

WRITING WELL: WORKSHOP OUTLINE

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- Who am I? (me, my work, my positionality, and the various places my PhD has taken me)
- Why is WRITING SO HARD?
- Top tips for successful writing
 1. Construct a smart structure.
 2. Construct smart paragraphs.
 3. Write a good topic sentence.
 4. Ensure you're writing what you're thinking.
 5. Elegantly weave in sources ... and cite *as you write*.
- Is writing for a grant the same as writing for an academic publication?

WHY IS WRITING SO HARD?



- The following are, give or take, in the top 10 reasons people start late, waste time, get distracted, fail to meet deadlines, etc. so you're normal! You're not alone!
- Can't address all these in detail tonight, but we'll tackle some.

1. Fear of failure/rejection.
2. Lack of belief in self (I don't have a good idea; I don't know how to write).
3. I'm not in the mood to write (probably linked to points 1 & 2).
4. I can't get started (also probably linked to points 1 & 2, or possibly point 7).
5. I can't find the time. I've got six jobs, nine kids, two dogs, [fill in the blank].
6. I write slowly and it doesn't seem to get anywhere.
7. I get distracted by the Internet/Netflix/Disney+/Prime/Tubi/Plex/Crave/Instagram/X/TikTok, [fill in the blank].

FEAR OF FAILURE/REJECTION? LACK OF SELF-BELIEF? WRITE ANYWAY!

Anthony Hopkins, actor (also painter, composer, writer, & Insta-hero):

“I act as if everything is possible. I act as if I believe. Even if sometimes, you know, you always have doubts, but when the doubts come, just push through and believe that it’s going to work. **Act as if it is impossible to fail.**”

<https://www.ft.com/content/7214ea00-a4b7-460a-8c29-e580e9d89d7f>

NOT IN THE MOOD? CAN'T GET STARTED? WRITE ANYWAY!

- You can change your mood:
 - Applied behaviour analysis theory: **emotion follows action**—it's not the other way around (i.e., action follows emotion)
 - It's not "I'm depressed and therefore I won't act, i.e., write"; it's "I'm going to act, i.e., write, and therefore I won't feel depressed")
 - In other words, just start doing it and the feelings will follow (and since you're doing it, your feelings should be positive: excitement, relief, sense of accomplishment, etc.)

NOT IN THE MOOD? CAN'T GET STARTED? WRITE ANYWAY!



TOP TIPS

1. **Make something you'd rather do contingent on doing some writing first.**

In other words, let the “something you'd rather do” be the reward for having gotten started. For example, tell yourself you CANNOT check Instagram or read the headlines on the BBC until you have written for 30 minutes.

2. **Don't torture yourself by comparing yourself with others who seem to write better and/or more quickly.**

Those people are the exceptions. Most people write slowly and most people's first drafts are really messy.

Even if it's *bad* writing, it's better than *no* writing. Editing can come later.

Repeatedly reading and revising your work to strengthen it makes you a good writer, it's not the mark of a bad one.

TOO BUSY? KIDS, DOGS, JOBS? THE STRUGGLE IS REAL ... BUT WRITE ANYWAY!

- This is truly tough – let's not deny that.
- There is no easy solution, but, if there's no way out (dogwalkers, childminders are cost-prohibitive, job schedules are demanding):
 - **Focus on the few breaks you do have (sorry) and use that time.**
 - **Write for 30 minutes after you put the child(ren) to sleep and before you start cleaning up.**
- *There is no evidence to suggest you need major chunks of time to write.*
 - To the contrary, multiple studies show that writers who produce a little bit each day are more successful.
- **Design your schedule to allow 30 minutes a day of writing.**
 - By seeing 30-minute segments and knowing that there are many precedents for succeeding like this, you may not be stalled by the thought that there just isn't time.

TOP TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL WRITING

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1. Construct a smart structure.
2. Construct smart paragraphs.
3. Write a good topic sentence.
4. Ensure you're writing what you're thinking.
5. Elegantly weave in sources ... and cite *as you write*.

1. CONSTRUCT A SMART STRUCTURE

- Write your outline:
 - What's your thesis statement/research question?
 - What is in the existing literature?
 - What's your research methodology?
 - What are your main supporting arguments/findings?
 - What are your recommendations/conclusions?
- Start with an outline those (or other) points and **STICK TO IT**.
 - By sticking to your script, you'll ensure great clarity and avoid repeating yourself.

MORE ON SMART STRUCTURES



- A well-structured essay has **UNITY** and **COHERENCE**
- **UNITY** → every part of the essay relates to and supports the thesis sentence/research question.
 - Check for unity with this question:
 - **Is *everything* I write—right down to examples and details—relevant to the thesis statement/research question?**
- **COHERENCE** → every part of the essay moves easily/logically from one thought to the next.
 - Check for coherence with these questions:
 - **Do ideas follow in a clear, logical sequence?**
 - **Is the relationship between each idea obvious? (i.e., Have you clarified for your reader why you moved to point B from point A?)**

MORE ON SMART STRUCTURES

- SMOOTH TRANSITIONS BETWEEN PARAGRAPHS!!!! – show the logic of your structure with clear transitioning phrases.
 - The first sentence of each paragraph needs to tie into the last sentence of the previous paragraph so that there is a smooth transition for the reader.
 - The second and the third body paragraphs should be structured in a similar fashion as the first body paragraph. They both need to begin with a sentence that ties into the last sentence of the previous paragraph.
 - Again, this is to provide a smooth transition from paragraph to paragraph so that all the paragraphs fit together easily as a whole.
 - SHOW HOW YOUR IDEAS ARE CONNECTED. HOLD YOUR READER'S HAND AS YOU MOVE FROM POINT A TO POINT B (PROVE YOU'RE LOGICAL!)

2. CONSTRUCT SMART PARAGRAPHS.

- Think of every paragraph as a mini essay—one that has unity and coherence!
 - **A successful paragraph has 3 qualities:**
 1. **Unity – one idea (topic sentence)**
 2. **Coherence – its parts should be clearly related**
 3. **Development – its main idea must be supported sufficiently with specifics or details**

MORE ON SMART PARAGRAPHS



1. Unity

- A paragraph should have a topic sentence that states the main idea clearly.
- Each paragraph should usually begin with a topic sentence, and every single sentence in the paragraph should contribute or relate to the main idea.
- If a sentence does not relate clearly to the topic sentence, throw it out.

2. Coherence

- A paragraph is coherent if its details fit together in a way that readers can easily follow.
- Coherence can be achieved by organizing ideas logically: make sure each sentence is clearly related to the one it follows (use transition phrases if necessary to show the connection).

3. Development

- A paragraph should explore its topic fully, using details and evidence.
- Illustrating a point with concrete examples can help to develop paragraph's main idea (topic sentence).

MORE ON SMART PARAGRAPHS

- Your paragraph should be long enough to do justice to the main idea of the paragraph (to its topic sentence).
- Sometimes a paragraph will be short; sometimes it will be long.
- If your paragraph is shorter than 5 or 6 good, substantial sentences, then you should reexamine it to make sure that you've developed the ideas fully.
 - If you are worried that a paragraph is too short, then it probably lacks sufficient development.
 - Does your paragraph raise any questions you haven't answered?
- If you are worried that a paragraph is too long, then you may have rambled on to topics other than the one stated in your topic sentence.
 - Do those topics need to be deleted or can you divide the paragraph into two or three (with smooth transition phrases!) for greater clarity and coherence?

3. WRITE A GOOD TOPIC SENTENCE.



- A topic sentence is your mini-thesis in a single paragraph: make sure your paragraph has one!
- **Top tip#1:** make your topic sentence clear and simple. Start it with a subject and keep it to one or two clauses. If it's more than one clause, start with the *main clause*.
 - E.g. "I work out every day because I want to live forever." (not "Because I want to live forever, I work out every day.")
- **Top tip #2:** Open your paragraph with your topic sentence. This isn't a hard and fast rule, but it will help you with clarity/logic/coherence.

MORE ON WRITING A GOOD TOPIC SENTENCE

- If you need to develop a topic sentence in more than one paragraph, you still want to have a topic sentence in the new paragraph (think of it as a sub-topic sentence): that is, be clear about the main reason for the new paragraph.
 - E.g., topic sentence in para. #1: “Reconciliation is only possible when non-Indigenous people commit to deep listening.”
 - Para. #1 may proceed to define deep listening.
 - The next paragraph (#2) may explain *why* deep listening is central to reconciliation.
 - So, the *why* will be your topic sentence for paragraph #2: “Deep listening is central to reconciliation because it fosters empathy, which in turn fosters understanding.”
 - Para. #2 will then develop this topic sentence, but it hasn’t lost sight of the goal, which was to support the topic sentence in the previous paragraph.
- When you’re editing your work—and you MUST leave time to edit your work—make sure you can spot a topic sentence in EVERY PARAGRAPH.

4. ENSURE YOU'RE WRITING WHAT YOU'RE THINKING.



- **AVOID OVERLY LONG SENTENCES.**

- Clues that a sentence is too long:

1. You've joined too many thoughts together
2. You've used lots of punctuation
3. The sentence contains two mini-sentences joined by *and* or *but*
4. The sentence contains lots of these words:

After, although, because, before, if, since, so, though, when, which, who

- **MAKE SURE YOU EMPHASIZE YOUR MAIN POINT IN A MAIN CLAUSE.**

- Emphasize your most important information by placing it in main clauses and your less important information in subordinate clauses

- E.g., “Old lovers go the way of old photographs, bleaching out gradually as in a slow bath of acid.” – Margaret Atwood

MORE ON ENSURING YOU'RE WRITING WHAT YOU'RE THINKING



- **AVOID PASSIVE WRITING.**

- *The man was bitten.* [passive voice]
 - The above sentence lacks specificity. Who bit the man?
- *The dog bit the man.* [active voice]
- Sentences in the active voice are usually easier to understand than those in the passive voice because active voice constructions clearly indicate who did what to whom.
- In addition, active voice sentences are usually more concise. (The man was bitten by the dog = 7 words; The dog bit the man = 5 words)

5. ELEGANTLY WEAVE IN SOURCES ... AND CITE AS YOU WRITE.



- **Introduce your direct quotations with a few words of your own and signal the quote is coming with a signal verb.**
 - Doing these things provides context and clarity and shows you're *engaging* with sources rather than *leaning* on them.
- **Choose one verb tense to introduce your sources and stick to it!**
 - Usually present or present perfect:
 - Jodi Wilson-Raybould **calls** on readers to adopt “three core practices of true reconciliation: learn, understand, and act” (2022, p. 19).
 - Jodi Wilson-Raybould **has called** on readers to adopt “three core practices of true reconciliation: learn, understand, and act” (2022, p. 19).
- **Exception:** when reporting on a study that is concluded, use the past tense even if you're using present or present perfect for everything else.

5. ELEGANTLY WEAVE IN SOURCES ... AND CITE AS YOU WRITE.

Cite as you write!

- If you're not using citation software, put in your sources as you go (in-text citations/footnotes AND bibliography).
- Every time you get to the end of a paragraph, update your citations/bibliography for that paragraph.

IS WRITING FOR A GRANT THE SAME
AS WRITING FOR AN ACADEMIC
PUBLICATION?

IS WRITING FOR A GRANT THE SAME AS WRITING FOR AN ACADEMIC PUBLICATION?

- No, and also yes.
- Yes: same rules apply about clear, coherent writing.
- No: See next slide

IS WRITING FOR A GRANT THE SAME AS WRITING FOR AN ACADEMIC PUBLICATION?



ACADEMIC WRITING

- **Scholarly pursuit:** individual passion
- **Past-oriented:** writing about work that has been done
- **Theme-centred:** theory and rhetoric
- **Expository rhetoric:** explaining to your reader
- **Impersonal tone:** objective and dispassionate
- **Individualistic:** primarily a solo activity
- **Few length constraints:** verbosity rewarded
- **Specialized terminology:** insider jargon

GRANT WRITING

- **Sponsor goals:** service attitude
- **Future-oriented:** writing about work that is going to be done
- **Project-centred:** objectives & activities
- **Persuasive rhetoric:** “selling” the reader (the funding body)
- **Personal tone:** conveys excitement (but don’t sound deranged/immature)
- **Team-focused:** feedback needed from co-PIs & other collaborators
- **Strict length constraints:** brevity reward/required
- **Accessible language:** easily understood

Special thanks to <https://www.merrimack.edu/wp-content/uploads/grantwritingvsacademicwriting-slidespdf.pdf>

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE GRANT WRITING

1. **Give Yourself Adequate Time.** Successful grant writing is not done at the last minute. Literally give yourself months.
2. **Read the Guidelines.** Be realistic: Is your project a fit for the funder's deadlines and objectives?
3. **Write Clearly and Directly.** Answer the questions as directly as possible. Thoroughly outline the steps that will be taken, key individuals involved, and partners engaged. (Relatedly, assemble the best team & boast about them in the application.)
4. **Yes To Number 3, But Don't Be Boring (Write Persuasively).** Create a sense of urgency: why is your project so timely? Prove a case for novelty and significance. Clearly state the intended—and important!—outcomes of your project.
5. **Foresee Barriers.** What problems could arise during your project? How are you planning on overcoming those? Address these frankly in your application.
6. **Create a Realistic Budget.** Research the real cost of activities, services, materials, fees, and equipment. Make sure that the project budget is a direct translation, in fiscal terms, of the project narrative you have spun.
7. **Get Feedback.** Bring your amazing team into the application process. They're the experts too. Make sure that you provide adequate time for this process.
8. **Triple-Check Instructions and Deadlines.** Do not put so much hard work into a grant application only to miss important instructions or, worse, the deadline!