

# Writing about Learning and Teaching in Higher Education

Creating and Contributing to Scholarly Conversations  
across a Range of Genres

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## CHAPTER 24

# WRITING AND REWRITING YOUR DRAFT

### *The Writing Process as Iterative*

*When we write we not only produce text, we also produce ourselves as scholars. (Thomson 2015)*

In this opening quote, Pat Thomson reminds us that writing produces both texts and selves. As with many dimensions of writing, there are numerous texts, including those we reference repeatedly throughout these chapters, to guide you through the various and multiple steps of drafting. We do not reiterate all or even much of that kind of detailed guidance because doing so is both unnecessary (since others have already done an excellent job, for example, in the works authored and co-authored by Pat Thomson) and impossible (in the space we have). Instead, we focus in this chapter on the key considerations that you, as a new or experienced author, should keep in mind when writing for the different genres we include in this book and as you strive to produce yourself as a particular kind of scholar.

Below we offer some general recommendations for drafting texts about learning and teaching that should apply across all genres, and then we discuss the importance of clearly articulating your argument. Then, we move through each genre, offering questions you might ask yourself as you draft. These questions are intended to help you keep in mind how, in your drafting process, you are working toward engaging in conversation with fellow learning and teaching scholars, clarifying and shaping your values and identities as a learning and teaching scholar, and using writing to learn.

## Recommendations for Drafting across All Kinds of Genres

As we noted in the introduction to [part 5](#) of this book, we hope that, as you develop and refine your writing, you will strive for the most generative balance between, on the one hand, working within established structures and expectations for writing and, on the other, pushing beyond those structures and expectations. The reason for this is both to stretch yourself as a writer and as a scholar of learning and teaching and to help the structures and expectations of the various genres become more accommodating of a diversity of authors. When you set out to draft a text, no matter what genre you are working within, we recommend that you do the following:

### Familiarize or Re-familiarize Yourself with the Expectations for the Genre

- Which of the expectations is it essential that you meet (e.g., including components such as a literature review for an empirical research article; achieving a particular word count; referencing other work that has been published in that journal or outlet)?
- Which of the expectations might be more flexible (e.g., methods; voice [passive or active]; person [first or third])?
- With which of the expectations are you most comfortable and familiar? Do you want to start with writing toward meeting those, to give you a boost in energy and confidence, or save those for when you need a boost?

### Capture Your Ideas Informally

- Consider keeping a diary, journal, or document on your computer or smartphone with you at all times and jot down thoughts as they come to you—or speak them into a smartphone or other recording device. If you wait until you get to your regular writing place and time, you may have forgotten them.
- When you are ready to sit down and write, you may also want to speak first. Writing can feel like a real risk or a commitment

for some people. So, as Margy MacMillan (personal communication, July 25, 2019) suggests: “Talk it through with your phone set to record. Sometimes we can be freer in getting the ideas out in speaking rather than writing—even better if you use something that can convert voice to text automatically.”

- As Kathryn Sutherland describes in Reflection 7.1 (The experience of using Thomson and Kamler’s (2013) three types of collaborative writing), you might try the “type-talk” technique with a colleague or critical friend, whereby one person talks and the other types, and then you switch roles.

### **Make an Outline**

- Consider making an outline that includes the required sections of the genre or, if there are not required sections, the order in which you want to make your points.
- To structure your outline, you can use the Guiding Questions included in chapters 12–22; these questions also appear in the online resources.
- To start with, simply jot notes or write/paste in bits and pieces you want to be sure to include. It can be helpful to see them organized in outline form like this before you start writing.
- It can be helpful to make an outline at any stage of the drafting process, including part way through or even at the end. As staff at almost any university writing center will contend, writing an outline allows you to see the bigger picture to more easily identify lack of flow and logic. Outlines serve different functions and help you address different writing questions at different stages of writing.

### **Give Yourself Permission to Fill in Text in Whatever Order**

#### **Works for You**

- Some people work best if they make their way through from the beginning to end of a draft, starting by writing an introduction (even if they know it will likely change), then mapping out the subsequent sections.

- Other people can get more writing accomplished if they plug in bits and pieces of different parts of their draft when they feel inspired or have the time. For instance, you might have done some reading of literature that you want to be sure to include, so you work on that part of the draft first. Or, you might have some key insights or lessons that you know you want to emphasize in a discussion section, so you can start with articulating preliminary versions of those.

### **Revise but Do Not Perfect as You Draft**

- There is an important difference between revising, rethinking, and redrafting, on the one hand, and putting pressure on yourself to capture exactly what you want to say in each sentence or section as you go. Many good writers write what Anne Lamott (1994, 21) calls “shitty first drafts,” and she reminds us that “this is how they end up with good second drafts and terrific third drafts.” Let the drafting be iterative, organic if you prefer, or even messy.
- Keep copies of each draft, giving each document a clear file name, such as with a short title and date or v1, v2, which will help you keep track of which is the most recent (rather than “latest draft,” which will not be helpful).
- Consider preparing a version that is under the word limit, because reviewers almost always ask for more—more explanation, more references, more supporting data, more implications. Having a manuscript under the word count gives you a little wiggle room (or else you will have to cut as you add in responses to reviewer requests).

### **Seek Input and Feedback at Key Points**

While it makes sense to spend some time gathering, drafting, rethinking, and revising your work on your own, it is also helpful to seek input and feedback from critical friends at various points. As we discuss in [chapter 26](#), it is essential to develop networks and groups of critical friends whom you can ask for feedback.

- How might it be helpful to you to talk through your ideas with a critical friend before starting to draft?
- Which of your critical friends might be best suited to reading a very rough and messy draft when you are in the early stages in order to help you shape it and give it direction?
- Which of your critical friends is particularly good at getting you unstuck when you are stuck on a writing project?
- How do you decide when your draft is nearly finished and would benefit from a critical read to help you complete or polish it?

These general guidelines should be helpful to you across genres. In Reflection 24.1, we quote a blog post by Pat Thomson (2019f) in which she outlines how she goes about drafting a paper.

### *Reflection 24.1*

#### **Writing a draft paper**

“I write in chunks. I’m doing it right now as I’m book writing under deadline pressure. . . .

“Here’s how I do it. To begin, I spend time writing an initial road map—a tiny text [Thomson 2019g]—for the paper or chapter. I then amass the various bits and pieces that I think I’m going to use—quotations, bits of data (my writing *mise-en-place* [Thomson 2012]). I often have various books and PDFs open on my desk-top and on the floor. At this point I’m ready to write chunks. I always start with the introductory chunk, as this sets the tone and argument thread for the whole piece. After I have the intro done I revisit my tiny text and make any adjustments I need to. I then work out how many steps there are in the argument to come. Each step is a section of the paper with heading. Each step is a chunk. . . .

“Writing in chunks is not the same as writing to a word count or writing to time. Chunk writing usually looks and feels a bit stop-and-startish while it’s happening. I work consistently at the screen but swap between referencing, copying, or cutting and pasting.

Sometimes it becomes obvious that I need something not at hand and I'll either stop and find it, or leave a marker that I can come back to at the end of the chunk-writing. I do a clean-up at the end.

“Chunk writing always seems quite creative, seeing the various elements come together. I like to keep the flow going so that, in reality, I spend more time on writing new text than in inserting or hunting and gathering. I also try not to edit what I've done too much as I know that this is a first draft. I'll get another go. And another. Writing a chunk of text, of variable length, but usually between one and two thousand words—sometimes a bit shorter or longer—usually takes me the best part of a morning. . . .

“For me, the magic trick in writing in chunks comes from focusing on one step in the argument at a time. I keep the current step at the forefront of my mind. I don't worry about what's come before or what is to come next. I don't get distracted by the whole. I just focus on this bit. Here. Now. You write a whole [chunk], not a part. You stop when you're done. And it's very satisfying to make the last full stop knowing that you have advanced the chapter by taking that one more step.”

*(Source: Pat Thomson 2019f. Reproduced by permission of the author.)*

*Pat Thomson is a professor of education at the University of Nottingham, UK.*

## **The Importance of Clarifying Your Argument**

Writing produces text and selves, as Pat Thomson notes in the quote at the beginning of this chapter. It does this through intentional and iterative processes of shaping and reshaping arguments. As the term suggests, an argument is a single, clear reason or a more complex set of reasons presented with the goal of convincing or persuading someone of a way of thinking or a way of being. An argument might contend that a particular idea or approach is right or wrong, but as genres expand, so too must the notion of an argument to include not



only “over against” points but also “yes, and” discussions. For some genres, for instance, such as reflective essays and stories, an argument might be a demonstration or narrative that aims to convince readers of the importance of considering something they had not thought about previously—not to replace but to expand existing perceptions. The iterative process of writing allows you to clarify and convey your argument. Ron Barnett provides a useful discussion of this in our online resource, “[The Distinction between Thesis, Argument, and Argumentation.](#)”

As with all aspects of writing, your identities and values will shape what you argue, as will having a sense of the audience you aim to persuade, present with a particular perspective, or encourage to build on and expand previous understandings. Ensure that your argument is clear, strong, and compelling by being aware of how dimensions of your identity inform your perspective and what you argue, and by considering the logic, line of reasoning, or narrative that will convey your argument to a particular audience. In keeping with our metaphor of conversation, imagine that you are actually in dialogue with someone or with a particular group, and consider how you might best communicate with them.

The way you develop your argument and the evidence you use to support it depends in part on the genre in which you are writing. An argument can be a perspective (as in an opinion piece); it can be a call for a change in practice based on evidence of the outcomes of such a revision (as in an empirical research article); or, as noted above, it can be more of a demonstration of an important experience. The basic questions you want to address here include whom you are trying to convince of what and why, or whether your writing is striving instead to communicate an understanding rather than convince.

### **Recommendations for Drafting by Kinds of Genre**

Below we offer recommendations for each genre, which can be downloaded in a table format in the online resource, “[Overview of the Eleven Genres to Support Writing Drafts.](#)”

### Empirical Research Articles

Use the Guiding Questions on page 121 or in the [online resources](#) to create an outline for yourself.

**What to keep in mind while drafting:** While the strict requirements of an empirical research article might seem constraining to some, they can also be seen as providing a clear structure that you can work, and even wiggle, within. In particular, they afford you the flexibility to jump around among the sections, as we suggest in our general guidelines above, filling in different parts when you have time and are in that frame of mind (to describe methods, for instance, which is more technical, or to work on the discussion, which requires more creativity and analysis).

**Questions you might ask yourself as you draft:** What particular contribution do my data, argument, and implications have to offer? How am I situating those within larger, ongoing conversations or positioning them to start a new conversation?

### Theoretical and Conceptual Articles

Use the Guiding Questions on page 136 or in the [online resources](#) to create an outline for yourself.

**What to keep in mind while drafting:** Your theoretical or conceptual article aims to provoke, deepen, or expand thinking about learning and teaching, so you should ensure that you keep front and center in your mind how your draft is doing that.

**Questions you might ask yourself as you draft:** How does the point I am making here provoke, deepen, or expand thinking? Of course, every point you make does not need to do that in, of, and by itself, but if you endeavor to address the question repeatedly, you might find interesting patterns or themes that help clarify your argument as you write.

### Literature Reviews

Use the Guiding Questions on page 148 or in the [online resources](#) to create an outline for yourself.

**What to keep in mind while drafting:** Because a freestanding literature review is primarily an analysis of what has already

been published, albeit within a new frame and possibly opening new directions for thinking, it gives you an opportunity to join a conversation about learning and teaching from your particular perspective as a new, experienced, or student scholar without having to generate new data or a new conceptual model. Your synthesis should go beyond summarizing the literature and produce new insights and often a new framework.

**Questions you might ask yourself as you draft:** How does the point I am making here help readers understand in a new way what has already been presented or argued?

### Case Studies

Use the Guiding Questions on page 158 or in the [online resources](#) to create an outline for yourself.

**What to keep in mind while drafting:** Contributing a discussion of a particular approach in your own practice affords you an opportunity to present yourself as a learning and teaching scholar and also invites potential dialogue and collaboration around the practice you present.

**Questions you might ask yourself as you draft:** What is this a case study of? What is most compelling and important about this case study to me as an author? What might readers find most compelling and inspiring?

### Books and Edited Collections

Use the Guiding Questions on page 174 (for books) or 177 (for edited collections) or in the [online resources](#) to create an outline for yourself.

**What to keep in mind while drafting:** For a book proposal ensure your passion for the subject matter comes through as well as the need for the book and the potential market.

As an author or authors drafting a book, among your principle concerns will be organization, breadth, and depth. You are telling a larger and longer story than in any other genre we discuss, and so you need to map out and regularly check whether you are achieving the best balance between breadth and depth as you work within a word limit. Regularly return to the theme or focus of the text and

ask yourself if you are still addressing that theme or focus and how you can ensure coherence.

As an editor of a collection, you will also need to consider organization, breadth, and depth, but in terms of other people's writing rather than your own. When you invite chapters, consider providing a template or outline that asks authors to address the same points as all other authors in the collection, but of course in their own ways and focused on their own contributions. As you offer feedback and guidance to chapter authors, consider ways in which you can ensure a coherent experience for your readers, reminding authors to address the sections of the outline provided.

**Questions you might ask yourself as you draft:** Have I articulated or invited a sufficiently diverse set of perspectives? Are the chapters organized in the best order to build into an engaging and coherent whole?

For a book proposal: Why is there a need for this book? What is the overarching argument?

For a book: Am I deepening, expanding, or otherwise developing the argument as I move through the book, or, alternatively, offering a logical series of perspectives from different angles?

For an edited collection: Are we ensuring that each chapter has integrity but also that there is consistency across chapters?

### **Conference and Workshop Presentations**

Use the Guiding Questions on page 187 or in the [online resources](#) to create an outline for yourself.

**What to keep in mind while drafting:** Many people find it best to avoid writing out your presentation, as reading from a script is rarely effective. Drafting some outline notes in bullet format that you memorize and use as prompts when you talk to your audience is much better than attempting to read a script, because how we talk and how we write are significantly different, for example, in terms of length and construction of sentences. You need to make sure the connections and transitions are clear and be prepared to respond to real-time input and feedback—questions and suggestions from participants. For a workshop devote as much time to designing the

activities as designing the presentation portion of the workshop. For posters the layout and design are as important as the content.

**Questions you might ask yourself as you draft:** Will this [statement, activity] be clear and accessible on a first hearing? Is the series of steps I am moving through/asking participants to move through logical and compelling and will they lead them to engage productively with the topic?

### Reflective Essays

Use the Guiding Questions on page 199 or in the [online resources](#) to create an outline for yourself.

**What to keep in mind while drafting:** Reflective essays are not necessarily trying to prove or convince but rather to convey the particulars of a lived experience and their significance.

**Questions you might ask yourself as you draft:** In what ways am I conveying the lived experience I am describing and analyzing?

### Opinion Pieces

Use the Guiding Questions on page 212 or in the [online resources](#) to create an outline for yourself.

**What to keep in mind while drafting:** In an opinion piece you are conveying your own particular perspective, so you need to consider how best to make that “hearable” and compelling to readers who may not have thought of what you address or may disagree.

**Questions you might ask yourself as you draft:** What is my main argument? What voice or perspective am I adding to the ongoing conversation about learning and teaching and why is it important?

### Stories

Use the Guiding Questions on page 225 or in the [online resources](#) to create an outline for yourself.

**What to keep in mind while drafting:** Since a story is a narrative, an attempt to capture and convey something you have experienced or witnessed but without the necessity to prove or convince, your focus can be on the details that will bring the experience most vividly alive for readers. Stories might be the most challenging genre in which

to gain enough distance from the content to convey it effectively to readers, so try to be cognizant of that challenge as you are drafting.

**Questions you might ask yourself as you draft:** In what ways am I moving from writer-based to reader-based prose—from writing for myself as audience to work through my ideas to writing for an external audience, someone not inside my own head?

### **Social Media**

Use the Guiding Questions on page 238 or in the [online resources](#) to create an outline for yourself.

**What to keep in mind while drafting:** Social media, including blog posts, listserv messages, or tweets, allow you to play with the format in creative ways and to write outside of narrow academic constraints. Drafting involves writing text along with consideration of the format, images, and hyperlinks to other outlets.

**Questions you might ask yourself as you draft:** What do I want readers to take away from my social media contribution and how do I want to express myself as a writer using social media?

### **Teaching Award, Fellowship, and Promotion Applications**

Use the Guiding Questions on page 246 or in the [online resources](#) to create an outline for yourself.

**What to keep in mind while drafting:** Drafting such applications is an iterative process that has to focus on the criteria. Kelly's drafting approach consists of: claim (of "excellence") + example (of what you do in your teaching) + evidence (data supporting excellence claim). She gets people to write these in outline form first and then to think through the flow. Don't forget the role critical friends can play in this genre, because they will see your practices and praise you in ways that you might not see.

**Questions you might ask yourself as you draft:** As I draft my application, how can I keep to the forefront my compelling argument as to how I meet the criteria?

## Over to You

Drafting is an iterative process that should take into consideration your own goals and your audience's interests; as you draft, you are producing yourself as well as your argument, as Pat Thomson notes in the quote with which we open this chapter. Questions to address about writing and rewriting your draft include:

- How might you use structures, guiding questions, outlines, and dialogue with critical friends to help ensure that you clarify and embrace your values as a writer and use the drafting process to learn?
- With which expectations are you already familiar in any given genre and with which do you need to familiarize yourself?
- What structures or questions might be most useful to you in your drafting process?
- At what points in the drafting process might you use outlining and why?
- In what order might you fill in different sections of the texts and why?
- Which of your critical friends might you consult at different stages of drafting and why?
- At what point do you feel your texts are ready for submission?