

PERCEPTION AND PRACTICE OF WRITING FOR PUBLICATION BY FACULTY AT A DOCTORAL-GRANTING UNIVERSITY

Robert Boice and Karin Johnson

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Of a faculty of 685 at a doctoral-granting university, 400 completed a questionnaire (the Writing Habits Survey) indicating the patterns and conditions under which they write for publication, the techniques they employ to facilitate their writing, and the factors that inhibit their writing. Overall, faculty seemed to devote substantial efforts to writing, they reported using rather unsystematic methods of writing, and they cited a lack of time as the chief constraint on their writing. The most productive writers seemed to work at writing in a regular (as opposed to sporadic) fashion, to have little anxiety about writing, and to minimize negative attitudes about the editorial process.

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The usual emphasis in faculty development programs is on the improvement of teaching—fittingly so, considering the ostensible goals of higher education. But it could be that an exclusionary focus on teaching produces less than optimal results in research universities. Faculty in such settings are reported to perceive teaching as far less rewarding than activities related to research (Fenker, 1977). Moreover, faculty in settings where publications are the prime factor in hiring, promotion, and status (Bayer and Astin, 1975; Mahoney, 1979) are demanding development programs with results that are visible and portable (Kirschling, 1979). Finally, where programs emphasize writing productivity, needy faculty who might otherwise avoid participation are enlisted when asked to serve as subjects in research (Boice, 1982a).

What has kept faculty developers from a readier involvement in means of facilitating research and writing? First, many development efforts are carried out in college settings where research and writing are not openly encouraged. Second, where research is valued, it has not been shown to produce obviously beneficial effects on teaching (Centra, 1983; Friedrich

Robert Boice and Karin Johnson, State University of New York at Albany.

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and Michalak, 1983). Traits like independence that seem to serve researchers well are unrelated to those like liberality which characterize good teachers (Rushton, et al., 1983).

Nonetheless, faculty development programs might profitably incorporate activities like scholarly writing, particularly as more universities become developmental sites. Harbingers of changing attitudes are appearing (Dorfman et al., 1982). Weaver (1982), for instance, argued that we should look more diligently for positive relationships between writing and teaching. The disciplined reflection required to fashion a coherent essay may deepen the writer's understanding of a topic and, in turn, make its teaching more cogent and enjoyable. Weaver's ideas have been corroborated in research where developmental efforts in either teaching or writing produced benefits in both areas (Boice, 1983c).

Despite those beginnings, we know very little about the typical attitudes and habits of faculty regarding scholarly writing. Even the best known of faculty surveys (e.g., Gaff, 1977) have overlooked this scholarly activity. Much of what we now know about the writing process is based on dramatic anecdotes of suffering (e.g., Valian, 1977) or on the recollections of professional authors (Gould, 1980).

This study represents an attempt to survey the writing habits and attitudes of the entire faculty at a doctoral-granting university. It was undertaken with the realization that faculty have traditionally remained silent about the writing process, except in humorous presentations (e.g., Parrish, 1983). We sought quantifiable information on writing activities that could be used to provide basic demographic and interrelationships with factors such as sex, writing blocks, and word processors.

METHOD

Questionnaire: Writing Habits Survey (WHS)

The WHS consists of 12 items arranged on both sides of a mimeographed sheet. Although its respondents were not identified by name, it begins with spaces for information about gender, age, years since PH.D., and academic department. Each of the 12 questions that follow (e.g., "Which pattern best describes the way you do scholarly writing?") contains checklists indicating frequencies or scaled choices (e.g., "regular amounts of writing on a daily basis, regular amounts of writing—two to three times a week, once a week, sporadically"). Essentially, the 12 questions represent six categories: (1) writing patterns, (2) writing conditions, (3) helpful sources and facilitative techniques, (4) use of revision, (5) interfering factors, and (6) estimated productivity. The six categories derive from previous survey research on the

most common factors that promote scholarly writing (Boice and Jones, in press).

Subjects and Procedures

All 685 faculty at the State University of New York, Albany, received a package containing a brief cover letter, the WHS, and a postcard (identifying them by number) indicating a decision to accept or reject participation. Nonrespondents received a second package after a delay of one month.

Overall, 400 of the 685 faculty completed and returned the questionnaire (a 58% rate of return). Of those 400, only 22% required the second mailing before participating. In general, the characteristics of the sample resembled those of the whole university, e.g., 13% of participants were female, the age distribution was nearly rectangular. There were no significant differences (χ^2) in participation rates of the various colleges and schools.

RESULTS

While the salient result was one of surprising compliance by faculty in revealing a substantial amount of information about their work habits (cf. Freedman, 1982), the WHS nonetheless elicited a record number of complaints at SUNY Albany's Institutional Review Board about invasions of privacy.

Demographics

Table 1 summarizes the patterns and conditions of writing for these faculty. Basically, most of these writers claimed moderately substantial efforts, reporting between 2 and 10 hours of writing for publication in a typical week. Similarly, most respondents reported thinking about writing projects on a fairly regular basis. Despite their claims of regular effort, most faculty wrote sporadically, in varied locations, at different times, and with varying amounts of distraction.

Table 2 depicts factors that may facilitate writing. Most writers reported the habit of revising their writing, a tactic widely believed by composition researchers to characterize skilled writers (Flower and Hayes, 1980). Most considered goal setting as an aid to productivity just as behavioral researchers do (Goldiamond, 1977). Relatively few of these faculty seemed to have fallen into the apparently bad habit of awaiting inspiration or the proper mood before writing (Boice, in press). But, only moderate numbers were helped by other factors such as scheduling and modeling that are commonly

TABLE 1. Patterns and Conditions of Writing

Item	Response Dimensions					
	0 hr. 6%	1 hr. 9%	2-5 hr. 30%	6-10 hr. 27%	10-20 hr. 19%	20+ hr. 9%
Amount time/week:						
Writing pattern:		sporadic 56%	once/week 5%	regular 2-3 25%	daily 13%	
Writing location:			same place 40%		different places 60%	
Writing time:		A.M. 11%		P.M. 7%	varied 82%	
Amount of distraction:				quiet 56%	varied 44%	
Time thinking re. writing/week:	never 1%	rarely 10%		once 13%	several 34%	daily 42%

TABLE 2. Facilitators of Writing

Item	Response Dimensions Checked										
Techniques employed:	inspiration 20%	mood 21%	schedule 32%	seclusion 34%	social pressure 18%	rewards and punishment 30%	goal setting 63%	other 16%			
Sources of help:	reviewers 51%	dissertation 47%	writing course 5%	self- experience 86%	modeling 50%	colleagues 46%	other 15%				
Revision:	never 1%	never 1%	little 17%	2 drafts 24%	several drafts 57%						
Use Word Processor:	never 72%	never 72%	occasionally 18%	always 10%							

assumed to be facilitators in writing (Hartley, 1980). The low rate of claims for help from a writing course was no surprise; few campuses offer such courses (Boice, 1982c).

Ten percent of this 1982 sample reported a heavy reliance on word processors. For the moment, productive writers who dislike writing in longhand or typing while composing may rely more on dictophones (Kellogg, 1982). Although it seems logical to suppose an increasing reliance on word processors, evidence to date does not confirm expectations that these devices will be more efficient (Gould, 1981).

Table 3 shows factors that interfere with writing, chief among them a lack of time. A slim majority of writers listed other priorities as an obstacle. Surprisingly few writers claimed problems with the editorial process, with support facilities (e.g., secretarial help), and with institutional encouragement. Writing blocks (defined as an inability to write because of some emotional/motivational problem) were listed by 12% of the respondents, a figure consistent with other estimates of phobic and anxiety-related disorders in the general population (Boice, 1982b; 1983a). Less than 1% of this sample reported problems in writing connected with discrimination factors of sex, race, or politics. Eight percent of this sample listed no publications, but most faculty had a total in the past 3 years of three or more: 1-2 (14%), 3-6 (37%), 7-10 (18%), and 10+ (24%). In the rank ordering of scholarly activities, faculty ranked writing below teaching and scholarly reading but above advising and administration.

Interrelationships

Correlational and nonparametric analyses indicated that writing productivity was not related to many of factors that were expected to be facilitators (e.g., revision, word processor) or inhibitions (e.g., lack of time, awaiting inspiration). Productivity *was* related to ratings of writing anxiety ($r = -.127$, $p < .01$), to age/rank ($r = -.21$, $p < .001$ for age), and to writing more than once a week ($\chi^2 = 46.17$, 12 *df*, $p < .001$). Other factors, including an expectation of harsh review comments, a belief that most published articles are meaningless, and a fear of making mistakes in print, were significant negative predictors of productivity, but the small samples involved make these questionable findings.

Because the factors that inhibit writing among women in academia have been widely discussed (Emmons, 1982; Menges and Exum, 1983; Over, 1982), particular attention was directed to factors associated with gender. In this sample, sex was not related to either writing output or to most writing habits. Only the use of seclusion (51% of women versus 32% of men) and lack of time for writing (86% of women versus 68% of men) discriminated between the sexes.

TABLE 3. Interference Factors in Writing

Item	Response Dimensions Checked									
	lack time 71%	other priorities 51%	lack support 24%	lack encour. 13%	writing block 12%	worth of publ. 12%	harsh reviews 7%	fear of mistakes 6%		
Amount of initial anxiety:	1	2		3		4	5			
	none 37%	27%		moderate 23%		7%	high 4%			

Writing anxiety, a known inhibitor of writing in clinical contexts (Boice, 1984), was related to writing blocks ($r = .262, p < .001$), to the use of contingency management ($r = .182, p < .005$), and to writing productivity ($r = -.190, p < .005$). Linear regression analyses suggest that the best predictor of writing productivity other than age is the most obvious—the amount of time spent writing ($r = .33, T = 3.3, p < .001$). Five variables (age, amount of anxiety, time thinking about writing, time spent writing, years since Ph.D.) accounted for 19% of the variance in writing productivity ($F(5, 307) = 14.09, p < .001$).

DISCUSSION

This survey provides some of the first data-based insights into the writing practices of faculty at a doctoral-granting university. Because these data must be considered as specific to one sample and in need of confirmation in other academic settings, it may be useful to consider them in three different and tentative perspectives.

In the first view, attention may be directed to the less-than-ideal writing habits of faculty. Most seemed to follow no salient regimen and to write in binges for deadlines. Moreover, most faculty in this study made little attempt to write under optimal conditions such as seclusion. Why would faculty working in a context where publications are valued so highly not evidence more self-discipline and concern for writing? One answer may be that writing habits are rarely taught to academicians; those of us who succeed at writing seem to learn mostly by trial and error (Boice, 1982b). Another answer is that most of these faculty have not become productive writers. Consider that less than a quarter of this sample claimed a recent total of 10 or more publications in an era where that total is no longer sufficient for promotion/tenure and where highly productive publishers have a minimum of 50 articles (Tuckman, 1979). Researchers who have taken a close look at the role of regimen in scholarly writing found it to be a strong predictor of productivity (Welsh, 1981). The message for faculty developers in this first view is that most of their clients who seek help for teaching could also use guidance with scholarly writing.

In the second perspective, focus is drawn to the interrelations between writing habits and factors including productivity. This view permits the conclusion that most of the ideals of writing habits are too poorly correlated with productivity to be taken seriously. It may be that the idealized practices of professional authors (e.g., Wallace, 1971) are nothing more than unnecessary rituals—although the experimental evidence for problem writers says otherwise (Boice, 1983a).

The third way of conceptualizing these results consists of concentrating

on the reported priorities of these faculty; this might be a most pleasing approach to traditional faculty developers. Overall, respondents rated teaching and reading as more important than writing. This could mean that the SUNY Albany faculty have rejected the imposed values of a research university that gives little overt reward for excellence in teaching or for scholarship that is not evidenced in publications. The attractiveness of this position has been made evident by McKeachie (1979) who supposed that the greatest satisfactions of faculty are intrinsic to their work. But faculty developers who work in the "trenches" might come to a different interpretation. It may be that faculty who obviously do not publish can find solace in claiming that their relatively private performances as teachers are more important (Aldrich, 1982; Cross, 1977; Walton, 1982).

Of course, none of these perspectives can stand on this single study. The truth of the matter is probably some combination of the three views such as this: most faculty are rather inefficient and unfulfilled writers whose output matches their motivational but not their aspirational levels. The result is evidently much like that for teaching—of well-intentioned and largely untrained individuals who are somewhat uncertain about how to improve and who are overly sensitive to disapproval.

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