WRITE STUFF
Resources to Inspire and Enhance Your Educational Scholarship

THOUGHTS ON WRITING

I love deadlines.
I like the whooshing sound they make
as they fly by.

Douglas Adams

WRITING MYTHS: THE MYTH OF NO TIME

The myth of no time is a very very very common barrier to writing productivity. I know, I know… we are all busy people… crazymaking busy at times. BUT, somehow we make time for things that are important. Making time to write could be one of those things. Fitting in time for writing might require shifting time away from something else. Sometimes this can be accomplished by delegation; sometimes by reprioritization; sometimes by managing deadlines. In the immortal words of Oprah, "*if you don't want to burn out, stop living like you're on fire.*"

Short of a sabbatical or writing retreat, most of us are never going to find a big chunk of undisturbed writing time. On the other hand, you don't need big chunks of time to write. Very likely you have windows of time--10 minutes, 15 minutes, 20 minutes—here and there in which to write. Can you reorganize yourself to create more opportunities: better time management, changing perspective, working efficiently, being more selective, saying "*no*"? It is hard, we all acknowledge that. However, it is thought provoking to consider that many organizational and productivity analysts equate busyness with laziness… they see busyness as the product of inertia and an unwillingness to exert control.

What are some strategies for successful writing:
- Less is more—get comfortable with brief writing sessions
- Stop multi-tasking—few if any of us are very good at this
- Be accountable—find ways to make a public commitment to write: writing group, writing partners…
- Schedule your priorities—don't prioritize your schedule… be proactive and schedule time to write
- Apply CQI thinking to your own work… what is getting in the way of reaching your writing and other goals?
- Expand your definition of writing… its not just words, sentence and paragraphs… think of all the activities that can add another line to your CV.

Adapted from Chapter 2: The Myth of No Time,
in *WAG Your Work: Writing Accountability Groups*.
Kimberly A. Skarupski, PhD MPH. (2018).

A SHORT BREAK
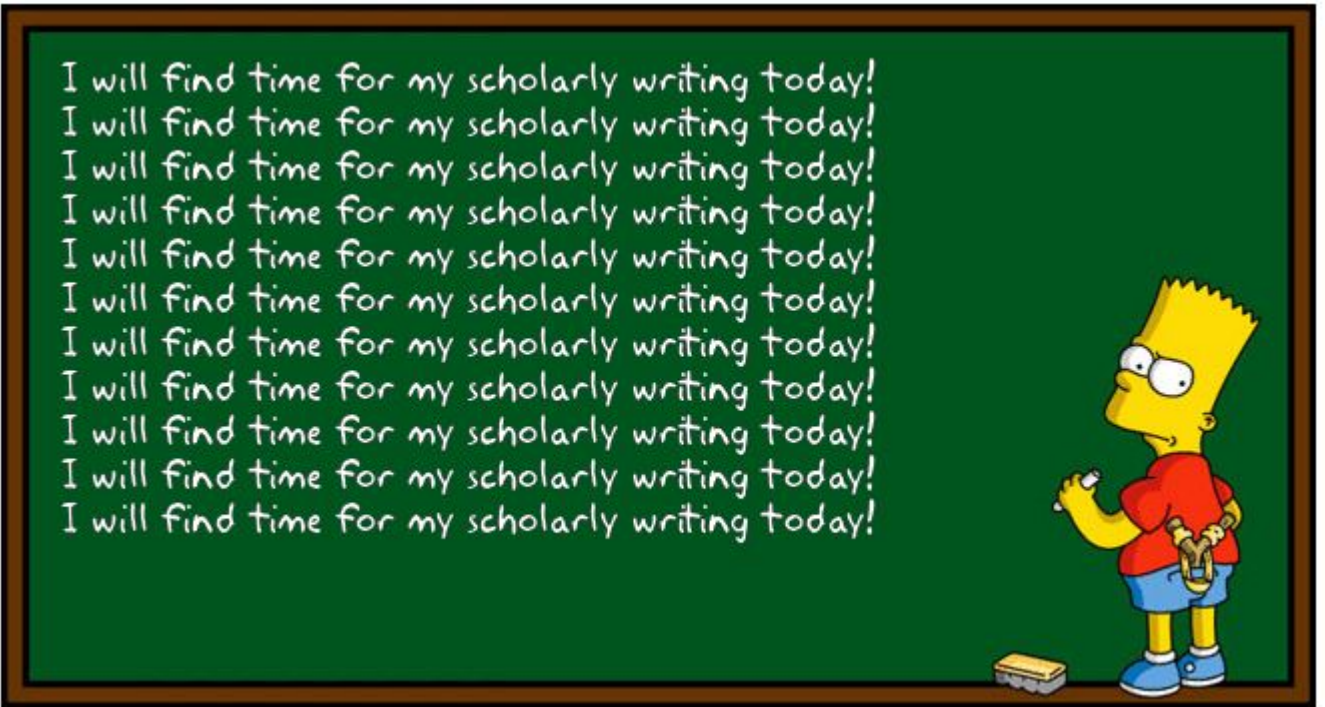
MAPPING THE GAP: WRITING AN EFFECTIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

In the last newsletter, the Problem-Gap-Hook heuristic was introduced as a way of opening your paper with a clear statement of the problem that your work focuses on, the gap in our current knowledge about that problem, and why that gap matters. The next step is to consider how the literature review section of a paper can be used to characterize the "Gap." The metaphor of 'mapping the gap' is a strategy for thinking about how to select and arrange your literature review to help readers recognize why your research needed and why the study represents a meaningful advance on what was already known about the topic.

Most of us have learned that a literature review describes what is known. The result is that this can often yield a laundry list of facts and figures that does not persuade a reader of the necessity of the current study. A different perspective is to think of your literature review as painting in sections of the map of your area of research. If you end up with a fully painted map, it shows that there is nothing more to know about your topic, leaving no room for your study. In the end, you want a map with painted sections surrounding a white space, "the gap" in what is known. Conceptualizing your literature review this way helps to ensure that it achieves its dual goal: of presenting what is known and pointing out what is not—the latter of these goals is necessary for your literature review to establish the necessity and importance of the research you are about to describe in the methods section which will immediately follow the literature review. Read more.

WRITING RESOURCE

Using Tenses in Scientific Writing

This resource—just two pages—summarizes the seemingly perplexing verb tenses used in the various sections of a manuscript. This resource was created for students at the University of Melbourne. *Using Tenses in Scientific Writing* provides an overview of why verb tenses change in scientific writing, that is, they manage time frameworks within a study. But what follows is the most helpful part of this resource. For each section of a standard scientific manuscript they describe section by section the appropriate verb tenses to use in your writing. The sections are: Abstract, Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, and Conclusion. This resource document is available free of charge from the University of Melbourne. Click here to download.

"I do not write with ease, nor am I ever pleased with anything I write. And so I rewrite."
-- Margaret Mitchell

Reasons Reviewers Reject and Accept Manuscripts

This article was published in Academic Medicine in 2001. In that sense it might be considered a classic. Despite its age, the findings and conclusions are ageless. Many of the reasons for rejection are just as salient now as they were then, after we survived Y2K.

Reasons Reviewers Reject and Accept Manuscripts: The Strengths and Weaknesses in Medical Education Reports

Purpose. Scientific journals rely on peer review to maintain the high quality and standards of papers accepted for publication. The purpose of this study was to explore the strengths and weaknesses of medical education reports by analyzing the ratings and written comments given by external reviewers.

Method. The author conducted a content analysis of reviewers' comments on 151 research manuscripts submitted to the 1997 and 1998 Research in Medical Education conference proceedings. The negative comments on 123 manuscripts that received ''questionable, probably exclude'' or ''definitely exclude'' overall ratings from at least one reviewer were evaluated. A similar analysis was performed on reviewers' positive comments for 28 manuscripts recommended unanimously for acceptance.

Results. On average, four peers (4.1, SD = 0.97, range = 2–6) reviewed each manuscript. Of those recommended for exclusion, a mean of 2.3 reviewers recommended exclusion and each reviewer wrote a mean of 8.1 (SD = 5.7) reasons. The top ten reasons for rejection were: inappropriate or incomplete statistics; overinterpretation of results; inappropriate or suboptimal instrumentation; sample too small or biased; text difficult to follow; insufficient problem statement; inaccurate or inconsistent data reported; incomplete, inaccurate, or outdated

review of the literature; insufficient data presented; and defective tables or figures. The main strengths noted in accepted manuscripts were the importance or timeliness of the problem studied, excellence of writing, and soundness of study design.

Conclusion. While overstating the results and applying the wrong statistics can be fixed, other problems that the reviewers identified (ignoring the literature, designing poor studies, choosing inappropriate instruments, and writing poor manuscripts) are likely to be fatal flaws warranting rejection.
Acad. Med. 2001;76:889–896. Read More

Webinar Series: Fostering Scholarship in Medical Education

Scholarship drives the practice of medical education forward, affecting how we educate trainees and ourselves, what we know about each other and our institutions, and how we identify and close gaps in our understanding of important topics.

This four-part webinar series is free-of-charge. This series starts in December with the goal of advancing your work as an educator, researcher, and writer. Sessions will highlight *MedEdPORTAL* and *Academic Medicine*, the AAMC's two peer-reviewed journals, and discuss emerging research in workplace education. Experts will offer suggestions for choosing the right format and home to best share your scholarship.

Register for parts 1 and 2 now at https://aamc.elevate.commpartners.com/products/fostering-scholarship-in-medical-education. Currently, parts 1 and 2 are available. Dates and titles for parts 3 and 4 are yet to be determined.

Keep a Conference Notebook: Get More from Your Conferences

STEP 1

Before the conference, **identify *two or three specific goals* you hope to achieve at the conference**. These might be:
- addressing challenges with respect to your work,
- learning more about approaches or topics of interest to you,
- finding colleagues who share common interests.

STEP 2

During the conference you will be inspired by the ideas and information you gather; also *be inspired by the people you meet*. ***Try for 5 or 6 new contacts at the conference***. Make notes about who they are, how to reach them, and why you want to follow up with them.

STEP 3

Reflect and follow through! Good thoughts and intentions from the conference frequently don't survive the trip home. To sustain your momentum, ***list at least 5 things you will do within 2 weeks of returning from the conference***. These may include individuals to contact, resources to order, or materials to develop. It also is a good idea to include someone you want to talk to at your home campus; someone with whom you would like to share an idea or something learned at the conference… perhaps someone local for collaboration.

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