulate conversation about the publishing experience.

For new academics, the experience of writing for publication is valuable for career development. This article reports on the background, structure, and limitations of a writing workshop the authors conducted during a recent conference. The purpose of the workshop was to aid both academic colleagues and students in publishing articles in peer-reviewed journals. It was designed as an introductory activity for participants to the publishing process. However, exploring the structure and activities of the workshop itself may contribute to knowledge of teaching and learning, which was one of the conference themes.

BACKGROUND

Most graduate programs in Canada require that students obtain competence in scholarly tools involving speaking and writing for dissemination of knowledge. They write numerous papers during their educational programs, usually to demonstrate learning about a topic. There are reasonable and clear expectations arising from differences when writing for publication versus course requirements; however, many graduate students receive little education in writing for publication (Gibbs, Boettcher, Hollingsworth, & Slania, 2012; Kamler & Thomson, 2014; Wingate, & Tribble, 2012). Many course assignment papers are consequently not suitable for publication, yet graduate students seeking to move into academic positions often look to these course papers as a stepping stone to publication.

For academics, an important way to advance one's career is through publication; it enables them to enhance the evidence base that underlies best their professional practice and to obtain research funding. Gibbs (2016) wrote that even accomplished academics find it challenging to keep publishing. One reason for this challenge was identified by McAllister, Mosel Williams, Gamble, Malko-Nyhan, and Jones (2011) who wrote that the pressures of teaching are escalated

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when leaving and retired faculty colleagues are not replaced, which reduces the resources available for faculty to put into publication. Yet academics who publish contribute to the reputation of their university by demonstrating its research capacity. The World University Rankings (-) published yearly provides documentation specific to research intensity and knowledge transfer uses citations, in terms of volume and impact, as a performance indicator.

For both groups, there are other demands upon their time, (e.g. family, committee responsibilities, research assistantships), that can impact the time and space required to write and publish. Research findings have indicated that academics who are successful at publishing their work are not necessarily less busy than their colleagues, but they do find it easier to set aside other tasks to focus on their writing (Mayrath, 2008). Chyun and Henly (2016) wrote “inexperience and competing interests in the high-stakes endeavor of academic publishing can generate a quivering of negative emotion when the process goes awry” (p. 1). It was the recognition of and personal experiences with these challenges that generated the idea for the workshop. The workshop was offered to participants of the University of Calgary Conference on Postsecondary Learning and Teaching, May 2018.

STRUCTURE OF THE WORKSHOP

The three objectives of the workshop were to:

1. introduce new writers to the publishing process,
2. provide information and guidance about preparing to publish, and
3. initiate a community of practice for novice writers.

These objectives were in alignment with the conference theme of improving teaching and learning practices through collaboration and dialogue. To achieve these objectives, an interactive workshop was conducted. We began our presentation by having participants complete a number of charts located on the walls of the room to do a quick assessment of their writing focus and experiences with writing and publishing.

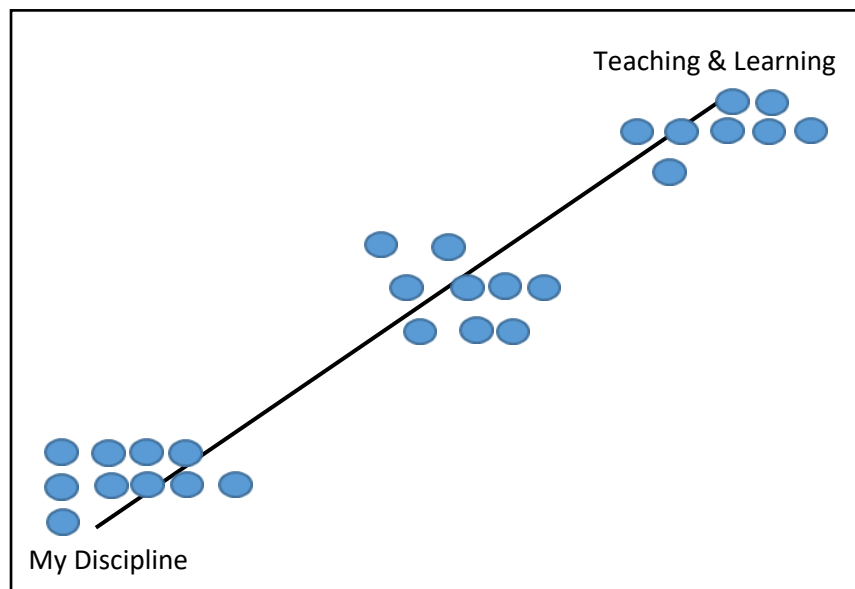


Figure 1. Workshop wall charts: writing focus and publishing experience. Indicate your writing focus.

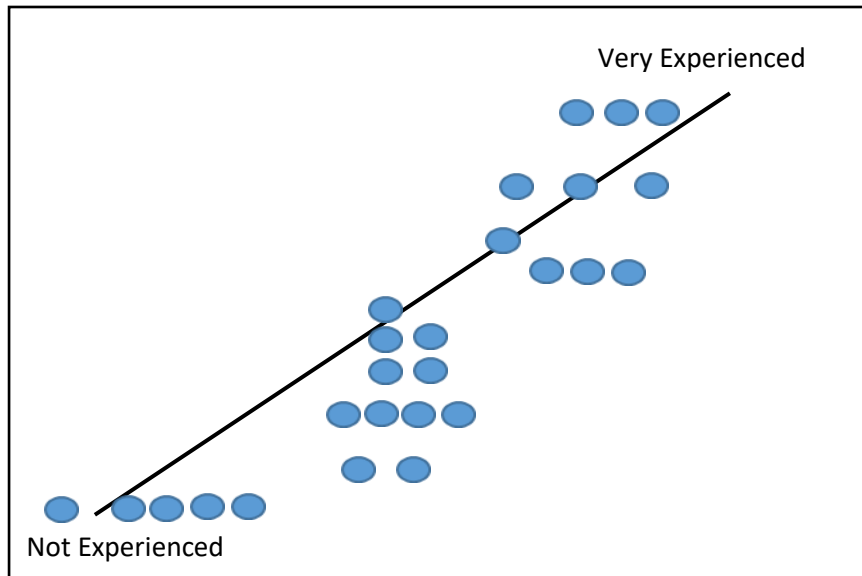


Figure 2. Workshop wall charts: writing focus and publishing experience. Rate your experience in writing for publication / publishing experience

To enhance engagement and interaction, conference delegates were invited to indicate their writing focus and publishing experiences (Figures 1 and 2). The purpose of this exercise was twofold: 1. To provide an opportunity for individual reflection on focus and experience; and, 2. To guide the facilitators with a baseline of participants' experiences. We quickly determined participants were focused on a continuum of 'discipline specific' to 'teaching and learning', with a trend towards teaching and learning. It was also a quick assessment that most of the participants were not as experienced with writing for publication and this information guided the level of detail in the workshop. It was also evident, from their comments, that this was an interesting start to the workshop. We felt that it triggered conversation among participants and engaged them in the workshop.

WORKSHOP CONTENT

The roles and responsibilities of the publisher, editor, author, and reviewer contribute to the publication experience. Consequently, the perspectives of these four stakeholders were provided to participant by the workshop facilitators. Each facilitator took a role that they were familiar with and provided a brief description of the role, followed by questions from participants. It was felt by the workshop facilitators that exploring these roles would help participants understand how a submitted manuscript moves through the publication process. This appeared from participants' comments to be a valid assumption.

The Publisher's View

The publisher has considerable power to shape the content and form of the final publication.

Knowing Publication Avenues in your Discipline

The decision to write a book or a journal article is often a challenge. It may be difficult to decide the question of co-authorship or acknowledgement. There are benefits to both approaches,

perhaps influenced by timing. Authorship confers credit, and has academic and sometimes financial implications. It also implies responsibility and accountability for published work. All individuals who qualify for authorship or acknowledgment should be identified. Conversely, every person identified as an author or an acknowledged contributor should qualify for these roles (Council of Science Editors, -).

Each journal addresses a distinct audience, requires a specific writing style, referencing format (such as APA, Chicago, or MLA), and has specific Guidelines for Authors. The publication prospects for a beginning academic are enhanced by a serious review of the best possible source for a manuscript. Visit your library and explore the journals in your discipline of interest. Consider the audience, the writing style of articles, and the type of articles published. It is important to consider practical things such as impact factor, perceived journal quality, print or online options, and possible fees for online journals. Also keep in mind the time it takes for accepted manuscripts to be published. Acceptance is of little academic or career value if the article is to be published 2 years after its submission.

The Editor's View

The editor selects manuscripts suitable for publication while rejecting unsuitable manuscripts. It is their responsibility to decide if a submission is to be sent out for peer review.

Following Guidelines for Authors

Journals provide submission guidelines that are essential to giving a manuscript the best possible chances for acceptance. These guidelines for authors, or author instructions as they are sometimes termed, are often published directly within issues of the journal or can be downloaded from websites. Not following these requirements can result in outright rejection of a submission, so chances of publication are increased by following the Guidelines for Authors precisely in the manuscript preparation.

Communicating with the Editor

Communicating with a journal editor can often set the stage for publication. Their role includes the selection of content, and their feedback will often indicate publication interest. Some editors like to receive queries before submission as it permits them to provide developmental feedback (Chyun & Henly, 2016). Fear that the writing is not good enough for publication, fear that others might think less of the writer, or fear of rejection are reasons for delays in writing and publication success. Successful writers learn that when it comes to writing, criticism is a "kindness." Those hoping to publish should find the "kindest" colleagues possible to obtain their feedback. Responding appropriately to honest, helpful feedback on content, style, and clarity greatly increase the possibility that a manuscript will be accepted by reviewers and subsequently published.

The Author's View

The author's goal is to have one's article read by numerous readers and cited by other authors. Authors should carefully read the aim and scope section of the journal before selecting a journal for manuscript submission. Typically, they want their manuscript to be accepted to a journal listed in high-profile databases and one with a high impact factor. There are no foolproof rules for success in writing and subsequently publishing a manuscript. However, a number of

strategies can be used to increase the likelihood that a manuscript will be accepted for publication.

Thinking and Crafting

Deciding upon the purpose of the manuscript is a critical first step in the publishing process. If you are uncertain about a possible topic spend a short time reflecting on it, perhaps several days. Do a quick search of the literature to ask yourself if your idea or approach is redundant or creative. Consider who your audience is: who do you want to read your article? For example, writing for researchers in your own discipline is different than writing for practicing teachers who may be from a variety of disciplines.

Creating Time and Place for Writing

When one starts a faculty position, the tenure clock is started. However, the increasing amount of responsibilities of new faculty members means that they tend to fill their time with activities with which they are most comfortable. To make certain that the publication progress is preserved in a busy schedule, we suggest authors dedicate a specific time and place for uninterrupted writing. For example, dedicate 3 to 4 hours on designated days (e.g., 2–5 p.m. on Thursday) for writing. Perhaps select early morning hours for writing. While designating a specific time and place is a good start, do not be deluded in thinking occasional interruptions will not hurt. If you choose your office on campus for your writing times, a sign on your closed office door stating “Unavailable” could produce publication results. The same suggestions about dedicated time and place to write are also useful to graduate students. They might differentiate for themselves, time for assignment writing as part of their course work and time for writing for publication.

Demonstrating Responsible Authorship

It is not the role of the editor to correct grammatical and spelling errors. Use common available tools such as a spell check. There are also programs available for purchase, for example, Grammarly, and several applications offer free versions with limited functions.

Responsible authorship also acknowledges the authenticity of the manuscript’s content. Sikes (2009) wrote that plagiarism “can occur ...because of negligence or misunderstanding of citation conventions” (p. 14). In addition to plagiarizing someone else’s work, one must also be aware of *self-plagiarism* that often occurs when one tries to “recycle” one’s own ideas or data from previously published manuscripts without appropriate referencing or acknowledging the publication(s) of other previously submitted papers. Some journals, such as the *Oxford Academic*, include a *Code of Ethics for Authors* document on their website in addition to the regular *Instructions (Guidelines) for Authors* information. This *Code of Ethics for Authors* clearly defines self-plagiarism and how to minimize the chances of self-plagiarism. Further, an increasing number of universities and journals invest in plagiarism detection programs such as Turnitin.com. Authors can utilize them diligently for each manuscript submission to ensure its originality.

Deciding Whether to Author or Co-author

Authorship poses challenges for graduate students and new academics. Consider single versus multiple authorship. Writing manuscripts with colleagues may result in higher quality manuscripts than single-authored works. As a graduate student, a first step into the publication field is to write with your graduate supervisor or a course professor. One way to do this is to

make it known to your supervisor that you would be interested in co-authoring. You receive co-authoring credit and you learn about publication basics, as well as use your advisor's connections and expertise to increase your chances of publication success. Such co-authoring prior to completing a degree is helpful if it is timed so that your article is published with the affiliation of your first academic position.

For new academics, co-authoring offers an opportunity to learn from each other, to enrich the content through discussion, and to develop collaborative working relationships. For students and academics alike, a written agreement between authors provides direction to the writing process and should include a detailed description of the responsibilities of each. This is best done prior to starting the manuscript writing.

The Reviewer's View

The reviewer is a key player in the manuscript processing and publication process. The peer review system is an important component of academic publishing, and it is vital in helping editors to decide whether or not a submitted manuscript is suitable for publication. The reviewer's responsibilities include protecting the integrity of a specialty, the reputation of the journal, and adherence to accepted ethical research practices, as well as treating the author's manuscript with respect, fairness, and impartiality (Peh & Ng, 2009).

Conducting a Review

Reviewers evaluate manuscripts following journal guidelines for authors. Submitting a 10-page, single-spaced manuscript when the identified guideline is 10-12 pages double-spaced is not appropriate. In a close reading of the manuscript, reviewers are looking for the strengths of a manuscript and evaluating the merits of the work. They are aware of concerns that may be evident in the writing, such as undeveloped aspects of the research design or a lack of alignment with research questions, and conclusions. Reviewers also pay particular attention to the suitability of the article for publication based on the scope of the journal and the subject matter of the article.

Peer reviewers provide an important academic activity. It is a voluntary role; undertaken to provide service to their colleagues within the academy and specifically within their discipline. Peer reviewers serve their colleagues in three important ways: firstly, they view from within but provide a perspective from outside (they are experts in their disciplines, but as the peer review process is blind, they are looking at a paper objectively as 'see' from outside). Secondly, they act as mentors through providing constructive feedback on academic work (they help us to make our papers stronger). Finally, reviewers act as quality gatekeepers (a service from which we all benefit as the integrity of our disciplines and reputations are enhanced by this process).

With regards to the reviewers' functions, it is important to remember that reviewers are also authors. They have been in the same position as you; they know what has been invested in a piece of academic work, and the anxieties most of us experience knowing our work is the subject of critique. It is therefore important to remember that peer review feedback must be recognized as a constructive and not destructive exercise. A reviewer may make a suggestion to revise a passage or seek clarification of a concept or point (clarification is especially critical in the theoretical passages and in theoretical papers). Overall, the reviewer's main objective is service to their peers and their academic discipline. It is therefore recommended that feedback and suggestions for revisions to authors are taken in the light of the intent.

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Wenger, Trayner, and de Laat (2011) defined a Community of Practice (CoP) as a “learning partnership among people who find it useful to learn from and with each other about a particular domain. They use each other’s experience of practice as a learning resource” (p. 9). One example of a CoP is a faculty writing group. Such groups provide mutual support in the publication process (Brandon et al., 2015; Kent, Berry, Budds, Skipper, & Williams, 2017) by allowing group members to negotiate ideas, navigate the writing process with others, and resolve challenges that may arise. Introducing the possibility of a CoP provided a strategy for participants to discuss the process of writing in a nonthreatening environment. The acquisition of ‘know how’ through conversations with colleagues was anticipated. Kent et al. (2017) suggested that the success of such communities is based on three factors: a formal structure, co-located writing in a shared space, and conversation among peers. Bringing individuals together will advance the collective understanding of the writing and publication process.

LIMITATIONS

The 45-minute length of the workshop challenged the facilitators to introduce the theme but prevented us from in-depth conversations with the participants. It was also a single event within a conference schedule and provided little opportunity for enhanced conversations about specific strategies to help novice writers move forward in the publishing process. While the possibility of a CoP was explored with participants, taking specific action towards its implementation was not pursued at the time. However, the facilitators agreed to explore the option of offering a series based on the Conference workshop to the University community. Another limitation was the lack of a formal evaluation of this type of introductory to manuscript writing activity. Informal feedback at the end of the session was positive from participants but lacked formal comments. A brief evaluation form would have been beneficial for the workshop facilitators.

CONCLUSION

Writing for publication can be a rewarding experience. It is both art and science. The art is in the style of writing, and the science is in the skill of writing. This article has described a workshop conducted to support emerging writers. We provided information and guidance about how to prepare for publication and helped both emerging and experienced writers consider the different perspectives of the four stakeholders in the publication process. It was designed as a single event to initiate conversations about writing for participants.

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