



Introduction

Using This Workbook

GOALS OF THE WORKBOOK

The primary goals of this workbook are to aid you in revising a classroom essay, conference paper, unpublished article, chapter, or thesis and sending it to the editor of a suitable academic journal. That is, the goals are active and pragmatic. The workbook provides the instruction, exercises, structure, and deadlines needed to do an effective revision. It will help you to develop the habits of productivity that lead to confidence, the kind of confidence that it takes to send out into the world a journal article that you have written. By aiding you in taking your paper from classroom or conference quality to journal article quality, it also helps you to overcome anxiety about academic publishing.

HISTORY OF THE WORKBOOK

Nothing quite like this workbook exists. Most books on scholarly writing give advice based on the experiences of only the author, a few scholars directly in the author's field, or the author's undergraduates. This workbook is not the product of one person's experience or thought. It was not written over just a semester or a year. This version is the product of ten years of repeated experimentation with hundreds of scholarly writers. I have revised it again and again, based on the dozens of courses in which I have used this workbook to teach graduate students at UCLA and faculty members around the world. It is also based on what I learned managing a peer-reviewed journal for ten years. Every time I taught the workbook, I have asked its users how it was working for them and what would improve it. Every year, I kept in close contact with my course participants as they submitted journal articles, underwent peer review, and got published. I learned more and more about what actually succeeds in the peer review process, not what is theorized to succeed. On the basis of these participants' experiences, I wrote and rewrote this workbook to be the most helpful it could be. I will continue to do so and am always interested in



hearing from readers about how it worked for them. Very few books on scholarly writing have undergone the fire of testing among hundreds of scholars across a wide range of disciplines. This one has.

PHILOSOPHY OF THE WORKBOOK


Most instruction books are prescriptive, setting up an ideal process and encouraging you to aspire to it. I don't believe in the ivory tower approach. My aim is to help graduate students and junior faculty understand the rules of the academic publishing game so that they can flourish, not perish. Thus, this workbook is based on what works. I don't tell you to write eight hours a day; that doesn't work. I don't advise you to read everything in your field; you can't. I don't describe how to write perfect papers; no one does. Publication, not perfection, is the goal here, so it is based on what students told me they actually did and what they were willing to do. This workbook is not intended for academic purists, but for those in the academic trenches who sometimes grow discouraged and who fear that they are the only ones who haven't figured it all out.

As a result, the workbook details shortcuts and even a few tricks. And it always tells the truth, however upsetting. Some journal editors don't like statements that publishing in certain types of journals will not serve you well when it comes to hiring, tenure, and promotion. Some professors don't like statements that pre-tenure scholars should prioritize certain types of articles and research. But, I state these truths anyway. The workbook's advice on query letters and argument regularly inspires debate and yet continues to help students achieve academic publishing success. I may not agree with the relentless professionalization of scholarly publishing, but I do believe everyone should know the rules and have a chance to succeed.

Over the history of writing this workbook and teaching my courses, I've noticed that a preponderance of my students were women, people of color, non-Americans, and/or first-generation academics. I would repeatedly hear from my students: "No one ever told me this" or "I had no idea!" This workbook has been responsible for helping many on the margins—racially, economically, internationally, and theoretically—to feel more confident and to frame their fascinating work in ways that would be acceptable to mainstream journals. That's why several people have said I should call this an "underground" guide to entering the profession, since it demystifies EuroAmerican academic conventions. My hope is that enabling more scholars from the periphery to publish in scholarly journals will improve (and radicalize) scholarship for the better.

PEDAGOGY OF THE WORKBOOK

Most books on academic writing assume that the most difficult part of writing is arriving at good ideas. This may be difficult for undergraduates, but it is not for graduate students or junior faculty. In my writing workshops,



good ideas abound. The real problem is how many good ideas languish in unfinished, unpublished articles. What most graduate students and junior faculty need is a way to make publishable the research they have already conducted, or written up in graduate school, or taught. They know that their classroom essays, conference papers, dissertation chapters, or rejected articles are not ready for journals, but they don't know how to improve them. Thus, in my workshops, I focused on guiding students through a revision of something they had already written, an exercise many graduate students claimed never to have done before. I firmly believe that revision is the heart of good writing and that many scholars are unpublished not because they have bad ideas, but because they have never learned how to improve their drafts. This workbook focuses on revision as a key to publication.

If you think you have no draft to revise for publication, read the Week 1 section for Day 2 titled "Selecting a Paper for Revision." You may find that you do have something to revise. It doesn't matter if the draft is poor or little more than an outline, the workbook will still aid you in revising such, although you will need to allot more time for writing. You may think it is better to start from scratch, but my students have found that revising their drafts was more effective. Once they learned to diagnose and correct their erroneous tendencies in a draft, they wrote their next article from scratch much more easily. They learned more from revising their work than drafting it. If you are in the social sciences and really don't have a suitable draft, you might want to consult Anne Sigismund Huff's new book *Designing Research for Publication* (in which she addresses disciplinary fields of inquiry, scholarly conversations, and the evolution of research projects), Nicholas Walliman's *Your Research Project: A Step-by-Step Guide for the First-Time Researcher*, or Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman's *Designing Qualitative Research*. Alternately, you can use this workbook to draft an article by reading the text, taking notes on what makes for a good article, and then starting. But, the workbook works best for those reworking a draft for publication.

Most books on academic writing are also excessively concerned with style. Half their pages are devoted to improving word choice and syntax. In my experience, this was the least of students' problems. The writing research supported my own observation that what most students need is a better grasp of the macro aspects of writing—argument, structure, and summarizing—not the micro aspects. Thus, this workbook is devoted to "deep revision," the changes that make the biggest difference to an article's quality and thus success.

I designed this workbook to help you build both skills and self-assurance. If you have neither, one, or both—welcome.

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

This workbook is designed to be written in. Go ahead and scribble (unless this is a library book, in which case, don't!). You may also access some of the sheets at my website, www.wendybelcher.com, so that you keep the workbook "clean."



Each week you will have five specific daily **tasks** designed to aid you in accomplishing your goal of submitting your article to a journal in twelve weeks. These tasks encourage limited but daily writing, so that the revision of your article can proceed steadily despite your other responsibilities like teaching, a full-time job, or caring for children. Although some of the week's tasks build on those of the week before, if you find that you need to switch one week with another (for instance, working on your introduction before working on your related literature review), that's fine. In some cases, you may find that you do not need to do a task because you have already done it. But if you come across a task you have not done, make sure you do it. Every task has been carefully designed to move you forward and to assist you in developing the good writing habits that will aid you in writing further articles. To arrive at the destination of publication, spend time at each station on the journey.


Although I wish it were otherwise, this workbook does not work by osmosis. You cannot just turn the pages, read the occasional text, and then magically have an article by the time you turn the last page. Reading the workbook is just a fifth of the work you must do to ready an article for a journal. The workbook makes that work easier and more straightforward, but it does not do the work for you. Rather, it provides a structure within which to perform the required tasks. If you read through the workbook just to pick up some tips, you won't learn nearly as much as you will by doing the related tasks. And you probably won't retain much. Doing is learning.

If you happen to fall behind on the daily tasks, don't give up or waste time feeling guilty. The times listed for the duration of each task are meant as minimums, each may take quite a bit longer. If you fall behind, just try to have a catch-up session or reset your twelve-week calendar accordingly. I have seen many cases where authors took twenty-four weeks (or months) rather than twelve weeks to send their article to a journal, and got published just the same. Persevering is the key.

There are four types of tasks in this book. In *workbook* tasks, you read the workbook and do the exercises. In *social* tasks, you talk about or share your writing with another student or a faculty member, or with a writing partner or writing group. In *writing* tasks, you write some part of your article, like an abstract, or something related to your article, such as a query letter. In *planning* tasks, you document your plans and track your success in achieving them.

USING THE WORKBOOK ACCORDING TO YOUR TEMPERAMENT

You can progress through this workbook in several ways. Early on, I observed that many of my students did not want the burden of free choice but wanted to be led, as Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor put it. If you prefer a very structured approach, and like the security of detailed instructions, just follow the daily tasks and proceed through the workbook



chapter by chapter. If you do this, you will have a journal article ready to go out in twelve weeks. There is a lot to be said for clear guidance.

If you hate to be told what to do, and like the freedom of making your own decisions, but still feel that you have much to learn about writing a publishable journal article, then don't follow the detailed instructions. Instead, set aside an hour every week to read a chapter of the workbook and outline its implications for your revising of your article, and set aside at least four hours a week to work on actual revising. After the first week, you can read the chapters in any order and focus each week on the main tasks outlined in that chapter, for example, improving your argument or selecting a journal. When you have completed them all, you are ready to send off your journal article. It may even be a good idea to switch the order of the chapters, since the most discussed aspect of this workbook has always been the order of advice. In the early years, I kept changing the order—moving the chapter about journals forward or back in the weekly line up, for instance—but soon found that no matter what order I picked, someone wanted another. All had excellent rationales for wanting the journal chapter in the first week or the editing chapter in the third week. I think the current order of chapters in the workbook is the best order, but you are free to construct the best order for your particular circumstances.

Two warnings about this approach. Freedom has its price—inertia. If you have a problem staying focused or have not written much in a long time, you should really try to follow the structured approach for the first three weeks. Then, if you want to follow your own path through the workbook, you will be doing it backed by the strength of habit. Two, try not to work on your article only one day a week or only on the weekend. The workbook is structured to keep you working on the article steadily, keeping you and it fresh, while you go about the rest of your life. Writing research shows that writing a little bit every day is more effective than bunching up your writing into big blocks. The Week 1 chapter explains this more thoroughly.

If you find at any point that you have moved through a week's tasks more quickly than anticipated—for instance, if you already had a strong abstract or structure—don't stop working for that week. You can either move right into the next week's tasks or you can spend the extra time reading related articles or books. Since most of us feel that we have never done enough reading, this is a good use of your extra time.

USING THE WORKBOOK ACCORDING TO YOUR DISCIPLINE

This workbook is useful for those in the humanities and social sciences. Many scholars have used this workbook to write journal articles in the humanities on literature, art, architecture, film, television, digital media, drama, and music. Others have used it to write about social constructions like gender, sexuality, philosophy, race, culture, ethnicity, nation, region, class, and religion. Still others have used it to write journal articles in such



social sciences as cultural anthropology, applied linguistics, geography, archaeology, education, political science, public policy, psychology, social welfare, sociology, business management, international relations, and urban planning. Those in the natural sciences who are writing less scientific articles have also used it—such as those in bioethics, public health, medical anthropology, development studies, and sometimes, economics. Only a few have used it for legal writing.

Those writing up research in the sciences—in such fields as biology, mathematics, chemistry, engineering, computer science, and physics—will not find the workbook very helpful, as the writing process for and the structure of scientific articles varies so much from those in the humanities or social sciences. I have had some authors use this workbook in such fields, but they have had to extrapolate quite a bit from the text, so I don't recommend it. If you are in such a field and use this workbook, let me know if you found it useful.

USING THE WORKBOOK ACCORDING TO YOUR CAREER STAGE


I wrote this workbook for graduate students and junior faculty and never thought it would be used by anybody else. Then I found out that draft copies were circulating among senior faculty. Since I think it is important not to aim at pleasing all possible audiences, I have kept this workbook oriented toward those who have rarely or never published before. Despite this, the workbook continues to appeal to those who have already published, perhaps because published authors aren't always sure what enabled their published articles to succeed or because they still feel the need for deadlines and structure to complete further articles. Perhaps most of us never stop thinking of ourselves as graduate students; certainly, learning to write well is a lifelong journey.

USING THE WORKBOOK BY YOURSELF

You can use this workbook by yourself. Some of the tasks require submitting parts of your journal article to another student or a professor for comments—but otherwise you can use this workbook independently. You should set aside about an hour a day five days a week to work through that week's readings and exercises.

USING THE WORKBOOK WITH A WRITING PARTNER

You can also use this workbook with a writing partner. This is a wonderfully effective method for completing your journal article. Since most students'



real challenge when it comes to writing is actually getting writing done, having a partner helps ensure that you persevere. Moreover, such writing partnerships can turn into lifelong working relationships. I recently helped a department's graduate students set up writing partnerships and it transformed their educational experience.

To use the workbook in this way, find another student who wants to revise an article and is willing to commit to doing so in twelve weeks. It is best to pick another student with similar academic goals and abilities, but you do not need to be in the same discipline or field. In fact, it can sometimes be helpful to work with someone unfamiliar with your content, so that you are forced to be clear about your topic. Since writing in the social sciences, the humanities, and the sciences are so different, it is best to work with someone from the same broad category, but this is not absolutely necessary. It is more important to pick a partner who is likely to persevere. It is also wise to think about what kind of person is most likely to keep you going: someone supportive or someone competitive. Ideally, your partner will be both, someone who encourages you when you feel discouraged, but whose drive pushes you to keep up.

As individuals, you should set aside about an hour a day, five days a week, to work through that week's readings and short exercises. As partners, the two of you should commit to meeting once a week to talk through that week's readings and exercises and to report on how you have completed the week's goals as stated in the workbook. This is best done in person, but can be done over the telephone or by e-mail. When the workbook task is to submit your article to someone else for review, you should submit them to each other for comments.

Since this is a serious endeavor, and will only work if both of you take it seriously, I recommend that you make a written commitment to each other to work together for twelve weeks. Although it may seem forced at first, people who make binding, formal agreements find it works to keep them on task. Either design your own agreement or copy the form on the next page. Then sign it and post it near your computer, front door, or refrigerator as a reminder.

Many people have found it useful to promise to pay a penalty for not following through on their commitment. One writing instructor required his students to write a \$25 check to a political organization that they abhorred and give the check to him in an envelope addressed to the organization (Boice 1990, 75). If the student did not meet his or her commitment, the instructor promptly sent the check. He claimed that this worked as a great motivator! Other possible payments can be penance (such as grading exams for the writing partner) or public shame (such as writing about your failure to three friends).

Others prefer the carrot to the stick and like to use positive incentives rather than such negative ones. Some rewards you can give yourself for meeting your twelve-week commitment are a weekend trip, a celebratory meal with friends, or a particular concert. Of course, the best reward will be the sense of accomplishment you feel when you submit the article. There is no substitute for it!



Commitment to Writing Partner
<p>I commit to meeting with _____ every week on _____ at _____. During each of the next twelve weeks, I commit to reading the appropriate workbook chapter and completing the weekly exercises.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">[partner's name] [day] [time]</p> <p>I also commit to spending at least fifteen minutes a day, five days a week, on revising my article until it is ready for submission (or for twelve weeks, whichever comes first). I commit to carefully reading and reviewing _____ article during the fifth and ninth weeks. If I cannot meet any of these commitments due to a prolonged illness or a family emergency, I will inform _____ immediately. If I cannot meet any of these commitments for any other reason, I will pay the following: _____. If I meet all of these commitments, I will gain the following: _____.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">[partner's name] [partner's name] [fee] [benefit]</p> <p style="text-align: center;">_____ [signature]</p>

USING THE WORKBOOK IN A WRITING GROUP

You can also use this workbook with a writing group. Groups are great for helping you to stay motivated because they provide support and friendly pressure.

Find three or more people who want to revise an article and are willing to commit to doing so in twelve weeks. If your department already has a journal reading group or writing group, this may serve as a good starting ground. You do not need to be in the same discipline or field, however. In fact, it can sometimes be helpful to work with people who are unfamiliar with your content, so that you are forced to be clear about your topic.

As individuals, you should set aside about an hour a day, five days a week, to work through that week's readings and short exercises. As a group, you should commit to meeting once a week to report on how you have completed that week's goals as stated in the workbook. This is best done in person, although some extremely committed groups have succeeded in meeting by e-mail. When the workbook task is to submit your journal article to someone else for review, you should exchange articles with others in the group. If possible, you should read the article of the person who is reading yours, rather than randomly exchanging articles, so that you have an

incentive to be kind and clear. Nothing encourages careful reading like knowing that you will be critiqued by the person you are critiquing.

It is also worthwhile to have one of your group do a little additional reading on that week's topic and report to the group on findings. As you know, having to teach something helps you to learn something.

If you have never participated in a writing group before, you might want to look in advance at the Week 9 chapter on giving, getting, and using feedback. You should make sure your group is a supportive environment for writing, not a graduate seminar for deconstruction. Be sure to treat all drafts and discussion as confidential since the group must be a safe place for people to bring their writing at any stage. Criticisms should be offered with care and clarity. Remember that you are working together to become productive writers, not perfectionists.

This is a serious endeavor and will only work if your group takes it seriously. I recommend that you sign a written commitment to each other to work together for twelve weeks. Although it may seem hokey or forced at first, people who make their work together intentional in this way find they are more productive. Design an agreement of your own, or make copies of the form below for each member, and have each person sign all the copies. Then consider posting your copy near your computer, front door, or refrigerator as a reminder.

Commitment to Writing Group
<p>I commit to meeting with _____ <div style="text-align: center;">[names of group members]</div> <hr/> every week on _____ at _____. During each of the next twelve <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> [day] [time] </div> weeks, I commit to reading the appropriate workbook chapter and completing the weekly exercises. I also commit to spending at least fifteen minutes a day, five days a week, on revising my article until it is ready for submission (or for twelve weeks, whichever comes first). I commit to carefully reading and reviewing other group members' articles during the fifth and ninth weeks. If I cannot meet any of these commitments due to a prolonged illness or a family emergency, I will inform the group immediately. If I cannot meet any of these commitments for any other reason, I will pay the following: _____ <div style="text-align: center;">[fee]</div> If any of us do meet all of these commitments, we will gain the following: _____ <div style="text-align: center;">[benefit]</div> _____ <div style="text-align: center;">[signature]</div> </p>



You may want to decide together what the penalty will be for not following through. For instance, you can collect \$20 from each member, put it in an envelope, and split the total among those who actually send their chapter out. Alternatively, you can use the money toward a group activity when you send off your articles, such as a celebratory meal. Of course, the best reward will be your sense of accomplishment when you submit the article.

USING THE WORKBOOK WITH COAUTHORS


You can also use this workbook with coauthors. How you use it depends on your cowriting process. If your cowriting consists of working separately and then splicing your writing together into an article, you can use the workbook as outlined in the earlier “Using This Workbook with a Writing Partner” or “Using This Workbook with a Writing Group” section. If you are working more closely, practically drafting every sentence together, you may want to read the workbook together and do the exercises together as well.

USING THE WORKBOOK TO TEACH A CLASS

You can also use this workbook to teach a ten-, twelve-, or fifteen-week writing class that meets once a week for two to three hours. Most graduate schools do not provide pragmatic writing instruction, so be prepared for your class to be popular! At each class meeting, assign the next week’s chapter for reading and have the students do all the assignments over the course of the week. In class, discuss the advice given that week in the workbook, particularly any conflicting advice that students may have heard. Such discussions are excellent opportunities for altering expectations according to your field and challenging students to arrive at what works best for them. Then have students report on how their daily writing proceeded and what they accomplished by doing the exercises. Encourage students to talk about their feelings about writing, both positive and negative. Any of the assignments designed for partners or groups can, and perhaps should, be done in class. Make sure to use a full class session at least once for exchanging drafts, as detailed in Week 5. Additionally, have students make individual presentations on journals they would like to publish in or on article standards in their field. For more information on using the workbook to teach a class, see my website www.wendybelcher.com.

FEEDBACK TO THE AUTHOR

I am constantly updating this workbook. If you have any thoughts on its content, please contact me with them. I always welcome corrections of any sort



(e.g., where the workbook has typos or grammatical mistakes), examples from your work (e.g., how you revised a poor title into a strong one), insights on what makes a journal article publishable (e.g., how it works in your field), successful strategies for getting motivated, and exercises that helped you. To contact me, please go to my website www.wendybelcher.com.