

Tips and tricks for (hopefully) successful scholars

SHARE talk May 18th 2010

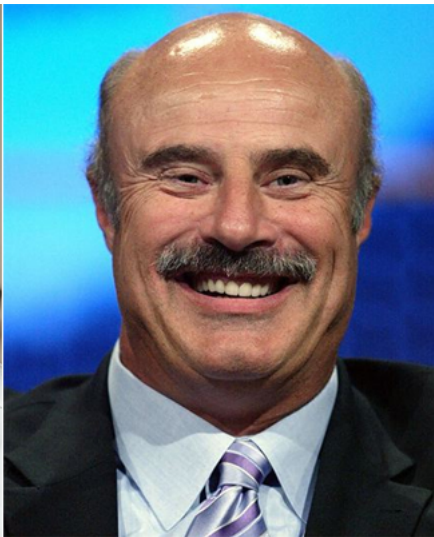
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May 18, 2010

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Produce research

Create impact



What determines success in academia?

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- ▶ Productivity
 - ▶ How much do you publish?
- ▶ Impact
 - ▶ How often do other people refer to your work? (h-index?)

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1. Not knowing what to write about
2. Not knowing what to do with results
 - ▶ Inexperience with the publishing process
3. Motivational issues
 - ▶ Many intelligent, creative researchers just can't seem to get research written up
 - ▶ Cause: motivational barriers and underdeveloped writing habits

How does publishing work?

- ▶ Seldom explicitly taught
- ▶ Ask!

“Advising isn't something you get. It's something you take.”

Publishing culture differs by field

- ▶ Journals? Conferences? Books?
- ▶ Time from submission to publication?
 - ▶ Wendy Laura Belcher: *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks: A Guide to Academic Publishing Success* (Especially for humanities)

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- ▶ when is a rejection real?
- ▶ Even knowing all of this won't help if you have trouble writing

Motivational barriers

- ▶ Research problems can be open-ended, unclearly defined, and intimidating
- ▶ The nature of the work encourages procrastination
- ▶ We give/get little (professional) training in the process of planning, writing, revising, networking
- ▶ We often have established habits that are hard to change 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



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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. When people tell me they have writer's block, I ask "What on earth are you trying to write?" Academic writers cannot get writers block.

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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 “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 — you have teaching schedule and you never miss it. If you think that writing time is lurking somewhere, hidden deep within your weekly schedule, you will never write a lot.

(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

Getting help with motivational issues

- ▶ Team up with a writing buddy
 - ▶ 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
- ▶ 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'
- ▶ Self-hypnosis ?
- ▶ Meditation
- ▶ Breathing exercises

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

Track your progress



Jorge Hirsch

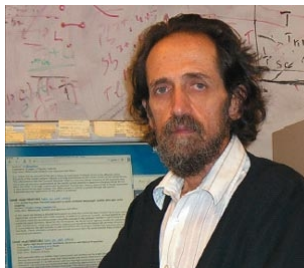


Figure:

conf.ncku.edu.tw/research/commentary/e/20080815/1.html

- ▶ Physicist at University of California, San Diego
- ▶ Developed the h-index in 2005
- ▶ Hirsch's h-index was then 49

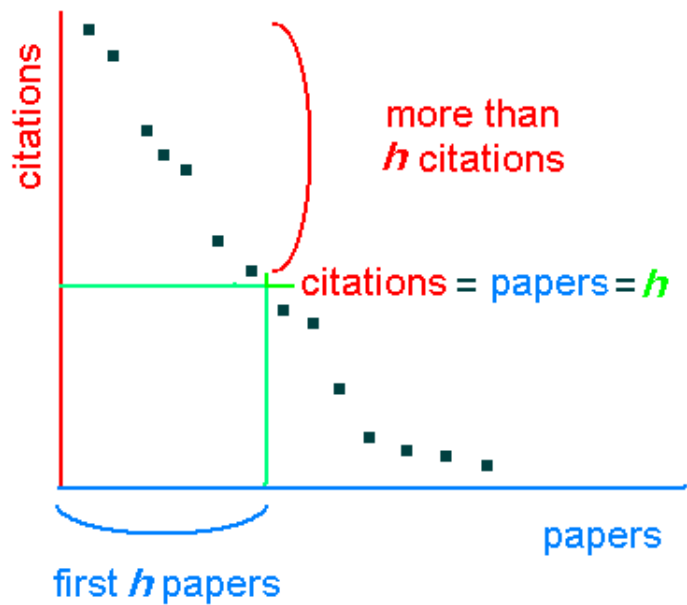
H-index

- H-index of 39 means the author has published 39 articles that have at least 39 citations each.

This researcher has a H-index of 5

Papers	Number of citations
1	15
2	11
3	9
4	7
5	5
6	2
7	1

Figure: taken from: <http://www.library.usyd.edu.au/rqf/hindex.html>



Creating impact

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- ▶ Do popular work.
- ▶ Make yourself and your work visible.

Get cited

- ▶ Make sure people **hear** about your work.
 - ▶ Give seminars and attend conferences
 - ▶ Network
 - ▶ Get a clear profile
- ▶ Make sure people **can find** your work.
 - ▶ An internal seminar or a national congress is *not* sufficient
 - ▶ Put your work on your homepage
- ▶ Make sure people **know** you.
 - ▶ Meet relevant people
 - ▶ Ask good questions. (Prepare for this!)

Building a clear profile

- ▶ Jack of all trades, master of none?
- ▶ Following new developments, keeping track of literature are all time consuming
- ▶ Most efficient to concentrate on related topics (and one hobby topic?)
 - ▶ similar background
 - ▶ easier to keep track of recent developments
 - ▶ more likely that your work will be recognized
 - ▶ you can really become an expert on the topic
 - ▶ this will all make writing (and publishing) easier



Networking on the Network: Phil Agre (1994)

1. Choose someone you wish to approach and read their work with some care
2. Make sure that your article cites their work in some substantial way (in addition to all your other citations)
3. Mail the person a copy of your article
4. Include a low-key, one-page cover letter that says something intelligent about their work.
5. If your work and theirs could be seen to overlap, include a concise statement of the relationship you see between them. The tone of this letter counts. Project ordinary self-confidence.
6. Refrain from praising or fawning or self-deprecation or cuteness or making a big deal out of it – you're not subordinating yourself to this person; you're just passing along your paper.
7. Don't make it sound like you're presupposing or demanding that you'll get a response.

Phil Agre on Conferences

Go ahead and attend the research presentations, especially the ones that specifically seem likely to be valuable to you. But spend most of your time tracking people down and talking to them.

“Research Outreach”

- ▶ Participate in the conversation about your topic
- ▶ Important for publishing as well.

Some people won't like you

Succeeding in Academia

- ▶ Researchers are judged on their productivity and impact, no matter the field
- ▶ Motivational barriers to productivity can be overcome
 - ▶ You can train yourself to have the habits that give you control over your success
- ▶ Publishing good work is not enough: your work needs to be recognized
- ▶ You *can influence* your research impact

Recommended reading

- ▶ Paul Silvia: How to write a lot.
- ▶ Wendy Laura Belcher: Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks: A Guide to Academic Publishing Success (Especially for humanities)
- ▶ Michael Alley: The Craft of Scientific Writing
- ▶ Abby Day: How to get research published in journals
- ▶ Robert Boice: Professors as writers
- ▶ Bolker: Write your dissertation in 15 minutes a day