WRITING FOR RESEARCH

ADVICE ON PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE

Raewyn Connell

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WRITING FOR RESEARCH

For the last twelve years, I have been running free face-to-face workshops on writing, in various universities and conferences. Not the kind of workshop that instructs you how to Deliver A Competitive Product & Target Top Journals. Almost the opposite! My workshops are built on the idea that the making of organized knowledge is an inherently social, co-operative process, and that writing is central to this larger undertaking.

In this booklet, I outline the ideas developed in the workshops. Part One concerns writing as a practice, its various genres in a research context, and the way research communication operates in the world. Part Two describes the practical steps in writing a research paper. Part Three discusses writing programmes, reflects on what makes it all worthwhile, and points to some further resources I can recommend.

I'm grateful to all the participants in my workshops, who have wrestled with the practice of writing and in doing so have taught me. I'm grateful to the many models of good writing I've met in a lifetime of reading, some of whom I mention in the final section. And I'm incredibly grateful to Rebecca Pearse, who has encouraged this project, designed this booklet, set up the website, and given the advice and support without which this couldn't have happened.

Raewyn Connell, September 2015

CONTENTS

PART ONE: ABOUT WRITING

1: THE NATURE OF WRITING

The importance of writing

In everyday life we encounter writing in a great many forms, from street signage to product codes to books. A while ago I read Shirley Brice Heath's wonderful ethnographic study *Ways With Words*, which looked at language and reading in two communities of the southern United States, especially their schools. She got the children to note what they read, and found an astonishing number of messages -15,528 - read by one school class in the course of one ordinary day, from when they got up in the morning to when they went to bed. That's an average of 600 messages read by each child.

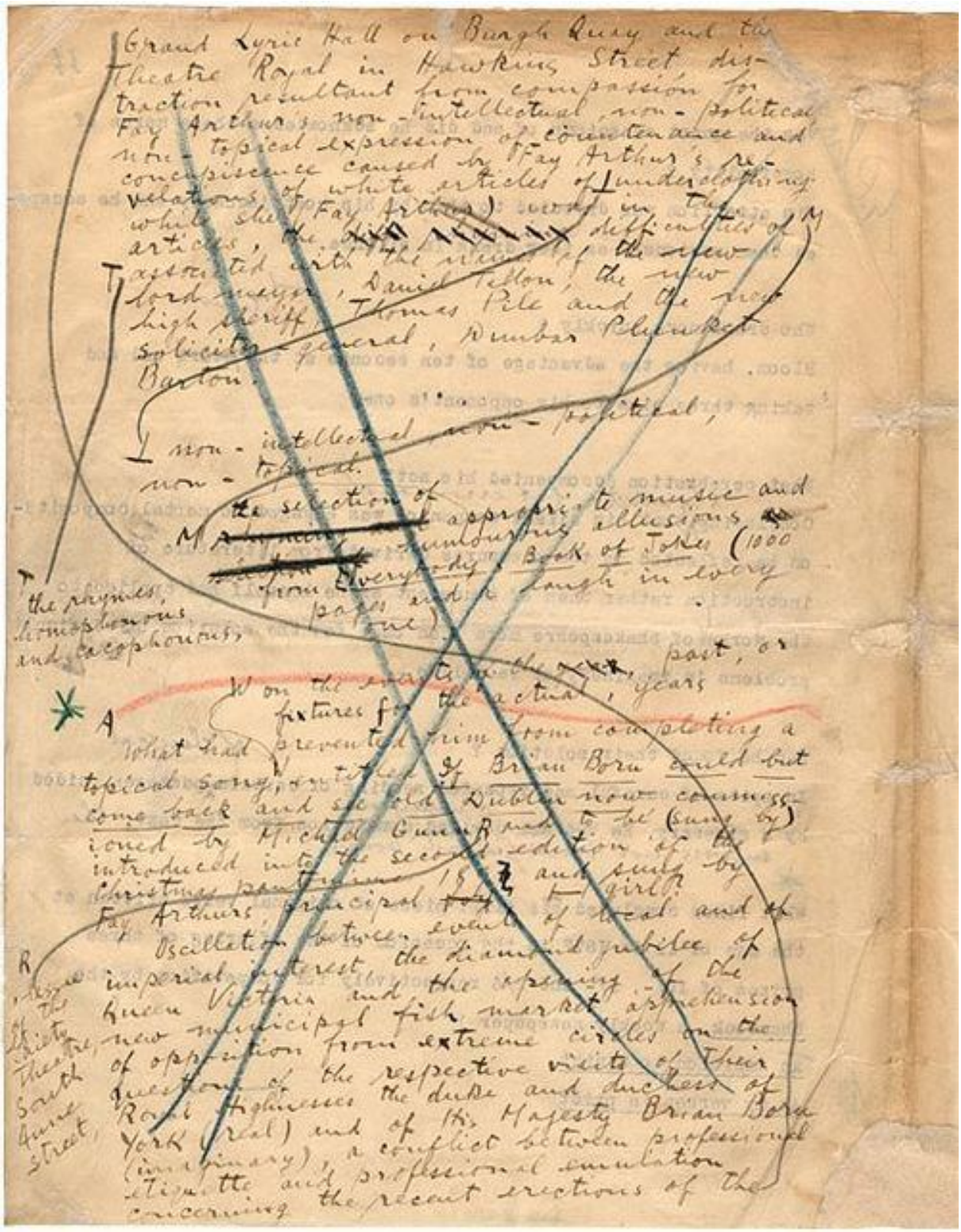
The philosophers tell us about the structural importance of writing in culture. Jacques Derrida's monumental *Of Grammatology*, if I have understood it correctly (no guarantees!), argues that writing can't be understood as subsidiary to speech, but is a form in its own right, deeply connected with our capacity for conceptual thought. Paulin Hountondji, in his brilliant *African Philosophy*, argues that writing is essential to allow authors to take responsibility for their statements, and for the correction of knowledge through critique.

In the light of these contributions, Raewyn Connell (who hasn't written any philosophy) argues that writing is a form of social communication central to the *development* of organized knowledge. Therefore, an understanding of writing is needed for the democratisation of knowledge. More of that, as we go along.

Writing as a practice

If you walk in through the red-brick entrance of the British Library, in Euston Road London, you find on the left a little museum of writing. Just now it is occupied by an exhibition about Magna Carta, the barons' delight. In ordinary times it displays a selection of books and manuscripts from the BL's fabulous collection, including English-language literature from Beowulf to the computer age.

The first time I went in, I hoped – since I have Irish ancestry – that they had something from Mr James Joyce. Really I needn't boast about my thin connection. Joyce is interesting simply because he is the greatest writer in English since Shakespeare. (How's that for a value judgment?) And there it was, in a glass cabinet in a dimly-lit room: a yellowing page of the original manuscript of *Ulysses*, the most influential text of modern literature in the world.



A sheet of Joyce's manuscript Ulysses (Source: *Flavorwire*)

And you know what? This famous piece of writing, by this supreme stylist, was an absolute *mess*! He'd crossed much of it out, changed words, scrawled in new bits and drawn arrows across the page to show where they should go in. Some was in ink, some was in pencil, some was illegible to anyone except Joyce... Anything less like our image of the master writer, calmly setting down the divine dictation of the Muse, was hard to imagine.

But the more I thought about this shocking situation, the more I concluded that the British Library, far from undermining Mr Joyce's image, had done us a great favour. That manuscript allows us to see directly the writer as worker (in a way we can't see, but can only imagine, Shakespeare). The manuscript mess is the trace of Joyce's labour, as he crafted the communication that eventually conquered the world. And he certainly worked hard at it: creating, revising, cutting, expanding, reconsidering. That book took him, by his own reckoning, seven years. The next one took longer.

(For a wonderful collection of MS pages from classic global-North writers, including this page from Joyce, see *Flavorwire*: http://tinyurl.com/bmynzx4)

If we can learn anything from great writers, this might be the most important point: writing is work. Like any form of work it has to be learned, and it needs resources. It can be done in bad circumstances – Anna Akhmatova wrote precisely-crafted poetry during the ghastly siege of Leningrad in World War II. But to be sustained, writing needs a workforce with sustainable conditions.

Writing as a social practice

This brings us to the profoundly social character of writing. Much writing is done by one person alone in a room, to be sure. No less a writer than Nadine Gordimer (Nobel Prize 1991) insisted, in her discussion of writing, that

> *Some form of solitude is the condition of creation. There are writers who are said to find it in a crowded café, or less romantically among the cockroaches in a night-time family kitchen, others who must have a cabin in the woods... The tension between standing apart and being fully involved; that is what makes a writer. That is where we begin.* [*No Place Like*, 11-12.]

Yet even in that cabin in the woods – I've visited Walden Pond in the USA, it's beautiful – the solitary author is working in the presence of her readers-to-come. The whole business presumes there will be readers! Writing is, to borrow an apt term from the great Jürgen Habermas, a *communicative practice*. This is true whether the actual inscription happens in a nunnery cell (e.g. Sor Juana, the great poet of colonial America) or in an overcrowded graduate-student hot-desk workroom.

(Ironically, Habermas's own writing, in translation, is lousy communication; of course it may be much better in the original German.)

Part of the damage done by the current neoliberal management of universities is that it devalues the social character of writing for research. Researchers are put under performance-management regimes that treat writing “outputs” as if they were plastic rattles being outputted from a factory. All that counts is getting the planned number of rattles per year. If any thought is given to where the output goes, it is to “target” the high-prestige journals. What matters to such managers is a journal’s ranking in a league table, not what readership is reached through it.

Once we recognize that writing is communicative practice, the readership does matter – profoundly. Then we see journals in a different way, not as steps on a prestige ladder but as centres of knowledge practices and nodes in communication. Journals, like books, conferences and some online spaces, link people and institutions, and carry forward a shared project of knowledge-making. It’s that possibility of connecting with a real audience, and contributing to a shared undertaking, that makes academic publication meaningful.

2: RESEARCH COMMUNICATION, THE SOCIAL REALITY

Managers nowadays have systems for counting the research “outputs” that each researcher produces, and rewarding or punishing accordingly. This probably seems to the bosses like sophisticated, performance-driven management. In real life it’s stupid. It creates destructive anxieties, promotes mediocrity and conformity, and undermines the real functions of scientific communication.

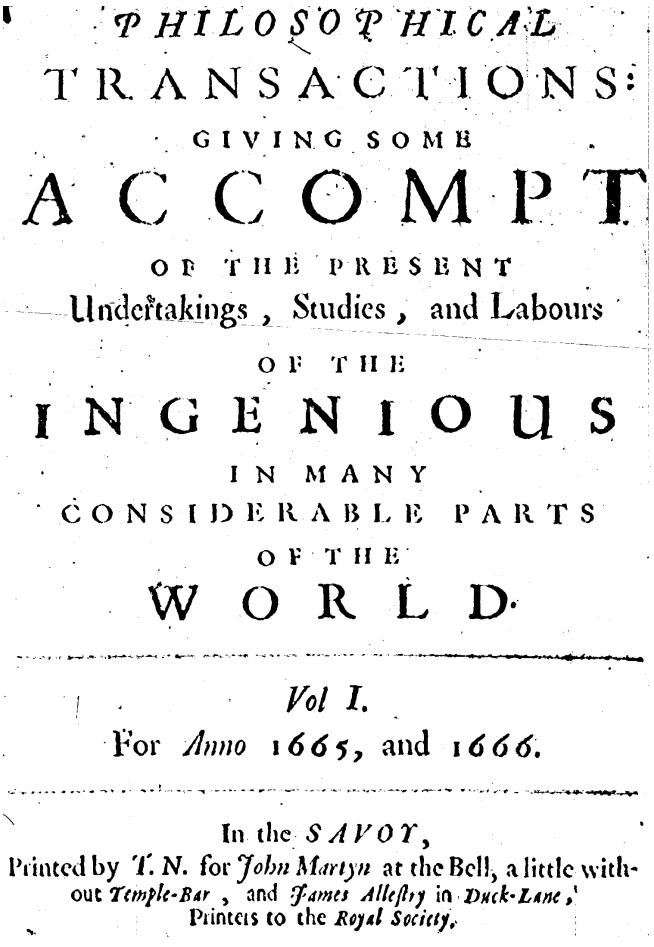
What truly matters in research is not how many publications you churn out, but

- who gets to read your writing, and
- what your writing is doing for them.

That is to say, what matters is the contribution your work makes to our collective project of knowledge-making, critique, circulation, and knowledge use.

I once spent a sabbatical leave at the sociology department in London University’s Institute of Education. The department head was Basil Bernstein, a famous researcher on social class and education. Bernstein understood this principle. When a student came to see him, enthusing about some piece of writing she or he had read, Bernstein would ask: “What’s the news in this?” That is to say, what is it adding to our already shared knowledge?

The dominant form of publication, in most fields of research today, is the research journal. Books still count for a lot in History and Philosophy, but even there the journal is important. In fields like Chemistry, Biology, Engineering and Psychology the journal is utterly dominant.



PHILOSOPHICAL
TRANSACTIONS:
GIVING SOME
ACCOMPT
OF THE PRESENT
Undertakings, Studies, and Labours
OF THE
INGENIOUS
IN MANY
CONSIDERABLE PARTS
OF THE
WORLD.

Vol I.
For Anno 1665, and 1666.

In the SAVOY,
Printed by T. N. for John Martyn at the Bell, a little without Temple-Bar, and James Allestry in Duck-Lane, Printers to the Royal Society.

The first science journal 1665. (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

We should therefore think about the journal as a social institution: how it works, how it's changing, and whether it's still needed in the age of the Internet.

The research journal has an intriguing history. It's a child of the printing press and the spread of literacy in early-modern Europe. Early research journals were, essentially, the printed minutes of the clubs in which the wealthy gentlemen, businessmen and scholars interested in the new "natural philosophy" would gather. So the journals were called *Transactions* or *Proceedings* of such-and-such a group – the best known being the Royal Society in London.

If a researcher in, say, the Netherlands wanted to communicate discoveries, they would write a letter to the secretary of the club, and it would be read out to the members, and recorded. The most famous are the letters from Antonie van Leeuwenhoek to the Royal Society, which recorded the discovery of single-celled organisms and virtually created the field of microbiology.

In the nineteenth century, after reforms launched by Wilhelm von Humboldt in Prussia, universities increasingly became the home of research and the main supports of scientific societies and their journals. University staff from then on provided most of the unpaid labour on which journals rely – writing papers, editing the journals, and reviewing the submissions. But there could be exceptions. One imagines some furrowed professorial brows when in 1905 the current issue of an old-established journal, *Annalen der Physik*, dropped into the letter-box. It contained an article "On the electrodynamics of moving bodies" written by a young official in the Swiss government's patent office. His name happened to be Einstein and this was the first statement of the theory of relativity. (They did later make him a professor.)

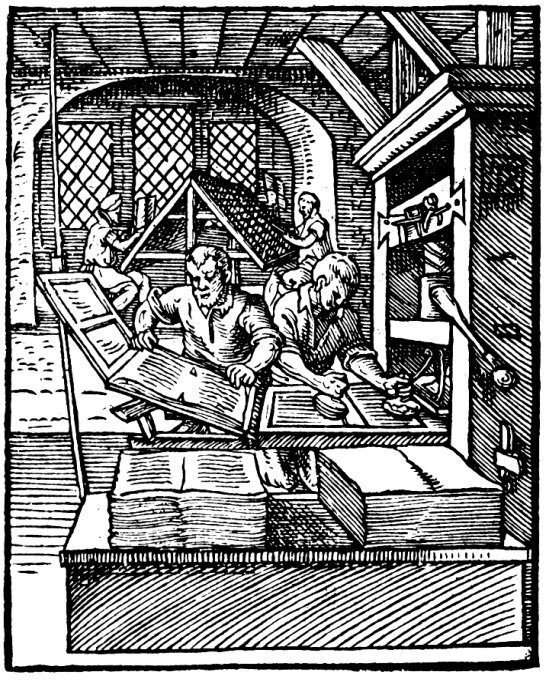
In the late twentieth century, in the age of neoliberalism, journals changed again. In the last forty years, specialized journals have multiplied tremendously. Just put "Research journals, Images" into your favourite search engine and you will see the stunning array.

At the same time - and not by coincidence - an amazing number have been taken over by big publishing corporations. Often in deals which looked good to cash-strapped scientific societies but have come back to bite them. By 2013, *more than half* of all peer-reviewed articles were published in journals owned by just five corporations: Reed-Elsevier, Springer, Wiley-Blackwell, Taylor & Francis, and Sage. Wiley, by the way, got *Annalen der Physik*.

These corporations make their money by selling journals to university libraries (which *must* have them) at inflated prices, by setting up paywalls around online publications, and by charging royalties for reprinting articles, e.g. for teaching. The corporations benefit from an enormous input of free labour from all the researchers who make the journal system work.

This is now a billion-dollar business, and it makes accessing knowledge more and more expensive in rich countries, and prohibitive for poor countries. There's a rising revolt against this. "Open access" is the new demand, and people are experimenting with ways to get it, mostly using the Internet. The most famous is *PLOS ONE*, an online open-access journal that began in 2006. It is peer-reviewed, charges the author a publication fee, and then distributes the paper for free.

But the Internet isn't accessible to everyone in the world, and the PLOS model too has its problems. Under intellectual-property laws and pro-business neoliberal governments, and with great pressure on academics to publish in mainstream journals, the corporate hold on our collective knowledge system is still hard to break.



The source of the trouble! (Image: "Printer in 1568-ce" by Jost Amman - Meggs, Philip B. *A History of Graphic Design*. John Wiley & Sons,. 1998. p 64. Wikimedia Commons)

In fact it grows new tentacles. The expansion of university systems and the management pressure on academics to publish and keep publishing, have created a market for ruthless entrepreneurs to exploit. They do this via imitation journals, sometimes called "predatory journals". These are online sites set up by fringe corporations presenting themselves under impressive, academic-sounding titles. They trawl for business by sending out millions of emails – I get several per week myself – offering to publish my research, peer-reviewed, quickly, in their "journal". What they don't say upfront is that they will charge me a lot of money, that the peer review is imaginary (it would cost them money to do real peer reviews), and that if I do take their offer and pay them, no-one will ever read my work because no-one takes any notice of their journal.

There's also a story to tell about the publication of research through books – something I've been doing for (gasp!) forty-eight years. This is a long story, best left for another day. I will just note that the economics of book publishing have also been changing, and it's now much harder to publish research monographs (i.e. books on a single issue, reporting a research project) except through high-priced book series targeted, like the journals, at university libraries.

These dilemmas in publishing arise because of the social, collective character of knowledge creation. When we write a paper for a journal, we are building on the work of many other researchers before us, as well as those who work with us. And we are trying to contribute to the knowledge and practice of many others to come.

The fact that our work is situated among the work of many others is the logical basis of "peer review". Peer review is a fraught subject. Young researchers can feel it is a kind of bullying, and even hardened researchers like me can feel it serves to defend orthodoxy. Here is one rejection letter I have had, from the editor of a well-known journal:

> *Dear Professor Connell,*
>
> *Could we first apologise for the delay in contacting you with a decision on this paper. This unfortunately resulted from circumstances beyond our control and we thank you for your patience.*
>
> *Your paper '[Title]' was returned to the assessors approached originally but neither recommended it for publication. She therefore regrets she is unable to offer to publish your paper in the [Journal] on this occasion.*
>
> *I am sorry to give you this disappointing news but hope that it will not deter you from submitting other articles to us in the future.*
>
> *Yours sincerely, [Signature]*

I don't bear any grudge; in fact I quite enjoyed that last paragraph. I've written such letters too! Young researchers should realize that every active researcher gets rejection letters, including the most senior of us. The paper in question wasn't bad, and got published in another journal a year or two later.

"Peer review" is essentially a mechanism for judging whether a submitted paper makes enough contribution to the shared project of knowledge formation to warrant using a journal's resources and reputation to circulate it.

Peer review is often called a "quality control" mechanism. That's a dubious image, which fits too closely with the factory image of research. Rather, peer review is a way that a collective decision is made, in fact, many thousands of collective decisions each

year. Peer review only gradually emerged as a custom; some important science has happened without it. Einstein's "Electrodynamics of moving bodies" paper, for instance, was never peer-reviewed. It was published on the judgment of the associate editor of the journal at the time – one Max Planck - who knew the young man's work.

Most of the time, in my experience as a researcher and an editor, peer review works reasonably well. I have rarely sent a paper to a journal without learning something useful from the anonymous reviewers' comments. At the least, I learn how my writing comes across to another reader! Sometimes it's much better than that. I've had some brilliant reviews that really advanced my thinking about the problem. On the other hand, I've had some snarky and even hostile ones. Unpleasant; but I've learnt to shrug those off. Basically, I think of peer review like the famous definition of democracy: the worst system we know, except for all the others.

3: THE GENRES IN WRITING FOR RESEARCH

Any research effort needs different kinds of writing, each requiring skill and judgment. It's only by combining all of them that a project is brought to fruition. ("Fruition", not simple completion. I'll come back to this.)

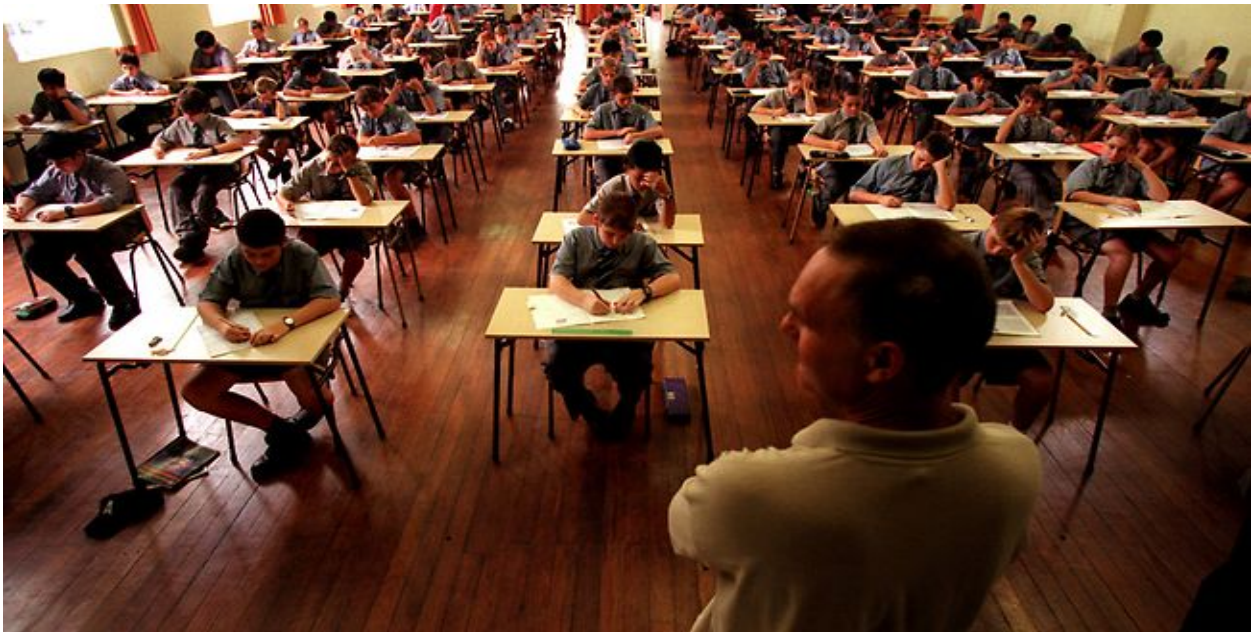
I distinguish five genres in writing for research: launch, internal, summative, outreach, and interactive. They have different audiences, use different styles, and can use different technologies. I do quite a lot by hand, using a pen with green ink – I think it's my Irish ancestry. This isn't essential; it's legitimate to use blue ink.

Launch writing

There's writing to be done in getting a research project going. You have to make plans, and it's unwise to keep them all in your head unless you are a super-spy heading for enemy territory. Often a research project starts with a bright idea jotted on the back of an envelope, or a comment you have made in the margin of a text, or a problem that arose in your previous research. Keep those notes! I have tried keeping them in a bound notebook – one hand-written research ideas notebook ran for 18 years – but this can be laborious. Manila folders are just as useful, and easier to recycle.

The audience at this point is yourself, so you can be wild and dangerous in what you write. Try ideas out, with no inhibitions! Try strange linkages between different thoughts, try following streams of thought. Most of this will soon be abandoned, but no harm is done, and you've had some good mental exercise. Some of it will crystallize into practical research proposals.

When it does, you have to do launch writing for other readers: formal research plans, especially if you are working in a team; permissions documents, e.g. for "ethics"



How not to devise new research ideas

approval; applications for grants or tenders for contracts. I have two pieces of advice about all this.

First, don't hurry. If you are working in a team, give your colleagues time to think and rewrite your draft plan. If there's a deadline, give yourself elbow-room before the crunch date. In the planning of research, hurry almost always results in banal research that repeats, with small variations, what's already been done by other people.

(That's why I'm very critical of the trend today to make PhD students produce a detailed research plan right at the start of their enrolment – or even before they enrol – when they have not had the time to explore, think creatively, or make a few mistakes.)

Second, think about launch writing from the point of view of the readers. If you need a grant, ask yourself what the granting body is trying to accomplish by funding research. If you need to get permissions, ask yourself what issues the permission-granters are worried about. In collaborations, make draft plans that address the problems your colleagues think important, as well as the problems you do.

Internal writing

Once a research effort is under way, a ton of writing is required to keep it going. You probably do more writing, certainly more varied writing, at this stage than any other.

Internal writing includes: emails to team members, drafts of questionnaires (a highly skilled business, by the way), fieldwork diaries, notes of observations, interview transcripts, minutes of meetings, progress reports, case studies, statistical analyses,

Internal writing can be informal (Image: *Flickr*, by Emily Logue 2006)

summaries of literature, notes of bright ideas, lists of jobs to do, and the further plans you need to make because the initial plans were never enough.

Much internal writing is quite informal, being done for a very small readership, sometimes the research team, sometimes just yourself. It can be creative and adventurous. I use case studies, for instance, to think aloud about theoretical issues, bouncing concepts speculatively off the concrete detail of the case. I wouldn't publish them that way. Similarly, I use my notes on articles or books to argue with the author, not just record what she says.

The important thing is to make internal writing as pithy and usable as you can. If recording data or decisions, then you are particularly careful to make the record accurate. Try to reduce repetition. When I'm reading books or journal articles, I make a full bibliographical record the first time I make any notes – this saves a lot of frustration later. (I do this by hand on 5" x 8" cards, the archaeological remains of an ancient computer-based system; I now have thousands.)

Internal writing is what accounts for the legendary chaos in a researcher's office or workstation while a project is underway. Keep as much of it as you can without getting buried; you do, often, have to refer back. Some of this will cumulate to become part of the next genre, summative writing. You can throw out most of the clutter when the project is disbanded - though you are required by ethics protocols to keep key records, e.g. of raw observations, for a fixed number of years.

Summative writing

This is the writing that gets your findings into other people's hands. It's the subject of most "Advice about Writing" texts, which teach you how to write journal articles, theses or books. Other forms of summative writing exist, such as the old-fashioned palaeontology monograph describing a particular species of fossil arthropod. (There's a very entertaining account of that genre in chapter 3 of Stephen Jay Gould's book *Wonderful Life*.) I suspect new forms of summative writing are emerging on the Internet.

For the time being, as I noted earlier, the journal article is queen. Therefore Part Two of this booklet will detail how to write a journal article. Here, I want to raise a general issue about summative writing.

Summative writing always involves selection; in fact, severe selection. Even with a long book – I've written a few – the research produces far more material than the author can include. Be kind to the reader! A journal usually forces selection by having a maximum word length for articles. It is painful to leave out rich illustrations, amusing quotes, and elegant arguments; but it has to be done. Get used to this pain, it will be with you throughout a research career.

Selective interpretation 1966
(Image: Australian Liberal Party, from *The War Room*, Nichols ed.)

A familiar point in the advice texts: good writing is defined as much by what it leaves out, as by what it puts in. The problem in writing *for research* is to select in a way that doesn't distort the truths established by the research. Selective interpretation, as much as stating falsehoods, is the rule in propaganda.

Even without propaganda intent, selection can mean distortion. Because researchers and journals prefer statistically significant results (there's a thrill in writing $p<.01$), many findings of "no significant difference" go unreported or unnoticed. I am convinced that this pressure has distorted the whole field of social-science and psychology "sex difference" research. It really ought to be called "sex similarity" research, because $p>.05$ (i.e. no significant difference) is the most common finding.

There's a mixture of ethical and technical issues here, which all researchers face. There aren't simple rules to solve them. But researchers will be helped by remembering, as I argued at the start, that writing for research is a social enterprise. They are contributing to a vast shared project of knowledge-making. Other researchers and teachers will come after them. Their own summative writing, if it's honestly done, will be valuable to those others. If it's not, it will mislead those others – for a while. And then be discredited.

I borrow the term "summative" from the field of educational measurement, which distinguishes "formative assessment", a continuing part of a teaching/learning process, from "summative assessment", which happens at the end and looks back. Summative writing looks back on a research project and tries to formulate its conclusions for a wider audience. Yet it's worth noticing that what is summative for a particular project may be formative for a longer research agenda, and is definitely formative for the collective project of building, circulating and using organized knowledge. I will talk about writing programmes in this larger sense, in Part Three below.

Outreach writing

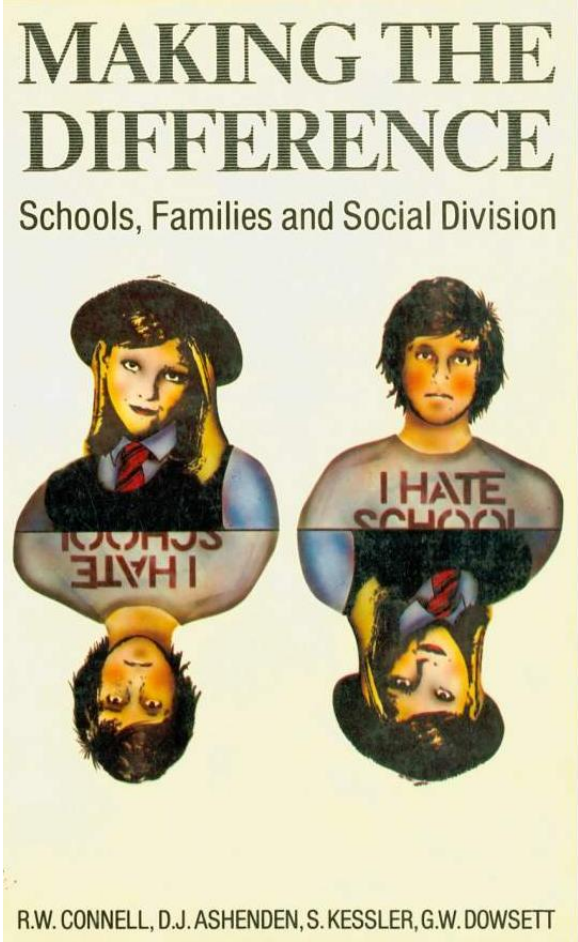
Summative texts for professional audiences are not the end. There's another genre where your research comes to fruition, as you take the findings to wider audiences - through practitioner journals, workshops, teaching, textbooks, popular science, mass media and the Internet.

It is part of researchers' business to take research-based knowledge to the people who can use it, or want to know about it. This is not an alternative to intellectual work, it's a necessary part of it.

Charles Darwin did it, Sigmund Freud did it, even Albert Einstein did it. I'm reading Einstein's little book *Relativity* at the moment, though it's stretching my high-school algebra. He wrote the first edition about the time he was publishing the technical papers on General Relativity, during the slaughter in the Great War; the book went through fifteen editions in his lifetime.

But for the finest outreach writing I know, have a look at Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. This is the work of a marine biologist who thought it was important to take scientific knowledge to a wider public. She wrote three beautiful books about sea and coastal life, but it was her last book, showing the environmental disaster of uncontrolled pesticide use, that shook the world.

Outreach writing is harder to do really well than summative writing such as a journal article. You can't presuppose much technical knowledge, and you can't assume the reader has a mental map of the research field. You can't use jargon, and you have to be very careful with technical terms that have a different meaning in the general language (e.g. "significance", not to mention "relativity").



Making the Difference **(1982, Allen & Unwin)**

Putting energy into writing (Image: *Flickr*, DataRock @ SXSW by Kris Krüg)

You also have to be respectful of your readers, and not talk down to them – a common problem when specialists write for "the layman". Think of yourself and your readers as citizens of the same world, needing to exchange ideas, information and skills.

This is straightforward when the audience is a practitioner group. I have done research in the sociology of education, and my key audience for this work is school teachers. (With the research for *Making the Difference*, we workshopped our writing with groups of teachers.) I know enough about teachers to respect their skills, and the complex strategising they do in their everyday work. Bringing my research into their forums is testing, but also exhilarating. I learn from them, and see my work contributing to theirs.

Dealing with mass media is different. Mass media usually work by fitting new information quickly into old templates, and this happens with research stories too. How often have you seen a news item that breathlessly reports a research "breakthrough"? – and how rarely do research projects actually have the shape of a breakthrough! (It's a military term, by the way.)

Writing for media has its own conventions. You put the conclusion at the start, not the end. It helps if you address a theme the media are already excited about. It's a good idea to work with media professionals, to get the hang of it.

Outreach writing is now being re-shaped by the Web. Hyperlinks give a way of including serious research documentation, almost impossible in older media. The proliferation of blogs makes it easy to put messages out, but also means they usually get lost in the babel. So curated outreach websites like *The Conversation* are useful, though they limit word-length and style.

Increasingly, simple text is supplemented, even replaced, by visuals and audio. It becomes more time-consuming and expensive to produce high-quality online material about research. My blog is definitely at the low-tech end. But the potential reach gets steadily bigger.

Interactive writing

Your research's contribution to the making and circulating of knowledge does not even end with outreach writing. If you have done a competent job on an interesting problem, there is a good chance other researchers will pay attention to your work, will use it and respond to it. In fact, the collective knowledge project depends on this happening. Knowledge develops in skeins of discussion, application, testing and revision that evolve over time.

The right attitude for responding to criticism (Image: *Flickr*, lily-padded pond near Angkor Wat, by Tajai)

To the extent this happens with your work, you will have the chance to engage in interactive writing – your contribution to the poly-logue that constitutes a field of knowledge. Here are texts like book reviews, rejoinders, review essays, handbooks, conference forums, debates, methodological papers, and more. These are researchers' attempts to sift and shape a body of research-based knowledge. The research you have done gives you authority to share in these attempts.

It's easy to start this on the wrong foot, defensively. If someone publishes a critique of your work, don't be upset. Be glad. Whatever their attitude, they have paid you a compliment! You are now part of the poly-logue. And you can usually learn something from any critic, just as you can learn from peer reviewing.

Many scholars adopt a combative attitude for interactive writing. This is a pity. When I was an undergraduate, I was taught by Allan Martin, an influential researcher in Australian colonial history. I was puzzled by his lectures, they sounded oddly different. I finally worked out why. When a conventional lecturer mentioned another scholar, it was to criticize what that scholar got wrong. When Allan mentioned another scholar in his lectures, it was to show what that scholar got right. It was a beautiful demonstration of how shared knowledge is built. I have never forgotten it.

PART TWO: HOW TO WRITE A JOURNAL ARTICLE - PRACTICAL STEPS

INTRODUCTION

Part Two of “Writing for Research” discusses how to write a journal article. With some adjustment, these ideas also apply to writing a chapter of a book or thesis. (But be careful to make the adjustment.) A journal article is summative writing, one of the five genres identified in Part One. It comes at a late stage in the project, when the research is done, the launch writing is complete, and the internal writing is mostly done.

Summative writing, in my experience, involves six main steps: the epitome; the argument-outline; the first draft; the revising; the presentation; and the publication. There are real differences between these steps in terms of writing practice. I’ll describe each in turn.

Remember, throughout, that the journal article is a distinctive form:

1. It’s strongly stylized. There’s a pre-arranged publication mechanism, the journal itself, with its own rules about style (usually downloadable from the journal website). In media jargon, the writer is just the “content provider”.

2. It’s cramped: it lives and breathes in a severely limited space. Most journals have word limits, and often the limits are tight. If you want to report your conclusions in a letter to *The Lancet*, be crisp: you have 400 words.

3. It’s a communication to a limited audience: a knowledgeable professional audience, not a wide public. Normally it’s wise to follow the conventions, and use the language, which that audience knows. Sometimes you might challenge the conventions: but have a very good case for doing so!

4. It’s self-contained. It has to explain itself and complete itself – which is quite different from a book or thesis chapter. But unlike self-contained genres such as the short story or the literary essay, the journal article explains itself in relation to the work of other researchers. Thus it becomes part of a collective process of knowledge formation.

My advice is based on the way I do this job myself. Doubtless there are other ways of doing it; this is what works for me. For simplicity, I’ll assume a sole-authored paper. Writing with other authors involves extra care and negotiation at each stage. It is generally slower, though it benefits from the extra minds at work.

A: THE EPITOME

This is a step that writing-advice manuals often overlook, because they are focussed on the writing technique, not on the research. I start here because it really is a vital part of the research communication process. It's both the last step in the data analysis and the first step in the writing-up. Therefore, it is the moment when you make the shift from internal writing to summative writing.

The Epitome is your summary of what you have found, and what you need to say to the audience. It's a bunch of notes to yourself. It can use shorthand, symbols, ungrammatical abbreviations – you are the only reader! It can be in your first language if you are writing the paper in a second language. You can write it on a yellow legal pad or on the back of an envelope. I wrote my last one on the back of a boring publicity handout. Recycle, and save the planet!

The epitome shouldn't be very long – it's an *epitome* of your material, not a dissertation. I try to make my epitomes shorter than one page, yet pack a lot in. For that reason I always write them by hand, not on a keyboard. (See the illustration on the next page.)

The epitome is not in any particular order. It can be compiled gradually, over several days while you read through your case studies or your printouts. It can incorporate notes you have written to yourself during the research.

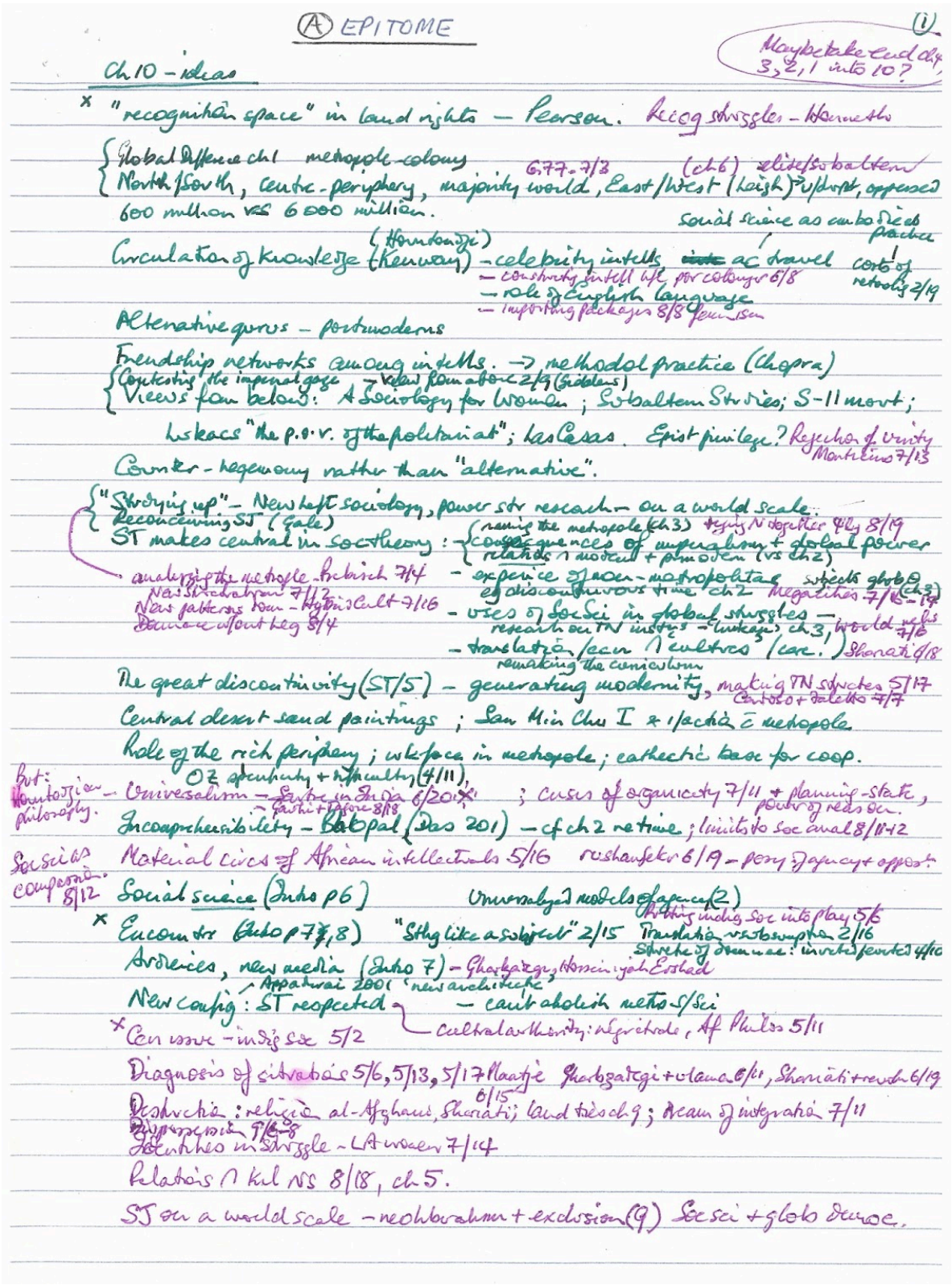
The Epitome should mention connections with the most relevant literature, since that is part of what you will tell your audience. It can include speculations, mad hypotheses, diagrams, and comments you would never show your Grandma. But it also contains the results of your solid data collection, your significance testing, your documentation.

Basically, it contains whatever you need to crystallize your evidence and bring your thoughts to a focus. All go into the pot, and simmer together. You want a rich primordial soup, from which your text will evolve.

B: THE ARGUMENT-OUTLINE

If the keynote of Step A is richness, the keynote of Step B is order and design. At this point you wrestle the disparate material of the research into a coherent line of argument, and a logical order of exposition. This is the hardest intellectual work in the whole process of writing an article. This is where you sweat.

The Argument-outline is the *intellectual* plan of the article. It is, literally, an argument. It is *not* a table of contents or a list of section headings, though such a list will easily emerge from it. It is a condensed statement of the claims you are making, on the basis of your research - and the grounds on which you make those claims. It shows the connections between the points that were noted down in no particular order in the Epitome.



Primordial soup: one of my epitomes. This one is for a book chapter; I use it here because of the nice colours, which show how it was built over two days.

At this stage you abandon most of the mad hypotheses that were OK in the Epitome, because you now want only what stands up to testing. You go back and forth to your data, or documents, or whatever material you are working from, checking the claims you are making. Often I find I have remembered a detail in the data or the literature slightly wrong. This is where I correct that memory, and modify the argument accordingly.

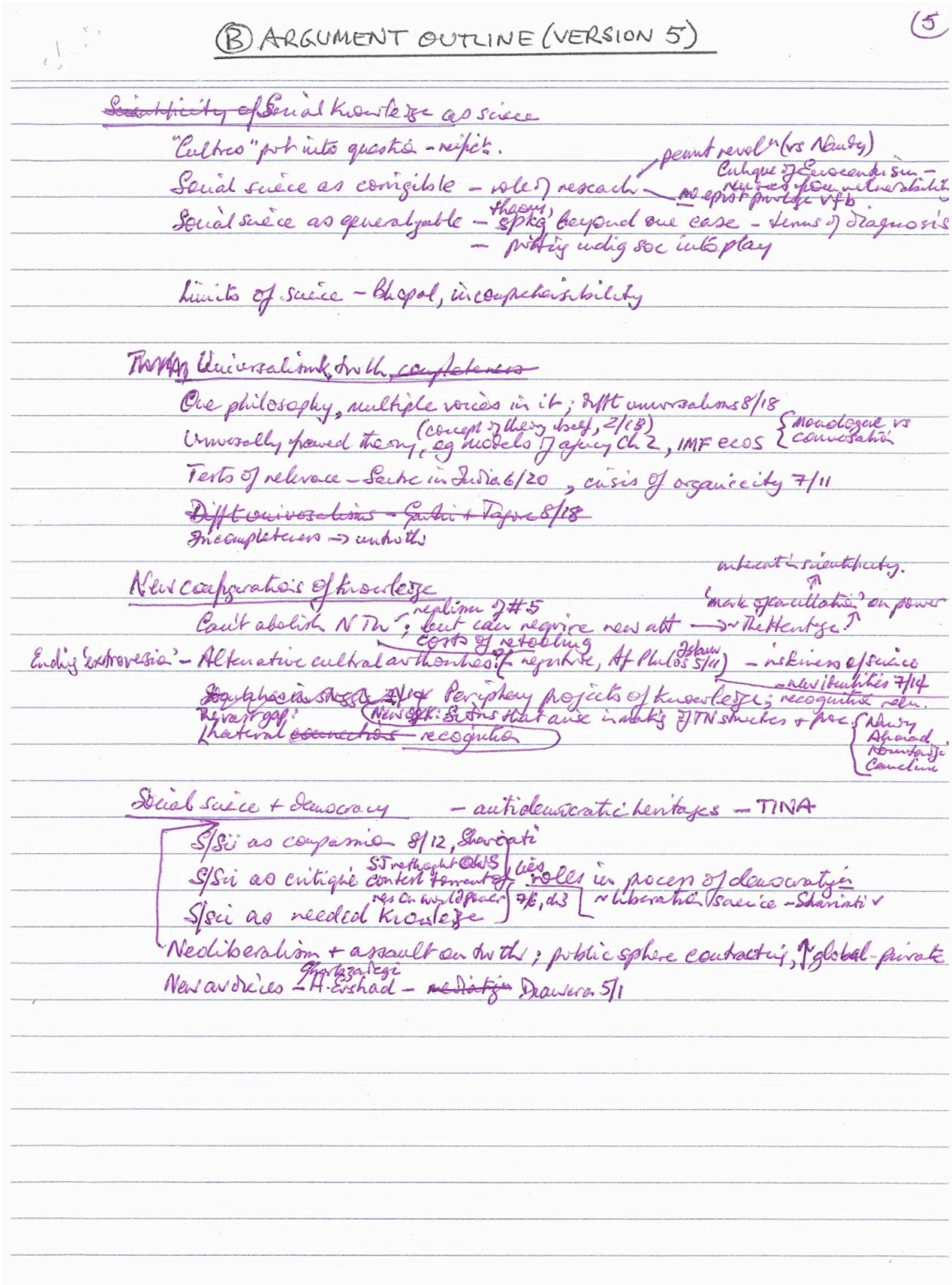
As I work on an Argument-outline, I find that my desk becomes piled with printouts, manila folders, books, journal offprints, notes, summaries and sketches. The chaos on the desk doesn't matter, provided the material is becoming shapely in my mind. I'm looking for the patterns I have noticed earlier in the research process, and especially the links between the patterns. The Argument-outline will therefore *look* more organized than the Epitome did. (See the illustration on the next page.)

The argument should be built around the main effects in the data, the strong central story in the documents, or the major theoretical idea you are developing. Often early-career researchers are so concerned not to make errors, that they obscure the truths they have to offer. Don't be hesitant. Speak your intellectual story with confidence!

And sit down quickly (Image: Wikimedia Commons, Luther, by Cranach

The story goes that the great teacher and religious reformer, Dr Martin Luther, was once asked by a nervous young minister how to preach. Luther answered: "Stand up straightly, speak out boldly, and sit down quickly." That's good advice for writing journal articles, too.

The Argument-outline might take satisfactory shape the first time through - if the analysis is very straightforward, or if you have thought a lot beforehand. Often, however, it will need further iterations. When you get a first version of the Argument-outline on paper, you can see with devastating clarity the flaws in your own argument, the gaps in evidence, the unconvincing conclusions. But don't panic!



(B) ARGUMENT OUTLINE (VERSION 5) (5)

~~Scientificity of~~ Social knowledge as science
"Cultures" put into question – reific.
Social science as corrigible – role of research – "permanent revol" (vs Nandy) – Critique of Eurocentrism – ~~as~~ epist privilege vfb – Rescues from relativism
Social science as generalizable – "theory" spkg beyond one case – terms of diagnosis – putting indig soc into play

Limits of science – Bhopal, incomprehensibility

~~Truth~~ Universalism, truth, ~~completeness~~
One philosophy, multiple voices in it; diff universalisms 8/18
Universally framed theory (concept of theory itself, 2/18) eg models of agency Ch 2, IMF ecos {Monologue vs conversation
Tests of relevance – Sachs in India 6/20, crisis of organicity 7/11
~~Diff universalisms – Gandhi + Tagore 8/18~~
Incompleteness → untruth

New configurations of knowledge
Can't abolish NTh; realism of #5; but can require new att – costs of retooling → ~ The Heritage? – 'mark speculation' on power – interest in scientificity
Ending 'extroversion' – Alternative cultural authorities (– negritude, Af Philos, Islam 5/11) – riskiness of science – new identities 7/14
~~Emphasis in South~~ Periphery projects of knowledge; recognition rela.
Reverse gap: New SKR: Solns that arise in making of TN structures + proc. {Nandy, Ahmad, Mamdani, Connell
Lateral ~~connections~~ recognition

Social science + democracy – antidemocratic heritages – TINA
S/Sci as companion 8/12, Shariati
S/Sci as critique – content torrent of SJ rethought, OWS – roles in process of democratization – ~ liberation science – Shariati
S/Sci as needed knowledge – res on world peace 7/6, ch3
Neoliberalism + assault on truth; public sphere contracting, ↑ global-private
New audiences – H. Ershad – Ghotbzadegi – ~~mediation~~ Drawera 5/1

My Argument-outline, 5th iteration. This is for the same piece of writing as the Epitome, above, so you can see how much more orderly it has become.

Take five deep breaths, go back to the raw material and check your data, go back to the analysis and think it through again, and then write another Argument-outline. You might go through this cycle five or six times, though one or two is more usual. The point is that you are testing and improving as you go.

I often tell my students, with this step in mind, to look carefully for the counter-examples, the evidence that *doesn't* fit the argument in its first form. When you find such material, you have to re-think the analysis until those awkward exceptions make sense *together* with the main story, rather than sitting outside it. That makes the analysis more intellectually powerful as well as more inclusive.

At the end of this step, you should have a coherent line of thought to present to the reader. You will know what explanations (e.g. of method) are needed, and in what order the evidence will be presented. You have a definite idea of how the article will start and how it will end. What you don't have, is any text. But don't panic! You soon will have text.

C: THE FIRST DRAFT

Ah, the First Draft! The trumpets ring out for the glorious moment when the eager pen touches the first pale sheet of paper, or the trembling finger presses the first key.

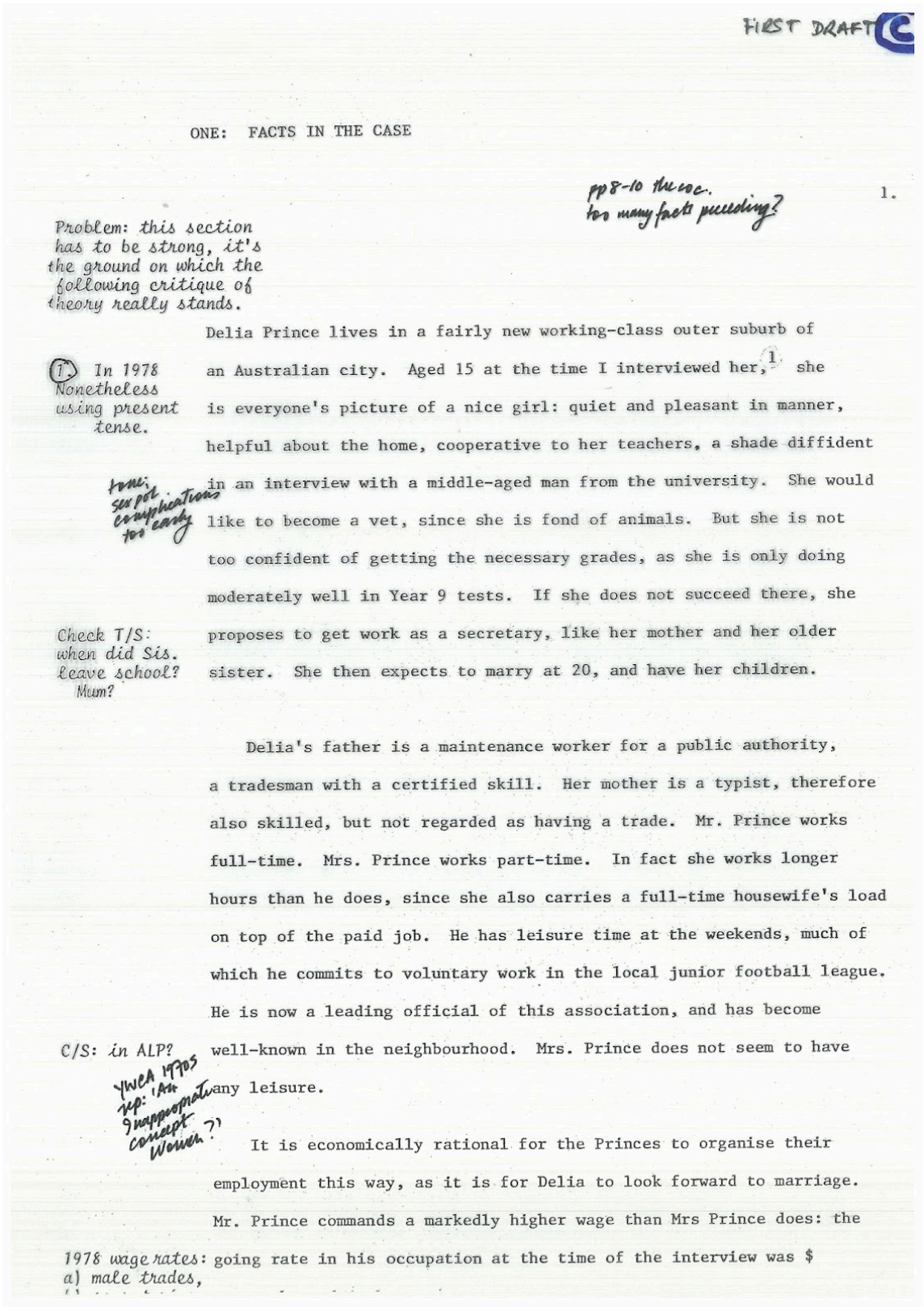
Enjoy the thrill. It won't last.

The First Draft is, by my reckoning, not the first step in summative writing but the *third*, after the Epitome and the Argument-outline. If you have done the first two adequately, the third will not be a desperate uphill struggle but a calm, reasonably steady progress.

What you are doing, basically, is expanding the Argument-outline into continuous prose, thus turning it into a form that makes sense to readers besides yourself. Remember always that you are part of a social process and a journal article is a *communication*. Think of who you are writing to: you are writing a kind of letter. As I noted earlier, that's literally what articles in the earliest scientific journals were.

I'm aware that some writers prefer to scrap all the preliminaries and launch straight into drafting, as a way to get going. Some say that this is their way of overcoming writers' block.

I wouldn't knock anyone's way of launching their keyboard into movement. What works, works. The very first sentence is often hard. I can stare at the screen for what seems hours without a phrase coming into my mind. I spin the chair around, change the music, pull my hair, read my notes again, stomp off for another coffee. Eventually something will come. (Caffeine addiction, probably.)



FIRST DRAFT

ONE: FACTS IN THE CASE

pp 8-10 the soc. too many facts preceding?

1.

Problem: this section has to be strong, it's the ground on which the following critique of theory really stands.

Delia Prince lives in a fairly new working-class outer suburb of an Australian city. Aged 15 at the time I interviewed her,[1] she is everyone's picture of a nice girl: quiet and pleasant in manner, helpful about the home, cooperative to her teachers, a shade diffident in an interview with a middle-aged man from the university. She would like to become a vet, since she is fond of animals. But she is not too confident of getting the necessary grades, as she is only doing moderately well in Year 9 tests. If she does not succeed there, she proposes to get work as a secretary, like her mother and her older sister. She then expects to marry at 20, and have her children.

1. In 1978 Nonetheless using present tense.

tone; sexpot complications too early

Check T/S: when did Sis. leave school? Mum?

Delia's father is a maintenance worker for a public authority, a tradesman with a certified skill. Her mother is a typist, therefore also skilled, but not regarded as having a trade. Mr. Prince works full-time. Mrs. Prince works part-time. In fact she works longer hours than he does, since she also carries a full-time housewife's load on top of the paid job. He has leisure time at the weekends, much of which he commits to voluntary work in the local junior football league. He is now a leading official of this association, and has become well-known in the neighbourhood. Mrs. Prince does not seem to have any leisure.

C/S: in ALP?

YWCA 1970s up: 'An inappropriate concept for Women'?

It is economically rational for the Princes to organise their employment this way, as it is for Delia to look forward to marriage. Mr. Prince commands a markedly higher wage than Mrs Prince does: the going rate in his occupation at the time of the interview was $

1978 wage rates: a) male trades,

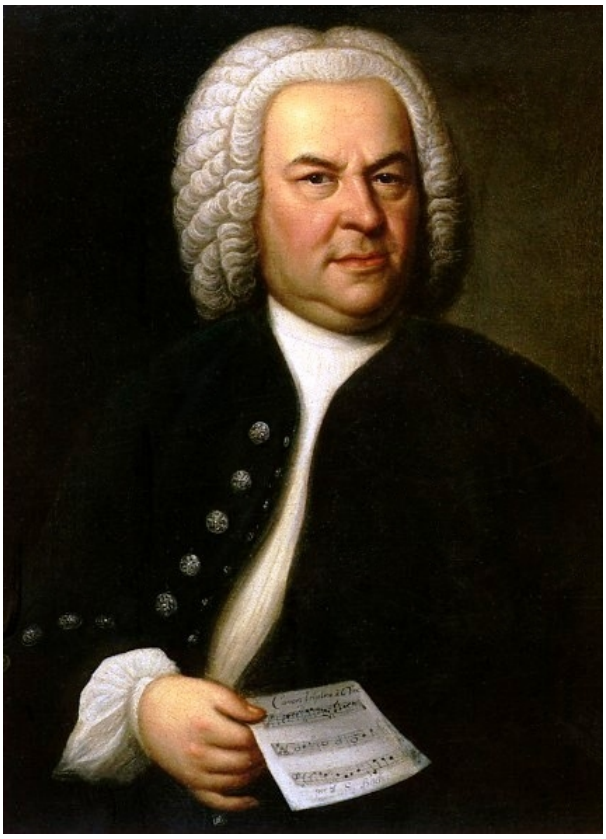
One of my first drafts, from the days of the typewriter.

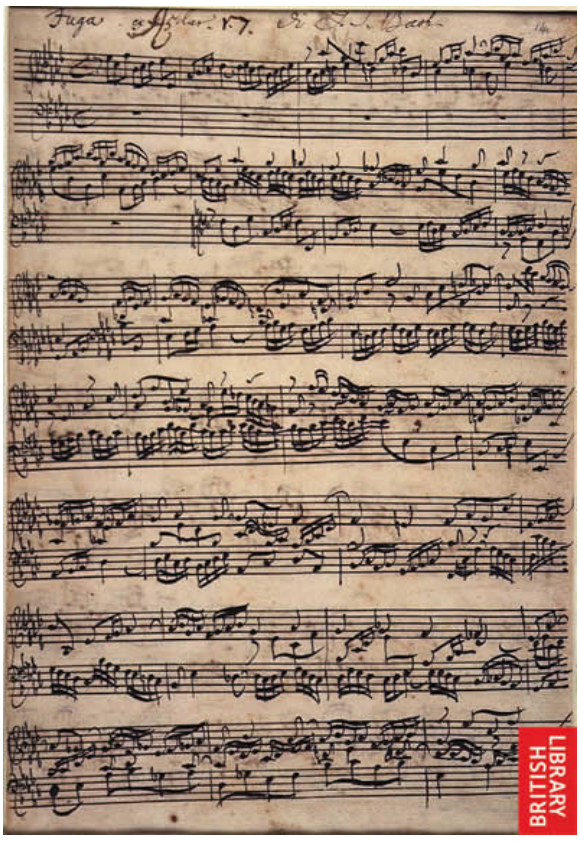
But I would say there are advantages to preparing carefully before starting a First Draft. This has to do, not with how you write the first sentence, but how you write the twenty-first - that is, how you *sustain* the writing process.

It's a great help if you know definitely what is coming next, know what will come after that, and remember what has gone before. You write each sentence, not as an isolated unit, but as part of a *movement* of text that ushers the reader from where your research began, to where it has now arrived.

This holds also at a micro-level. While I am actually generating text, I find myself thinking and hearing two or three sentences ahead. I think this is common with experienced writers. The sentence appearing under my fingers is not a self-contained unit, but is being written in relation to the sentences immediately to come. It prepares the ground for them; they develop, complete or quarrel with it. This also works backwards. My current sentence is written in relation to the sentence or two before – developing, completing or quarreling with them.

So writing is a bit like working under a moving spotlight, that lights up a few inches on either side, progressively shifting across the job. What's lit up, what's taking shape, is of the order of a paragraph in length.





A well-tempered paragraph. (Images: JS Bach (Wikimedia Commons) and J.S. Bach: 'The Well-tempered Clavier', Book II, Fugue in A Flat major, British Library Add. MS 35021, f.14)

When I say “hearing” sentences, this is literal not metaphorical. There’s a music in prose; a well-written paragraph should sing. I listen for the rhythm of sentences: for rise and fall; for over-complicated sequences. I listen critically for unpleasant combinations of sounds or unintended jingles. And I rewrite immediately if something sounds wrong.

Written prose is not transcribed speech. Anyone who works a lot with interviews, as I do, is acutely aware of this. But we do read text with the ear as well as the eye. A sentence that doesn’t sound well probably won’t read well. I think a lot of the clunkiness in journal articles comes from authors not listening as they write. The prose comes out sounding like a platoon of untrained army boots on the march.

So, the First Draft gets written. Probably not in a steady flow. My texts always come in fits and starts - more precisely, in small surges of a few sentences, or two or three paragraphs. It’s rarely more than that before I have to switch my mind off, stand up and move around. Generating text demands intense concentration, and unless you are a yoga whiz, that is physically demanding. I become quite tense and have to take short breaks often.

Don’t, don’t, don’t solve this problem by lighting a cigarette – as the murderous tobacco corporations want you to do. Just set fire to the money instead, you will be better off.

After a break of any kind, I usually find that the best way to get going is to rewrite the last sentence or two that I have written. That gets me into the spotlit zone and feeling the sequence of sentences again.

At last the bright day comes: the last full stop goes onto the last paragraph, and the last citation into the list of references. And now the job is effectively done, right?

Wrong.

D: REVISION

Revise, revise, revise. There’s not very much to say about this, so I’ll say it again. Revise, revise, revise.

While you were generating the First Draft, you probably discovered points in your argument where you weren’t sure of the facts, or precise about the concepts, or certain of the references. This is the moment for checking and correcting. And get it right! Nothing is so off-putting to a journal reviewer as errors of fact or inaccurate use of concepts.

This is also the moment when you work up the raw material of the First Draft, which with all your care probably wasn’t scintillating prose, into a text you will be proud to publish.

The great Australian novelist Patrick White, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1973, used to write three drafts of every novel. He called it “oxywelding” the prose. To me it’s

Oxywelder. (Image: Patrick White and his cat, *The Telegraph* by ROSS)

more like feather-stitching, when I have to adjust very fine details. But more like earth-moving, when I have to move or delete whole chunks of text.

Either way I have learnt to be ruthless. It's a basic mistake to fall in love with your own text. In a journal article, where space is cramped, this is especially so. You must be willing to rephrase, redraft, cut, condense, and cut again.

Admittedly this can feel like cutting your own legs off. In qualitative social research, every researcher has a stack of wonderful quotes; in quantitative studies, every researcher has many fascinating tables. Theorists have brilliant insights, fieldworkers have splendid specimens. And dammit, most of them have to be thrown out!

The secret, when revising, is to look at the text through other people's eyes. Above all, put yourself in the position of your intended reader. [Sociologist alert: yes, this is Taking the Attitude of the Other.] Ask what she really needs to know. Ask how much time she has to spend on your work.

In short, revise for accuracy; for pithiness; for sufficiency; for clarity.

E: PRESENTATION OF YOUR PAPER

So you have drafted and then revised and revised and revised your paper. Now it's ready to send to a journal, yes?

No. There's still some work to do, after you have finished the text to your satisfaction as a communication to your readers. You have to get it into the hands of the journal editors. (About journals, see Part One.)

Once upon a time, I did this by making three or four copies of the paper - carbon copy, roneo or primitive photocopy - stuffing them in an envelope, licking a stamp, and posting the lot to the journal. The extra copies were for the reviewers.

Nowadays with mainstream journals, articles have to be submitted through horrible websites, designed by the corporations that own the journals. Is this faster? No. These websites are rigid and unfriendly to humans. The journal's editors often find them difficult to use, too. But they have become unavoidable.

I can give no advice on how to overcome these websites, except that if you find you are blocked, then contact the journal directly and ask if they can insert your paper in the on-line system. Remember that journals need and want submissions.

With less-mainstream journals you may send an article by e-mail directly to the editors. That's much easier. But these journals will probably have smaller outreach.

Thunderbolts (Image: Yevtushenko in action at the Blok holiday Shakhmatovo 1972, by Vladimir Bogdanov)

The golden rule, in presenting your paper to a journal, is this: **Be Kind To Editors!** You may think of an editor as a god-like creature sitting on a mountaintop hurtling thunderbolts of Yes and No across the landscape. (Yevtushenko once wrote a memorable poem called “The City of Yes and the City of No”.)

In fact the editor is usually another harassed academic with a bad back and caffeine poisoning from trying to cram in all the jobs due before Friday.

Most academic journals run on voluntary labour. Being a journal editor is not a prestigious job; it takes time away from research, helps only a little in getting promotion, and will never get a Nobel Prize. But editors are key people in the social process of communicating and developing knowledge. They are making a really important contribution. So make their job easier, please!

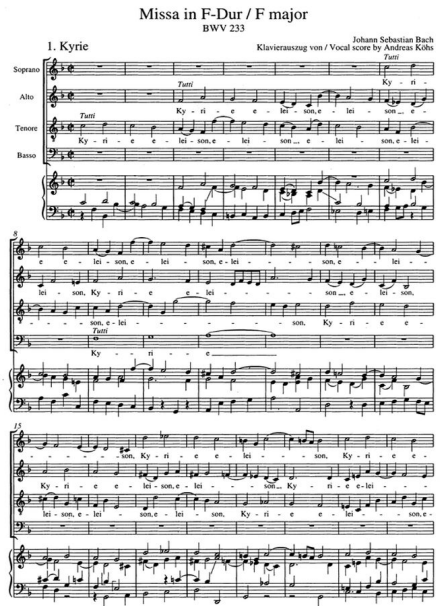
Therefore, follow the journal’s format and conventions for style, and its rules for layout, citation, etc. It’s not hard to do, it doesn’t take much time, and it does show respect.

Make sure your paper is in the field of knowledge that the journal actually covers. Don’t send your paper to an inappropriate journal just because of its Impact Factor - that will waste your time, and theirs. *Read back issues of the journal concerned!* It’s surprising how many authors don’t do this. If the journal has been discussing the issues you are working on, then join that conversation, cite recent papers on the theme, and thus easily show the editor the relevance of your work.

For early career researchers, *don’t* send a chapter of your dissertation or thesis. A dissertation is a different genre from a journal article, written for a different audience and with a different communication logic. The journal, if it reviews such a piece at all, will certainly send it back for re-writing. Again, time wasted for everyone. You can, of course, write a journal article *based on* the material in a thesis chapter, and many people do. But you need to think it through from the start as a journal communication.

Editors generally are looking for good quality, not perfection. Don’t agonize about sending a paper, or feel that it has to be a world-shattering text. Think of it as another thread being woven into the fabric of knowledge, another voice in the marvellous, massive counterpoint of human culture.* If you have done an honest, thoughtful job, you can feel confident about seeking publication.

* While writing this section, I was listening to J. S. Bach’s mass in F major. Such music can make you feel a mere worm in the presence of the divine. But Bach did not take a vainglorious attitude. To him, music was a craft, and he once said: *I was obliged to be industrious. Whoever is equally industrious will succeed equally well*. Let’s take the same attitude to writing for research.



..succeed equally well..

F: PUBLICATION

At Step E, you will often get a rejection. The journal might decide not to review your paper, or the reviewers might criticize it too strongly, or the editor might decide there is not enough room for your words (see the discussion of “peer review” in Part One). High-prestige journals reject many more papers than they accept: 90% or more, at the top of the tree. In that case simply go to another journal, and repeat Step E. Eventually you may get an “accept”, but more often a “revise”.

Technically this may be either a “revise and resubmit” or an “accept conditional on revision”, but the task for the writer is much the same. At this point the journal should send anonymous copies of the reviewers’ reports, and you have to read and use them.

This can be emotionally difficult. Other people’s criticisms of your lovely text, over which you have sweated so long, can hurt. Sometimes the criticisms are sharply expressed, which can feel like Internet flaming. Regrettably some reviewers behave competitively, showing off their own expertise. More often they are courteous. Some will identify flaws in your argument, some will point out literature you should read, some will criticize technical points in your method.

The vital point here is to set aside any anger or despair that these criticisms arouse. It’s like the task in meditation, where you set aside pain – not denying it, not fighting it, but letting it float aside – while you bring your mind back to the point of focus. In this case, the focus is what you can learn from the reviews.

As always, remember that knowledge-making is a shared, social process. The reviewers provide your first view of how readers out there in the world will read your contribution. If you think they have not understood your argument, don’t complain, but take it as a cue to write more clearly. Having knowledgeable scholars read and comment on your work almost always helps improve it.

When you send the revision back, tell the editor, in a covering letter, what you have done in response to the reviewers’ criticisms. This need not mention every minor change, but should list the main changes, and should clearly state what you have done about the reviewers’ main points.

You *are* entitled to reject criticisms made by a reviewer. The editor herself may not agree with every point that reviewers make! But when you reject reviewers’ advice, you should tell the editor and give the reasons. This is part of Being Kind To Editors – don’t make the editor hunt around your text to find out. The editor may send a revised text back to the same reviewers, or may find new reviewers, you cannot tell in advance.

At last the editor smiles, your paper is accepted for publication, hurrah! But stop! Put that champagne back in the ice-box! There is one more job: copy-editing.

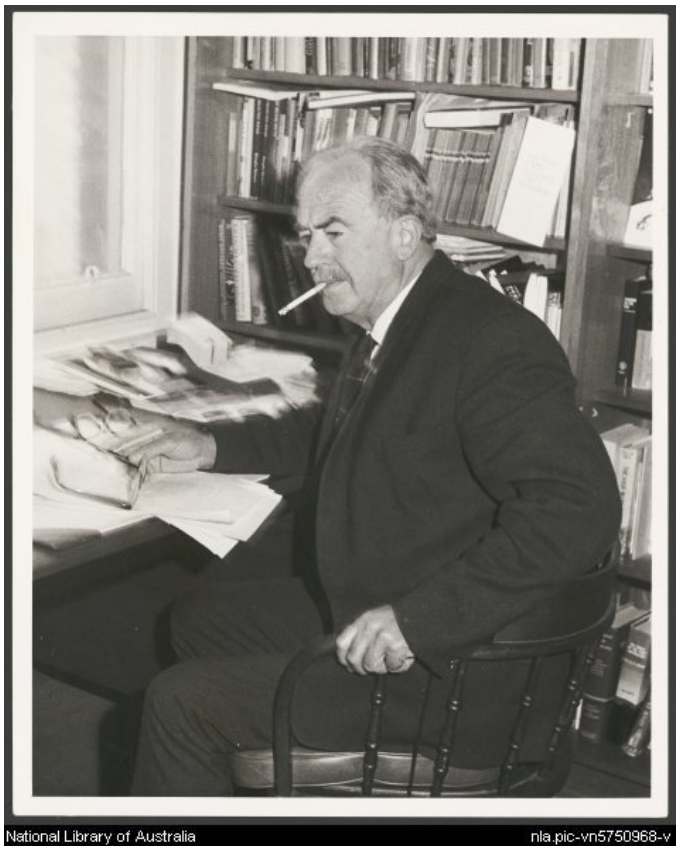
In this process, the editor, or more often nowadays a professional copy-editor, will go through the text to correct grammar, style, punctuation, referencing, and the other technical details required to make the journal look neat and professional. You are likely to be sent a list of “queries”, some of them quite fiddly, which you have to answer quickly.

This too can be confronting. I once had a terrible argument with a copy-editor who had taken all my semi-colons out, and replaced them with commas; sometimes this made nonsense of my sentences. [As the previous sentence shows, commas and semi-colons perform different functions. When we “hear” the sentence, they represent pauses of different lengths.]

But again, you can learn from copy-editing. Early in my career I sent a critical essay about political opinion polls to the Australian literary journal *Meanjin*. Its founding editor Clem Christesen was one of the most influential figures in Australian intellectual life. He was kind enough to accept the essay and it’s now in my list of published works. But when I got the copy-edited text back for approval, I was appalled. Almost every sentence had been altered: punctuation, vocabulary, order of clauses, even the paragraphing. My first reaction was anger at the insult to my splendid style.

When I simmered down, I looked more closely at the editing, and discovered I had been given a memorable gift. Christesen was a very good editor. Almost every change he made to my text was an improvement. From that time to this, I’ve been glad to have criticism, and I’ve tried to see my texts from the point of view of a reader.

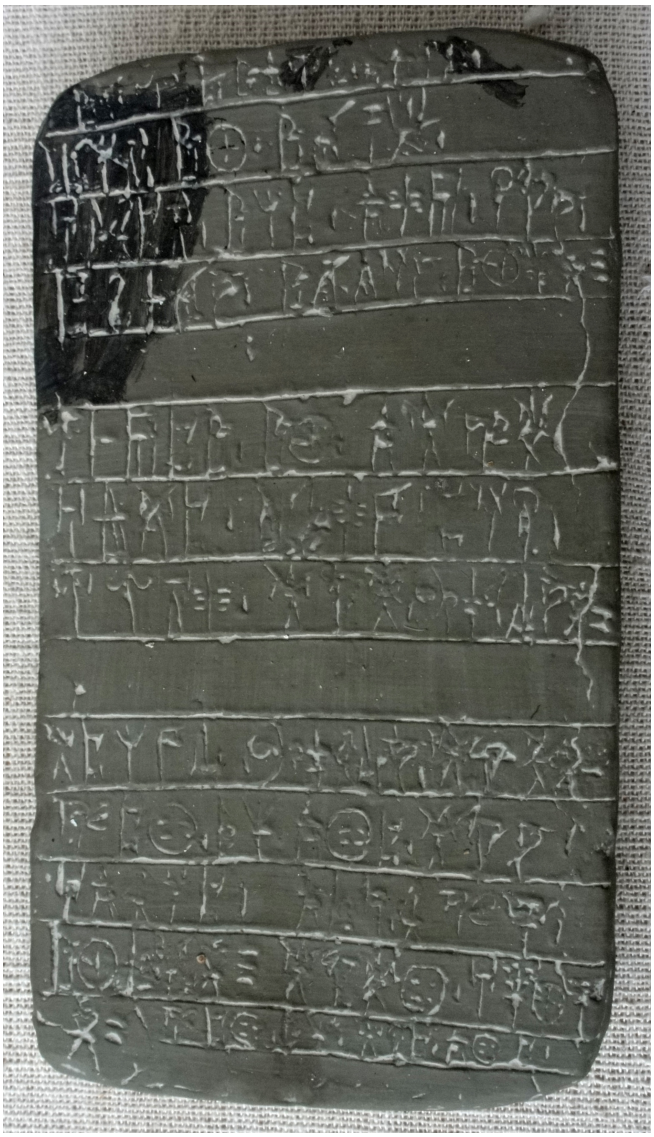
TOP: The copy-editor's bane



RIGHT: Editor at work: Christesen (Image: National Library of Australia)

The last stage of all is the waiting. This can be disconcerting. If it's a high-prestige journal, you can wait for a couple of years before seeing your work in print. By then the discussion in the field may have moved on, and you have probably moved on to other problems too.

Publication lag is not a new thing. One of the most famous articles in classical scholarship announced Michael Ventris' astonishing decipherment of the mysterious Linear B script on the ancient clay tablets of Crete and mainland Greece. This paper had the catchy title "Evidence for Greek dialect in the Mycenaean archives". It was submitted to the *Journal of Hellenic Studies* in November 1952 and published unusually quickly, nine months later.



Decipher this! A Linear B tablet (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

But while the authors were waiting, the news leaked out, and reached the media – resulting in an editorial in *The Times* and international celebrity for Ventris, all before the scholarly article appeared.

Because of the lag problem, many mainstream journals now publish an article on-line soon after it is accepted and copy-editing is complete. You then have to wait until the journal issue to which it is allocated comes round, before you have the details of volume and issue number. Oddly, you may end up with two different dates of publication for one article. (Believe it or not, there is now a bibliometric research literature about this problem.) Purely on-line journals simplify this and usually mean quicker publication, so they have become more popular, especially in the physical and biomedical sciences.

Online or offline, your article has finally hit the streets. Now open the champagne, and invite the neighbours in! Your work has joined the vast, troubled, but inspiring collective effort to develop human knowledge and understanding.

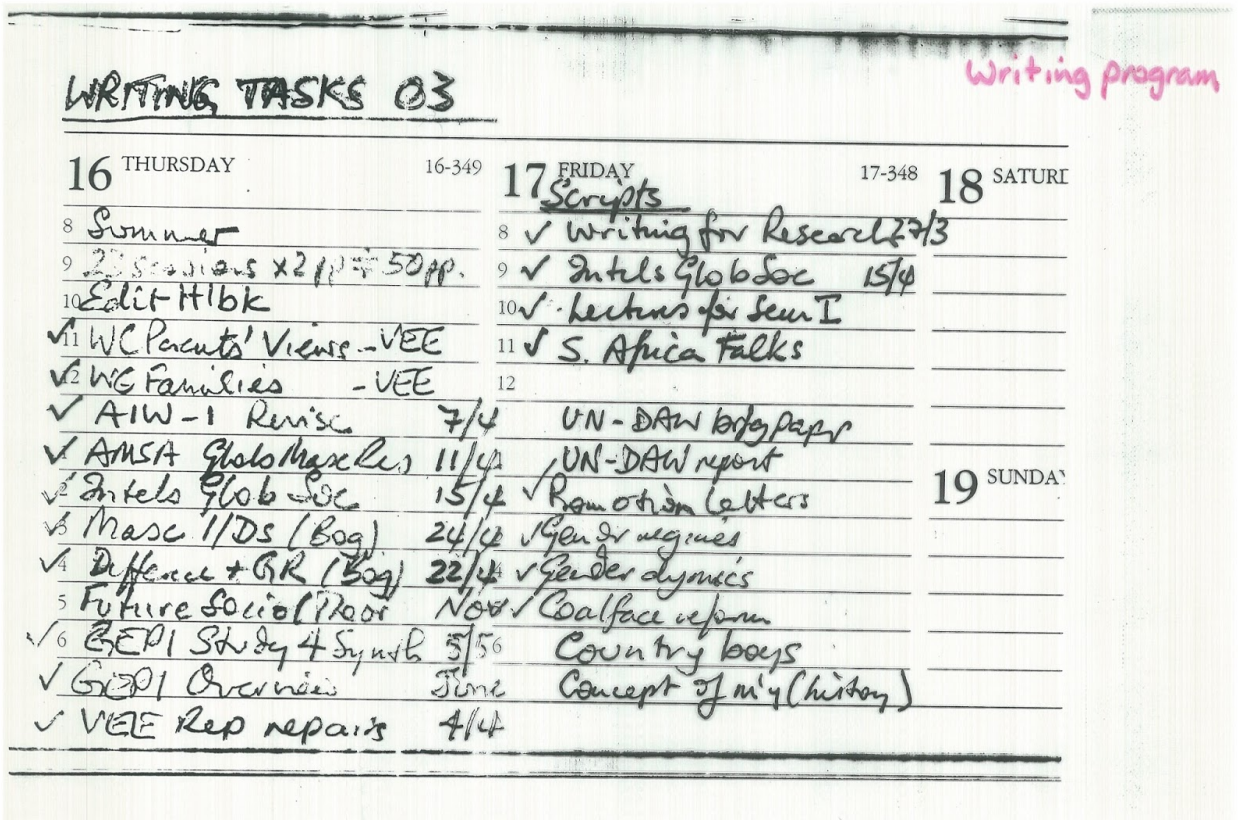
PART THREE: THE BIG PICTURE

1: WRITING PROGRAMMES

There's a widely-held belief that writing happens by sudden inspiration. A bolt from the blue strikes an author, kindling a fever of creativity from which a text surges. And a few years later, a Nobel Prize looms...

It's true that emotions matter in writing – I'll talk about that later. But the rest of this tale is a myth. In Part One, I showed how writing is a special form of labour. The greatest of writers work with great care, and often for a long time, to produce a text. And they don't sit down at any random time to write about any random topic. They plan ahead, and work systematically. Researchers should too.

I plan my writing about a year ahead. I make a list of the papers, reports, essays, and lectures I expect to write in the course of the year. Book chapters also, if I'm working on a book. I include texts that I am revising, as well as new texts, because revising too is serious labour. On the same principle, I include major pieces of internal writing such as case studies or reports.



From Raewyn's diary: Main writing tasks for a year. I got most of them done.

I gradually turn this list into a programme of work. I note, in the list, any deadlines: dates when I am due to give a lecture, or when other people need my text (e.g. for a special issue of a journal they are editing). I have a sense of what pieces are most urgent, so I have a rough order of business.

I don't turn that into a rigid schedule for a whole year. I once tried doing so, and became very frustrated as I couldn't stick to the plan. A writing programme needs some flexibility, for new jobs that arrive unexpectedly, and yes, for inspiration. There are times when a job on my list just feels ripe and I need to do it now. Perhaps I have been meditating and the ideas have come together, perhaps an opening passage has written itself in the back of my mind...

About a month ahead, I actually schedule the writing times. I block off days, or half-days, in my diary, and write down which text I will be working on that day. To schedule accurately requires a bit of experience. I can usually estimate, to within a day, how long it will take me to write a text of a certain length.

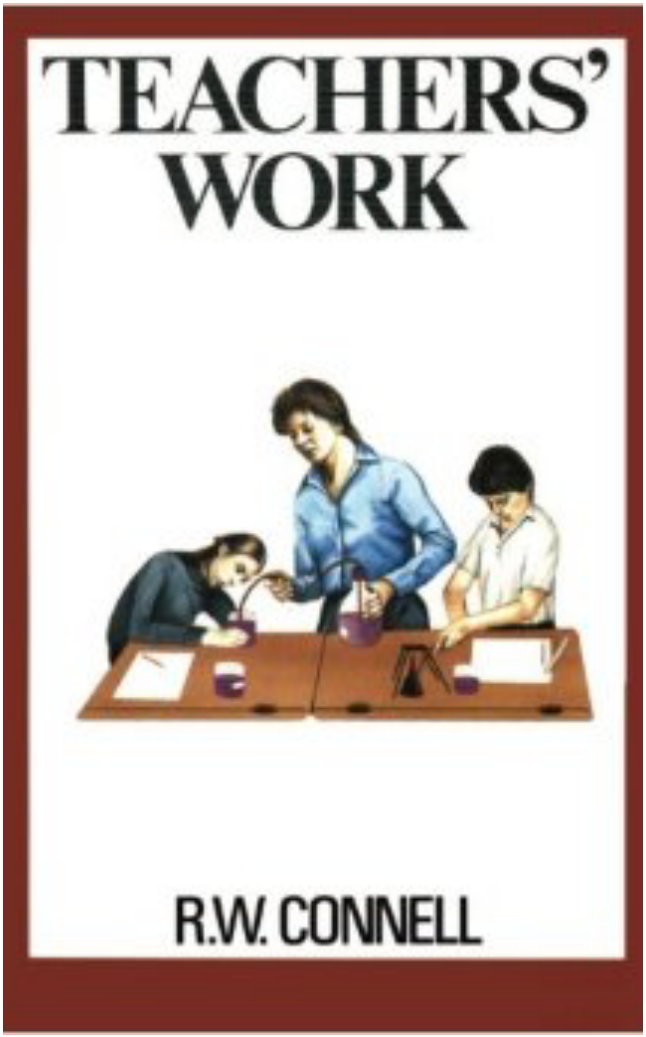
But the job might be unexpectedly difficult; and if I get sick, or the government declares war on the whales and we need to organize a revolution, the writing schedule goes out the window. It's important to be realistic, and not get into a panic or feel guilty, if the timing goes wrong. It sometimes will go wrong, that's a fact of life for a writer.

That's the micro-planning, on the scale of a year, a month, and a day. But there's a macro-dimension too (sorry for the jargon, that's the wicked sociologist in me). I am also thinking about five years ahead, to the kind of research and writing I hope to do in the next phase of my life. This isn't exactly planning. All I produce is little wish-lists of books or papers. Many of them will never get written. But thinking this far ahead gets my current writing in perspective, and helps me think more imaginatively about audiences, collaborations, and genres.

What I have just said might sound utopian to many readers, and they would be right. I have had great privilege, as a senior academic with a tenured and well-paid job in a rich country. This privilege has allowed me to make my own agendas, trying to respond to social and intellectual needs as I understand them.

Many researchers are contract workers in completely insecure jobs. Many who have permanent jobs still have agendas given to them, by governments, donors, or department heads. Others are doing research and writing only part-time, and some don't have a job at all. Others, especially in developing countries, have more than one job and have to rush between them because none is adequately paid. Deadlines are much more demanding for doctoral students, NGO staff, or policy researchers. It's hard to plan a year ahead if you are scrambling all the time for new short-term contracts. A lot of writing for research is produced under economic or organizational pressure.

A room of one's own



Emotion work. (Image: *Teacher's Work* 1985, Allen & Unwin Australia)

So what I have said is not intended to lay down rules about writing programmes. It's mainly an account of my practice as a writer, and readers can take from it any part that's useful. But there are two issues where I would say something prescriptive.

The first is about clear time and place. In 1929 the great novelist Virginia Woolf published an essay that named what women needed to be successful creative writers: "a room of one's own", and five hundred pounds a year - a middle-class income in England then. That's the famous formula, and it works for men as well as women. But Virginia also insisted on time. A writer needed to get clear of the endless demands of house and family. That's hard, for women who are under social pressure to do care work.

A regular place to write, whether it's a desk in a quiet bedroom (my writing place for many years, though I have a whole study now), a cabin in the woods, or the dedicated corner of a kitchen table, is an immense asset for a writer. University managers who

think cheap “hot desking” is good enough for doctoral students and research staff are making a really bad calculation.

A regular time to write is also a great help. That’s made more difficult by the turbulence of casual employment. But even one fixed session a week is worth having.

Whether it’s regular or occasional, once you have time and place cleared for writing, make sure they *stay clear*! Close Twitter, Facebook and E-mail. Send the kids to the beach, lock the door and put the mobile phone in the refrigerator. Be ruthless! Let the world look after itself for a space. It will probably still be there when you come out of your writing time.

My second prescription is a little less obvious. Intellectual work is not just technical labour. I once wrote a book based on research with high school teachers, in which I emphasised the emotional character of their work - in creating human relations with kids, in handling pressure, and in the core process of classroom teaching itself. The perceptive sociologist Arlie Hochschild named “emotion work”, and I think the idea applies to writing too.

Producing a text is partly a matter of mood, focus, and excitement. Being depressed or anxious makes it harder. What’s called “writer’s block”, I think, is often an effect of such emotions getting stuck in a repetitive pattern.

The answer is not a state of emotionless, lotus-pond calm – I couldn’t write at all in a lotus pond! A writer needs productive emotions, perhaps a productive sequence of emotions. In my writing sessions I use lighting, music, drugs (overworking the espresso machine!) and anything else that helps to generate a mood of engagement and a controlled tension that carries the writing forward.

This is highly individual, I’m sure. I play Bach and you may prefer Beethoven. But whatever your musical tastes, recognize the emotional dimension in writing, and that may help you use it productively.

2: WHY DO IT? WHAT MAKES IT WORTHWHILE?

Writing for research isn’t easy, and isn’t quick. Good writing can’t be done on the spur of the moment. It’s a true proverb that what is easy to write will be hard to read. As I have emphasised, writing is labour that involves the writer’s emotions, and it can be a grinding, nerve-shredding business. It takes years to learn how to write well. I’ve been practising for five decades and I still don’t find it easy.

There are special difficulties about writing for research. Texts must survive a series of technical judgments – by yourself, your colleagues, journal reviewers, and ultimate readers. The texts that researchers write (and neoliberal managers dehumanize as

Research impacts. (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

"research outputs") take a long time to pass through the pipelines and appear in the world.

The uses that readers make of them (in management's weird military dialect, "research impacts") take even longer to emerge. There's no instant gratification here! And it's always uncertain whether a given piece of research writing *will* find many readers and users.

In the face of all this, three things make writing for research worthwhile. It meets a social need. It's a satisfying craft. And it involves a rare privilege.

Meeting a social need

I have emphasised that making organized knowledge is inherently a social process. It's not a matter of neural surges in isolated brains, and it's not done by machinery. Research is done by women and men working in cooperation, in sustained interaction, linking over distance and time. The core of the communication that makes their cooperation possible is, precisely, what we have been talking about: writing for research.

Writing for research, then, is a key to the growth of knowledge as a social resource. It's worth doing because of the *collective* purpose it serves. That can go terribly wrong, I

know. Modern research has gone into ghastly weapons and polluting products, from DDT to drones. Neither states nor corporations can be trusted to use knowledge only in humane ways. But the struggle for human survival and social justice itself needs knowledge; in fact, needs growing knowledge and wider access to it. Even small research contributions become part of the *shared* wealth of knowledge in the public domain, and sustain the collective process of producing knowledge and understanding.

This is easy to see for biomedical or engineering knowledge. It also applies in the social sciences and humanities, for the self-understanding of cultures and societies. The stakes are large. If our institutions seriously hamper writing for research – by economic pressure, by political or managerial control – they damage humanity's capacity to learn.

Practising the craft

In the Age of Wal-mart, the connection between a usable object and the work of the people who made it is heavily disguised and easily forgotten. That also happens with research. Formulaic "outputs" conceal the human labour involved. There's a mass of bad writing out there!

Doing a slow job well

So it is good to notice, and celebrate, the work itself. I have emphasised that writing for research is generally slow and often difficult. Yet there is great satisfaction in doing a slow and difficult job well. There's a real pleasure in feeling a good sentence, a good paragraph, a good line of thought, taking shape under your hands. It's even a sensual pleasure. Not as high as going to bed with someone you love; but it lasts longer...

It's a craft you learn the same way as you learn any other: by watching skilled people do it, and then practising, and practising, and practising. It's good to read a lot, and in different forms: drama and poetry are very useful for prose writers. I read a lot of poetry in translation, the oddest of all genres – it makes me think about the writing process on two levels at once.

When you practice, don't stick to just one genre. Try your hand at haiku, heroic couplets, epistolatory romances, lines of computer code. Once when I was a graduate student I wrote a poem in Fortran 4, a now-obsolete programming language. It was a dreadful poem but started me thinking about possibilities and limits in language.

The privilege

We live in an age when the public sphere is drenched in disinformation and distortion. We joke about "spin doctors" being consulted, but the normal speech of politicians, governments and corporations is spin – emotional manipulation ("War on Terror"), oversimplification ("Tax Cuts"), tendentious selections of data ("50% Less Fat!"), or just outright lies ("Coal is Good for Humanity"). On a vast scale, the fashion industry, the porn industry and the drug industry peddle fantasies about human bodies.

As a university worker, I am deeply ashamed by the way universities, during the last twenty years, have joined the pack. Neoliberal university managements now routinely spend tens of millions of dollars on campaigns of seductive misrepresentation to attract fee-paying students. When their senior executives open their mouths, out comes the familiar corporate spin – excellence, efficiency, "leadership", customer satisfaction.

In such a world, it is a privilege to speak the truth. And that's what we are trying to do, in writing for research. Heaven knows, truth can be hard to establish. All researchers understand that, if they know their trade. Building our collective knowledge involves many false starts and failed hypotheses, much uncertainty and debate, and a lot of plain hard work.

But as Galileo Galilei is supposed to have said in another context, "*eppur si muove*" – still, it does move! In writing for research, we do have the chance to speak truth – as it is emerging, and as it is already known. That allows us to speak truth to power, in the classic role of the intellectual. But the privilege also allows us to speak truth among the people without power - for whom accurate knowledge and deeper understanding matter most of all.

3: SOME RESOURCES

George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language" (1946), is reprinted in almost all collections of Orwell's writing. It has a powerful argument for clear writing as democratic politics. It also gives practical do's and don'ts for writers, including the immortal bad sentence: "A not unblack dog was chasing a not unsmall rabbit across a not ungreen field". Orwell's essay gave rise to a whole school of criticism, such as Don Watson, *Death Sentence: The Decay of Public Language*, Knopf, 2003, which skewers hideous Australian examples of bad speech and writing under neoliberalism.

Chinua Achebe, *The Education of a British-Protected Child*, New York, Knopf, 1999. This unpromising title conceals a fine collection of essays by the great Nigerian novelist, on writing, language, colonialism, and more. Another notable collection is Sara Paretsky, *Writing in an Age of Silence*, London, Verso, 2007. Yes, the US thriller writer. This has terrific essays on intellectual work and freedom under the War on Terror.

Among the hundreds of writers' accounts of their writing, I particularly like BASHO Matsuo, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, Penguin, 1966. Basho is one of the most respected Japanese poets and this is a lovely account of his 1689 trip on foot through the countryside, writing *haiku* poems and thinking about eternity as he went.

Since I'm a sociologist, I'll also recommend "On intellectual craftsmanship", the famous appendix to the US sociologist C. Wright Mills' book *The Sociological Imagination* (1959). It has excellent low-tech advice, still relevant, about research planning, good for all disciplines. Mills himself was a notably clear, pungent writer.

And two fascinating texts that I *don't* recommend as advice, but can stimulate thought about writing. Gertrude Stein, *How to Write* (1931). Representative passage: "Grammar in relation to a tree and two horses." (Gertrude, why only two?) More positively, James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922). All this book is amazing stuff, with spectacular writing and great comedy. Look especially at the "Oxen of the Sun" episode, set in a maternity hospital, where Joyce parodies the whole history of English prose.

Portrait of Basho by Yosa Buson (Image: Wikimedia Commons)