



Teaching and Learning about Teaching and Learning: Writing Skills in Environmental Science

Angus Morrison-Saunders

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- Senior Lecturer in Environmental Assessment, Murdoch University, Australia
- Extraordinary Professor in Environmental Sciences and Management, North West University, South Africa
- co-Editor of *Impact Assessment & Project Appraisal* journal



Basis of this presentation...

- my own views about writing skills issues formed over past 20 years of tertiary teaching and from being a journal editor (since 2009)
- + some views in published sources

Main Points

- 5 writing skills challenges and issues are seemingly ubiquitous worldwide at all levels of academia
 - clear communication and validity
 - methodological robustness and accountability
 - story telling
 - engagement with audience/reader
 - dealing with the literature
- philosophically plagiarism is characterised by *absence* (of writer/student and teacher)
- journal article writing incubator approach is an effective, productive and enjoyable way to teach writing skills to (early career) academics

Purpose/Outline

1. The Big Five writing skills issues and challenges

2. An engagement philosophy of plagiarism

3. The journal article writing incubator workshop process

Discussion invited about writing skills in environmental science...

1. The Big Five writing skills issues and challenges

What do

- Murdoch, Cambridge, North-West uni...
 - undergraduate essays, postgraduate/HDR writing, journal manuscript submissions...
- all have in common?



I seem to encounter similar writing skills issues regardless of academic level or location

Five main issues (in no particular order) follow...

(i) Clear communication and internal validity

- use of synonyms creating miscommunication/confusion
 - keep the message/terminology consistent
- inconsistent flow
 - e.g. Intro says paper to be about XYZ, but sections or paragraphs that follow are actually XZQ
- conclusion does not match/address research aims or questions
 - e.g. if have 3 research aims/questions, then have 3 clear conclusions
- Abstract does not match main text
 - e.g. aims/conclusions in abstract different to text





(ii) Methodology

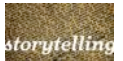
- inappropriate methodology
 - e.g. quantification of qualitative/subjective data; small sample size (case studies, interviewees etc)
- methodology not explained sufficiently
 - i.e. enable a future researcher to reproduce the method and achieve the same/equivalent findings
- methodology not justified (e.g. in an international context) and/or assumptions & limitations of method not addressed
 - i.e. *Why did you do what you did?*



(iii) Story telling

Work out what your story is (when writing) and tell it well!

- a simple story is best
 - stories have a beginning, middle and end
- a PhD thesis chapter is NOT a paper
 - less is more, learn to 'let it go'



Films are very good at story-telling...

- Analogy: consider a movie adaptation of a novel
 - some characters and plot events get left out to simplify story (i.e. the film)
 - [sometimes fundamentally changes meaning though – don't leave out a Tom Bombadil! (Lord of the Rings)]
 - many films start and end with the same scene... (i.e. state your main message right up front)

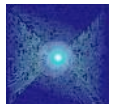


(iv) Engagement with audience/reader

- provide messages of relevance to (international) readers
 - e.g. who cares about EIA in WA?
- write for a particular audience – and identify them
 - e.g. if have message for government EIA regulators, then say so
- do not end with 'further research is needed' (unless writing only to researchers)
 - it is boring
 - science always builds upon what has gone before (i.e. future research is a given)



(v) Dealing with the literature



Common errors

- generalised statements that are not supported with evidence/references
- no literature provided to support methodology
- inadequate engagement with published literature
 - parallel fields tackling similar issues
 - e.g. A claim that "This is the first study to..." is probably not true (in many of the environmental sciences)
 - ignoring older literature
 - e.g. the principles of EIA have not changed since 1970s (even if the language/terminology has)
- plagiarism...



2. An engagement philosophy of plagiarism

In simple terms plagiarism is *intellectual theft*



Oxford Dictionary definition:

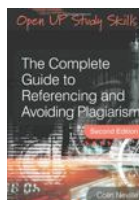
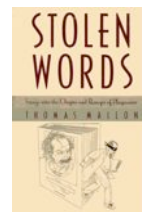
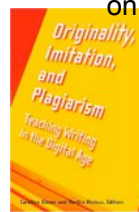
The practice of taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as one's own

- **Origin:** early 17th century: from Latin *plagiarius* 'kidnapper' (from *plagium* 'a kidnapping', from Greek *plagion*)

<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/plagiarism>

Morrison-Saunders A 2012 Missing in action? A philosophy of plagiarism and implications for learners and teachers, in: *Teaching and Learning Forum 2012 Creating an inclusive learning environment - Engagement, equity, and retention*, 2-3 February 2012, Murdoch University, Western Australia, <http://www.roger-atkinson.id.au/tlf2012/abstracts.html#morrison-saunders1>

Similar definitions can be found in many works on the topic (and other unis)...



<http://research.library.gsu.edu/content.php?pid=195563&sid=1893632>
<http://www.mikeslibrary.com/bookdetails.asp?book=5987>
<http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocslid/books/plagiarism.html>
<http://giga-usa.com/varying/1/bkstoram.htm>



Murdoch University definition... (i)

Plagiarism and collusion are defined as including any of the following five types of **behaviour** and apply to work in any medium (e.g. written or audio text, film production, computer programs, etc):

1. Inappropriate/inadequate acknowledgement
2. Collusion
3. Verbatim copying (without acknowledgement)
4. Ghost writing
5. Purloining (using material from other student)



Assessment Policy 2011 January 01 s9.3

Policies



Murdoch University definition... (ii)

Plagiarism constitutes using the work of another without indicating by referencing (and by quotation marks when exact phrases or passages are borrowed) that the ideas expressed are not one's own.

Students can use the ideas and information from other authors, but this use must be acknowledged.

It is also not acceptable to submit an assignment that is simply a paraphrasing of extracts from other authors: **the work submitted must include some intellectual contribution of the student's own.**

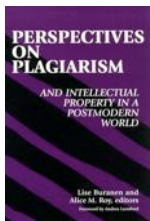


<http://our.murdoch.edu.au/Educational-technologies/Academic-integrity/>
Murdoch University Handbook 2012, p23

4 metaphors for plagiarism (Leight 1999)

derived from analysis of 70 definitions :

- plagiarism as stealing
- plagiarism as ethical violation
- plagiarism as borrowing
- **plagiarism as intellectual laziness**



Leight D (1999) Plagiarism as Metaphor, In: L Buranen and A Roy (eds) *Perspectives on Plagiarism and Intellectual Property in a Postmodern World*, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, pp221-229 – http://openlibrary.org/books/OL31209M/Perspectives_on_plagiarism_and_intellectual_property_in_a_postmodern_world

Academic Integrity – Murdoch University (i)

Academic integrity is an adherence to five fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility in all work.

...

The University regards most seriously any acts of dishonesty relating to assessment of University courses and research.

This includes plagiarism, unauthorised collaboration, examination misconduct, theft of other students' work and misconduct in research.

Acting unfairly or dishonestly in assessment is defined as misconduct under University statute.



<http://our.murdoch.edu.au/Educational-technologies/Academic-integrity/>

Academic Integrity – Murdoch University (ii)

Depending on the seriousness of the case, dishonesty in assessment can lead to a requirement to **undertake additional work**, failure in a unit or in a part of it, suspension from the University or even permanent expulsion from the University.

The University regards any form of cheating as a serious matter of academic dishonesty that threatens the integrity of the assessment processes and awards of the University, to the detriment of all other students and graduates of the University.



<http://our.murdoch.edu.au/Educational-technologies/Academic-integrity/>

Ethics of plagiarism – Why do people do it? (i)

Deontology (morals, fundamental rights)

- 'I didn't know what plagiarism was/'I didn't know that plagiarism was wrong'

Utilitarianism

- 'Plagiarism leads to better learning or higher grades/'Nobody gets hurt'

Rational self-interest (social contract theory)

- 'I'm publicizing the author's work/'The teacher doesn't put much effort into this, so why should I?'

Granitz N & D Loewy (2007) Applying Ethical Theories: Interpreting and Responding to Student Plagiarism, *Journal of Business Ethics* 72:293–306

Ethics of plagiarism – Why do people do it? (ii)

Machiavellianism (ethical egoism)

- 'Look how clever I am... I can plagiarize, do well, and not get caught'
- 'It's the teacher's fault' [if caught]

Cultural relativism

- 'It's allowable in the country where I come from'

Situational or contingent ethics

- 'My kid was sick!'/'I ran out of time to study...'

Granitz N & D Loewy (2007) Applying Ethical Theories: Interpreting and Responding to Student Plagiarism, *Journal of Business Ethics* 72:293–306

Application of the Granitz and Loewy (2007) study

Understanding which theory of ethical reasoning students employ is critical, as preemptive steps can be taken by faculty to counteract this reasoning and prevent plagiarism.

[more on some of their strategies later...]

Granitz N & D Loewy (2007) Applying Ethical Theories: Interpreting and Responding to Student Plagiarism, *Journal of Business Ethics* 72:293–306

Why plagiarism happens – Murdoch Uni (i)

There are many reasons why you might consider plagiarising something. Factors that may lead you to consider plagiarising in your work could include:

- *Poor time management - over committed with work or social activities*
- *English Comprehension difficulties - low English language test (IELTS or TOEFL) score*
- *Cultural differences - referencing sources was not required in previous educational institutions*
- *A belief in not getting caught.*



<http://our.murdoch.edu.au/Student-life/Study-successfully/Referencing-and-citing/How-to-avoid-plagiarism/>

Why plagiarism happens – Murdoch Uni (ii)

Generally, most plagiarism is unintended. A significant portion of plagiarism results from poor study habits or from a combination of:

- *Carelessness*
- *Submitting first drafts*
- *Mistakes with citations*
- *Information that has been copied but not cited and referenced*
- *Inappropriate and poor paraphrasing*
- *Reference list incorrectly formatted or not attached*
- *Inadequate English language skills and understanding*



<http://our.murdoch.edu.au/Student-life/Study-successfully/Referencing-and-citing/How-to-avoid-plagiarism/>

Dealing with plagiarism

Academic Integrity – Murdoch University

The ***Foundation units in particular assist students in identifying plagiarism***, which may be an acceptable practice elsewhere, but is not acceptable within universities.



<http://our.murdoch.edu.au/Educational-technologies/Academic-integrity/>
Murdoch University Handbook 2012, p23

Murdoch University submission and receipt of assignments – policy

Plagiarism Detection:

Students are expected to produce assignments consistent with Murdoch University's academic integrity values.

Prior to assignment submission, opportunities should be made available for students to submit an electronic copy of their assignment to the University's plagiarism detection software in order to identify any potential plagiarism.



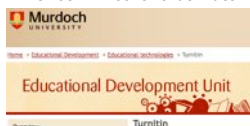
Assessment Policy 2011 January 01 s13.5

Turnitin software – Murdoch University (i)

It is increasingly important to ensure that students are aware of plagiarism and how to avoid it.

To assist with this, Murdoch University provides Turnitin plagiarism-checking software.

- Turnitin is a pattern matching system that checks text submitted in assignments, against text in its database, the web and electronic journals.
- Students and staff are able to submit documents electronically and Turnitin will provide a report which shows matched text in colour and a percentage rating.
- Receiving the report provides students and staff with the **opportunity to check whether that material has been referenced properly.**



<http://our.murdoch.edu.au/Educational-Development/Educational-technologies/Turnitin/>

Turnitin software – Murdoch University (ii)

The University has **adopted a developmental rather than a punitive approach** with the use of Turnitin.

That is, Turnitin is available for students to **check their own** assignments before submission for marking and **it is expected that this will improve their understanding of collusion, plagiarism and referencing.**



<http://our.murdoch.edu.au/Educational-Development/Educational-technologies/Turnitin/>
<http://www.aldis.com.au/AboutPlagPrev.htm>

How to avoid plagiarism – Murdoch Uni

It is important to understand that **none** of these [i.e. listed in previous slides] is an acceptable justification for an act of plagiarism.

If you are experiencing difficulty with your studies, **then you should seek assistance** from your tutors, lecturers, and / or the dedicated and helpful staff at the Student Learning Centre.



<http://our.murdoch.edu.au/Student-life/Study-successfully/Referencing-and-citing/How-to-avoid-plagiarism/>

An engagement philosophy of plagiarism

Plagiarism is typically defined as a behaviour

- e.g. in terms of crime & punishment/rules to be followed
- Ethical analysis serves to explain reasons for such behaviours

Formal (Murdoch Uni) strategies to address plagiarism are: Foundation Units, student self help and Turnitin software

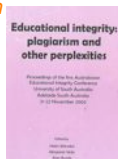
But what is plagiarism philosophically?

- e.g. operating at level of ideas, beliefs, values, principles of reality...

Clerehan and Johnson (2003) suggest need for philosophical approach...

Current discussions of plagiarism in the Australian university have taken a criminological turn. At the same time, there has been a growing tendency to focus on technological solutions to the problem such as Turnitin.com.

Against these trends, we argue that plagiarism remains, fundamentally, a philosophical and pedagogical issue for universities (p88)



Clerehan R and A Johnson (2003) Ending the War on Plagiarism: Appropriation in Context. In: H Marsden, M Hicks and A Bundy (eds) *Educational Integrity: Plagiarism and Other Perplexities*, Proceedings of the first Australian Educational Integrity Conference University of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia 21-22 November 2003, pp88-96

An engagement philosophy of plagiarism – **students**

To me, plagiarism is the **absence of self**, the non-engagement or non-investment of the writer

- e.g. copying and pasting is passive



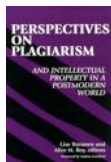
Writing is a creative and individual process
A writer should embed themselves in their written work

- e.g. 100 students in a class writing the same essay should return 100 unique pieces of work

image: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0087727/>

Leight (1999) hints at absence of students ...

the real problem of plagiarism is that it takes the place of intellectualizing, which should not only be the work of the student but anyone involved in academic pursuits (p228)



Leight D (1999) Plagiarism as Metaphor, In: L Buranen and A Roy (eds) *Perspectives on Plagiarism and Intellectual Property in a Postmodern World*, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, pp221-229

An engagement philosophy of plagiarism – **teachers**

Use of software such as Turnitin arguably substitutes a machine for teacher engagement(?)



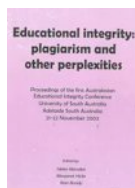
Reliance on Foundation Units or Student Learning Centre to address plagiarism abrogates teacher responsibility(?)

image: http://www.impawards.com/1985/missing_in_action_2.html

Taylor (2003) suggests absence of teachers...

The plagiarism debate is typically characterised as a problem of either teach-them-to-be-good or catch-them-at-it. By itself, neither approach has a realistic chance of success because teaching and learning processes are ignored.

By locating blame with the students, educators unconsciously absolve themselves of responsibility to examine their pedagogy. (p180)



Taylor G (2003) The Critical Role of Pedagogy in Plagiarism Prevention: the Unley Ten Point Counter Plagiarism Strategy, In: H Marsden, M Hicks and A Bundy (eds) *Educational Integrity: Plagiarism and Other Perplexities*, Proceedings of the first Australian Educational Integrity Conference University of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia 21-22 November 2003, pp180-186

Melles (2003) hints at absence of teachers...

...textbook definitions, university policies and guidelines present plagiarism as 'transparently' wrong or an a morally neutral case of incorrect acknowledgement of sources. Discourse of 'crime and punishment' is neither intraculturally honest in presuming consensus within Australian society, nor interculturally justified. (p60)

... plagiarism practices are positioned on the periphery pedagogy (p64)



Melles G (2003) Challenging Discourses of Plagiarism and the Reproductive ESL Learner, In: H Marsden, M Hicks and A Bundy (eds) *Educational Integrity: Plagiarism and Other Perplexities*, Proceedings of the first Australian Educational Integrity Conference University of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia 21-22 November 2003, pp60-66

Solutions to plagiarism (i)

Based on this philosophical perspective, there must be active engagement by teachers and students alike

- e.g. all academics (as appropriate) to teach writing skills
 - instruct and inspire
 - motivate and empower
 - role-model good behaviour
- set writing tasks that demand writer engagement (i.e. are difficult to plagiarise)



image: <http://www.imdb.com/media/rm3394999296/tt0430922>

Solutions to plagiarism – Clerehan and Johnson (2003)

Student writing... must be understood in the context of a wider cultural shift whereby 'the author' is seen as the 'originator', rather than merely the 'reporter' of ideas'.

... we propose that this problem can be addressed by focusing on teaching students appropriate and discipline specific techniques of 'appropriation' and acknowledgment'. . (p88)



Clerehan R and A Johnson (2003) Ending the War on Plagiarism: Appropriation in Context, In: H Marsden, M Hicks and A Bundy (eds) *Educational Integrity: Plagiarism and Other Perplexities*, Proceedings of the first Australian Educational Integrity Conference University of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia 21-22 November 2003, pp88-96

Solutions to plagiarism (ii)

Zero tolerance for plagiarised work (and poorly referenced writing more generally)

- non-engagement = grade of zero
- follow university procedures for reporting plagiarism

(but consider giving opportunity for resubmission – so that student engagement can occur)

- e.g. mean score for resubmitted work if first offence

Plagiarism Policy and Procedures



5.3.3 Educational guidance or remediation will be provided to all Students found to have plagiarised at Level I and they will be provided with the opportunity to address the plagiarism issues in their work without penalty.

Resubmission as solution...

- Blum (2009, pp174-176) provides a detailed example of how she permitted a student guilty of plagiarism to resubmit the work (a take-home final examination) with discussions taking place with student in between submissions (including agreeing on the punishments that would apply - i.e. maximum grade obtainable)



Blum S (2009) *My Word! Plagiarism and College Culture*, Cornell University Press, London
<http://research.library.gsu.edu/content.php?pid=195563&sid=1893632>

Solutions to plagiarism – Granitz & Loewy (2007)

- **Teach proper citation and documentation techniques**
- **Act as a role model**
 - e.g. reference all lecture notes, unit materials etc
- **Avoid standardized general assignments**
- **Adopt zero tolerance approach**
- **Institute clear, severe penalties**
- **Enforce penalties**

+ others (including codes of conduct and software)

[Note: these authors advocate different strategies for each of 6 ethical reasons given for student plagiarism]

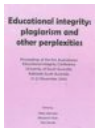
Granitz N & D Loewy (2007) Applying Ethical Theories: Interpreting and Responding to Student Plagiarism, *Journal of Business Ethics* 72:293–306

Solutions to plagiarism – Taylor (2003)

By designing tasks more thoughtfully, being explicit about processes, paying attention to the functions of language and rewarding the process as well as the product it is possible to significantly increase the difficulty of plagiarism and therefore reduce its incidence.

Educators also need to contribute to the development of students' ethical intelligence and be aware of methods used by plagiarists as well as simple strategies to detect theft of intellectual property. (p180)

Taylor G (2003) The Critical Role of Pedagogy in Plagiarism Prevention: the Unley Ten Point Counter Plagiarism Strategy, In: H Marsden, M Hicks and A Bundy (eds) *Educational Integrity: Plagiarism and Other Perplexities*, Proceedings of the first Australian Educational Integrity Conference University of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia 21-22 November 2003, pp180-186

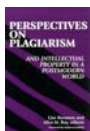


Solutions to plagiarism – Leight (1999)...

...the diverse metaphors of plagiarism show that defining it as any one thing may cause problems for students and their teachers alike.

Local communities need to come to a consensus and talk about how they decide to define it.

And most important, teachers need to talk to students about how definitions can be socially constructed yet still carry the weight of "law" (p229)



Leight D (1999) Plagiarism as Metaphor, In: L Buranen and A Roy (eds) *Perspectives on Plagiarism and Intellectual Property in a Postmodern World*, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, pp221-229

Solutions to plagiarism – Clerehan and Johnson (2003)

Narrow, generic definitions of plagiarism, furthermore, can lead to misunderstanding of the problem, particularly for students, and to ineffective solutions. More specifically, such inelastic language has tended to suggest solutions to plagiarism that hinder rather than enhance teaching and learning.

... What we are trying to suggest here is that it is teachers who have to take responsibility, to some extent, for student learning, especially when it comes to the work of writing. We cannot afford to let technology, or the law, bear this responsibility in our place. (p95)

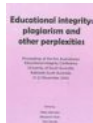
Clerehan R and A Johnson (2003) Ending the War on Plagiarism: Appropriation in Context, In: H Marsden, M Hicks and A Bundy (eds) *Educational Integrity: Plagiarism and Other Perplexities*, Proceedings of the first Australian Educational Integrity Conference University of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia 21-22 November 2003, pp88-96



Solutions to plagiarism – Taylor (2003)

There is no simple antidote to plagiarism and never will be.

No miraculous technology, no overnight conversion of the student body to scrupulous honesty, no glamorous solution but the long haul that pivots on effective pedagogy and encompasses a range of strategies.
(p186)



Taylor G (2003) The Critical Role of Pedagogy in Plagiarism Prevention: the Unley Ten Point Counter Plagiarism Strategy. In: H Marsden, M Hicks and A Bundy (eds) *Educational Integrity: Plagiarism and Other Perplexities*, Proceedings of the first Australian Educational Integrity Conference University of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia 21-22 November 2003, pp180-186

3. The journal article writing incubator workshop process

- outline experiences with running journal article incubator workshops
 - structure and approach taken
 - teaching and learning environment created
 - results obtained
 - lessons learned as presenters

Full paper version:

Morrison-Saunders A, R Bell and F Retief 2012 The journal article incubator approach to teaching writing skills and enhancing research outputs, in: *Teaching and Learning Forum 2012 Creating an inclusive learning environment - Engagement, equity, and retention*, 2-3 February 2012, Murdoch University, Western Australia, <http://www.roger-atkinson.id.au/tlf2012/abstracts.html#morrison-saunders2>

Incubator writing workshops



Chiang Mai University, Thailand 2002 *Richard Bell*



Cuu Long Rice Research Institute, Vietnam 2008 *Richard*



Murdoch University 2010 *Richard and Angus*



North West University, South Africa 2011 *Angus and Francois Retief*



Murdoch University 2011 *Angus*

Purposes of writing incubator workshops [as provided to participants]

- Improved skills and training in the process of writing and publication
- Enhanced abilities for efficient and effective writing of journal papers
- Skills gained in reviewing and revising papers and manuscripts
- Experience gained in providing and receiving constructive feedback on manuscripts
- **Completed manuscript ready for submission to a peer-reviewed journal**

Process and format (i)

- email of invitation sent around to faculty
- 3 workshops over 2 month period + 1 other important milestone
 - Wkshp 1 *What makes a good journal paper?* (4hrs)
 - Wkshp 2 *Critiquing a published paper* (2hrs) [1 week after Workshop 1]
 - Submission of draft journal manuscript [3-4 weeks after Workshop 2]
 - Wkshp 3 *Feedback on draft manuscript* (4hrs) [may need to run several of these]
- Social event (e.g. free drinks for proof of article submission to journal!) [2-3 weeks after Workshop 3]

Process and format (ii)

- roundtable format for workshops (with data projector)
- dates/expectations specified in email of invitation (i.e. so participants only sign up if committed)
- participant numbers determined by staff capacity to review papers
 - 6-12 is ideal for 2 presenters (up to 6 papers each)
 - if higher numbers, then parallel review workshops (with more staff) are advisable
- *option*: staff can commit to writing a paper too
 - i.e. walk the talk!

Target audience for incubator workshops

- Hons, Masters, PhDs (often writing their first journal paper)
- post-docs
- academic staff (early career)
 - NWU workshops attended by a Professor too
- visiting fellows (often non-English background)



Francois

NWU 2011 (Workshop 2)



Murdoch 2011 (Workshop 1)

Learning about writing and publishing

- distribute some learning materials prior to the first workshop...

Workshop 1 writing resources (journal articles)

Morrison-Saunders (2011)
Writing about writing: Ideas for Short Report and Journal Article Composition

Minto B 1998, Think Your Way to Clear Writing, *Journal of Management Consulting*, 10(1): 33-40

Lambie et al 2008 A Scholarly Writing Resource for Counselor Educators and Their Students, *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 2008; 86(1): 18-25

Workshop 1

- step through stages of writing and structure of journal paper
- Powerpoint slides derived from journal articles about writing journal articles...
 - as for *Writing About Writing* resource
 - i.e. models good practice
 - lots of quotations by writers about good writing
- questions/discussions approach (interactive)
- some participant writing exercises included

Workshop 1 content: *What makes a good journal paper?*

TOPICS

- Background
- Why write?
- Valid academic publication
- Selecting the right journal
- Writing for the right audience
- Aims and message development
- *Workshop Activity – Journal Ranking Exercise*
- Argument construction and referencing
- Language use, structure and presentation
- Choosing a good title for a paper
- *Workshop Activity – Working Title*
- What makes a good Abstract?
- What should be included in the Introduction?
- Methodology
- Study limitations
- Results section
- Discussion section
- Conclusion section
- *Preparation for Workshop 2*

Participant feedback: Workshop 2 experience (i)

The exercise of doing a critique on a published paper was also very stimulating in sharpening critical skills, with a view to applying them to my own writing.

The workshop made it possible to critique my own writing process, therefore identifying the shortcomings. It provided skills that will definitely be helpful for the future.

Paper writing

- a strict deadline was set for submitting complete draft journal manuscript to the presenters
 - 3-4 weeks after Workshop 2
 - presenters also wrote a paper (recent workshops only)
- enthusiasm and momentum generated (also competitive edge) in first two workshops is important to harness for the writing process
- better to receive complete or near-complete draft manuscript, even if rough, than no submission
 - i.e. may still be able to 'get them over the line' with a final paper later on
- some participants drop out at this point

Participant feedback: Paper writing experience (i)

Being fresh to the formal academic world (apart from being on the receiving end as student) I found the workshop tremendously helpful.

I had no prior article writing experience and the workshop gave me the tools and know how to write my first article. Thanks for this!

Participant feedback: Paper writing experience (ii)

Writing an article as part of the workshop was rewarding because it was done according to a strict time line. I found that the workshop was a great initiative to get a couple of articles published in our department.

This was the most exciting part of the workshop. Sometimes a good dose of pressure is all you need to finish a paper.

[Note: time deadline related comments were most common (nearly all participants mentioned this as being valuable)]

Critiquing draft papers of colleagues

- each participant was assigned 2 draft journal manuscripts written by colleagues to review
 - distributed 2-3 days prior to Workshop 3
 - but make all papers available to all participants so the keen ones can read them all (or skim them to understand context during review process)
- presenters reviewed each of the papers received (or divided them up between multiple presenters)
- reviews to be undertaken so can be provided to author (electronically or hard-copy)

Critiquing process (Workshop 3+)

- draft journal manuscript projected onto screen
- author gives brief explanation:
 - content – purpose & main message of paper
 - target journal – intended audience/readership
- designated reviewers (colleagues) provide their feedback first
- presenters add their additional feedback

The idea is to be supportive and constructive but also truthful...

Participant feedback: peer-review experience (i)

Seeing my own work being torn apart publicly (but luckily in a small and familiar enough forum) really drove the message home and helped me to also focus better (more critically) when reading other authors' work ...

I think that this workshop has honed my own 'review skills' and made me a more critical reader in general, I now look for the essential structure, impact and flow in argumentation in most things which I read.

Participant feedback: peer-review experience (ii)

Conducting a critique of the article written by another participant wasn't a new exercise for me, since I have reviewed papers for journals.

However, it was really good to hear multiple critiques on the five or six papers dealt with during that session.

The repeated emphasis on certain key elements of good papers was sobering, that was very good.

It was also encouraging to note that other authors struggle with the same issues.

Participant feedback: peer-review experience (iii)

This was a rather masochistic exercise but also very revealing, informative and helpful; it enabled me to fast-track and to get it right!

From this process I also learned that most colleagues were rather diplomatic in their critique (including me), but the editor's review comments were the acid test and really focused us onto the nitty-gritty of what is required.

The atmosphere in the group was very collegiate and supportive - great!

Some key lessons learnt ...

- journal article incubator workshops are very successful on several levels
 - its enjoyable and rewarding as a presenter
 - happy & grateful participants (good teaching experience)
 - support of senior academics
 - motivates presenter to write a paper (own research productivity)
 - successful research outcomes
 - MU 2010 – approx 12 original participants; 1 year on: 4 papers submitted to journals (3 more expected)
 - NWU 2011 – 9 original participants, 7 draft manuscripts reviewed, 5 papers submitted to journals (1 more expected) [+2 book chaps]
 - MU 2011 – 5 original participants, 4 draft manuscripts (+presenter's), 3 papers submitted (2 more in prep currently)

Participant feedback: learning experience

I'd wholeheartedly say run the workshops again. I liked the set-up and presentation of the course, and still have the handouts sitting on top of my cupboard at home.

I'll refer to them for years to come I think as a good checklist. Definitely run them again, it was really helpful to have advice from [the presenters], who have published so much.

Participant feedback: other benefits

I am thankful to have had the opportunity to attend a workshop like this at the start of my academic career.

This has been the first opportunity ever, that our subject group sat together and discussed each other's research. Even if this was the only outcome of the exercise it would have been worth it. ... It is also safe to argue that the event created a sense of camaraderie and teamwork.

Main Points

- 5 writing skills challenges and issues are seemingly ubiquitous worldwide at all levels of academia
 - clear communication and validity
 - methodological robustness and accountability
 - story telling
 - engagement with audience/reader
 - dealing with the literature
- philosophically plagiarism is characterised by *absence* (of writer/student and teacher)
- journal article writing incubator approach is an effective, productive and enjoyable way to teach writing skills to (early career) academics

Thank you!

Discussion invited about writing skills in environmental science...(?)

