Mindful Reading & Intentional Writing: Research and Strategies for Effective Writing

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Why is Writing Important?

• predictor of school performance
• essential to academic scholarship
• desirable and necessary in the workplace
• value for learning and self-expression


Minus 1 for Writing Proficiency
The Most Commonly Lacking Skills Among Recent Grads

44% of managers feel writing proficiency is the hard skill lacking the most among recent college graduates. Public speaking follows with 39% of managers feeling this way.

Young one, you lack writing proficiency, public speaking and critical thinking. You must learn these skills to succeed.

When listing the most-commonly lacking hard and soft skills they’d like to see in recent grads, hiring managers called out writing proficiency as the hard skill most commonly lacking and critical thinking/problem solving as the most commonly lacking soft skill. Public speaking and attention to detail follow for the second-most-lacking hard and soft skills, respectively.

• purpose is to offer a **research-based approach** for improving your writing

• offer **9 lessons** related to developing an **understanding** of writing, deliberate practice, and **cultivating resources**

• these are **not shortcuts**… but they are under your control
Understanding Writing
The Nature of Writing

• what **is** writing? what is it **for**? **who** is it for? **how** can make word goodly?

• understanding and **beliefs about writing** influence how we approach writing

• effective writing begins with the **right mindset** toward the process
Lesson #1:

Approach writing as a process of iterative, user-centered design.
Pop Quiz!

a) the purpose of writing is to **share accurate and established ideas** with clear sources

b) writing is a way to **express, explore, and develop one’s own ideas** and feelings

c) writers must **iteratively and recursively refine their ideas** over time

d) writers must adapt their ideas and writing style to **meet the needs of the audience**

Beliefs about Writing

• “all of the above,” but some beliefs are more sophisticated than others

• more expert writers understand that writing is an iterative, recursive process that must adapt to the audience

• “telling” vs. “transforming” vs. “crafting”

## Beliefs about Writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge-Telling</th>
<th>Knowledge-Transforming</th>
<th>Knowledge-Crafting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>author</strong>-focused</td>
<td>• more <strong>text</strong>-focused</td>
<td>• more <strong>audience</strong>-focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• communicates the author’s ideas</td>
<td>• refines the author’s ideas and expression</td>
<td>• anticipates the needs, reactions, and ideas of the readers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• reports ideas gathered from other sources with little synthesis</td>
<td>• synthesizes and uses sources to support author’s main ideas</td>
<td>• revisions consider reader interpretation, confusion, agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• difficulty separating intended meaning from communicated meaning</td>
<td>• revises and refines the text to better express authors’ meaning</td>
<td></td>
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*writing proficiency and expertise*
Lesson #2:

Focus on the writing process rather than the written product.
written products (e.g., articles, books) are tangible but their origins are invisible

- good writing may even seem “effortless”

but effective writing only emerges from careful planning, drafting, and revising

- i.e., good process \(\rightarrow\) good product
It’s Not Called “Pieing”
It’s Called “Baking”
it’s not called “papering,” it’s called writing

Lesson #3:

Have a detailed plan—writing goals, resources, flow, and organization.
Outlines and Flowcharts

- outlines (and similar techniques) plan the **order and content** of the paper

- **separates the mental demands** of “writing” from the mental demands of generating ideas, organizing, linking ideas, etc.

  - easier to **manipulate ideas** and see gaps

  - think **hierarchically** and logically
• outlines aren’t the only method; can use **storyboards**, **graphical** representations

The **purpose** is to think about goals, ideas, sections, and resources **before you start trying to “make words”** or expressing your ideas in text.

You can plan **verbally** or **visually**... but **have a plan**
“Tour Guide” Analogy

• **think ahead** for what tourists will need (and want) to best appreciate the “sights”

• **anticipate** what details they will need and when they will need them

• have a **clear and logical path from “point to point”**—never let them get lost
The **Confusing** Polytechnic Campus!
The **Amazing** Polytechnic Campus!
Intentional Writing

- carefully plan an engaging journey through your ideas, arguments, and evidence—no reader left behind!

- every component should set up and prepare the reader for the next piece

- readers should never wonder “why am I here? what’s the point?”

- have a compelling reason for every decision you make when planning (and later, when writing)
Lesson #4:

Revise your work multiple times and at multiple levels—mechanics, structure, and ideas.
students often think of revising in terms of “proofreading” or “polishing”

- spelling, grammar, punctuation

but... they neglect meaningful revisions

- superficial > substantive

In addition to improving spelling, sentence structure, and word choice...

- move things around
- consider “flow”
- what do readers need and when?

- e.g., instead of slowly building up to your conclusions, try stating main ideas up front and then supporting them
Revising for Meaning

• are technical ideas defined clearly using accessible language? are there examples?

• are any ideas unnecessary or redundant?

• have you left out information that readers need to understand your ideas?

• is there a more compelling example or explanation you could give instead?
• plan on multiple revisions and drafts
• writing is an **audience-aware, iterative process** of planning, drafting, and revising to clearly **communicate** ideas via text

  • good process → good product

• so... **how do you develop these skills?**
Practicing Writing
Lesson #5:

Make the commitment to improve your writing—every assignment, every paper, every email.
Deliberate Practice

• repeated **practice**, over periods of **time**, with the **intent to improve** and persevere

• try to **build on and challenge existing skills**, knowledge, and potential

• very important for **skill acquisition**


Repeated Practice

- writing is a **skill**, therefore you need to **write more** in order to get better at it.
- the **only** way to acquire a complex cognitive skill is through **mindful practice**.
Intent to Improve

- rote, mindless practice is minimally effective—cannot just “go through the motions” and expect to get better

- must be intentional and self-regulated
  - set challenging but realistic goals
  - put forth strategic effort
  - analyze your mistakes... and adapt
self-regulated learning is like **applying user-centered design cycles... to yourself.** Identify your own needs and resources, try out solutions, and iterate.
you can’t “go it alone”—writing is usually a taught skill (not self-discovered)

good feedback helps you self-regulate:

• reveals how well you did (monitor)

• suggests concrete ways to improve (adapt)

What is Good Feedback?

- **timely**: is received when there is time to think about and act on it
- **formative**: information and suggestions that can be acted upon to improve
- **specific**: directly indicates strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities
- **elaborated**: explains the reasoning, rationale, “how,” and “why” underlying the feedback
Lesson #6:

Seek out opportunities to co-author with experienced writers (who are willing to talk about it).
writing mentors

“pull back the curtain” to reveal and explain writing processes and expectations

provide a “safety net” for exploration and failure

offer feedback for solving writing problems
Write with Faculty

• your **advisor** is (or should be) a crucial **writing mentor/resource**
  • both of you want to publish
  • **32% boost** in career productivity

• **broaden your network** to include other faculty in your program or elsewhere
  • collaboration ➔ expanded portfolio

Lesson #7:

Form a peer writing group.
expert and experienced writers are not the only source of feedback and mentoring

your peers can also provide feedback

• receiving feedback from multiple peers can be as good or better than feedback from a single expert or instructor

  • more comprehensive, several perspectives
  • triangulates critical problems
  • peers give feedback “in your language”

Giving Feedback

• similar to “learning by teaching,” giving feedback benefits writing development

• practice with evaluating text

• practice recognizing problems and solutions

• gain perspective as a reader or audience


Practice Makes Better

• no one is ever “finished” learning how to write and improve their writing

• improving your writing is an ongoing, intentional process of writing more, seeking out mentors and feedback, and using that guidance to get better

• how can we speed up this growth?
Cultivating Resources
what do you **need** to be a good writer?

• knowledge of the “rules of writing”

• understanding of key genre expectations

• a toolbox of writing strategies

• both general and disciplinary knowledge
Lesson #8:

Build a library of writing style guides, links, and "role model" texts.
countless guides for writing have been published, in print and online

- buy, download, or bookmark several resources and consult them often
“rules of writing” help you understand the expectations of the task, genre, or field

- through practice, the rules become automatic

but, rules can be broken on purpose

- e.g., emphasis, sarcasm, dialect, creativity

- you cannot break rules strategically if you do not know or understand them
find papers, authors, and examples of writing that you like—emulate them!

- learn by studying examples of success
  - pay attention to what works
  - reflect on how and why
  - reverse engineer it
• every **genre** has expectations

• expository vs. narrative vs. argument

• term paper vs. lit review vs. thesis

• read examples of work in key genres to **learn about the expected structure**

pay attention in Dr. Craig’s methods class!
• style guides and role models are a starting place for **finding your own voice**

• as part of deliberate practice, **experiment with different ways** of expressing ideas

• carefully **heed the feedback** you receive
Lesson #9:

Read more, broadly, and mindfully.
one of the most critical aspects of improving as a writer is to read more

wait... what?

reading and writing are reciprocally connected

being a **writer who doesn’t read**...

... is like being a **chef who doesn’t eat**
• use the text as a **resource** and inspiration

• **question the author**—be skeptical and critical of claims, evidence, methods

• **connect new and prior knowledge**; actively work to **resolve confusion** or knowledge gaps

Read “Selfishly”

• be a **participant**, not a **recipient**

• how do the ideas, arguments, and findings **relate to your own hypotheses** and work?
  • **support** your ideas? **expand** them?
  • **challenge** your ideas?

• how can these ideas advance **your own** expertise or agenda?
Build your Knowledge Base

- reading increases your **knowledge**, which gives you **more to write about**
  - academic articles expand your knowledge of relevant **disciplines and methods**
  - news articles and books expand your knowledge of the **world and events**
  - recreational reading can **inspire new ideas** or challenge how you think and feel
Critical Thinking

• reading and writing **share underlying reasoning processes**
  
  • practice **critically evaluating** how good (and poor) texts construct meaning and ideas
  
  • practice drawing upon and **integrating knowledge** from variety of sources
Perspective Taking

• “readers” and “audience” are the same

• as a **mindful reader**, you can consider what it’s like to be “on the other side”
  - what **annoy** you? what **inspire** you?
  - what **confuse** you? what **inform** you?

• apply “lessons learned” to your writing
as you develop your skills as a writer, simultaneously **develop knowledge, strategies, and perspectives** that effective writers draw upon

these resources **facilitate** writing and deliberate practice for improvement
Conclusion

9 Research-based Lessons for Writing

1. be user-centered
2. be process-focused
3. have a plan
4. revise and refine
5. commit to improve
6. seek co-authors
7. write with peers
8. build a library of resources
9. read mindfully
The end!

Thank you!

Questions?