

PECULIARITIES OF ACADEMIC WRITING IN EDUCATION

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Teaching academic writing in modern education is associated with three tasks of a modern global university – research work, education and public practice.

This is especially true when preparing future teachers, they must have research competencies in the field of academic writing, thus transform their teaching practice in the form of pedagogical research: writing articles in scientific journals, conducting experiments, etc.

In teaching academic writing, three sets of active competencies are developed simultaneously, so didactic approaches to teaching writing are aimed at motivating personal work on their own text and creating a discussion environment in which they develop the ability to convince, accept criticism and defend their own rightness using scientific argumentation methods.

Academic writing. Scientific and methodological branch of knowledge, direction of scientific and pedagogical research and discipline that studies methods and technologies for building academic (educational) and scientific texts. The goal of academic writing is to develop the competencies necessary to write a text in accordance with international rhetorical conventions and to educate independent-minded researchers and active participants in global academic discourse.

Perhaps the most basic look at scholarly writing should address the basic question,

“What is considered great scholarly writing?” Wellington and Torgerson delineate what is considered to be high status and eminent writing[1]. While not addressing the issue of writing quality, Wellington and Torgerson note that there are five categories that relate to high quality, scholarly writing[1, 35]. First, a journal should be refereed. Second, a journal should have a respected editorial board accompanied by respected actions and policies. Third, the reputations of the authors should be well known. Fourth, the content of the journal should be high quality. Finally, the users of the journal should coincide with a high readership in higher education. Based on these criteria, Wellington and Torgerson suggest that the following journals in the United States that fit this description include: (1) *Harvard Educational Review*, (2) *Educational Researcher*, (3) *Review of Research in Education*, (4) *Phi Delta Kappan* (5) *Teachers College Record*, and (6) *American Educational Research Journal*[1, 36].

Aside from the analysis of the quality of journals and this brief foray into the non-stylistic aspects of scholarly writing, it is important to address an essential aspect of scholarly writing - the process of publication. To introduce this topic a look at the process is important. Jackson, Nelson, Heggins, Baatz, and Schuh suggest that writing for publication can be helped by understanding the process[2]. With regard to this review, they note that there are few graduate programs that offer courses that deal with the publishing process or the nature of academic publishing. They do note that it is important that any prospective author understand his/her audience and write accordingly. In addition, they offer the vague advice to follow the appropriate style manual for the particular publication.

Out of the more than 430 pages of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological

Association, only eight are devoted to writing style. While not listed in the following manner, the style tips are as follows:

- Use the past tense or the present-perfect tense;
- Avoid noun strings;
- Try to use short words and short sentences when possible;
- Avoid jargon;
- Avoid wordiness;
- Avoid redundancy;
- Vary sentence length;
- Use specific language;
- Avoid colloquial expressions;
- Avoid pronouns such as, 'this, that, these and those';
- Avoid illogical or ambiguous comparisons;
- Avoid third person references when referring to yourself;
- Avoid anthropomorphism;
- Avoid the editorial 'we'.

Aside from these points, there is nothing regarding writing style.

On the flip side, the Chicago Manual of Style offers nothing about writing style, focusing more specifically on grammar, spelling and mechanics.

Educational Writing and Writing Style

As noted previously, scholarly writing is predominantly for publication in venues with a particular audience of readers in higher education. Academic writing in education can be quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods. Because the general conception of education composes the framework for any particular topic, the content spans a wide range of topics and disciplines. Journals can range from English Education to Science Education, from Educational Theory to Educational Leadership. Journals specific to this study are addressed elsewhere in this study. Once again, scholarly writing in education should be considered writing of high quality with the intent of publication in journals refereed by peers.

In, "Thinking and Writing for Publication: A Guide for Teachers," Wilcox suggests that her work is a "how-to" guide for teachers to develop a friendly tone to their writing[3]. The idea of good writing habits focuses primarily on finding the time to write and developing the habit of writing. In addition, Wilcox's guide suggests that there are exercises to develop writing skills. However, all of these are directed at reflective writing and making writing a personal endeavor. Neither of these guides gives any guidance on how to write.

Gargiulo and Jalongo give the viewpoint of editors for writing for publication, in this case, specifically for early childhood education[4]. Perhaps their biggest piece of advice is to make sure they are writing for the correct audience. They make many suggestions regarding finding out about a journal's content, publication format, submission policies and review processes. They close by listing twelve suggestions for becoming a published author. Ten of these have nothing to do with the components of good writing or with writing style. Algozzine, Spooner and Karvonen (2002) offer information on preparing special education articles in APA style[4, 24]. The vast majority of this article focuses on the different sections that should be included, their approximate lengths and their content. This work does, however, offer the only guidance in writing style of any of the aforementioned articles. They suggest that authors should remove any biased language from their writing.

Aside from the previously mentioned articles that have been printed regarding educational writing, there are also a few books that are devoted specifically to this subject. Each is a compilation of ideas with the intention of giving information on how to get published. Like the other literature in this field, there is little information on writing style aside from suggestions on style guides and writing books.

Perhaps the most general insight into published educational writing comes from Jalongo [4, 18]. Although general, it does offer a glimpse of the style of educational writing. She suggests that

good educational writing is, “more showing than telling, with personal insights and concrete examples integrated into the text”[4, 20]. She also notes that educational authors need to speak authoritatively on their subjects. While this information isn’t specific, it does reveal the necessity of professionalism and concrete language. The only difficulty with this advice is that it is not easily quantifiable. In terms of this particular study, identifying and quantifying “personal insights” and “concrete examples” could prove difficult. In addition, this advice focuses more on the content of the sentence than the structure of the writing style.

Non-Scholarly Writing

Before entering into any sort of discussion of style, it is important to note that much of the pertinent literature on the writing style for educational writing is devoted to non-scholarly publishing. With titles like, *How to Get Your Teaching Ideas Published*, *Writing for Publication: A Practical Guide for Educators*, and *Doing Academic Writing in Education: Connecting the Personal and the Professional*, it is apparent that the specific books on this type of writing are focused on the writing and publication of practitioners. As Jalongo (2002) notes, the purpose and audience for her book is, “Examining professional writing from the particular perspective of professional writing for fellow professionals[4,21]. Similarly, Stangl (1994) clearly states that her text shows how to get teaching ideas published, not on scholarly writing. Finally, Richards and Miller note that their focus is on graduate students, school administrators, educational specialists and others involved in education. Because of this, the focus of many of these works is not as much on scholarly writing, as found in academic journals, but on the process of publishing by teachers and other practitioners.

Besides the literature that is directly about educational writing, there is another small body of work that deals with educational rhetoric and discourse. While these works do not directly deal with the act of writing or the process of writing, they do offer interesting viewpoints about the nature of educational writing and the potential for change. These works are peripheral to the crux of this discussion; however, neglecting their inclusion would diminish the overall purpose of this research. Therefore, they will be dealt with briefly.

Perhaps the most intriguing example of educational writing is the diversion from tradition in books regarding educational writing. While many works on scholarly writing and educational writing focus on how to publish in the traditional journal format, there are a number of books that focus on the various deviations from tradition. While these derivations are not radical in any means, they do offer a varying viewpoint about educational writing. Because of the diverse nature of education and the fact that virtually any topic is covered, there are many theorists on educational writing who feel that the limitations of academic writing curtail the expressiveness of educators. The works of Cameron (2003), Clough (2002), Edwards, Nicoll, Solomon and Usher (2004) and MacLure (2003) constitute this writing about educational writing. It is interesting to note that all of the work originated in the United Kingdom.

MacLure (2003) reinforces this notion through an analysis of educational and social discourse. Again, this text does not deal directly with the act of writing, but with an analysis of discourse. MacLure focuses on how discourse is used in the media, parent contact, research and metaphor[5].

Cameron (2003) chooses to focus entirely upon the use of metaphor in education as a means of teaching and understanding. She notes that metaphor is “interactional, contextualized, prosaic and dynamic” (p. 265). She notes that the use of metaphor causes us, as educators, to consider the relationships among ideas and to see the whole picture. This might suggest that the use of metaphor in educational writing moves information from the static and sterile feel suggested by quantitative articles to a more three-dimensional style of writing that is closer to educational practice.[5, 40]

Finally, Clough (2002) suggests that the use of narrative and fiction in qualitative educational writing is another means of explicating ideas. Like Cameron, Clough’s notion of the evolution of educational writing takes on the aspects of educational practice by moving away from the precise and moving toward the dynamic. This radical departure from tradition suggests that perhaps, in the future, the focus of educational research could change.

Thesis and Dissertation writing

One of the preeminent forms of academic writing in education, and scholarly writing in general, is that of the dissertation or thesis. Every doctoral student and many Master's degree students participate in some form of dissertation or thesis project. The purpose of the dissertation or thesis is to show the ability to effectively communicate the information on a given topic on a professional level. Unlike other forms of scholarly writing, the audience is that of a professor, department of college. However, the foundations of other scholarly writing apply.

The audience expects high quality writing. Although the audience is specifically a committee in higher education, the expectations are of that the writing be professional and academic. Yet, Brause (2001) notes that, "many of the participants [in the study] remarked that they had no idea what to expect in the dissertation process". She continues by noting that most doctoral students were, "totally independent at the time of their dissertation writing". Torrance and Thomas (1992) agree by noting that although many doctoral students have writing abilities that mirror those of productive academics, there is a significant minority that finds the writing difficulties might hinder the completion of degrees. Torrance and Thomas found that the biggest problems in student writing included clarity, flow, fact development, grammatical errors, text structure and redundancy.

This begs the question, "Is writing taught in graduate school?" Golding and Mascaro (1986) found that in a survey of one hundred and forty-four universities, 93 schools did not have graduate writing courses. Golding and Mascaro note that the majority of these 93 universities felt that this instruction should occur through means other than writing courses. Of the 51 schools that did offer a writing course, Golding and Mascaro note that 31 out of 78 possible courses were optional or elective. They conclude that it seemed clear that formal writing instruction belongs at the earliest part of a university education. Might they be suggesting freshman comp? If the idea that writing should only be addressed at the earliest level is true, where do students learn how to write in the means suggested by the previous review of scholarly writing and academic writing in education?

As noted previously, Both Delyser (2003) and Riebschleger (2001) suggest that students are unprepared for this type of writing when they get to that point in their education or find that there are few resources to help them learn how to write. They both note that most of the information about this type of writing focuses on the process of writing, namely the form and layout of the text, rather than how to write. Riebschleger in particular suggests that although she loved to write, that fact was not helpful in the dissertation process. The lack of preparation in this particular style of writing limited her effectiveness.

Perhaps the greatest contribution to the topic of dissertation writing comes in the form of the structure of the dissertation. Most, if not all, works on dissertation writing focus on this process and product in terms of layout, format and composition of the text. Paltridge (2002) found that the content of most published advice on dissertation and thesis writing is directed toward the structure and layout of such works. However, he notes that there is a definite separation between what is published and what actually occurs. His analysis shows that the majority of the texts that he analyzed focused on organization, outlining and layout. Yet, the advice given in most guides did not meet the results that were produced by students. The guidebooks were limited as to their structural suggestions. Actual dissertations and thesis projects were much more broadly structured.

Our research revealed a high degree of interest of the pedagogical and scientific community in teaching academic writing, but at the same time a lack of awareness about the discipline itself, its content and methods. Unfortunately, academic writing as a branch of pedagogical research and discipline was formed outside of Kazakhstan, in the Anglo-American educational environment. Therefore, it is necessary to create a scientific and pedagogical basis for the introduction of a new discipline in Kazakhstan's higher education, which is in demand in the domestic academic and scientific community in the context of globalization, and to open up opportunities for Kazakhstan's pedagogical science in interdisciplinary international research.

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