

# How to Feed Your Friends & Seduce Your Editors: Writing and Reviewing for SoTL





## Seducing Your Editors: SoTL Writing Tips



### *Choose a Topic*

1. Choose a topic, pose a question, or investigate a problem that can be investigated empirically, theoretically, or critically. Zoom in. And get comfortable.
  - a. Start with a teaching approach that you are good at, or interested in, or struggling with.
  - b. Consider yours and others' interests.
  - c. Consider your discipline and its teaching demands.
  - d. What do you already know about your topic? Talk it out. Map it. Daydream. Note-take.
  - e. Collaborate with colleagues both in and out of your department. Many faculty assume that all instructors "teach the same way," which is rarely true.

**NOTE:** Unless you are writing a reflective journal or teaching blog, never simply describe a teaching approach you enjoy. Your editors and reviewers expect you to embed your idea in existing literature, connect your practices to existing theories, and assess their effectiveness with data/evidence, always within a conceptual framework.

### *Review the Literature*

2. Review existing literature – books, journals, newsletters, blogs, magazine articles.
  - a. Relate and be relevant: How will your work contribute to your practice, your colleagues, both within your university and beyond, and to the study of teaching as a whole?
  - b. Once you've collected your resources, cite your references.

### *Collect Data*

3. Decide whether you will collect qualitative, quantitative, or both types of data. Good scholarship involves assessment of *any* sort, and SoTL is no exception. Just be sure that the method you use best addresses your topic/problem/question.
  - a. If necessary, obtain approval from your institution's ethics review board.
  - b. Collect credible data as evidence, using either affective, process, or performance measures. These can include Likert scores, comments on instructor evaluations, surveys and questionnaires, mid-semester feedback, and more. Basically, collect evidence of student learning. Yes, case studies appear to help students in law, for example, learn complex legal theories better than lectures, but can we prove it?
  - c. Involve your students as co-researchers. Their insight is valuable.
  - d. Seek support from past students. Many students do not realize the effects of more non-traditional approaches to teaching, i.e., inquiry-based learning, until long after the course is completed.
  - e. Research does not end with data collection – analyze, write, consult, reflect, collaborate, and if necessary, collect MORE data.
  - f. Draw reasoned, supported conclusions.

### *Know Your Audience*

4. Learn about the world in which you write.
  - a. Be wary of disciplinary language and style differences. SoTL is unique in that it crosses all disciplinary boundaries, without excuse, without apologies, without direction. In many cases, your readers will not already know what you are telling them.
  - b. Do not over-acronym. There is no need to shorten common (SC) phrases (P). SC words or P will only confuse your reader, who may not be familiar with well-known disciplinary jargon.
  - c. Identify appropriate journals. Read them – learn what they publish. Review the author’s and reviewer’s guidelines. Ask questions when you are unsure. Know your audience.

### *Get Started*

5. Don’t give in to the pressure of the “first line.”
  - a. Just jump in with what you already know – a review of the literature, a title, even your biography – just start writing.
  - b. Prepare an outline.
  - c. State your hypothesis or question at the very start.
  - d. And write. Re-write. Rest. Write. Re-write.

### *Review Your Writing*

6. Be wary of first impressions. Mind your title – be sure it is not too long or too short, but appropriately reflects the paper’s main argument. And remember, as you write, your title is not set in stone.
7. Always include an introduction and a conclusion. In your introduction, you can always demonstrate an understanding of how your work relates to past literature – put yourself in the game. And in your conclusion, summarize your main points, your results, what your reader must take away from the paper, and possibly end on a quote, a question, or a future area of interest. Leave your reader wanting more.
8. Use headings and subheadings to help with organization. You can always remove extras if they aren’t necessary in the end.
9. Find out what citation style the journal uses, and adhere to it, strictly. The Purdue Online Writing Lab ([owl.english.purdue.edu/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/)) is a great citation resource.
10. If the journal requires it, include an abstract, and keep it short.
11. Wear your Sunday best. Your paper will be reviewed by national and/or international scholars, editors, and copyeditors – PROOFREAD before submitting.
12. Share your drafts with your colleagues – they will help you catch errors, misconceptions, gaps before your editor does.
13. After writing your paper, do away with it for a while – and if deadlines permit, a long while. When you come back to, read it from the perspective of someone who doubts your claims.

**And don’t worry: no one is an expert!**



## Feeding Your Friends: SoTL Reviewing Tips



### *Confirm or Pass Along*

1. To commit or not to commit – act fast.
  - a. Whether you agree to complete the review or not, notify the editor.
  - b. Admit your limitations. The editor will decide whether the paper is better reviewed by someone else.
  - c. If you cannot meet the review deadline, decline the request.
  - d. Note and report any conflicts of interest. This includes anything that might unfairly affect your view of the manuscript, either positively or negatively.

### *Know Your Role*

2. Learn your mission, and know your role.
  - a. Before reading the paper, review the reviewer's guidelines. If you receive no instructions and are unclear about your role, ask for more information.
  - b. If a rubric is provided, use it. Review rubrics are primarily used so that editors can be sure their reviewers comment on specific and desired criteria – for example, topic, relevance to the field, methodology, conclusion, etc.
  - c. Remember, you are the reviewer, not the author, not the copyeditor, not the proofreader. Don't be so picky. You can comment on the writing, but don't make your decision solely based on a few grammatical errors.
3. Be constructive, and comment on the good and on the bad.

### *Find the Point*

4. Right from the start, look for the point. Is the topic, research question, or problem clearly stated?
  - a. Be sure you know the paper's main point early into the introduction.
5. Is there reference to existing literature on the topic?
  - a. Are the sources current and relevant?
  - b. Do the authors cite and reference their sources?
  - c. Do the authors make unreferenced major claims?

### *Assess the Evidence*

6. Do you understand the argument, position, or point? And if so, do the authors use the right type of evidence to support their claims?
  - a. If the manuscript uses a study to support an argument or claim, be sure to look for any ethical problems and whether the authors have research ethics approval. Also, note whether the authors included a copy of the study instrument or questionnaire.

7. Is there a conclusion or summary?
  - a. Are the conclusions supported by the evidence?

### *Make a Decision*

8. Make a decision – we want to know the bottom line. Rather than discussing your opinions and forcing the editor to guess your overall recommendation, state it at the end of the review.
  - a. Defend your decision.
9. Keep it confidential. While under review, the manuscript is a confidential document. Do not discuss it with your colleagues without permission from the journal.

### *Saving Face*

10. Remember, most of us are not taught how to be effective peer reviewers. We learn to review by imitation. Do not bark your way through a review. Be as constructive and objective as you can lest this bruised and battered author becomes your future SoTL reviewer.
11. Be courteous and critical and kind. And start on a good note. Authors are more likely to respond well to reviews if the first comment they read is positive. Bury the bad in logic. Try not to annihilate authors – good ones are hard to find.
12. Before completing your review, be sure to review tables, figures, and citation style. Also, comment on the presentation and writing. Though these issues are not necessarily deal breakers, they are fairly important to the revision process.
13. Number your comments. This helps the authors when responding and the editors when reviewing responses. Be sure to indicate which comments relate to which parts of the paper.
14. Don't get personal. Stay focused on the paper, and not the author, and not your own research or publications.
15. Send your review in on time. And if you must miss the deadline, let the editors know in advance.



## Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: A Staff Exploration of Reflexive Learning



Teaching and learning in higher education is in crisis as economic pressures change the funding models of many universities. Staff development has been a growing concern internationally, with increasing pressure from stakeholders within the institution and beyond. There has been growing demand for accountability from the government, students and employers. As a result, there is increasing need for effective assessment practices. Support has come from grassroots groups such as POD, SEDA and STLHE, and has also been supported by government through bodies such as HEA in England. The literature shows that one highly effective way of developing is through reflexive activities. Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) has the opportunity to provide a reflexive activity that contributes to new understandings of the profession and of the individual (Boyer, 1998).

### Criteria for Manuscript Review and Selection

1. Contribution to scholarship and/or effective or innovative practice(s) in higher education.
2. Presents original ideas or results supported by evidence.
3. Supported by existing literature.
4. Relevant and useful to the intended audience.
5. Clear, coherent, and well-written.

Comments for the author(s):

Evaluation:

1. Accept without changes
2. Accept with minor changes
3. Resubmit with major changes
4. Reject



## Chocolate Exercise





### **Introductory Resources**

- Boyer, E.L. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*. New Jersey: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Glassick, C.E., Huber, M.T., & Maeroff, G.I. (1997). *Scholarship assessed: Evaluation of the professoriate*. New Jersey: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Hutchings, P. & Shulman, L.S. (1999). The scholarship of teaching: New elaborations, new developments. *Change*, September/October, 1999, 10-15.
- Shulman, L.S. (1999). Taking learning seriously. *Change*, July/August 1999, 10-17.
- Shulman, L.S. (2000). Inventing the future. In P. Hutchings (Ed.), *Opening lines: Approaches to the scholarship of teaching and learning*. Menlo Park, CA: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

### **Other Useful Resources**

- Bass, R. (1999). The scholarship of teaching: What's the problem? *Inventio*, 1(1).
- Randy Bass discusses the *problem* in teaching research. This article is a great resource to help writers and researchers learn how to identify problems worth exploring and solutions worth implementing.
- McKinney, K. (2007). *Enhancing learning through the scholarship of teaching and learning: The challenges and joys of juggling*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kathleen McKinney provides practical tips on how writers can move their projects forward, and from there, how they can make their SoTL projects public. She includes a helpful set of questions on "getting started" (p. 26-27) and spends a majority of the book answering them in multiple ways along with questions and further reading.
- Poole, G., Taylor, L., & Thompson, J. (2007). Using the scholarship of teaching and learning at disciplinary, national and institutional levels to strategically improve the quality of post-secondary education. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 1(2), 1-16.

This article is a great summary of the important elements required for the continual improvement of post-secondary education: an understanding of good teaching across disciplines; use of well-collected data to inform decisions that can affect change; and access to the SoTL projects across disciplines.



## **STLHE Journals**

### *The Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CJSOTL)*

CJSOTL is the official journal of the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. It is an open access online journal dedicated to publishing quality peer-reviewed articles and essays in French and English that address teaching and learning interests of universities and colleges across Canada. Website: [www.cjsotl-rcacea.ca](http://www.cjsotl-rcacea.ca)

### *Collected Essays on Learning and Teaching (CELT)*

CELT is a peer-reviewed journal which accepts submissions from STLHE conference presenters wishing to publish the essence of their workshops and concurrent, round table, and poster sessions in essay form for a wide readership interested in teaching improvement practices in higher education. CELT accepts articles in both English and French. Website: [celt.uwindsor.ca](http://celt.uwindsor.ca)

*And others...* To find journals that publish articles on SoTL from a variety of disciplines, see the following lists of general SoTL journals:

University of Windsor's List: [www.uwindsor.ca/ctl/research-and-dissemination-opportunities](http://www.uwindsor.ca/ctl/research-and-dissemination-opportunities)

University of Waterloo's List: [cte.uwaterloo.ca/research\\_on\\_teaching\\_and\\_learning/index.html](http://cte.uwaterloo.ca/research_on_teaching_and_learning/index.html)

University of Guelph's List: [www.tss.uoguelph.ca/resources/idres/periodicals.pdf](http://www.tss.uoguelph.ca/resources/idres/periodicals.pdf)

Illinois State University's List: [ilstu.libguides.com/sotl](http://ilstu.libguides.com/sotl)

State University of New York – Buffalo State's List: [www.buffalostate.edu/orgs/castl/publish.html](http://www.buffalostate.edu/orgs/castl/publish.html)

Kennesaw State University's List: [www.kennesaw.edu/cetl/resources/journals.html](http://www.kennesaw.edu/cetl/resources/journals.html)