Writing for Publication
Workshop

Dr Rowena Murray
University of Strathclyde
r.e.g.murray@strath.ac.uk
Programme

- Targeting journals, analysing journals, writing to prompts, drafting abstracts

- Freewriting, generative writing, dealing with reviewers’ feedback, strategies for the long term
Writing for publication: principles

- Using tried & tested strategies
- Discussion: rehearsing arguments
- ‘Pre-peer review’
- Writing/revising time -- increasing
- Analysing published writing
- Developing paper/chapter @ meetings
- ‘Binge’ and ‘snack’ writing
Workshop format

- Presentations: principles and rationales
- Writing activities
- Peer & group discussion, plenary
- Peer review
- Analysing published writing
- Writing time: options …
- Goal-setting for writing
Preparing to write

- Decide on specific writing project
- Choose target journal
- Email editor about your topic, contribution and appropriateness of your paper for that journal (pp. 63-5)
- Collect info about journal
- Select sample paper from the journal
Analysing published writing

- Identify acceptable subjects, structures, styles etc. in terms of what has recently been accepted by your target journal.

- This is not to say that editors and reviewers use a checklist, but that there is consensus, at some level, on what is acceptable.
1. As far as you can tell from the abstract, how is the paper structured?
   (Bear in mind that there should be a match between abstract and paper, depending on the journal.)

2. How is the contribution articulated?
   (Which words are used, are there any ‘modulators’, e.g. ‘Perhaps … suggests … might … could …?’)
What did you find?

- Structures: …?

- Contributions: …?
Analysing abstracts (pp. 44-57)

- Which words are used?
- How is the need for work articulated?
- What level of detail is used?
- Are definitions provided or not?
- What type of context is provided?
- How detailed is ‘contribution’ sentence?
- Are verbs used to define purposes?
Analyse other sections of published papers

- In your target journal
- Highlight topic sentences (i.e. first sentence of each paragraph).
- Is there a forecasting paragraph? If so, where does it appear in the paper?
- Identify key words used in title, abstract, conclusion and throughout the paper.
- Estimate relative length of sections.
Writing to prompts (pp. 82-5)

- What writing [for publication] have you done, and what would you like to do [in the long, medium and short term]?

- 5 minutes’ writing
- In sentences
- Private writing -- no one will read it
- To be discussed in pairs/groups
Brown’s 8 questions (pp. 108-14)

- To draft an abstract
- Not just for experimental work
- Set word limits
- Using generic structure
- Generating text you can work on later
- Write abstract first, revise it as you go
- Construct/see the whole argument
Brown’s 8 questions

1. **Who are intended readers?** (3-5 names)
2. **What did you do?** (50 words)
3. **Why did you do it?** (50 words)
4. **What happened?** (50 words)
5. **What do results mean in theory?** (50 words)
6. **What do results mean in practice?** (50 words)
7. **What is the key benefit for readers** (25 words)
8. **What remains unresolved?** (no word limit)
Freewriting (pp. 74-81)

- Write for 5 minutes
- In sentences
- Without stopping
- Private writing -- no one will read it
- Write about about paper topic or sub-topic
- Like brainstorming in sentences
- Structure and coherence not required
- Explore many angles, do ‘open’ writing
Generative writing (pp. 81-2)

- Same routine as freewriting
- But more focused, more ‘closed’
- Focus on one part of your freewriting
- To be read by one other person in the group
Free- and generative writing in writing for publication

- To get started
- To explore possibilities
- To silence the ‘internal editor’ temporarily
- To develop confidence
- To develop fluency
- To work out a complex argument
- To do rough drafting
Pros & cons

- ‘Freewheelers’ like it; ‘structurers’ don’t.
- It’s probably good to use both types of writing strategy.
- You need to try it for a while to see whether it has benefit for your writing process.
- It may be important to ‘write about your writing’ for some of the time.
References

Freewriting

Generative writing
Outlining (pp. 99-116)

- 3 levels of outlining
- Aligning your outline with your abstract
- Aligning your outline with target journal
- Peer feedback
- Writing your outline in sentences
- Goal-setting for writing
Level 1 outlining

- Main headings = ‘broad brushstroke’
- Easy to align with type of heading used in target journal
- Checks coherence of your argument
- Imposes word limit appropriate for your work and the target journal
- Using key words of your topic
Level 2 outlining

- Sub-headings -- in the form of prompts
- As in your target journal
- Break your main heading into parts
- This helps you decide on content
- May help if you write in sentences: e.g. The purpose of this section is to …
- Set word limits for sections and sub-sections.
Level 3 outlining

- Makes you **really** decide on content
- Lets you check if it’s all needed
- Check your sub-sub-headings ‘add up to’ your headings and draft abstract
- Set word limits
- Write about content in sentences
- Revise as you go along
A combined strategy

- Use both structuring and ‘freewheeling’.
- Recognising your preference, use different strategies for different purposes.
- Use a detailed outline to plan increments for your writing.
- Defining writing tasks first may make it easier to find time slots for them.
What do reviewers say? (pp. 187-202)

- Comment on your methodology
- Critique of your conceptual framework
- Challenging link between research aims & methods or data & conclusions
- Gaps in your lit review/references
- Disagreeing with your use of terms
- Questioning assertion of contribution
In their own words

- The author’s writing skills are appalling.
- The paper is loosely organised.
- There is a fundamental weakness in ...
- I feel very negative about this paper.
- It is difficult to see what it adds.
- The author makes several assumptions about ...
Dealing with reviewers’ feedback

- If it’s not rejected, revise and resubmit.
- If it is rejected, revise, ‘re-target’ and send somewhere else.
- Expect positives and negatives.
- Analyse: what do they want you to do?
- Ignore emotive, ‘overheated’ language.
- List your revision actions: e.g. cut, add, reduce, expand, make more explicit.
What can you learn from reviews?

- Ways of improving your writing for specific contexts, i.e. targeting your writing better
- That writing for publication is competitive
- How your research is perceived by a small number of experts in your field
Respond to the editor

- Thank you for the very useful feedback.
- I/we will revise the paper in order to ...
- Is there a deadline?
- I/we am/are aiming for a deadline of ...
- There is one point that I/we must take issue with ... I/we feel is beyond the scope of this paper: ...
Strategies for the long term

- **Writer’s group**: inter-disciplinary, meeting twice a month, for 90 mins., with a facilitator, to progress projects (pp. 170-5)

- **Writer’s retreat**: off-campus, residential, all work in one room/not, non-surveillance, no email/internet, with peer discussions of work-in-progress (pp. 176-84)
References & readings


Your next steps?

- Specific writing sub-goal?
- Form/join a writer’s group?
- Go on writer’s retreat?
- Analyse articles in your target journal?
- Find peer reviewers?
- Identify series of writing tasks?
- Enjoy!