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Wymann, Christian

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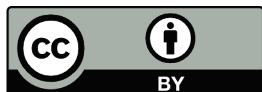

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Introduction

Are you minding your writing? Are you deliberately taking the myriad decisions that academic writing asks you to take? Do you know yourself as a writer well enough? Not at all, or not as much as you wish? I thought so. Why else would you pick up this book?

Don't feel ashamed. We all have our writing weaknesses that we don't want to look at too closely – or that someone else will detect. Don't hide yourself, because that won't make your situation any better. As painful as it might be, looking at your writing weaknesses – as well as strengths – with an analytical and professional gaze will make you a better writer.

Yes, you read that correctly: *professional*. Professionals analyze what works and what doesn't work for them in order to find solutions for better performance in the future. Whether it's business, music, sports or writing, you can always improve something that didn't work out the way that you thought it should. Instead of dwelling on your hopes, high or low expectations or day dreams, let's pause for a minute or two and get down to the problem and solve it. This is what professionals do; this is what you should do. The alternative of acting as if you had no problems and carrying on as usual wouldn't sound alluring, if you knew what could potentially await you: the pain of writing, frustration, anxiety, guilt, stress, pressure and far more unsatisfying mental states. Get hold of yourself and

accept reality. Let's be frank and clear: you need to know what you're doing when writing.

Who can benefit from this book and how will it help them?

If you're reading this, I expect that you're one of the following: a student in an institution of higher education, a PhD candidate, a postdoctoral researcher, an established researcher, or any other kind of serious and/or professional writer. They tend to be my primary audience; at its core, their writing includes some sort of researching and processing of information. They engage in communicating new knowledge that others will work with and react to.

I will ask you some of the most fundamental and simple questions about writing and being a professional writer. These are the questions that I ask my clients in counseling sessions and workshops. Regardless of whether they are first-year bachelor students, PhD candidates or established professors with years of writing experience – they all profit from answering these questions, and so will you. With these questions I want to initiate a reflexive process that lets you take a step back from your actual work. This will help you to see what is going on in your writing life and what needs improvement or radical change. Having thought about the questions, including others that may occur to you during this process, you will change how you think about writing and about yourself as a writer. You will establish a solid base (but not inflexible, mind) upon which you can learn, improve and grow in the future.

After reading this book you may end up like some of my clients: they may not remember exactly what the counseling session or workshop was about (or my name, for that matter), but they will be haunted by the questions and the answers that they discovered for themselves. To be honest with you, I sometimes have to remind myself of some of the insights I have gained in the past, in order to solve a problem (sometimes my girlfriend takes on this task in a rather unsentimental tone).

I want you to have your own individual answers to these fundamental questions for long term use. Your answers should help to make you a skilled and flexible writer, meaning that you can adapt to different writing situations and deal with any writing problem that may come your way. As a byproduct, you will become a more satisfied and happier writer who enjoys the challenge that writing poses. No longer will you perceive writing as some version of your own personal hell; writing will become an obstacle course that you know you can master. This will feel different, I can guarantee you that.

In short, I want you to take full responsibility for your writing. Take charge and make decisions, instead of relying on others who might have the noblest of intentions but don't have the answers or solutions you need. What the writing process looks like, how and why you take writing decisions, and how you act and feel as a writer is entirely up to you. Because, in the end, it's you who has to defend your texts; nobody else will be responsible for what you have chosen to do (except your co-authors, who are equally invested, of course).

What you can expect from this book

I will keep it as short and as concise as possible. You shouldn't spend more time reading this book than necessary. You should rather read about what you need in order for you to get going and then return to your writing. That's why I suggest that you read this book selectively: pick what you need and move on. Don't feel guilty if you don't end up reading the book from cover to cover.

In discussing the questions and their possible answers, I will be drawing on the experience of my clients and other writers (including myself). Sharing others' experiences may help you reflect your own problems and solutions. Apart from that, the examples should show you that you aren't alone. Everybody faces writing challenges from time to time. Acknowledging that may lift your spirits – "a problem shared…" and all that. It may also help you to avoid doubting your own character or psyche. Since all writers have struggled with writing, it's fair to conclude that it isn't because every writer is incompetent or dumb, but because writing is intrinsically a difficult and complex thing to do (see Zinsser 2006).

1. Why do you write?

Why, oh why! It sounds like a heretical question nobody asks themselves or others for fear of the writers' inquisition. For many writers, though, this question could prove crucial. If you ask yourself this question from time to time, you will discover more about your motivation. Motivation is key when it comes to being happy with what you're doing, and with being successful. Insufficient motivation will lead you in many directions, but ultimately not to where you're meant to go. And even if you do end up in the right place, the process of getting there may have been a nightmare.

Remind yourself of something we all consider once in a while: life is short and anything can happen to end it. I know that sounds harsh; it's nevertheless true for us all. And because life is so short, it's a waste of your time and energy to spend it doing things that you don't want to do. Hence the question: Why would you want to spend time and energy sitting in front of a computer screen or a piece of paper to write? Are there no other things that you prefer to be doing? I can think of many and yet I sit down regularly and write about things I know and have learned.

My motivation to write has changed many times since I became able to hold a pencil. From "I have to because my teacher says so" in primary school, to "I have to in order to get a decent grade" in high school, to "I have to and somehow also want to because I want to succeed in my studies" at university, to "I want to get a PhD" and eventually:

"I want to because I like the challenge and I want to communicate things that others can learn from." If I can't write on a regular basis – due to lack of a new topic to write about, illness, my kids sucking up my time and energy – I'm missing out on something and can become grumpy at times. Especially after having completed a book project without having something else to write, I suffer from Post Publication Depression. Thinking back to the times when writing felt like hell, this change in motivation motivates me even more.

So, again, why do you write? Is it for a degree, for reputation, because you have to (due to some extrinsic motivators), because it's your life's essence and without it you would shrivel up and die, or some other reason? No matter what motivates you or how your motivation changes over time, from project to project, you should be clear about it.

Your motivation may have two layers: a *fundamental* one that does not change for longer periods of time, on the one hand (my fundamental motivation has held true for the last six years), and a *project-dependent* motivation on the other. The latter will not likely conflict with your fundamental motivation, but may shift your focus.

Here's an example of the second kind of motivation: one project motivates you because it offers an opportunity to communicate with influential experts in your field. Another feels like an obligation (your superior asked you to do it), although you see the potential for some kind of institutional kudos for it. Yet another project annoys you because it's on a topic that you're no longer actively researching or working on. You may be doing a colleague a favor and want to get it over with in order to spend more time on more motivating projects.

Knowing your motivation for a new project and knowing if it goes against your core motivation puts you in a good position to stay true to your academic self (it sounds cheesy, I know), and to reject the project or modify it to the degree that fits your motivation.

2. What do you think your writing can do?

Does this question sound awkward or trivial? Then it's definitely something that you need to consider at least once in your career as an academic writer. As far as I understand, many (novice) writers don't have an adequate answer.

First, let's ask this question in a completely different context: what do you think carpentry does? Yes, carpentry produces furniture, windows, doors and many other everyday things made out of wood and other materials (at least that's what I understand as the son of a former carpenter). Of course, every carpenter would give you a more elaborate answer, but that's what it boils down to.

First answer

So, what does writing do? What can your academic writing do? It certainly can't produce the chairs and tables you're putting your bottom and laptop on. What it does produce is nevertheless equally useful. Writing produces communication. I know that's a self-evident statement, as you're reading the very words that I have written, communicating my ideas to you. But do you apply this knowledge to your writing? Herein, I think, lies the crux.

Students and novice writers (as well as the old guard) need reminding that their writing should communicate

information to others, the writer's audience. What many university curricula fail to include is teaching students to do just that. That's why I want to make sure you know the answer to this 'trivial' question. With the wrong answer or concept, your writing might go awry – and you would never know why.

Writing in academia functions as a means of communication in order to address specific audiences about themes, problems, question, theses, hypotheses or insights. You not only want to talk to them at conferences and meetings, but through your elaborated and 'disciplined' writing. By writing you enter a conversation about a research topic with your own contributions. Failing to address your audience appropriately means you're not playing the game of academic communication according to its rules. If you wrote only for yourself and tried to publish your text, you would fail. You have to make sure that you're writing for others and taking your potential reading audience into account.

You see, the question isn't that trivial after all. It's, in fact, the backbone of science. If you want to participate in science, you have to communicate your research in some form and play according to the rules. Texts in the form of journal articles, books, book chapters and more represent the primary media of academic communication. Those who claim to have done research but didn't or couldn't communicate it properly won't be seen as part of the scientific conversation. Be a pro, know what your writing can do, as well as why and how.

A second answer

The first answer is likely something that many writers would eventually conclude. A second answer, however, will be equally relevant to you. Writing not only communicates information to others, it also helps you to record, work with and reflect information to yourself. Phrases such as "writing to learn" or "writing as research"/"research as writing" imply as much. Throughout the entire writing process, which we will look at in the next chapter, you're using writing as a means for different ends. It's a multifaceted tool that externalizes your thoughts, and allows you to forget and then return to the information.

Writing thus not only produces communication in the form of texts, but also represents the medium through which thoughts become communication for different purposes.

3. What does the term *writing process* mean to you?

You have heard the term *writing process* many times, I assume. Maybe you even used it when talking about what happens when you write – at least, I hope that that's the case. Many of my clients know more or less what their writing process looks like. However, few of them would say that they consciously choose one way or another to navigate the process. That's why I want you to think about it now; it could make a difference for the rest of your writing career.

Menace, joy or neither?

Before we dive into the details of the process, let's answer the following questions: What are your thoughts in general about the writing process? Do you fear the process; see it as a menace? Or do you enjoy it and welcome the learning opportunities that it offers? Or are you indifferent and just want to get it over with? Do you have the same thoughts and feelings about each writing project or do they differ depending on the type of project? If so, what makes the difference?

Whatever you think or feel about the writing process, identifying it matters. It's similar to the question of motivation: if you know how you feel and think about the upcoming process, you will be better prepared to deal

with problems that may arise which are caused by your thoughts and feelings.

Understanding the process and its components

What does the writing process imply or encompass for you? What are its components, phases or steps, however you want to name them? In order to answer these questions, it helps if you draw your typical writing process as schematically as possible. A flowchart or a comparable sketch on paper will do the trick. (Alternatively, you can draw the last writing process you went through.)

As I can't see what you have drawn or whether you have simply doodled around a coffee stain on the sheet of paper next to you, I want to tell you what the writing process ideally includes.

- In the *orientation and preparation phase* you can figure out what you need to do. Either you will define the writing project yourself or you have received a writing task from someone else. In both cases, you need to make sure that you're set to do the right thing. This means that you need information such as a deadline, an idea of whom you're writing for (your audience), the length of the text, formal requirements, citation style and more. In this phase, you will plan the process ahead of time (hopefully), explore the research topic, problem or question for the first time, search for literature, and, if required, work on a proposal to be approved before you really start.

- In the *research phase* you will need to do all sorts of research. Depending on the topic, your proficiency and the goal of the text, you can either read a bunch of books and papers or immerse yourself in the world of empirical research of some sort or another (doing interviews or surveys, crunching numbers and analyzing them statistically, etc.).
- In the *structuring phase*, you will need to determine how your text will be structured. The structure will depend on the discipline/research field or the requirements of a publication outlet or institution. As is widely known, people in the humanities need to come up with their own text structures; scientists mostly follow the same old tried-and-true IMRaD structure. If you belong to the lucky latter ones, don't celebrate too early. You will still need to figure out how each of the parts of your paper will be structured internally.
- The phase many writers dread: the *writing phase*. In this one you will write a first draft. It sounds simple, I know, but lots of people find it painful.
- The *revision phase* allows you to work on your first draft. You will revise and rewrite parts, chapters or the entire text one, two, three times or more.
- A phase that many people forget about or neglect, but shouldn't leave out, is the *feedback phase*. That's when your colleagues and other peers tell you whether your text works the way it's supposed to and what, in their opinion, you should change, avoid, think about, etc. This phase might be as painful as the writing phase, because it's here that you will discover how much work you still need to do.

- In the *proofreading and formatting phase*, you will do some more work on the final version of your text. This includes all the small stuff like checking grammar, typos, layout, improving the graphics and tables, checking the citations and so on.
- At the end, only one phase remains: the *submission phase*. Before you submit (or resubmit) your text, you will go through the requirements again, make sure that you're sending the document to the right address, and check everything else that needs to be done, before you push the SEND-button (not many letter boxes involved anymore, I guess), and then start cheering.

I didn't include all the other things that will happen when your text has been accepted. However, I think most of what happens between submission and publication could be squeezed into one of the phases mentioned so far.

Maybe you noticed that I didn't number these phases. I tried not to create the impression that one phase need necessarily follow another. Except for the *orientation and preparation* phase at the beginning, and the *submission* phase at the end, there is no right or wrong order of the phases in-between. The questions you need to ask yourself – ideally every time you start a new writing project – are: which of these phases will you go through and in which sequence? That's part of the planning to be done in the orientation and preparation phase.

You won't only have to figure out the sequence of the phases; you should also be aware that you may need to go through a phase more than once in the process. Depending on how you want to work on your text, you could switch between research, writing, revising and feedback

for each of your planned chapters, for example. The process would no longer be as linear as the list above might suggest. Rather, you could choose to build the four phases into cycles. Similarly, you could choose to wait to structure your text until you have a first draft. In the end, it all depends upon your writing strategy (more on that in chap. 4).

Deconstructing the phases

Here is another question that you should answer: What do each of the phases just mentioned encompass on their own? Do they imply sub-phases and sub-steps? And in which order should you go through them? How many times?

Let's take a look at the *revision* phase. When I ask most writers what revising means to them, they tell me something about proofreading and editing. They can't specify exactly what they're doing, they just do something, somehow, that appears to be *revising*. That's a possible approach, but not the best one. They don't seem to deliberately decide what they want to do in the revision phase. That doesn't sound efficient and effective to me.

If you break down the revision phase, you will see that it can encompass various separate tasks. Here is what you can revise in a text (this isn't an exhaustive list):

- Structure: Overall, in each chapter, in each paragraph
- Content: Anything redundant or unnecessary? Anything missing? Anything wrong?

- Arguments: Are they valid? Are they supported by evidence, references, etc.?
- Technical terms: Do I use them consistently? Do I define them sufficiently?
- Style: Is the style appropriate for the audience? Is it academic? Does the text contain everyday phrases not fitting the required style?
- Language: Do I use the right words? Are there words I can do without, because they represent 'word clutter' such as certain adverbs (e.g. very, often, a lot) or adjectives (e.g. huge, interesting)?
- References: Do I refer to all the studies I want/should? Is it always clear who has said what?
- Hedging/Boosting: Do I carefully and deliberately use hedges in order to tone down statements, or boosters to make claims stronger? Or do the words (again) represent 'word clutter'?

You have to decide what you want to revise in your text and how you will do it. You profit from having a clear plan of how you want to spend the revision phase, otherwise you could end up wasting time and neglecting some aspects while favoring others to work on. Your text should appear and sound consistent throughout, for which you need a systematic approach. I know, it sounds like a lot of work, but it's worth it.

Whether it's the research phase, the feedback phase, or any other, you will do yourself a favor if you know what you're doing beforehand. The more deliberately you take decisions about the process and its phases, the more efficiently and effectively you will work.

The fallacy of separating research from writing

Did you wonder why *research* constitutes a phase in the writing process? In your opinion, should research (aside from the reading part) constitute a process in itself, separate from the writing process? If you want to believe that, go ahead, but be aware that this separation could create problems for you.

Once, a PhD candidate in economics left in the middle of my workshop. Before he left, we talked about the writing process. I explained to everyone why I understand research to be part of the writing process. This participant didn't agree with me and told me why he thought the two are separate. While I don't mind people disagreeing with me, I didn't like his choice to leave. He was the only one in the group that was in his sixth year of his PhD and nowhere near completion. He was the one challenged by the transition from research to 'writing it up'. I think that part of his problem was that he considered research and writing to be two separate things.

When I talk about the writing process, *writing* has a broad meaning. Writing, as implied above, includes everything in the process and especially every activity by which we record information on paper or electronic document in order to retrieve it later: notes, excerpts, memos, survey questions, statistical data, lab protocols, first tentative drafts, the proposal and more. Writing, thus, does not only include the writing of the text that you're going to submit or publish (which happens in the writing phase). Different forms of writing pervade research – whether

reading the literature, doing experiments, surveys, field-work, data crunching, data analysis or visual presentation in graphics and tables. That's why I think research can't be separated from writing. I would also like to argue that one *should not* separate the two.

I hear a lot of complaints about the transition from research to writing. When my clients tell me more about the challenges they face, it becomes obvious that their idea of research and writing as separate processes make their work harder than it needs to be. If you read a lot of the literature on your topic without taking notes or making summaries or excerpts, then you aren't using the full potential of writing. Equally, if you gather data without augmenting the process by writing about it in some way, you forgo a chance to record important information you will need later on in the actual writing phase (e.g. for your method section).

The idea of the research and writing process as intertwined may sound like a minor detail, but it has consequences. I want to give you three reasons why research as an integral part of writing (or vice versa) makes sense.

First, you constantly write things down when you're researching, but I assume that you aren't as deliberate and systematic as you could be. The more consciously you use different sorts of texts to accompany your research – searching and reading literature; conceptualizing, preparing, performing and analyzing your empirical research – and archiving them for easy retrieval and use, the more you will benefit later on in the process.

Second, by writing down insights, questions, thoughts and so on, you provide your brain with new food for mental work on a regular basis. You train yourself to think and

write about your topic, concepts, methods, etc. Neglecting this, in contrast, may lead to what I experienced during my PhD: as soon I tried to sit down and write the actual paper that I was supposed to submit, my writing was quickly blocked, because I lacked the training I needed in order to write about my topic. Equally, you will not yet know whether your ideas work on paper if you don't experiment with describing them. Don't waste time only doing research; use it wisely by engaging with your research in written form.

And *third*, since you have written and archived so much, you will have a large foundation of different texts to support the transition from researching to actually writing the text that you will submit. You will not start with the infamous blank page or screen. You can draw from all of the summaries, excerpts, insights and everything else that you made note of. Some of the material can be rearranged and revised, while other notes just represent the start of a new thought that can now be worked out.

4. What's your writing strategy?

Now that you know more about the writing process, its phases, their sub-phases and your previous understanding of them, we should also look at your writing strategy.

What is your writing strategy? Is there one that you apply every time you need to write something? Or do you change strategies from project to project or even within a project? Do you perhaps combine different strategies without knowing it? And do you choose your strategy, or does it simply happen one way or another?

As indicated in the previous chapter, you can proceed through the writing process in a myriad of ways. None of them is better than another; it's a matter of whether or not it works. Having a writing strategy means knowing how you will go through the writing process.

Different books give you different numbers and names for strategies. I'm going to present five strategies that I have found useful and have been used by writers. These strategies don't describe what happens in all of the phases of the writing process; they focus on the structuring, writing and revising phases. Each strategy possesses certain advantages and disadvantages that you should be aware of, should you use one or more of them. The more you know, the better you can control the outcome of the process.

Planning strategy

Every writer has to come up with a plan for their text. Any text, especially if it's academic, needs a structure in order to communicate research well. The planning strategy means that you will work out a plan or structure for your text, from the broad to the detailed elements (in your head or on paper/screen), before you even think about starting with the draft. As soon as you have your plan, however, you're ready to fill in the gaps. Strict planners start with the first page and work through to the end. They revise their text afterwards. Many writers can't start without a plan and therefore, deliberately or not, apply this strategy.

Having a plan and structure is helpful in allowing you to keep focused on what it's that you're setting out to do during the writing phase. You can always go back to your plan and see if you're still on the right track.

While writing you will learn more about your topic, gain a different understanding or have entirely new insights. In this case, however, your plan may no longer be the right one for the text and you might need to alter it. But have you not worked so hard to come up with this plan only to have to change it now? You may be reluctant to scrap things after all of this work. As you can see, a fixed plan could create a dilemma and get you stuck in process.

Another disadvantage – or outright risk – that might affect you in the structuring phase itself is: what if you spend too much time on figuring out how you want to build your arguments and present your results? After weeks or even months of (nothing but) structuring, the deadline may be closer than you wish. As a consequence, there's a risk that you will rush through the writing and

revision phases, maybe abandoning the latter altogether, ending up with a text you know you could have written better.

Despite these drawbacks, the planning strategy is favored by many writers and allows for an efficient process.

Write away strategy

What if you simply can't create a plan or structure for your text before you write the first word? Waiting until the last moment to write because you get stuck with creating a plan would mean disregarding one of the risks just mentioned. You need a different strategy, one that allows you another course of action.

To write away means to let yourself loose on the screen or paper; it means not caring too much about the structure of what you're going to write. You allow yourself to express what you know right now without the constraints of a plan (as I did for the first draft of this book). Does that sound impossible? Try it. Some writers, especially planners, can't imagine simply writing away because they feel the need for structure in order to express their thoughts. No problem, but others tick differently; they are the type who need this alternative strategy.

By writing away you can follow your thoughts wherever they may lead you, even in unexpected directions (not possible with planning). You might take detours to themes and arguments that could be relevant or not. By letting your thoughts flow onto the page, you allow yourself to develop ideas. You may create lots of text in little time. The text may look messy even to you, but you

couldn't care less in the moment. All you care about is putting your ideas and arguments on paper before you forget them. This strategy represents freewriting on a large scale (see Elbow 1981). Freewriting means writing without self-censorship or constraints, usually for five to ten minutes at a time.

The structure of your text will come into play later in two ways: either while still writing away or after finishing your first draft and revising it thoroughly. In both cases revising will take time, because you now have to tame your thoughts, ideas and arguments into this streamlined, linear text with the golden thread that everybody expects.

As with the planning strategy, many things can go wrong here. While the advantages just presented make writing away a liberating strategy, they also imply risks that shouldn't be neglected.

Similar to taking planning too far and spending more time on it than is healthy for your writing process, you can spend too much time freely expressing your thoughts. Working on page 354 you realize that time is almost up. You start to panic – rightly so – and rush the remaining phases, handing in a text that isn't yet as disciplined as it should be.

To write away doesn't mean to begin without a clear starting point, such as a research question, thesis or hypothesis. Allowing yourself detours and getting thematically sidetracked poses the risk, however, that you may get lost and end up in a completely different place. While the planning strategy can be a straitjacket, writing away can create the illusion of 'no holds barred'. I may have said that you can write freely and without constraints, but that's, of course, not entirely true. You're always constrained in

some way: the text genre, the general style of your prose, grammar and so on. Writing away doesn't mean that you can change, for example, from dissertation to poetry or a factual or 'objective' style of writing to an experimental one.

When writing as it comes to your mind for a long period, the revising that follows may include deleting big chunks of text – and a feeling of having wasted your time might creep in on you. This feeling could dissuade you from choosing this strategy in the future. In this case, you need to remember that what feels like a waste of time was actually a detour necessary for coming up with ideas and arguments that you might later keep.

Versions strategy

You might have a similar feeling of wasting your time with this next strategy: writing different versions of your text. *Is that not what we always do?* you may wonder. Not really. *Versions*, in this case, means separate and distinct versions of a text, not just revisions you can track or save on an hourly or daily basis with your writing software.

Writing versions means starting with a text draft and finishing it… and then you put it aside and start a second version. Put that one aside. Repeat. Sounds tedious? That depends on whether or not you're used to working like this and also on the length of the text. If you write versions for short texts, such as abstracts or parts of a chapter, you might not spend much time achieving the intended result. You strive for different ways to describe, work with and arrange things in your text. By writing different versions,

you allow yourself to play with concepts, examples, analyses, structure, style and so on. As a side effect, you will deepen your understanding of a topic.

I admit, this is a strategy that only a few writers choose. In my experience, only three writers have revealed themselves to be followers of the versions strategy in the past six years. They didn't use it exclusively, but in combination with another strategy or only for specific texts or parts.

Nevertheless, at least one person in the academic world exists who has successfully written books and articles with this strategy. In his book *The Clockwork Muse*, sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel (2001) revealed that he writes his texts in four versions. Yes, you read that correctly: four. Sounds crazy even to me. But it works for him. And whatever works, is fair play.

Before you dive into writing versions, however, you need to know about its risks. First of all, it takes time to write several separate versions of a long text, such as a book. Unless you're a master in scheduling your work – as Mr. Zerubavel impressively revealed himself to be, in his book – and have experience with this strategy, I wouldn't recommend it.

Another downside could be psychological: you invest time and energy in writing different versions and at the end you have to choose one of them, or some parts of each one of them to be copied and pasted and revised. You might regret having put in the work of writing so much that will not make it into the final version. Of course, the apparent detours will have helped you figure out many things, but it still might feel as though these detours were all for nothing. If you do decide to produce versions, make

sure to fortify yourself against such regrets and see the positive side of the process.

Patchwork strategy

To treat a text like a patchwork is, next to planning, the second or third most-used strategy. While it has its advantages, you can also get into trouble with it.

Patchwork writing means writing about the things that you like or know most about at that moment: today some issues regarding method, tomorrow a graphic for your results section, another day a part of the introduction, and so on. The interval in which you switch from one part of your text to another doesn't need to take a whole day; it could be a matter of hours or even minutes. Whenever you have an idea for another section, you switch. If you get stuck on an argument, you switch. You can follow the path of least resistance, which can make writing a pleasurable task.

You may have heard about Niklas Luhmann, a German sociologist who wrote dozens of books and hundreds of articles on systems theory. He used the patchwork strategy of jumping to another chapter or book whenever he was stymied in his writing. The strategy ensured that he never got stuck. In an interview he was asked what he did when he didn't have anything else to switch to. He replied that he would simply start a new book, of course (Luhmann 2002). Is that not true for everybody?

While patchworking works well for many writers, it also creates problems that they may notice too late. When you switch between parts of your text or even different

projects on a whim, that means without a plan of *when* or *why* to switch, you may lose the overview or the "thread" of what you want to say. I will give you an example from my time as a PhD candidate.

When I finally started writing my thesis two or three years into my PhD, I wasn't aware of my writing strategy. I simply jumped into the work, because I had figured out some of the important stuff and was thus enthusiastic to put my ideas and thoughts on paper. I wrote for three to four hours every morning of the work week; I was immersed in the topic, the literature, my arguments and analyses. Whenever I had an idea for another chapter, I would switch and begin writing it up. Depending on how long I spent doing so, I either switched back to where I started out or I stayed and continued to work in the new place. This process happened again and again, steering me blindly through my thesis each writing session. I don't remember how exactly I spent my mornings; I just know that it felt productive compared to the years before. Being able to note every idea was definitely an advantage in the moment. I didn't expect this to be a problem later on.

In the revision phase of the writing process, however, I realized that something had gone wrong. I probably couldn't have told you why, but when reading the supposedly complete chapters I was confronted with a text that contained broken threads, repetitions or redundancies, as well as unfinished sentences. Revising what I thought had been well thought out was frustrating. I had to figure out what I had been intending to say in a sentence that I had left unfinished. More often than I wished, I either had to rewrite an argument in order to make sense of it, or delete it outright. Repetitions called for decisions of

where, exactly, I wanted to place a particular argument or example. Only by finding all of these outlier sentences and paragraphs was I able to repair the thread of my thesis. (If you read one of Luhmann's books, you might spot similar problems with repetitions. As Luhmann (2002) revealed, he almost never revised his texts.)

When using the patchwork strategy, you need to brace yourself for a thorough revision. The more you jump around within your texts, especially longer ones, the greater the risk of repeating yourself or leaving an argument unfinished. In order to harness the potential of the strategy and avoid the risks, try not to switch to a different part of your paper immediately. Instead, write your ideas down on a separate piece of paper (e.g. sticky notes), or in another file, and get back to the part you were working on. Collect these ideas and then implement them in one of your next writing sessions, or come back to them individually when you're working on that respective chapter.

Another risk of patchworking lies in postponing writing the more difficult and complex parts. In most cases, your mood would tell you that today isn't the day for a certain highly complex and theoretical discussion. Chances are you would end up doing something that didn't feel overly complicated. Postponing or – let's be honest – *procrastinating* in the face of difficult work means that you will have nothing but the hard stuff left at the end. Is that how you want to spend the last few days or weeks before a deadline? Stress will inevitably increase if you follow this path. Make sure to be honest with yourself whenever you want to postpone the more challenging parts, and work on them nonetheless. Afterwards you can recover by doing something easy for a change.

You will profit from the patchwork strategy if you define what you're going to work on today or in the next few hours. During the specified time, stick to your choice of tasks. Allow yourself to switch between them, but not like a butterfly flitting from one flower to another on a whim (assuming butterflies don't have a strategy, that is).

Revising strategy

The last and most widely used strategy combines two different tasks: *writing* and *revising*. As you produce text, you write and revise more or less at the same time. You spend as much time with a sentence as it takes to create the best outcome. In most cases, you will not go back to revise sentences or paragraphs or even the entire text, because you have already invested time and effort in constructing them in the best way possible.

Take, for example, the case of Clifford Geertz, eminent cultural anthropologist of the 20th century. He wrote books and articles using the revising strategy. Fortunately, he revealed his way of writing in an interview (Olson 1991). The way he describes his approach to writing, however, sounds more like the confession of a sin. He produced one paragraph per day (and even then, only if he was not doing fieldwork abroad) and never revised it later in the process. When he reached the end of a text, the text was finished. If you read Geertz's text, you will notice how well-crafted his sentences and paragraphs are. Even though his sentences may seem long and complex, they are still legible and comprehensible. You can see how he

must have pored over each and every sentence in order to make it perfect.

Although he crafted perfect sentences and paragraphs, Geertz was not happy with his writing strategy. It felt slow to him, and he even said that it might be the result of some psychological issue. As you can see, even the greatest researchers have had their own troubles with writing.

Geertz's example shows that the revising strategy may have its drawbacks. While you're crafting near-perfect sentences, several things can go wrong if you're not careful.

First, you may write more slowly than you would prefer. Most of my clients who follow this strategy complain about the slow pace. Some even say that they often can't get anywhere. Frustration sets in because they can't see much progress. They feel that they should be able to write more than just one or two sentences a day.

The problem has two sides: on the one hand, these writers write several sentences or even paragraphs, but by rereading them immediately they are unhappy with the result. Instead of giving themselves some structural or linguistic slack, they start to revise and, in the worst case, delete. At the end of the day, maybe a sentence or two will survive the cutting, maybe nothing at all. Because this is happening every time they sit down and write, writing becomes frustrating.

On the other hand, progress is slow, if it existed at all, because some writers can't put down any words or sentences unless they are put on the page perfectly. Writing and revising takes place in their heads and it thus takes them far too long to create anything useful. If they do

eventually come up with something, they might face the first aspect of the problem just mentioned. Lots of time and effort is invested, resulting in no real progress.

The second problem, as you have correctly guessed, lies in the intention to produce perfect prose the first time you write it down. Many who apply this writing strategy reveal themselves to be perfectionists. Their expectations of their writing abilities and their texts soar high in the skies. That's why they spend so much time on just one sentence, and are often dissatisfied with what they produce. In the most extreme case I have encountered, one client's perfectionism prevented her from writing anything until some language expert gave her green light.

To strive for perfection may be a noble intention, but it bears the risk of slowing you down and making you obsess about the things that don't yet matter in the first draft. But then again, perfectionists don't write drafts, they try to write the final version from the start.

The third problem that might befall you when using this strategy is that you may lose perspective of the big picture of your text. Focusing on individual sentences for a long period of time can lead you away from your larger argument or thread. As a consequence, you may not realize that you're sometimes drawn too deep into one particular issue while neglecting others. Because of the narrowed focus, you might also gradually shift the meaning of particular concepts or – if it takes you that long – change your writing style. Whatever happens during the slow process you may either be unwilling or unable to revise for logical, conceptual or stylistic consistency when finishing the text. Your text will be finished, and you might be too.

If you keep these risks in mind, the revising strategy may work out for you. Whatever strategy you chose, however, you should always consider whether combining it with another strategy or two might help you to become even more efficient.

Combining strategies

When asked to reflect on their writing strategy, most writers find out that they are using a combination of the strategies presented above. It's seldom that someone sticks to one strategy exclusively. I want to give you some hints on which strategies go well together, and why.

For some years, I thought that planning and writing away were mutually exclusive strategies. Planning follows a defined structure, whereas writing away has an as-yet undefined structure. They seem incompatible. Nowadays, however, I see a possibility for combining the two strategies in order to get the most out of them.

Consider the following case: you came up with a general plan for your text, having defined preliminary titles for each chapter. You might have even done some brainstorming on each chapter's content, and for some of them you know how they will need to be structured internally. For other chapters, however, you may not have a clue about how to make the argument or present the chapters' main points. In order to figure out the internal structure of these chapters, you have two possibilities: either you stick to the planning strategy and work out the internal structures of each chapter, and only then start to draft them, or you combine what you have done so far with the writing

away strategy. This means that for the chapters that still lack an internal structure, you can create a first draft by writing away. You need not waste time waiting for some insight to solve any internal structural problems. Instead, you use the potential of the writing away strategy to figure it out. For those chapters with an internal structure you stick to the planning strategy.

While the combination of planning and writing away doesn't seem to be used much, the combinations of planning and patchworking, or planning and revising, are in vogue. On the basis of a plan, you can either switch between your set chapters (planning and patchworking) or you can meticulously fill in the blank space by writing and revising at the same time (planning and revising). You could even use a triple-combination: planning, patchworking *and* revising.

The only combination that seems impossible is writing away and revising. You can't freely follow your ideas without censoring yourself and at the same time revise the sentence that you just wrote. The two strategies represent two different mindsets and paces. It's, however, possible to use one of the strategies for certain parts of your text and the other for other parts, depending on how you want to approach each of them.

As you can see, you can do almost anything with writing strategies. Whatever combination you prefer, you will profit most when you know what you're doing and why. Know the advantages and risks of each strategy in order to work as efficiently as you would like to. If you have to switch strategies in the middle of the writing process, do so deliberately. It's your choice, because it's you who will profit or suffer.

Depending on the project, the topic, its complexity, the time available, your motivation, and other circumstances and factors, your strategy choices will differ. Here is one last example of this from my own writing experience: I try to choose how I go through the writing process as deliberately as possible. For my first book I applied the planning strategy. For my second book I chose to write away. For my third book (that I wrote together with a colleague), I combined planning and writing away. And for this book, I chose to start by writing away because I didn't have any kind of structure in mind. I simply knew that I wanted to address the fundamental questions writers should ask themselves. Instead of following the same strategy for each project I was working on, I would try to figure out each time which strategy or combination would allow me to be efficient and effective.

5. How do you approach writing projects?

When I talk to writers who are unhappy with their writing process, especially when they are confronted with different writing projects at the same time, I usually hear something like: “First, I work on project A, because... Once I’ve submitted A, then I work on B”, and so on. What is wrong with that approach, you might wonder? Nothing, *per se*. If it works for writers and they’re happy with the process and the result, then I’m the last person to admonish them or try to teach them another approach. But as I said, the people who tell me this kind of story come to me because they have had trouble with this approach. Being unhappy with an approach without being able to solve the problem is common for writers with untested abilities or unhelpful (if not detrimental) ideas about the work process in general.

Before I go on, I want you to think about your own ideas. What is your understanding of how to approach new writing projects, if you’re already working on another or receive several at the same time? How do you plan and structure the work process?

Problems with a sequential approach

Depending on your experiences with a sequential approach to writing projects, you might have been success-

ful. As soon as you finished project A, you could empty your brain and go on to work on project B with a fresh mind. No harm done.

If you had negative experiences with this approach, they could stem from the following problems.

Let's assume that you have three different writing projects with similar deadlines. You have six months until then, so you plan to spend two months per project. Sound like a plan? Not to me.

First of all, can you be sure that you won't be given another project or even several during those six months? And even if you can be sure, what guarantees do you have that each of the three projects will only take two months? Maybe you need to read much more for the first project than you anticipated. Maybe the second project is more complicated than it initially seemed. Maybe you will get the flu (or something nastier) and be away from your desk for at least a week (if you have young children, you will definitely get ill at some point).

You see, lots of things can go wrong. As soon as one of these things or something else happens, projects get postponed. Postponing, however, means that the deadline draws closer and the reserved time for the remaining projects shrinks. In the end, you will either have to ask for a deadline extension (or a second extension, or a third – you know the sad academic cycle), or you put in some night shifts, trying to binge-write the hell out of it. The result: you're exhausted and frustrated both about the process and the quality of your writing (not much revising or editing, not to speak of the missing feedback from colleagues).

We’ve only played around here with the idea of three projects at a time. I have met writers who had to juggle five, seven, or more projects, and thought that a sequential approach was the way to go. I doubt that they were successful.

What holds true for several writing projects at the same time also applies to your approach to the phases of the writing process for a single project. The writing process consists of different phases that you need to go through in one way or another, sometimes repeating a phase several times. If you’re the sequential type of writer, you work on a writing phase until it’s done and then switch to the next.

In many cases I have heard about writers starting to read the relevant literature and then doing nothing else for weeks or months. The problem here is that they have trouble finishing this phase, because there’s always something else that they think they need to read. They are right, because other researchers will never stop writing and publishing. The longer they spend reading, the more publications will be produced and available to them. Accordingly, the first text draft will be postponed. When they finally get to the writing phase, they will have to rush it, because the deadline has drawn closer in the meantime. If they’ve done a bad job when reading, they will have no notes or other written material that might help them to start writing (you might laugh now, and ask who would do that; the answer is *more people than you would guess*). Instead, they sit in front of the white screen and realize that they have to bring out the books and articles once again. That’s an unnecessary hassle and the pinnacle of inefficiency.

Working on projects and phases in parallel

The alternative to a sequential approach to writing projects and phases is simple: work on different projects and/or on phases of one project in parallel. I know, it may sound simple, but not that easy. I didn't say it would be a walk in the park.

Let's again take the case in which you have three projects that you need to submit at around the same time. Instead of only working on project A like a maniac, without thinking about B and C, you begin all three. What you have to figure out is how much time you want to allot to each project and when it will take place during the work week. That depends, among other things, on the size and complexity of the project, how familiar you're with the topic, your motivation, how much material you have to read for it and whether you need to do empirical research. With these and other factors in mind, you have to plan the time needed for each project in general (the entire work process) and break it down to a smaller scale (monthly, weekly, daily). As soon as you're done with an intensive phase of one project or are done with the project entirely, you can give the other projects more time and energy, and plan anew.

I see at least four advantages to working on projects and phases in parallel. *First*, you will no longer postpone anything. *Second*, you will not lose contact with any of your current projects because you will continue to work on them on a regular basis. Your ideas remain fresh, since your brain is busy thinking about each project.

Third, you aren't at risk of neglecting projects as might happen with a sequential approach. And *fourth*, you will not focus only on one topic and task at a time for days or weeks on end. Rather, you can allow your brain to relax from one project by working on another one. You can change from project to project and phase to phase, not being stuck with one thing that will soon bore and frustrate you. An added benefit is that working on one project might give you inspiration for another – or as Boice (1990: 81) put it, you will increase the chance for a "cross-fertilization of ideas".

Buying into this approach and feeling glad about the advantages it brings, you might still be wondering how to work on several projects and phases in a week. I will gladly give you some hints, although the details you will have to figure out for yourself.

One way to work in parallel is to allot days or half-days to particular projects or phases. Alternatively, you can define recurring work sessions for each day of a specific duration (see Silvia 2019, Wymann 2021). With a schedule like that, you can allot projects and tasks to each of the defined sessions: either from day to day or from week to week. Depending on your priorities, one project or another may receive more sessions.

As an example, you could start your Wednesday with one hour of continuing to write your draft of project A. After a break with coffee and a snack, you could read an article for project B for two hours. After lunch you do something easy for project C. And finally, you would end your day with another short writing session for project A.

As soon as you have gotten into the rhythm of regular writing on different projects and their phases in parallel,

you will not want to go back to the days of sequential working. After a while, you might even forget how working sequentially is done.

6. How much time do you need to write?

Whenever I ask writers this question, they either can't say, or they say that they need at least three or four hours to get going. Some even claim that they need eight hours in order for their brain to start working. These writers don't typically write on a regular basis. They wait until they have found what they think is enough time to once again dive into the work, without resurfacing for many hours. They then wait again for the next opportunity to write, at some unspecified time in the future. As Paul Silvia (2019) teaches us, however, you're not supposed to wait for or find time for writing. You need to define it and take it. So, in order to write regularly, you need to find out – among other things best explained by Silvia – how long you can concentrate on a writing task.

Writing is a time-intensive activity. Writing a paper or book takes a certain number of hours. Why writers commonly believe that they have to spend half a day or more at a time for writing, is beyond me (I confess, years ago I would have bought into this myth). Spending hour upon hour writing is one thing. Being physically and mentally unable to do so on a regular basis, but trying nonetheless, is another.

If you belong to this group of writers, ask yourself why you accept the exhaustion and frustration accompanying long writing hours. Do you think you have to put in these hours? Does it make your text better? Must suffering be

a part of a writer's life? Or in other words: it would be nice to invest as little time as possible in writing, right? To know exactly how much time you would need to spend in order to get the same quality of text you have previously produced, or an even better quality text? To feel neither exhausted nor frustrated (most of the time), but content and motivated? To look forward to the next writing session (or crave it)?

Finding out how long I can write for in one session has made a big difference in my writing life. From nightly binge-writing sessions during my university studies, to morning sessions of three to four hours during my PhD, to one-hour sessions for my first three books. Nowadays, I have half-hour sessions; I have experienced it all. Paradoxically, my productivity increased with every reduction of my writing time. Clients wonder how this could be and might even doubt my claims. The simple truth is: I trained myself to write more in less time, and thereby figured out what I need in order to do so. I ask you to figure this out for yourself.

Whether you end up with one hour or two hours or even three hours is irrelevant. Whatever works as the ideal length of time for your writing sessions is enough. Don't listen to anybody else who might tell you that you should take a certain amount of time. Nod and smile and go your own way, because nobody can know you as a writer as well as you know yourself.

One way to discover your writing time benchmark is the following: start working on a text and observe yourself. As soon as you detect major self-distraction (need for coffee, lengthy daydreams and the like), frustration about mistyping or other mistakes, or feel tired or exhausted,

stop. How long were you able to concentrate (more or less) on the set task?

Depending on the task, be it writing the first draft, reading, creating a graphic or revising text, you might get different numbers. If your body or brain tell you to stop and take a break you should take these signs seriously. Fatigue, exhaustion and frustration set in whenever you don't respect your physical and mental limits. Of course, you can start fresh after a break, if you want to. If you do, then you start a new session and the clock begins again. As a control-test, you can work far longer than the time limit you have set and see what happens. Whenever I work longer than planned, I end up exhausted, with stiff limbs, and frustrated about my inefficiency. I try to avoid these experiences.

As soon as you establish your own writing time length try to stick to it if possible. If you're anything like me, then you will only commit to one writing session a day and then let it rest until the next session is due. But chances are good that you think you should spend more than just one session a day. No problem there. You can plan to write two, three or a zillion times a day, but only if you separate the sessions with breaks to recover your body and brain. For each of the sessions you will need a separate task and goal, even if that means doing the same task with the same goal for one project several times in a day (for further explanations see Silvia 2019). Working this way corresponds to what I previously said about working on projects and tasks in parallel (chap. 5), because you can choose to work on all of your four projects in one day, one session at a time. Neat, right?

Having figured out your benchmark time for writing, you will likely end up associating writing with being productive, efficient and not spending much time on it. Writing is still a hard and intensive business, but it doesn't take hours upon hours to accomplish. One (short) session at a time will do the trick.

7. What's your writing style?

I don't know why so many people, including students and young researchers, think that academic texts need to be boring or have some sort of dry aftertaste. I might have thought so years ago, too. Nobody ever explained to me what academic style is and that it may vary from author to author and text to text.

The question of style encompasses diverse aspects. I want to give you some hints about what you should consider when writing academic texts. Let me start with an example from a client.

Susan was a law PhD candidate. We met for a counseling session arranged by a doctoral school. Susan liked her research and liked writing about it. However, she struggled with the different writing styles that she encountered. On the one hand, she associated the English style with precision, clarity, short sentences, and well-structured paragraphs. On the other, she found that the German style appeared linguistically ornamented, convoluted, comprised of long sentences, lots of jargon, and paragraphs that were too long and badly-considered. She preferred the English way of writing academically, even though she was a German native-speaker. Her problem arose when she was confronted with German journals and publishers: they expected her to use the German style and wouldn't accept texts in the English style that she preferred. She found herself in a frustrating dilemma, which she would need to resolve in order to write and publish successfully.

I sometimes hear similar complaints from researchers working in other disciplines. They prefer to write in a certain way and don't want to change it completely in order to be published. What would be your solution to this kind of problem?

In order to understand such dilemmas we need to first understand what academic style might mean (see Sword 2012, Zinsser 2006). Academic style, as implied, may show itself through the choices you make on different levels in your texts. In this chapter, I will discuss some of those levels and aspects, but by no means exhaustively.

Words, sentences, paragraphs

First, the use of either simple or technical terms, or even jargon, makes a difference. People often confuse technical terms with jargon. The former describes words and phrases specific to a research area that the author defines or that everyone in this area understands. Jargon, however, refers to unnecessarily complicated words and ones that are foreign to a research area. These could be replaced with simpler ones.

Second, sentences can be either clear and concise, or have complex and convoluted constructions that a reader has to analyze for five minutes in order to make sense of them (read anything from sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and you will know what I mean). When it comes to sentences, however, it's not a matter of short versus long, or simple versus complex. It's rather a matter of how you vary different kinds of sentences in your writing.

While putting simple and concise sentences one after the other might provide information in a clear way, the text might sound boring: lacking rhythm and tone (you can sense that best when you read the text out loud, which is a good idea in the revision phase). The same applies to long and complex sentences: they're not fundamentally better or more academic. If your readers constantly find themselves on the verge of suffocating because your sentences haven't given them enough time to breathe (mentally), you will lose them sooner or later. Variation is key, as well as – and above all – clear communication through your sentences, whether they are short, medium or long.

Third, paragraphs may be of different length and structure. As far as I'm concerned, the key function of a paragraph is that it allows readers to better navigate a text, finding the famous *golden thread* and being able to follow the information and argumentation. If you have a two-page paragraph with tons of information packed into it, you or your reader might easily get distracted and lost. In contrast, if you read one single-sentence paragraph after another, the text is poorly dissected and may equally hinder one from getting into a reading flow. So, your choices about the length and structure of paragraphs will affect the readers' experience and how well they understand what you want to tell them.

The author in the text

Another level of style concerns how you, as the text's author, appear in it. Besides your name, contact information and credentials being printed somewhere, you're also part

of the text, whether you like it or not. Until algorithms write research papers, human authors will always leave some traces behind in the prose they produce. How many and what sort is something you, as the author, can influence.

You can influence how and how much you appear in your paper in at least two ways. On the one hand, there is the so-called self-reference: words and rhetoric that make it possible to identify you within the text. Do you use the personal pronouns "I" or "we" when you make an argument or claim? Or do you let your paper, chapter, research or project talk ("This paper claims that…")? Or do you avoid all that and seek shelter behind the passive voice ("It is argued that…")? Again, it's not a matter of right or wrong; it's a matter of what works best for your paper, including the chosen publication outlet and its demands, the targeted audience and your own preferences. Far from giving you definite answers, let me just say this: if you're willing to adapt to different writing contexts (but only to a certain degree, i.e. not selling out), you have to master the different ways of appearing in the text.

While we are on the subject of self-reference, you need to be aware of another nuance (I hadn't been for a long time, I confess). Torsten Steinhoff (2007), a German writing researcher, distinguishes between three different uses of the "I" in academic texts. You can use the "I" as a researcher ("I argue/claim/analyze etc." referring to knowledge, results and so on), as the author of the text ("As I will show in chapter two…", guiding the reader through the text on a meta-level) or as the narrator of a story ("As soon as I read the book by…"). Steinhoff's study shows that most researchers considered the *researcher-I* and the

author-I to be part of academic rhetoric, but less so when it came to the *narrator-I*. While the use and acceptability of these, and maybe other, roles within the text might vary in the disciplines, you can see that it makes a difference.

Whenever I discuss this issue with students, PhD candidates or established researchers, I realize that most of them aren't aware of these roles. Even if they aren't able to differentiate between these roles or to identify them explicitly, they might well be irritated by a sentence or paragraph that includes an inappropriate use of self-reference. Being aware of these issues is key when it comes to how you want to present yourself in your text.

Humility and confidence

Now, to the second way you might appear in your paper: the way you treat information, especially from other sources. This is also a form of self-reference, albeit a more hidden one.

As you may know, depending on the discipline or research area, you're expected to *critically evaluate* the literature and information you're working with. You can't always state what others did and presented in their papers matter-of-factly. Sometimes you have to make sure the reader knows your thoughts about someone's research and why you chose to use it, or you want to distance yourself from their approach, results or conclusions.

One way to do this is to explicitly state whether or not you agree ("I agree with Muller that phenomenon X correlates to Y"). Depending on your self-reference choices you might nevertheless opt for a more distanced way of

handling this issue ("This paper does not follow the methodological approach outlined by Muller because..." or "While Muller suggests an X analysis, it will not be used in its entirety here"). The way you report others' research and insights sheds light on how relevant, truthful, or convincing you find them. It places you and your research within the targeted research field and in relation to the different positions other researchers take. It says as much about the ones you report on as it does about yourself (see Graff/Birkenstein 2013).

You can choose to do that as factually as possible, but you can also choose to spice up how you frame other people's research (Hyland 1998). Either you use words and phrases to hedge, which will tone down statements and allow you to appear to be diplomatic (although you may be cursing and shouting in your mind), or humble or just cautious ("The claim made by Muller seems to need further evaluation", instead of "Muller's claim sucks"). Hedging is also good for being on the safe side with your own results and insights ("It could be concluded that X relates to Y, although..."). Criticizing others gently and being cautious with your own statements will help you to come across as nice – even if you're arrogant in reality.

The other rhetorical means to spice up your reporting is to use words and phrases that boost your statements, arguments, and results. As the name says, in contrast to hedges, you boost something in order to make it strong. For example, instead of writing "This paper would like to suggest..." you write "This paper claims...". The latter is stronger and portrays you as being sure of it. You can also use more subtle phrases such as "of course" in order to convince your readers. The only thing you have to be

careful about is that you don't appear arrogant, even if you truly are (and proud of it). You're supposed to play the (more or less) nice game of scientific contribution to a research area in which many people participate. Boosting is okay, but don't overdo it, no matter how confident you feel about your data, results, or arguments.

Your voice

All of the rhetorical strategies mentioned make up what is called your "voice" in the text. It's the culmination of these and other big and small decisions on various textual and rhetorical levels. They depend on many parameters, which are defined by supervisors, institutions, journal editors, and publishers, as well as audience expectations. You may nevertheless have some leeway in how you approach certain issues (see Sword 2012).

At the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned seemingly boring and dry research papers. Publishing these kinds of papers isn't just something that happens (to you). It should be a deliberate decision. Similarly, publishing engaging – and sometimes maybe even entertaining – academic texts should be the product of decisions made by you as well. After all, you should be able to explain and justify everything that you put into your text.

Concerning Susan, the PhD candidate we met at the beginning of this chapter, what would have been your advice for how she should deal with her stylistic dilemma? I'm sure you wouldn't have told her to ignore the German law studies community simply because she didn't like their style. Rather, like I did, you would have told her to

master the two different sets of expectations by becoming a more flexible writer, who can write prose in both styles. As long as this doesn't go completely against her writing ethics, she should be able to adapt. If she felt that she would be selling out her writing style and feared that she would thereby lose her voice and harm her academic reputation, she should rethink her publication strategy as well as her choice of journals or publishers. But, all in all, she should know her craft, in order to be able to make these informed decisions.

One last thing: while each and every decision is yours to make, you should err on the side of the conventions. As long as you don't have a secured position in academia or an established, indestructible reputation (or best, both), you shouldn't experiment too much with creativity – it could backfire (it didn't in my case, but my PhD thesis is certainly a bad example of this). Only established researchers should allow themselves to go beyond disciplinary conventions. As a professional, I'm sure you know what you're doing, as well as when and why to strategically milk that stylistic cow (did you notice the booster?).

8. What does text feedback mean to you?

We are constantly receiving different kinds of feedback in different life situations. Feedback on your academic work is one kind. Ask yourself the following questions: What do you understand as feedback? What does it involve and what not? Do you invite it and how? And if so, when during the process? How do you deal with it? How do you cope with critical or even contradictory feedback?

We can distinguish between formal and informal text feedback. Formal feedback, for example, comes in the form of peer-review on submitted journal articles or the evaluation of your academic work for a qualification, such as a PhD thesis. In the case of formal feedback, you can't choose whether you want to receive it or not. Informal feedback, in contrast, is initiated by you when you ask someone to look at your text. A similar case would be the feedback that you receive during the discussion of a paper that you present at a conference. You need both types of text feedback in order to be a professional writer.

What feedback means

Many writers, both inexperienced and experienced ones, often have an inappropriate idea of what feedback on a text means. "Inappropriate" in so far as this idea makes their writing life more difficult than it needs to be. They

think that feedback is either editing and proofreading, or a mixture of comments, editing and proofreading. Feedback on a text, however, simply means giving or receiving comments on specific text issues without going into the text to change it. The persons giving feedback don't alter anything. They tell you what they think and maybe make suggestions for improvement. Editors and proofreaders, in contrast, go into the text and suggest changes and corrections by actually doing them for you. The only task left for you in the latter case is to either accept or reject the changes.

The distinction between feedback and editing/proofreading is important, especially when you ask for feedback. You also need to be able to distinguish between them, however, if you're ever asked to give formal or informal feedback. It will make your life easier.

Besides these distinctions, feedback is the most effective tool for overcoming "text blindness". After spending weeks, months or even years with your text, you will be unable to notice the holes in your argument, the broken golden thread, the missing or redundant information, and all the other inconsistencies we all produce while writing. Other eyes and brains will spot most of them and may even have suggestions on how to improve the text. Not inviting feedback from others would thus be a grave mistake. Because you're a professional, you will use the chance to improve and learn with the help of others.

When to invite feedback

Writers often wait for feedback until they have completed their final text version. They can't, or so they believe, give anybody anything else but the final draft, without inviting embarrassment. By waiting so long they forego opportunities of profiting from feedback in previous stages of the writing process. The earlier you get feedback on your thoughts and arguments the better for your text.

The first opportunity to receive feedback is when you have a draft of your proposal. If you don't have to write one, the first rough draft will do the job too. Don't be afraid to show unpolished prose, underbaked arguments or missing commas. As I will show you, the feedback you will receive depends on how you ask for it.

Other opportunities for feedback present themselves when you have finished a chapter or a larger section. Or to put it differently: whenever you think you could profit from someone else's opinion or perspective, then you should invite feedback. Even if you're scared or feel that you aren't yet ready, take all your courage and send someone your draft. Your text will never ever be perfect, so each version of your text is good enough to be seen by someone else. Competent colleagues and friends will do their best to help you.

As you can see, there is no excuse not to put your dear text into the hands of a critical reader. It will help if you start the feedback conversation in the best way possible. Otherwise you might end up with comments that you find unnecessary or unhelpful.

How to ask for feedback

When I hear about failed feedback, I usually diagnose *miscommunication*. Let me give you a concrete but typical example from a client: having written a thirty-page chapter draft, Amelia, a PhD candidate, sent it to her supervisor for feedback. After a few weeks the supervisor sent the draft back. The only comment about the text that the supervisor made – attached to the first paragraph – was that she didn't like the writing style. Amelia was frustrated, because her supervisor didn't give her more feedback, especially on the argumentation, the structure and so forth. When I asked Amelia what she told her supervisor to give feedback on, she was surprised and didn't understand what I meant. Was she allowed to tell her supervisor, upon whom she depended so heavily, what to do?

This example shows how much can go wrong when no conversation about each other's expectations is happening. Miscommunication leads to frustration, and is a waste of time and energy on both sides. It's therefore crucial that you know what your job as an author asking for feedback involves.

The first rule of feedback on a text is: as the author, you have to set the scene for the following process. Independently of whether you receive the feedback in written form, in a one-to-one exchange, or both, you need to formulate a *feedback instruction*.

Setting the scene

Your feedback instruction needs to clarify both what you expect the person giving feedback to do, and what not. Your expectations thereby depend on the phase of the writing process you're in.

Writers who simply give their text away without any further information will receive a lot of things, but likely none or little of what they need at the moment. With feedback instruction, you specify what is important for you to hear or read about.

In the early phases of the process, when you want feedback on a proposal or first rough draft, you don't care about spelling mistakes, stylistic issues or any other small details. Instead, you care about the structure of your text, the content, the argument and other more substantial issues. If Amelia – from the example above – had indicated what kind of feedback she needed, chances are good that she would have received exactly what she had expected at this point in the process. Instead, the feedback on writing style didn't help her.

In later phases of the process, after going through your manuscript several times, you will become more interested in the details. At this point, you have made all the necessary decisions about structure, content and so on. Now is the time to look at the language, style, grammar, word clutter and more. While looking at these aspects could also be the job of an editor or proofreader, a colleague may well give you feedback on them, without doing the work for you.

The feedback instructions, thus, should allow you to express your needs and expectations. If you choose to say,

"Tell me about everything you see in my text!", then that's your decision. In this case, brace yourself for everything. If you choose to say, "Tell me whether it speaks to audience XY, and nothing else", then that's your decision too.

The advantage of feedback instructions should be obvious: you not only define your expectations but also those of your feedback partner. With the feedback instructions in hand, your colleague can focus on specific things, while neglecting others. No need to look out for every mistake or issue; only the ones that the author specified need the person's attention. If I know what you want me to look at in your manuscript, I can use my time and energy more efficiently.

True, you will at times meet people who don't understand or respect feedback instructions and who just do what they always do: look at and comment on everything they see, thereby wasting their and your time and energy ("Why did he tell me about the spelling mistakes? I told him I don't need that now…"). In case you know such a person, don't ask him or her for feedback again. If it's your supervisor, you might need to demonstrate the benefits of feedback instructions for him or her. Back in my PhD days, I stopped asking for feedback from one particular person, because I always received the same unhelpful comments.

Whenever you receive *formal* feedback as was initially described, you can't give feedback instructions. The criteria for feedback or evaluation will have likely already been defined. You can only wait for what is coming your way.

One last thing: whenever you're asked to give informal feedback on a colleague's or even student's text, ask for feedback instructions. It will make your work more efficient and effective, because you will comment on the

things that the author wants to know about. In the past few years, I haven't given text feedback without first receiving feedback instructions. Whether they are general or specific, I need information about the author's expectations and needs in order to do my job well.

Nobody likes feedback but everyone needs it

Even well-meant and constructive feedback has the potential to trigger my defenses. Do I like feedback on my texts, upon which I spent so much time? Not really. Do I know that I profit from others' comments, thereby improving the text quality? Yes, without a doubt. I need feedback on my thoughts, arguments and everything else that my texts present, even though I might want to defend all of my oh so well-thought-out writing decisions in the first instance of receiving feedback. Minutes, hours or days later, I'm wiser and will work on what my colleagues have commented on. Their comments will likely be the comments of my future readers, so I had better improve my text in order to not give others the opportunity to comment on the same or similar issues.

Don't worry if you aren't fond of feedback either. Who is, anyway? Writers who claim to love feedback are lying to you and themselves. Feedback attacks our writer's ego (unless it's purely positive, then we feel flattered). Having admitted that, we can go on and try to work with it the best way possible.

Good feedback is critical and constructive, and will show you where questions and problems in your text arise

that you have not yet spotted. Your colleagues mean well. But still, you might struggle with their comments. If you receive feedback on the same text from different people – in a group or separately – you will often face diverging or even contradictory opinions. One person says one thing and another person says the opposite. Both are convinced that they are right and they would like you to change the criticized passage in their favor. What do you do?

Here's an example: when I received the peer-reviews on an article years ago, the two reviewers disagreed on one point. One reviewer claimed that my paper was too colloquial, so not at the linguistic level of an academic text; the other claimed that my paper was too jargon-laden, and therefore too academic. At first, I didn't know what to do and asked some colleagues about it. But no matter what others thought about this conundrum, I had to solve it on my own. It was my paper after all. So, I did nothing about this issue and my paper was still published.

Similar feedback problems will happen to every writer now and then. The lesson, however, is that *you* have to make the decision about which comments will improve your text and which ones will not. If you work with co-authors, you will make the decision together, of course. But you have to remember: regardless of who gives you feedback, it's you who has to justify all the writing decisions. PhD candidates, who feel dependent on their supervisors and must therefore do everything they say, will have a problem with this. They think they can't afford to disagree with their supervisors, even though it might mean changing a paper in a way they themselves have trouble accepting. They forget, though, that they are expected to become researchers who are capable of doing research

on their own and publishing the results. Having to justify your writing decisions on your own is part of the deal. Nobody else will be willing to take the blame, even if they wanted you to change something that turned out to be wrong. You're the author, you take responsibility. And that's the reason why you, as a single author, have to decide which feedback to take into account and which you forget about quickly.

The bread and butter of writing

As a professional writer, the feedback that you receive on your texts and the one that you give others is part of your daily work. Shying away from it would mean forgoing an opportunity to learn. To become a better writer, you have to expose yourself to other people's criticism. Whether it comes from friends and colleagues or some anonymous peer reviewer, you should make the most of any chance to learn more – even if only to realize that the reviewers have no clue about the topic themselves. Feedback represents an integral part of writing that you depend on; don't neglect it.

9. What blocks your writing?

You may have heard about them: writing blocks. Some people call the same phenomenon "writer's block". Deemed to be common among (literary) writers, it also befalls researchers who are poised to record their insights and results.

First, we should clarify what we mean when we talk about *writer's* block in contrast to *writing* blocks. The term *writer's block* suggests that it's the writer as a person that's blocked. It implies psychological problems that emerge when the person is supposed to write a text. No doubt, there are people who experience this kind of problem. These problems, however, have nothing to do with writing in itself. They are also likely to crop up if the same person is supposed to draw, play music, cook for a group of friends or perform any other tasks, typically with an audience. Such a person likely deals with psychological problems such as anxiety, self-doubt or fear of failing. In the past, I have only dealt with one or two academic writers among hundreds who showed signs of psychological issues that kept them from writing. In these cases, I tried to do everything in my ability as a writing coach, but eventually had to give up. The problem was not the writing, so I was the wrong person to go to for help.

So, it turns out that writer's block is a common but misnamed term to describe what happens to a lot of writers. Instead, we should call it *writing blocks*: blockages, hindrances or obstacles to the writing itself, not the per-

son. That's where writing coaches like myself come into play; this is where we can help to unblock the writing.

The most useful definition of writing blocks comes from Keith Hjortshoj (2001). His definition should help you to understand when your writing is blocked and when something else is happening.

Paraphrasing Hjortshoj, we can only talk about a writing block under two conditions. *First*, you're motivated to work on the writing project. *Second*, you're competent to do the work. This means that if you're motivated, but lack the competence to do the work, then technically speaking, your writing isn't blocked. The same holds true if you're competent, but not motivated to produce the required text. Imagine the following case: you have studied linguistics and are now supposed to write a paper on quantum mechanics. In this case, your writing isn't blocked, you're just not competent enough, no matter how motivated you are or how much you tell yourself that you can do it. If neither condition is met – not motivated *and* incompetent – then your writing isn't blocked either. Therefore, it follows that if your writing gets stuck, it's neither your motivation nor your competence's fault. So what is it, then?

Most often, it's one of the following two things: either you have expectations, beliefs and ideas about writing that don't fit the task or situation, or you apply seemingly tried-and-true strategies that no longer work.

Expectations and beliefs about writing

Your ideas, expectations and beliefs influence what you perceive as real. This might seem trivial, especially when

you work with a constructivist epistemology in your field of research. In terms of writing, that means that whatever you think about writing will become real for you. My job as a writing coach, then, is to help you realize that your writing reality could be different. If you think about writing differently, writing will work differently too, for better or worse. Let's look at some examples (for the standard 'writing myths' see Jensen 2017, Wymann 2016).

If you think that established writers and researchers have reached a point where they write publishable texts whenever they sit down to work, you're heading for trouble. Thinking like this, and admiring those famous people, you will expect nothing less from yourself, as you strive to become a good researcher and writer. Sitting down, your inner censor – a little neuronal creature inside your mind who is basically helpful, but often plays tricks on you at the wrong times – will keep reminding you over and over again that the ideas, arguments, words, sentences and paragraphs need to be perfect and publishable from the start. You will believe this well-meant advice coming from your mind, and get nowhere. You sit and stare at the screen, not knowing how to phrase the sentence in a way that will never have to be changed again (see chap. 4 on the revision strategy). Your expectation that your prose had better be perfect right away is nothing but a big obstacle in front of you. Unless you change your thinking, this obstacle will not vanish anytime soon. That this self-made pressure rises as the deadline comes closer only makes your writing more difficult.

In this case, you need a good dose of mind-changing. First of all, nobody that I know, have read about or heard of has written perfect texts from the outset (although Clif-

ford Geertz, whom I mentioned in chap. 4, might be somewhat of an exception, he still needed a whole day for a single paragraph; see Olson 1991). I might be wrong, but I believe that most writers invest hours upon hours in order to get to the point that their text might seem perfect. Take, for example, Karl Popper, the philosopher of science. He revised his book *The Open Society and its Enemies* twenty-two times by hand and his wife typed the manuscript five times. It took him several years (Geier 1994: 84). See? There's a lot of work behind a polished and published text. Behind the scenes it reeks of sweat and sounds like work.

Take two other examples that show how stubborn perfectionists can be, thereby getting them nowhere in their lifetime:

Max Weber, the German founder of sociology, wrote a lot, but published only a few things while alive (his PhD thesis, his postdoctoral qualification and a few articles). Everything else that we can read from him today was compiled and published by his widow. When Weber actually gave his manuscripts to a publisher, he must have enraged (and enriched) them. He did what you aren't supposed to do to the galleys, unless you want to spend a lot of money: he edited them time and again, changing more than just typos (Kaesler 2015). Of course, we don't know exactly what Max Weber thought about writing and what it was that led him to be an annoying perfectionist for others. Although you could draw the conclusion that it doesn't matter whether you're annoying your publisher or whether you publish a lot in your lifetime (because your wife or husband might publish everything else posthumously) – don't. Better change your mind now while you're still alive and writing.

The second and similar example comes from the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (Monk 1990). He is famous and widely read as well, but he too was a perfectionist with only a few publications to his name while alive. In one case, he worked on a manuscript for about twenty years, annoying his friends with yet another revision on an ongoing basis. While busy perfecting his philosophical thoughts and constantly working on his texts, he nevertheless feared he wouldn't be finished before his death. These two – perfectionism and fear of missing the actual deadline – don't go well together. In the end, Wittgenstein died with what he would have liked to have published still unfinished. Others did that for him afterwards.

So please, don't be a Weber or a Wittgenstein – except for the brilliance and fame, maybe. Become like Popper, who knew that perfectionism was a waste of time that you could better use by refining your thoughts in several stages of rewriting and revision.

I use the following metaphor to explain my thoughts on the issue to writers: I tell myself that I prefer to write loads of shit that I can work on until it's somewhere near gold, instead of trying to conjure gold from nowhere (now that I write it down, it sounds like alchemy).

Whatever thoughts, beliefs or expectations bother you or impede your writing, you need to recognize them as what they are, namely mere thoughts, beliefs, expectations. Then you can start working on how you want to change your mindset in order to get writing and progressing. Clear the obstacles from your writing path or, at least, find a way to get around them.

Now you may be thinking, "How am I going to even find out what beliefs, etc. I have?". Good question indeed.

You have several options: either you find out for yourself, on your own, or you can go to someone like me, a writing coach, to help you find out.

Tackling writing blocks

If you go the solo route, you need to use a somewhat paradoxical tool: you have to write about writing. By writing down your thoughts on what is going awry in your writing, you make problems with your mindset and their potential solutions *visible*. Here is a list of formats that you can use in order to get there:

- Write a letter or e-mail to a real or fictitious person, explaining what is wrong, why, and how you could get out of this situation. You don't have to send the letter or e-mail, but you may if you think that it will help.
- You start a dialogue with a real (alive or dead) or fictitious person (e.g. Aristotle or your favored, seemingly perfect researcher/writer). Let this person ask you questions about your mindset, about your writing, your problems, etc.
- Use freewriting (Elbow 1981), writing in bursts of five to ten minutes, in which you write down everything that comes to your mind (similar to a stream-of-consciousness protocol, although you will have trouble keeping up with the pace of your thoughts). In these five minutes you only write, no editing or going back to read allowed, and you can't censor what you write (yes, you may swear and create grammatically incorrect sentences). The best thing about freewriting is

that you don't need to show the results to anybody. The text and the insights are meant for you only.

- You complete the following sentence for five to ten minutes: "Writing is like...". In doing this, you can come up with metaphors for writing. Here's one: "Writing is like mountaineering. You need equipment and lots of skills, strength, and endurance. Step by step, you go up the mountain, sometimes crossing treacherous terrain. But in the end, you will reach the summit, likely exhausted. At least with writing you don't have to climb down again." After you write your metaphors, you can analyze them and see what you think about writing and whether you associate it with positive or negative things.

Each of these writing exercises should help you to do two things: first, they allow you to take a step back from your serious and academic writing; they allow you to see how you write and how you think about it. Second, they allow you to actually write, even if it's not your academic writing for the time being. You won't simply think about your writing but engage with it *by* writing, which might free your mind from its never-ending cyclical thinking. You put your thoughts out there, in a readable form, and you can also put them away, to look at them again later (or bring them with you when you see your writing coach).

Strategies that no longer work

While expectations, beliefs and thoughts are a purely mental issue, applying strategies that don't work has

both a mental and a practical side. First, you think that the strategy or strategies that have worked so far will also work now and in the future. Second, you try to apply the strategy to your writing project and find out that it's not working as planned. Your writing gets stuck – not you, remember – because of an old strategy that's unsuited to its present purpose. If you're like I was during my studies, you would try harder every time, fail miserably in the attempt, and not learn a thing from your writing experience.

Of course, that's not the way to go. If you're aware of what you're doing and what does not work and why, then you're ready to learn and adapt. If you aren't aware at all, like me back in the day, then it may also take years for you to find out the hard and frustrating way. So, let's not take that route.

For certain stages in your education, and for certain writing projects or text genres, you can use particular writing and working strategies. They work in these contexts and for these projects. However, as soon as you're confronted with a new writing project, a different writing context, or new text genres, your old tried-and-true strategies no longer work. Here is an example from my education.

In school I learned to write an essay in a short, uninterrupted period of time (somewhere between two and four hours). The teacher gave us a task and on the word 'go' we would scribble away for a set amount of time. I was lucky if I could finish the first draft. I don't remember ever being able to proofread more than the few pages I had ended up with in the final minutes before time was up. Writing essays was stressful and, considering the grades and comments I received, not as rewarding as I would

have wished. These essay ordeals didn't teach me much (except how to analyze poems by Goethe and his consorts, in which I comparably excelled), at least not in terms of writing good prose or developing writing strategies that worked.

So, equipped with a linear writing strategy – get the task, briefly think about it, write a draft, don't revise, and sparingly proofread before handing in the paper – I endeavored to write my first long paper towards the end of high school. This paper had to be something like a first pre-academic work of around twenty pages. Again, I didn't learn how to write this new text genre or how to approach or plan the unfamiliar process. My friends and I were thrown into the deep end (I think we were among the first pupils that had to do this, so our teachers also had little or no experience with the genre or process). Equipped with formidable writing strategies from essay writing I struggled through the process and ended up receiving a disappointing grade, although sufficient to pass.

Along with the essay exercises, this paper was another blow to my interest in writing. Ironically, this didn't seem to deter me from pursuing further education at university. Maybe I thought that I would now be able to write academic papers due to my experiences with this pre-academic paper from high school. I don't remember what I had been thinking, but I was definitely wrong all the way through.

My university writing can be summed up as follows: stressful, frustrating, worrying, exhausting – my personal writing hell. Why? I kept on applying the same seemingly reliable strategies that I had used in school, and was not aware that I was in trouble. Besides, why should I have

thought about my past writing experiences and strategies in order to learn something, when I had always received high grades for my papers? Reading them today, I wonder whether my professors actually read anything of mine, and if so, whether they had been too kind to my prose.

Somehow, I got through it all and finished with a grudge against any kind of writing. You would think that by then I might have learned a lesson or two. Well, naive as I was, I jumped right into the whole mess once again: a PhD scholarship was waiting for me. Hell began again, but this time, it took me another two to three years to finally figure out that I needed to make changes.

In those first few years of my PhD I did a lot: reading, gathering empirical data, talking to a myriad of people about my ever-changing thesis, and writing short papers for seminars. The only problem at this time: I didn't work on the monograph everyone was expecting me to write about my PhD topic. To be fair, I had some pages on theory and method, as far as I can recall. However, when my scholarship ended after three years, I hadn't much to show for it. That was one of the turning points in my writing life. I knew I had better get going, or I would have to quit (and maybe would even have to refund the university).

So, I started to work on my monograph in earnest. I changed my time management approach to writing, and I started to actually dig into the work that I was meant to have been doing from day one (unfortunately, nobody told me that – or I hadn't been listening). With renewed motivation and a new set of strategies – some deliberately chosen, others just spontaneously occurring – I wrote the monograph in about a year of daily writing sessions. Compared to my earlier studies and the previous years, writing

felt different and pleasant. Having an average output of two pages per day, I kept a good writing pace. Now it was easier to enjoy my free time. But don't worry, I still had my fair share of self-doubt, crises and a near burnout.

After submitting my monograph, I felt elation – only to be crushed again by my well-meaning defense committee, who thought that I needed to re-work some chapters before they would allow me to defend my thesis. After another three months of rewriting and some more time waiting for the verdict, I successfully defended my thesis after a four and a half year emotional and academic roller-coaster. I never thought I would want or need to write anything like that ever again.

A year and a half later, I started to work as a writing coach for PhD candidates and dove into the waters of writing research and didacticism. Only then did I start to realize what I had missed as a student and PhD candidate: all the things you can do when writing, and how you can learn about yourself as a writer. Since then, I'm (most of the time) fully aware of what I'm doing when writing and what works for me. The days of writing hell are over and I actually enjoy the challenge that writing poses. Knowing what I do, why, and how to do it has helped me to become a more professional writer. Knowing different strategies and how to apply them in different writing contexts has made me an efficient and adaptable writer.

Long story short: the transition from one context to another (school to high school to university to PhD) poses the potential for writing blocks, because the strategies may not necessary work in the new context (that's the main message of Hjortshoj 2001). Instead of trying to run up against the wall, you need to adapt to the new situation

and learn to jump or tear down the wall. As soon as you spot problems when writing in a new context, you have to take a step back and figure out what you need in order to master the new challenge. Anything else is foolish and likely a waste of time (you have just seen that I know what I'm talking about).

Here is the essence of writing blocks: they afflict many writers and are normal, because writing is a hard and complex task. Don't despair. The good news is that you can unblock your writing (by yourself, or with the help of someone else) by taking a step back and looking at your thoughts, beliefs, and expectations on the one hand, and your writing strategies and skills on the other. You don't have to beat yourself up if you find weaknesses or inadequate strategies. Learn from them, adapt and be wiser the next time. Believe me, I learn about myself as a writer time and again, because writing projects and contexts change. But as professionals, we don't shy away from the work we have to do, in order to do our job as best we can.

10. What are the Dos and Don'ts of academic writing for you?

Everybody thinks about plagiarism first. You should avoid it, of course. What else do you think a professional academic writer should do or not do? No worries, I will not give you a complete list of Dos and Don'ts – not even close. You have to do your own homework and figure that out for yourself.

First, the list will change over time. As an undergraduate student one has different Dos and Don'ts compared to a PhD candidate. And the latter again has a different list (with some similarities maybe) to a senior researcher or professor. Second, the list will differ from discipline to discipline. If you belong to the lucky ones who do interdisciplinary work, you might end up with more than one list, depending on where you publish and whom you address your papers to. And third, people in the same discipline might not even be able to agree on a list of Dos and Don'ts (that's what I experience in workshops) – not that they would ever be able to agree on anything academic, anyway.

I can give you some hints about what I hear from academic writers; what they consider to be Dos and Don'ts. And then I will give you my personal list.

Here is what I hear, explicitly or implicitly, in workshops and counseling sessions.

Dos and Don'ts: Common list from clients

(Caution: Statements with * aren't to be taken at face value, or need further explanation.)

- Do write as complicatedly as possible, because the value of academic texts is measured by how much your readers have to struggle to understand you.*
- Don't write complicated sentences; that isn't academic in itself.
- Do be precise, specific and concrete.
- Don't plagiarize: that means, using others' work without referring to it, attributing your own words to someone else, or any similar version of confusing sources or references (or withholding them).
- Do find your own research niche to tend to. But don't forget that there are other researchers who have their tiny fields next to yours.
- Don't use the personal pronoun "I" – it leads you down the subjective path forbidden in the objective halls of academia.*
- Do follow the instruction and advice of your supervisor; she or he knows best.*
- Don't be arrogant when writing about others' research, results or arguments. Be decent and diplomatic.
- Do the research first, and then write it up.*
- Don't try to please everybody; you can't and shouldn't.
- Do wait for a whole free day in which to write; anything less won't do.*
- Don't separate research from writing, because they are inseparable.

- Don’t use word clutter or pointless linguistic ornamentation. Keep it real and short.

Dos and Don’ts: My personal list

- Don’t forget that writing, especially academic writing, is hard. Enjoy the challenge nonetheless.
- Don’t spend more time on writing than necessary.
- Do respect deadlines as you would a dear friend.
- Do know your craft: you have to know what you’re doing and why; the more you know, the better.
- Do know and master your craft as best as possible, and then the admonitions of plagiarism, arrogance, use of the personal pronoun and so much more simply become superfluous.
- Do adapt to new writing tasks, contexts and audiences (but again, that’s self-evident if you know what you’re doing).
- Don’t take writing lightly; be a professional.
- Don’t wait for a magic pill for writing; do the work and learn.

Even my list changes over time, and depends on my audience and the context. I see this as a good sign that I keep on learning about myself and writing.

Now it's your turn

Reading about your writing habits, ideas, expectations and strategies is one thing; applying your insights is another entirely. This may annoy you for some time. In the first weeks and months you will likely struggle with your new set of habits, ideas and strategies. Don' despair, because that's normal and a good sign of change.

Soon you will forget about all of this, because it will have become second nature when you write. As the old ones before them, your new habits and strategies will become self-evident. Forgetting about your new skills isn't bad at all. Equipped with well-worked skills and tools, you can focus on more pressing issues such as your research problem and how to solve it. Instead of worrying about your approach to writing, you can start worrying solely about theories, methods, results and the proper rhetorical way to present all this in your paper.

I hope that you will feel some kind of pleasure when writing from now on. It doesn't have to be fun, but if you continue to hate and avoid writing, what would be the point of it? Since I adapted my habits, ideas and strategies – my new work tools – I enjoy writing even though it's still a hard and sometimes nerve-wracking activity. Years ago, I considered academic writing as an endless march through hell; nowadays, I consider it as a challenging obstacle course I know I can master. Sometimes this course is harder, sometimes easier. At times I struggle with my own expectations and ideas. Often, however, I can focus on the

pressing issues and let the writing tools I have acquired help me progress the way I want. Whenever it’s necessary I try to adapt my tools to new text genres and contexts. And most importantly: I’m the master of my writing; I take as many writing decisions as I can as deliberately as possible. Be a professional writer and do the same. Start now.

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This book presents ten of the fundamental questions that every academic writer should be able to answer. It focuses on questions which may appear trivial at first glance but will likely prove to have more impact on the writer's efficiency and success than initially expected. The author's main argument is that writers who become better acquainted with themselves through the topics included in the book, become more productive and happier writers. By knowing their own skills and the specific challenges of academic writing, it will become a task they can master. Because of its focus on these fundamental questions, the book differs from usual guide books on academic writing. It addresses writers irrespective of their disciplinary background.

The author:
Christian Wymann, PhD, author and former writing coach

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