

# PROFESSIONAL ACADEMIC WRITING: ENRICHING THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE

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## **The Nuts and Bolts**

Professional academic writing can be a satisfying, creative, embodied and highly nourishing experience, bearing professional fruits and providing free advertising for the writer. Numerous resources are available advising authors how to write research articles for publication. The basic elements – Abstract, Introduction, Method, Discussion, Conclusion, and References – remain the same, for most disciplines. But an essential piece of the writing process is usually missing from these resources – the relational embodied experience embedded in the writing process. Writing does not occur in isolation; therefore, the aim of this pre-congress workshop is to address the human experience when writing for publication.

The theme of the 2014 Congress echoes the relational component of the writing process and sets the frame for our pre-Congress workshop day: “The Writer in Relationship: Self – Text – Audience”. In this experiential workshop, participants will learn ways to tap into their embodied ‘knowing’ in order to write from a place of experience and truth. They will learn guidelines for effective communication through writing in a safe, collegial environment, and strategies to overcome conscious and unconscious barriers to writing – emotional and/or environmental. Exercises will guide participants as they open to their own knowledge, experience, and connection, to discover stories that will inspire and encourage themselves as writers and their audience of readers.

As we explore the relational components of writing, we will also discuss the necessary technical and intellectual skills that one needs to employ to create a publishable product. Our focus is non-fiction writing, so we will discuss academic/scholarly papers and magazine articles. We will examine writing plans – developing a course of action – for types of articles that publishers accept, as well as avenues for publication. We will also address writing style. Our goal is to communicate and to hold the reader’s attention, so we will talk about (look at and play with) the four characteristics of good scholarly writing: clarity, logic, precision, and persuasiveness.

Rather than following the archetype of the lonely writer in a cold garret, it is also essential to develop a ‘writing community’ and to nurture relationships with other writers and editors. We will learn how to listen to one another’s texts and offer supportive feedback that helps an article come into its truth. And we will talk about editors who are alert for creative and relevant articles and welcome the chance to meet writers who know their content, know how to write, respect boundaries and deadlines, and so forth. Relationships are paramount when it comes to working with editors. Editors who know their writers also have an easier time reading and responding from a place of connection – they are able to hear the author’s voice and maintain it, while offering suggestions for revisions. During this workshop, participants will meet with a panel of editors and publishers and will have the chance to ‘pitch’ paper/article/book ideas at them: so come prepared! Participants should leave the workshop with an outline/draft of an article for future publication, an online writers’ support system, and personal contact with professional writers and editors in the field of Body Psychotherapy and Somatic Psychology.

### **A brief look into the workshop content itself**

There is an age-old notion that we have an inner Muse, an essence filled with wonder that marvels at life’s experiences, who becomes absorbed in the moment and mulls ideas in our mind’s eye. The name assigned to this energy is not as important as learning to recognize it and respect its stories, its voice, and listen to its whispers. Everything that we consciously ‘want to’ write has probably already been written, so it is truly a matter of settling down and listening. Your Muse will dictate the story, if you are willing to be her scribe. I use the word Muse knowing that my Soul is part of this energy, and I use a

feminine pronoun when referencing my Muse because she is clearly bustling with female energy; however, this does not mean that your muse is a woman, or even a man for that point. Your muse could be an animal guide, a place, or an astral energetic synergy with no concrete shape. Your inner voice speaks to you and through you, in order to touch the world. In this workshop, we will do an exercise to introduce participants to their Muse, if they have not already met, or to reacquaint them if a relationship already exists.

### **The Egoic presence**

The second voice that we will encounter in this workshop is what I call our Egoic presence – this word has many connotations, so – in order to distinguish my definition from other uses – I mean the exaggerated sense of self-importance: the energy that knows we are separate and distinct individuals and usually controls our thoughts and behaviors through fear and shame or narcissism. The Egoic presence can be a destructive force, until you come to know it and tame it.

This energy can assume the role of Editor when we set pen to paper. It can be our innermost critic. This voice can also halt any attempt to write. It can smother you with slanderous appraisals and promises (or threats) that nothing you say will come out right; that you are an idiot to even contemplate writing; and so on and so forth in an endless litany. During the initial brainstorming and drafting process, listening to your Editor squelches anything you might consider. Again, using whatever label you prefer be it Ego, Editor, Inner Critic, this energy has to learn to be silent – to stand back – during the initial writing process. Her proper role comes into play later.

I like to think about it this way: when you are in relationship with someone, you rely on your personal power to create a safe space, a compassionate container for your interactions so that – as you resonate in their energy – your energy is not depleted. You share what works for you; how you like to be spoken to; if necessary, you share what hurts and why and what feels good and why. You are nurturing reciprocity, attachment, and love – but that doesn’t necessarily mean that you totally throw out boundaries, discrimination, judgments, criticism, etc. – they can have their place, perhaps later.

When you come into conversation with this inner energy – the Editor, Critic, etc. – that you previously may have assumed only wanted to destroy

you, you start to open up to the opportunity to learn its gifts, and how it has helped you to survive thus far, and how it can help you excel. From here, you can now revise the rules of conduct – especially when writing. It is worth taking time to see and feel this inner voice, so we will come closer to knowing its presence and what it can offer that is also constructive.

### Relationship with the Text

We typically generate our best writing when we feel inspired and interested, and not pressured or anxious, and especially not worrying about the outcome. Once you are in tune with yourself and your inner resources, your writing often simply starts. From a place of nonjudgmental, self-reflective, witnessing of yourself as a writer, you avoid ruminating on destructive thoughts and feelings and are free to focus on defining yourself as an active, engaged writer, which actually helps to enhance self-acceptance and self-love (DeSalvo, 1999). Terry Marks Tarlow (2014) writes in her new book, *Awakening Clinical Intuition*, that setting an intention versus setting a goal can lessen internalized pressure – an intention, she says, creates a positive, more expansive space where there are no expectations or internal demands, thus allowing time and space for something new to happen.

When you are in harmony with yourself, you are in concert with your words, with what's happening on the page: there's a drawing out from the inside; a cascade of words falls haphazardly on to this incredible blank white space. I liken it to winter snowshoeing when you are the first person on the trail: the only tracks on this smooth white expanse are yours. There is a sense of striking out, being the first to pass this way. What I see, I have just created. There's a deep sense of accomplishment having made this path that others will like to follow. A key element in the writing process is to let go of worrying about making a mess and simply go with the flow. It is easy to get sucked into spelling, and finding the right word along the way, or the correct punctuation, or the elusive reference, etc. Sometimes you may feel compelled to follow that sideline, you may have to 'chicken track' sideways to do a Google search and find what comes to mind but that you cannot quite grasp. Be wary, however, that it does not become an undercurrent of sabotage: that these callings to spell well, to make the perfect sentence length, to vary your sentences, to work with construction while formulating ideas; may or may not be in your best interest.

It is helpful to have an inkling of what you want to write about and why. Where do you envision this writing going – and why? What you want for outcome experiences – and why? Questions about intention, and acknowledging your expectations, can support that inner Editor's need to know. And it sets the stage for your Muse as she comes to know the implications for this writing. So, we will talk about motivation and direction.

To improve the quality of our writing, we need detailed accounts linking thoughts and feelings to events. Writing succeeds as a narrative when it is detailed, organized, compelling, vivid, and lucid. We need to write about what happened and how we felt about it then (in the moment that this event occurred) and how we feel about it now (as we write in reflection): this means we have to dig down and experience the moment in its totality. We were there, bodily (including the mind), our conscious and unconscious presence taking it all in, recording it, and archiving the experience, in order to recreate it one day. This can be even be seen as a form of mindfulness practice.

The act of writing brings the totality of a moment to life again on the page. We use all our senses (sight, sound, smell, touch, sensory inputs), our thoughts (analysis, comparison, question, wonder, doubt, acceptance), and our reflections on what is occurring and what it means – 'meaning making' is key here. It is not about telling your readers what to think and feel, just as you would never do that with a client. It is about sharing your embodied experience and sharing your 'take' on it and then letting readers decide for themselves what it all means. Readers want to learn from your experience and then apply what fits to themselves. So offer it all, do not hold back, thinking you will save it for another day, another paragraph down the road. Write what is flowing now and trust that more material will come, more facts will fill in the blanks.

You know what you want to say about your research, about your methodology, about your experience with clients in case sessions, and how this translates into your thinking, your practice, and also to other people's potential work. Now is the time to get your words out there and let them live and breathe on the pages of professional publications, on your blogs and websites, and in your newsletters. Then, readers can discover within themselves what resonates and rings true.

Some people think a story starts with the facts. In scholarly writing, we offer the hypothesis, statistics, and outcome results; in magazine articles, we

describe the process, methodology, and final experience. For me, the story begins and ends with people – people who experienced the intervention, be it a study design, or a new methodology, and how they were (or were not) altered by the experience. Character development (and the more intimate detailing) is important to create a ‘relationship’ between the reader and the person (in a biography), the character (in a novel), or the client (in a case study), regardless of the type of publication.

### **Relationship with the Audience**

We write first for ourselves and secondly for our readers. Our audience, be it laypersons, colleagues, or professionals (including editors), comes to know us through their experience of our story. As therapists, we are trained in transference and counter-transference. Reading and writing thrive on these particular ‘states of being’: how our inner worlds ‘project’ their reality onto the outer (different) reality. Readers often ‘become’ the characters in a story; they resonate with what is happening in the character’s life; and how that character is (or is not) dealing with, coping with, and thinking about their experiences. As writers, we want our readers to get us, to see us, and accept us – our thoughts, our knowing, our experiential moments and our reflections. And, in turn, we stand in their space. We try to guess how they will read our lines, and what they will read between those lines, to interpret them and develop them. We try to anticipate what they will do with our ‘knowing’ and how it will land in their lives. It is all about the inter-relationships between writer and reader, or between the writer and the text, and between the text and the reader: and hence the reader with the writer. The text is the medium.

So, the text is no longer the writer; it takes on its own life. The words on the page are not ‘You’. Your words land on the page, in their own glorious way, and readers read them, absorb them, and then ‘sit’ with them: eventually, they will react on their own accord. We cannot control how anyone hears us and responds; nor can we control how readers interpret our text. Sure, we can use guides, or signposts, to send them where we hope they will go, and we can offer clarifications, to be explicit about what we are saying, and still, the reader has a personal encounter and walks away thinking and believing what he/she believes – regardless of how careful we thought we were in our delivery.

Once we have created an initial draft, it helps to work with other writers,

to get feedback that will help bring the text forward. Work-shopping our stories with trusted colleagues is often essential. And, as therapists, we have a distinct advantage here – we know how to sit back and listen to our clients. We do not tell them what to think or say. We do not interject our thoughts about how their story should have been, or what they should do. We ask questions, and we offer suggestions, only really to deepen our – and their – understanding of their experience. We will learn how to approach a colleague’s text the same as we appreciate the richness of interactions with a client. It is not about you, or your way of doing this. It is not how you would say it, or present it, or reflect on it. It is about hearing the other person, listening with curiosity and compassion; wanting to understand this person’s experience of his/her experience and how it creates, in turn, his/her approach to the text itself. From this place of openness and acceptance, we can ask questions for clarification, for further details, for a reference (or foundation), if necessary, in the literature that supports their assertions. We do not challenge or correct. We love, and – with this love – we support what is there; and we offer questions and suggestions to encourage growth and further expansion.

### **A Quick Summary**

Respecting publisher guidelines is critical, and every text has its limitations, so I will just offer these parting words: writing while maintaining a full time job or practice is ‘do-able’. It starts with creating a discipline to manage your time properly: a time to ‘do’; a time to ‘be’; and then a time to write. What is then necessary is: finding your writing style and voice; finding the intersections between your expertise, your passion and the right audience; and developing relationships with yourself, your text, and your audience.

During the course of our day, we will gain writing strategies to guide this process. And, more importantly perhaps, we will experience an embodied relational approach to writing that will, in all good faith, transfer from this small workshop setting to a larger perspective of the Self as a Writer in relationship with a supportive community.

### **References**

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**Presenter**

**Nancy Eichhorn** is an accredited educator with a doctorate in clinical psychology, specializing in somatic psychology, in private practice in Dover, New Hampshire, USA. She works with individuals and groups integrating embodied writing, narrative therapy, somatic psychology, Body Psychotherapy, body-mind practices and mindfulness meditation practices in an educational setting. Her academic background and certifications include multiple masters degrees (M.Ed. reading, M.A. creative nonfiction writing, M.A. clinical psychology), an Intermediate Certificate in Relational Somatic Psychology, EMDR, Basic Level 1, certification as a holistic health educator, and extensive teaching experiences (1984 to present-elementary to higher learning institutions and private practice). Her current projects include publishing the USABP magazine, *Somatic Psychotherapy Today*, facilitating writing workshops (scholarly and creative nonfiction), ghost writing, editing, and working with students in private sessions.



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