

Active Research Writing

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Motivational Barriers to Writing

Disclaimer

- ▶ I am not a perfect writer.

Barriers to writing productivity

- ▶ Three main barriers to writing
 - 1.
 - 2.

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 1. Not knowing what to write
 - 2.

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 - ▶ Many intelligent, creative researchers just can't seem to get research written up and published

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- ▶ Three main barriers to writing
 1. Not knowing what to write
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 3. Motivational issues
 - ▶ Many intelligent, creative researchers just can't seem to get research written up and published
 - ▶ Cause: motivational barriers and underdeveloped writing habits

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Active Reading

1. Read efficiently
2. Read purposefully
3. Keeping track of what you read
4. Putting it on paper

It is essential ... to abandon the hope of being comprehensive in your reading.

–Belcher, p. 141

Have a strategy for deciding what to read

One reading strategy

One reading strategy

- ▶ Find articles directly related to your topic
- ▶ Identify highly cited articles (e.g. Google scholar)
- ▶ Compare reference lists in recent papers
 - ▶ Carefully read a range of authors
 - ▶ Strive for balance between competing theories
 - ▶ Don't cite derived information

Better reading strategy?

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Ask, and ye shall receive.

John 16: 24

Better reading strategy?

Limit your reading

- ▶ Don't browse
- ▶ Don't collect
- ▶ Read newest material first



How do you do the reading?

Two reading purposes

- ▶ To relate results to your own work
 - ▶ Have specific questions in mind
 - ▶ Major portions of papers not directly relevant
 - ▶ Should be fast

Two reading purposes

- ▶ To relate results to your own work
 - ▶ Have specific questions in mind
 - ▶ Major portions of papers not directly relevant
 - ▶ Should be fast
- ▶ To increase expertise in a topic or field
 - ▶ Requires reading more for depth
 - ▶ Broader topic, more reading
 - ▶ Takes more time
 - ▶ **Should still be question driven!**

Did Barack Obama know Louis Farrakhan?

A Kind and Just Parent

82

erful university and its allied neighborhood association have worked to manipulate boundaries and borders to assure “stability” and separation. Our neighbors include Muhammad Ali, former mayor Eugene Sawyer, poets Gwendolyn Brooks and Elizabeth Alexander, and writer Barack Obama. Minister Louis Farrakhan lives a block from our home and adds, we think, a unique dimension to the idea of “safe neighborhood watch”: the Fruit of Islam, his security force, has an eye on things twenty-four-hours a day. I pass Farrakhan’s mansion, offer a cheery wave to the Fruit, get a formal nod in response, and turn north two blocks across 47th Street, into the lap of urban blight.

To my right the lake, a shining sea of blues and greens, Navy Pier,

Question Driven Reading

- ▶ Identify the articles where the answer may be.
- ▶ Skim to find the answers
- ▶ Record the answers
- ▶ Move on





- ▶ Not lazy, focussed
- ▶ Not skimming, using the text (and time) effectively
- ▶ Are you missing important points?
Probably, but **reading is an iterative process**
- ▶ Skimming in quantity can lead to deep understanding



Two views of note taking

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1. Take notes.

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2. Don't take notes.



Take notes

- ▶ Limit notetaking!
 - ▶ Take question driven notes
 - ▶ Short abstract-style summary from **your perspective**
- ▶ Make sure they will be interpretable later
- ▶ If you can't find them, you can't use them
 - ▶ store with article
 - ▶ note taking software (**Evernote** most popular)
 - ▶ notebook systems
 - ▶ shared documents

Rebbapradaga et al. (2009) Tips, Tricks and Software for Keeping Research Organized

- ▶ You will do A LOT OF STUFF in 5-7 years!
- ▶ Much of it you'll FORGET
- ▶ You will WASTE TIME trying to recreate or reproduce work you've already done if you are disorganized

SQ3R Cornell Method

- ▶ Survey
- ▶ Question
- ▶ Recite
- ▶ Recall
- ▶ Review

....I may read a twenty-page piece ... In that piece, I may find fifteen sections that I have marked as important.... I then past the respective paragraphs under the typed heading. In the end I may end up with a four-page cut-out...

When my research is done, I read all of the cut-and-paste articles, one by one, and I write next to each paragraph in each article an organizing idea. I then type out a cover sheet listing all of the organizing ideas for each working article.

I then past all of the cover sheets on artist boards and try to figure out from reading the sheets how I might develop my arguments.

–Giroux 2003, 102-103

Don't take notes

Don't take notes

- ▶ Take notes sparingly, use them quickly
 - ▶ Honestly, I seldom reread my notes

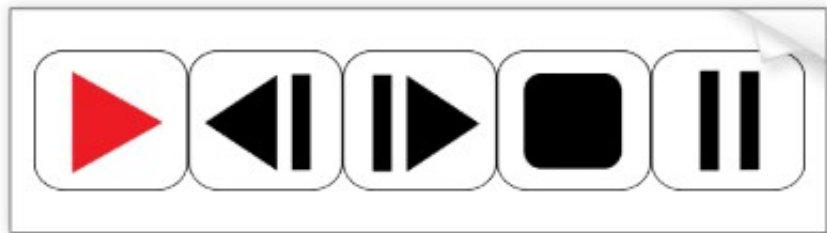
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- ▶ Take notes sparingly, use them quickly
 - ▶ Honestly, I seldom reread my notes
 - ▶ highlighting, margin notes, better for me
 - ▶ Two reasons to write stuff down while/after reading
 - ▶ Draft of text I will soon write
 - ▶ To understand or learn the content
 - ▶ Proof of understanding is the finished article

Why taking notes wastes time



Why taking notes wastes time

- ▶ even with careful reading and note taking you will need to reread
- ▶ novels can be read sequentially
- ▶ work reading is parallel and iterative
 - ▶ needs change as you read other articles
 - ▶ your understanding of the topic develops with writing
 - ▶ accept that reading is iterative

Why taking notes wastes time

- ▶ even with careful reading and note taking you will need to reread
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- ▶ work reading is parallel and iterative
 - ▶ needs change as you read other articles
 - ▶ your understanding of the topic develops with writing
 - ▶ accept that reading is iterative
 - ▶ however, with time and expertise you can anticipate what is important faster...



Directed Reading + Immediate Writing, Repeat

- ▶ Read to find the answer to a question
- ▶ Incorporate answer into paper as soon as possible after reading
- ▶ **Advantages:**

Directed Reading + Immediate Writing, Repeat

- ▶ Read to find the answer to a question
- ▶ Incorporate answer into paper as soon as possible after reading
- ▶ **Advantages:**
 - ▶ minimizes forgetting
 - ▶ writing progresses
 - ▶ guards against lazy reading

Associated Method?: Speed Reading

- ▶ Read Title, Abstract, Headings, Conclusion, Reference
- ▶ Choose 10-20 terms, write short definitions of importance to article
- ▶ Carefully study all diagrams, tables, charts, etc. and their captions
- ▶ Skim most interesting parts of the article
- ▶ Summarize quickly what is relevant to your results (in your draft!)

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- ▶ More of a study strategy

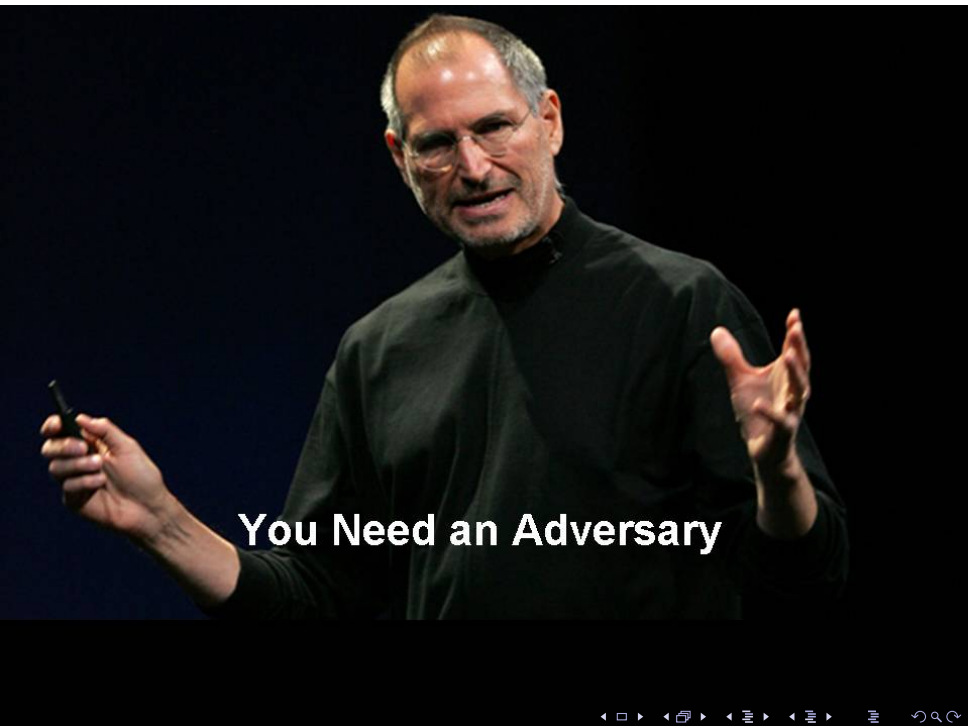
Putting the literature on paper



Synthesize, not summarize

Although it reviews quite a large literature, most of the works receive only a very superficial mention. There is little attempt to integrate or critically evaluate earlier published work on the subject.

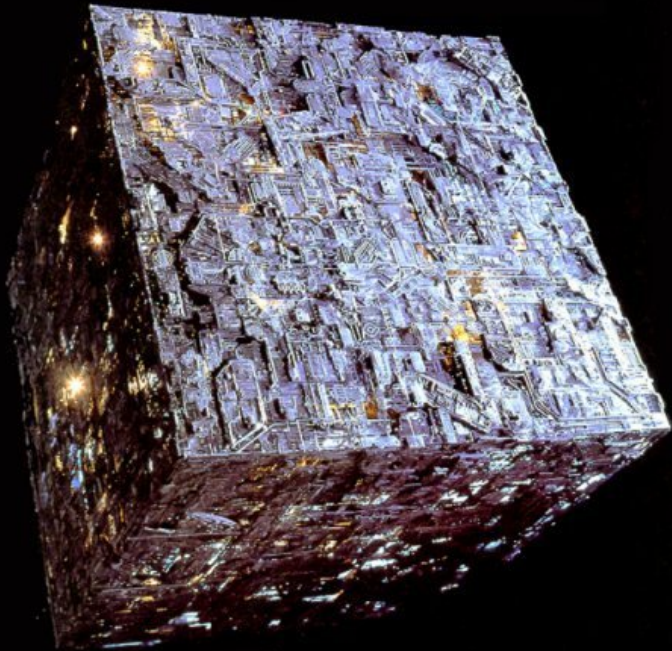
–Day, p.49

A photograph of Steve Jobs, wearing his signature black turtleneck and glasses, speaking on a stage. He is holding a small black device in his right hand and gesturing with his left hand. The background is dark.

You Need an Adversary

*Will Big Blue dominate the entire computer industry?
Was Orson Well's right?
– Steve Jobs*





Owning the writing

- ▶ If your background is the same as everyone else's, then you haven't related the literature to your own results sufficiently enough
- ▶ Background supports your claim/conclusions/interpretation of the results/your **argument**

Argument driven writing

- ▶ Main reason articles are rejected
 - ▶ No clear argument
 - ▶ Makes them unengaging, boring, hard to follow

An argument?

Text	Analysis
The purpose of this paper is to analyze how verb types influence pronoun interpretation.	Statement of project, not argument!
This paper uncovers how gender biases can influence pronoun interpretation.	Topic statement. :(
Gender biases influence pronoun interpretation.	An argument, but a vague one.
Profession gender biases influence object pronoun interpretation more strongly than implicit causality biases do in source-goal verbs.	A specific argument.

Data driven article

- ▶ Tries to represent too much.
- ▶ Makes the writing weak
- ▶ Don't let the data organize your writing, let your ideas about the data organize your writing..."

Argument driven writing

- ▶ Don't represent.
- ▶ Make a bold claim, and then try to support it.
- ▶ Not just a hypothesis:
 - ▶ Does X affect Y? : Good.
 - ▶ X only affects Y if treated with Z. : Stronger!
- ▶ An argument in writing is a process of persuasion.
- ▶ To an argument you can respond "I agree" or "I disagree"

REVISED and UPDATED
for the 21st Century

The **FOREST** *for the* **TREES**

AN EDITOR'S ADVICE TO WRITERS

"With an early promise not to 'Strunk you over the head with rules about style,'
Lerner . . . provides inspiring, uncondescending advice for writers."

—ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

BETSY LERNER

A typical structure

- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ Background
- ▶ Method
- ▶ Results
- ▶ Discussion
- ▶ Conclusion
- ▶ Bibliography
- ▶ Appendices

What readers are interested in

- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ Background
- ▶ Method
- ▶ Results
- ▶ Discussion
- ▶ Conclusion
- ▶ Bibliography
- ▶ Appendices

What authors are most concerned with

- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ **Background**
- ▶ Method
- ▶ Results
- ▶ Discussion
- ▶ Conclusion
- ▶ Bibliography
- ▶ **Appendices**

Argument driven writing



Make sure your literature relates to your argument

- ▶ Discussion
 - ▶ References introduced in intro and background should reappear in the Discussion
 - ▶ If they don't are they needed ?

So what?

- ▶ Why should the reader care?
 - ▶ What can they do with this knowledge?
 - ▶ How should it influence the theory/future experiments

Make sure you answer *So what?*

Anderman(2006): Reviewers complain that they liked a study, it was good, but it didn't make enough of a contribution to the literature

You should have a sentence in there that says, 'This study makes a new contribution to the literature because ...



Clarity: WTF focussing

- ▶ What do your results say?
- ▶ Why is this reference here?
- ▶ What is new about your research?

Clarity: WTF focussing

- ▶ What the fuck do your results say?
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- ▶ What the fuck is new about your research?

Clarity: Modal Paper

- ▶ Study a quality recent paper on your topic

Polishing and Revising

Style: Reader participation

- ▶ Good presentations: Let the audience think with you
- ▶ Tell a story
- ▶ Talk a walk with the author
 - ▶ Leave room for the reader to participate in the discovery
 - ▶ Don't portray everything as solved

Style: Adding depth/ owning your writing

- ▶ Don't mention obstacles that others will not have when repeating your research
- ▶ What do you bring to the table that others don't
 - ▶ Fresh results
 - ▶ A different perspective, different knowledge
 - ▶ If anyone writing up your results would have the same background, discussion and conclusion, you probably could do better...

Revising

Revising

It just doesn't seem to be "there" yet. Maybe try to revise it once more. –Mats Wiren

Kill your darlings.



Dress shabbily, they notice the dress. Dress impeccably, they notice the woman.

–Coco Chanel

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Remarkably, there is nothing quite remarkable about instances of effective communication: they draw ones attention to the ideas expressed, not to themselves, so they are hard to learn from by imitation without the contrasting viewpoint

–Jean-luc Doumont
(Trees, maps and theorems)

Getting Feedback

Getting Feedback



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Getting feedback

*... when it comes to criticizing a co-worker's efforts, most colleagues are **wimps**. Faced with such widespread wimpiness, it is inordinately difficult to find a colleague whom you can trust to tell you when your shabby efforts are, in truth, shabby.*

*– James Popham
Professor Emeritus
UCLA Graduate School of Education*

Give feedback

- ▶ Commenting on others writing teaches you about writing
- ▶ Easier to recognize weaknesses in someone else's efforts
- ▶ Be constructive and helpful, and you'll get the chance again

Feedback strategies

- ▶ Colleagues, friends
- ▶ Remember to ask a non-expert!
- ▶ 24-hour buddies
- ▶ members of your network!

Barriers to writing productivity

- ▶ Three main barriers to writing
 1. Not knowing what to write
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Motivational barriers

- ▶ Research problems are open-ended, unclearly defined, and intimidating
- ▶ The nature of the work fosters procrastination
- ▶ We get little professional training in the process of planning, writing, revising
- ▶ We often have established habits that are difficult to continue with after the PhD

Your personal situation

- ▶ What other demands are there on your time?
- ▶ How much experience do you have in completing writing projects?
- ▶ What type of writing is it? Is it writing up an experiment, or is it arm-chair linguistics?
 - ▶ Is writing part of the research process?
- ▶ What are your current habits? (Do you even know?) Are they working well for you?

Motivational and practical barriers to writing

1. “Writer’s block”
2. Time constraints
3. Confusion and lack of focus

About Blocking: *How to write a lot* Silvia, 2007:85



I love writer's block. I love it for the same reason I love tree spirits and talking woodland creatures — they're charming and they don't exist...Academic writers cannot get writers block.

About Blocking: *Write your dissertation in 15 minutes a day* Bolker

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- ▶ Aimed at Phd students, useful for many
- ▶ If you are currently not writing anything, 15 minutes is a big increase
- ▶ Set a daily writing goal:
 - ▶ the “inspiration” method, most common method for unsuccessful writers
 - ▶ the “sit there” method: write for a fixed amount of time
 - ▶ the “many pages” method

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 - ▶ the “sit there” method: write for a fixed amount of time
 - ▶ the “many pages” method
- ▶ “This (many pages) method rewards learning to write faster, and from what I’ve seen, fast writing produces no worse results than slow writing does. This method also produces a large volume of writing, and at least *some* of it is likely to be useful.” (page 45)

Can you really force writing?: Boice

Group	Average number of pages	modal number of days between creative ideas
Forced	3.2	1
Spontaneous	0.9	2
Abstinent	0.2	5

Table: Experiment comparing productivity between forced and spontaneous writing

Tricks

- ▶ Make writing contingent:
 - ▶ No shower, email, phone, breakfast, coffee ...before writing
- ▶ Make yourself accountable
 - ▶ 'prewritten check to a hated organization'
 - ▶ "Very few checks get mailed. These writers learn to write regularly regardless of initial mood'.

About time: Bolker, others, Write first

- ▶ What do you want to have finished?
- ▶ Do that first.
- ▶ MIT: most import task

No time: Professors as Writers: Boice: p 14; lack of time

- ▶ most listed reason for not writing: lack of time...
- ▶ traditional surveys of professors: typical work week 60-80 hours.
- ▶ observational studies: even professors with heavy teaching loads have several 20-30 minute blocks available.

Prioritizing Research Time

"I treat my research time the way I treat my class time. It is high priority and I don't cancel my research time unless I would cancel a class for the same reason." – Paul Humke, professor of mathematics at St. Olaf College

“I can't find time to write”

Do you need to find “time to teach”? Of course not.

(Silvia, 2007: 12)

Experts: Regular writing

- ▶ Regular writing, even in short gaps, leads to greater productivity because of less warm-up time
- ▶ 30 minutes a day will lead to 10 hours of writing
- ▶ Note: Phd students often **do not** have the time limitations of teaching academics, because of this, writing habits established during the Phd don't work later on
- ▶ **Practice !**
 - ▶ a “15-minute project”
 - ▶ a fake deadline

Positive Procrastination

- ▶ Neglect Project X with impending deadline to work on Project Y
- ▶ Two projects are better than one

Getting help with motivational issues

- ▶ Team up with a writing buddy
- ▶ Announce your goals
 - ▶ Turn a solo project into a co-authored one
 - ▶ A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.
- ▶ Start an agraphia group (info in Silvia)
- ▶ Join an online writing group (often listed as ABD groups):
 - ▶ <http://www.phinished.org/> Free online dissertation writing group
 - ▶ <http://www.academicladder.com/> (free newsletter, 4 wks: 70 \$)
 - ▶ <http://www.abdsurvivalguide.com/> (some free groups, free newsletter)

Create inspiration!



Tips to get started writing

- ▶ Be ready
 - ▶ dress the part
 - ▶ announce the plan
 - ▶ make sure you at least looks like you are writing
- ▶ Go for content!
 - ▶ write an email explaining it to someone
 - ▶ enlist the help of a friend
 - ▶ write aloud with a hand held recorder
- ▶ change your location
- ▶ change your wordprocessing program, pen, paper (lined, spaced, small notebook, big paper), mode, font, language(?)
- ▶ start working on the presentation, rather than the article
- ▶ make it a race/ a game
 - ▶ can you produce 200 words in 15 minutes? Test yourself

Alley, The Craft of Scientific Writing, (1987, 246) Writing is revising

*In my own writing I average about five pages a day.
Unfortunately, they are all the same page.*

Tips to get revising

- ▶ Outline
 - ▶ Revision strategy: reverse outline
 - ▶ (Re-)outline with post-its then write a paragraph for each idea
 - ▶ Ask someone else to reverse outline it....
- ▶ Read, start new document, rewrite, compare versions
- ▶ start writing a to-do list of what has to be done, and slowly expand on it
- ▶ read it aloud
 - ▶ let your wordprocessor read it aloud
 - ▶ let someone else read it aloud

Increasing focus

- ▶ Coffee, Ginseng, Gingko?
- ▶ Aromatherapy?
- ▶ iMusic, white noise, music for accelerated learning, make a work CD,
 - ▶ Minimal music: Simeon ten Holt, Brian Eno's 'Music for Airports', Bloom
- ▶ Self-hypnosis ?
- ▶ Meditation
- ▶ Breathing exercises

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- ▶ Meditation
- ▶ Breathing exercises
- ▶ Careful not to turn these tips into another way to procrastinate.

Track your progress



Summary

- ▶ Researchers are judged on writing productivity
- ▶ Argument driven reading and writing can speed up writing
- ▶ Motivational barriers to productivity can be overcome
- ▶ Establish good habits now