

BOOK REVIEWS

Writing for Scholars: A practical guide to making sense and being heard (2nd Edition), by Lynn P. Nygaard

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This is, by far, one of the most valuable books scholars can put in their libraries. Nothing is taken for granted in this book, which is divided into ten chapters aimed at unpacking all the baggage that comes with producing successful scholarly articles, chapters, or books. Besides tackling the writing process, the text also provides essential information about the idiosyncrasies one can expect to face in the broader structures and processes of academia (e.g. peer review processes, co-authoring). Every stumbling block is examined and deconstructed with clear and concise techniques aimed at helping the scholar overcome difficulties in the long and arduous journey of academic writing.

The book opens with a dialogue about what constitutes good scholarly writing. While the author acknowledges that this is defined differently across cultures, the book itself appeals to Anglo-Saxon traditions and conventions. Here the reader will find a breakdown of important assessment criteria to consider before submitting a manuscript, including relevance, academic quality, core argument, coherence, sentence flow, and technical aspects of a piece of writing. The second chapter positions writing as a process of discovery that is actually a *part* of the research as opposed to just something done at the end. Readers are urged to begin writing *before* they have 'thought everything through'. Here, creative versus critical phases of writing are examined with the creative phase focusing on the question 'what do I want to say?' and the critical phase focusing on 'how should I say it?' Also in this chapter are ideas for establishing successful writing rituals that consider time, space, and activities aimed at stimulating individual creativity.

Chapter 3 goes on to explore notions that include objectivity, subjectivity, and transparency. The author notes that while objectivity involves judgement based on external criteria, subjectivity involves judgement based on personal criteria. Since neither of these scenarios is *judgement-free*, the importance of transparency within the scholarly argument becomes particularly important. The core themes of the book are most evident in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, which are centred on three guiding questions: *Who* are you talking to? *What* do you want to say? *How* do you want to say it? Three types of audience are identified: other scholars, user-groups (e.g. practitioners), and the general public. Since each of these groups has different knowledge dimensions, they will require different background information in order to understand the value of the particular research.

These chapters also explore the importance of the core argument and, in particular, the relationship between the research question and how one answers it. Here one will find guidance on how to form a good research question, how to analyse an argument succinctly, and how to make sure the question actually matches the answer provided. Developing the structure of a manuscript is also a topic of discussion and the reader is advised to take a step back and think about the overall 'story' they want to tell, one that has a clear beginning, middle, and end. The IMRAD acronym (introduction, method, results, and discussion) takes up much of Chapter 6 and is further broken down as a structural tool that can help ensure that all sections in a manuscript are intact. Rules, conventions, and the role of the abstract are also elaborated on.

Chapter 7 looks at how to choose a good title as well as at how headings, tables, and figures can be utilized to make a manuscript more appealing and user-friendly. Included in this chapter is a 'do' and 'don't' list pertaining to figures. In Chapter 8, the focus shifts to feedback processes. Positive ways of contextualizing and channelling feedback received are discussed. A significant section of this chapter also focuses on *giving* feedback, either in a formal capacity (e.g. as a supervisor or reviewer) or in an informal capacity (e.g. as a colleague or writing group member). This makes the book particularly suitable to scholars who work in a supervisory capacity. Active versus passive listening are highlighted and an author-centred approach is advocated that aims to understand what the author really wants to say and where s/he needs the greatest help.

There is a brief digression in Chapter 9, which moves away from the written manuscript to address issues related to public speaking. Once again, knowing one's audience is fundamental to planning a successful presentation. Important differences between written and spoken language are highlighted and persuasion techniques such as ethos, pathos, and logos are explained. This chapter also includes tips on how to use voice and body language effectively, as well as on how to get the most out of computerized slide presentations. Last but not least, Chapter 10 returns to the manuscript, and addresses final touches such as word limits, formatting, house style, and referencing. Whether a manuscript is accepted, rejected, or in need of revisions, this final chapter presents some proactive ideas aimed at getting through the waiting and response process. Finally, the book also has a companion website but this was not fully operational at the time of the review.

In summary, the book itself takes the highly complex process of academic writing and manages to explain it in a succinct and remarkably engaging manner. Whether one is an emerging or seasoned scholar, this book has much to offer and can be referenced frequently across disciplines. Consequently, its usefulness as a resource makes it a book that is unlikely to collect dust on a bookshelf. This is essential reading for any academic writing course at the postgraduate/doctoral level. It is also indispensable reading for any researcher who is serious about improving the quality and impact of his/her writing craft.

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