

Ten tips on getting writing started

By Wendy Laura Belcher

Many academics find sitting down at the computer and starting to write to be one of the most difficult challenges facing them. One reason for this, as one of my students put it so well, “if I never start, then I never fail.” Other reasons include getting out of the habit of writing—or never having a writing habit at all.

While tough to overcome, these obstacles do have some straightforward solutions. Here I share ten tips on getting your writing project started and moving it toward completion.

1) Make other tasks contingent on writing

An excellent way of dealing with the difficulty of getting started is to make a preferred task contingent on a nonpreferred task, as the behavior management experts put it (Boice 1983).

In this case, writing is the nonpreferred task you must complete before you get to something you prefer. For instance, do not allow yourself to read the morning newspaper or check your email before

you write for thirty minutes. Tell yourself that you will call a friend or watch a favorite television program after writing for an hour. Some academics have this flipped, telling themselves “I’ll watch TV for an hour and then write.” But it is better to make the pleasurable activity a reward. Turn your procrastination tactics into productivity tools.

2) Make writing low stakes

Someone told me that she tricked herself into writing by promising herself, “I’ll tweak a few lines while the tea kettle boils.” That sentence, she said, was “the gateway drug to at least fifteen minutes of scribbling.”

3) Start by revising

Start writing by looking over what we wrote the day before. Anthony Grafton says, “I always start by rapidly revising what I wrote the day before” (Grafton and Charney 2013). The word “rapidly” is essential here. It’s easy to get bogged down in revising. *continued on page 8*

Analog contracts in a digital world

By Julie Saitz

College level textbooks and their publishers have been in the news a lot lately, with all of the major higher education publishers emphasizing a shift to a digital first market strategy. The vast majority of publishing agreements for established textbooks were written in a world where print books were the dominating market offering. As the world shifts, there are certain contractual provisions to be mindful of when evaluating one’s royalty statements and in negotiations over amendments.

In reality, print sales still dominate, but publishers are trying to move away from the model,

and the future of higher education materials is uncertain.

Royalty rates in higher education can range from a low of 8% for an ELT book to a high of 20% for a successful book in advanced mathematics. It’s safe to say that the average royalty rate for college level textbooks is around 15%. This rate is typically applied to net sales of the work, that is the money a publisher receives from sales less returns. This is in contrast to the trade publishing world where royalties are based on the list or cover price of a book, regardless of the actual price for which the publisher sells the book. *continued on page 6*

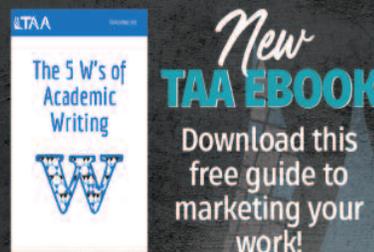


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President's *Message*

The Shifting Landscape of Textbook Publishing

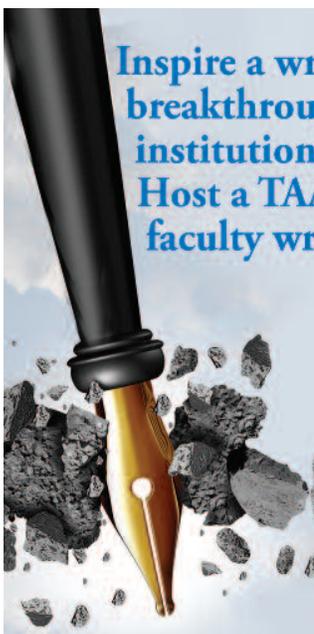
As many of us return to campus for the fall semester, it may be time for both textbook and academic authors to take a look at what our institutions are doing regarding textbook purchases and costs. Is your campus offering Cengage Unlimited or signing up for Pearson's Inclusive Access? With Pearson's recent announcement this past July that it will also be "moving from ownership to subscription based access models" (bit.ly/2YHzstV), several of the major publishers have now committed to digitally transforming their businesses into something more akin to Netflix than what authors have been used to (DVD purchases).

It only takes a few hours of internet research to discover that the publishing industry is only doing what consumers want—lower textbook prices—and hoping that the investment will be worth it in the long run. After losing out to rentals, piracy, and OER models, publishers are lining up to recollect on their own investments. But where does this leave their authors?

In a recent email Pearson sent to its authors (me being one of them), we were asked to consider that our expertise be our greatest focus and respond to customer expectations by assisting with digital content which should build a competitive advantage if we work together. A deeper read of the linked press release implied that we should start getting used to the fact that our books will be selling for less. If it all works out, the publishers will sell more digital books (because all students will purchase one of these for less) and maybe we won't notice anything in our royalty statements. Hmmm, I'm not so sure. Regardless, terms in our "traditional" authoring contracts don't make as much sense as we transition to digital.

The future of publishing is turning a corner. As we navigate the next several years, I am comforted by the support, services, and expertise provided by our TAA member community. Let's keep communicating with each other and be proactive during this journey. ■

— Laura Frost, Ph.D.



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TAA is accepting session proposals for its 33rd Annual Textbook & Academic Authoring Conference. We invite the submission of presentations relevant to writing, publishing, and marketing textbooks and academic works (journal articles, books, and monographs). The proposal deadline is October 7, 2019.

TAA's conference will be held at The Westin San Diego Gaslamp Quarter located in the heart of beautiful downtown San Diego, CA, June 12-13, 2020. A highly interactive event, the conference will be attended by authors and aspiring authors of textbooks, journal articles, and other academic works, as well as by industry professionals from across the country.

Topics of interest include, but are not limited to:

- Time Management and Writing Productivity
- Tech Tools to Enhance Your Works
- Publishing Industry Updates & Trends
- Navigating Copyright and Permissions
- Savvy Contract and Royalty Negotiating & Monitoring
- Marketing Your Works and Creating Your Brand
- Authoring in an Open Access/OER Environment
- Non-Traditional Paths to Getting Published

For information visit: taaonline.net/taa-conference-call-for-proposals

Nominations for TAA's 2020 Textbook Awards open Sept. 1



Gain recognition with your fellow authors and within the textbook publishing industry by nominating your textbook for a 2020 TAA Textbook Award. We are excited to open nominations for the Textbook Excellence Awards, McGuffey Longevity Awards, and Most Promising New Textbook Awards September 1 through November 1, 2019.

The Textbook Excellence Award recognizes excellence in current textbooks and learning materials. Nominated works must be new or revised editions with a 2018, 2019 or 2020 copyright year. The McGuffey Longevity Award recognizes textbooks and learning materials whose excellence has been demonstrated over time. To be nominated, a work must have been in print 15 years and still be selling. The Most Promising New Textbook Award recognizes excellence in 1st edition textbooks and learning materials.

Textbooks and learning materials can be nominated by authors or publishers. The awards are open to members and non-members. Awards will be presented at an Awards Ceremony held at TAA's 33rd Annual Conference in San Diego, CA, June 12, 2020.

Learn more about nominating your book for a Textbook Award at TAAonline.net/awards

Safeguarding your scholarship in OA: What to look for and what to avoid

By Danielle Apfelbaum & Derek Stadler

As open access publishing matures into an accepted (and in some disciplines, the standard) form of scholarly communication, it is more important than ever to be able to spot what Jeffrey Beall calls “predatory publications”, publications that accept article processing fees but fail to provide essential editorial services. As academic librarians who have many years of experience helping faculty navigate this new landscape, we recommend using the following strategies for safeguarding your scholarship while pursuing open access options for your work.

Know the red flags. A number of tools already exist to help you identify low-quality and/or predatory publications. We recommend having one or more of the following guides handy when evaluating an open access venue for your work: *Criteria for Determining Predatory Publishers* (Beall, 2015); the *Journal Evaluation Tool* (Rele, Kennedy, & Blas, 2017); and the *Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing* (Committee on Publication Ethics, 2018).

Steer clear of quick fixes. If there is one thing academic publishing is not, is fast. Beware of journals touting speedy turnarounds. The peer-review process is a time-consuming process, and with good reason. First, an editor has to review a manuscript to determine if the submission is a good fit for the journal. Then, scholars with expertise in the same domain must be sought out to provide a review of the manuscript. By the time a reviewer signs on, evaluates the manuscript, sends the manuscript back for revisions, receives the revised manuscript, and reviews the manuscript once more, several months—if not years—may elapse.

Beware of scope-bloat. Predatory publishers thrive on article processing charges, so it shouldn't be a surprise that predatory publications tend to accept articles broadly within or across disciplines. This practice drives up the number of potential submissions—along with the journal's potential profits. Journal titles should reflect a narrow research focus, for example, *Veterinary Microbiology* or *Communications in Information Literacy*. If you look at a journal's title or the description of its scope and think, “How can one journal cover all of these areas? You could dedicate an entire journal to each of the areas or topics this publication covers,” you might want to scrutinize the publication further before submitting your work.

Avoid publications with absent or deceptive affiliations. The editorial

board is the heart of a journal and serves as a point of pride. After all, it should be comprised of experts from whom the publication, in part, derives its reputation. When information about the editorial board of a journal is sparse or missing all together, be cautious.

Keep an eye out for bogus metrics and false indexing claims. Be-

ware of knock-off metrics—such as the global impact factor or the international impact factor—designed to mimic commonly-used metrics (e.g., journal impact factor). Familiarize yourself with the most-valued metrics in your discipline as well as the data sources from which they are calculated, and you'll be able to spot a fake metric without difficulty.

Question simple submission procedures. Does the journal ask you to send in your submission via email or a simple web form? If so, consider this: even small journals, such as *Urban Library Journal*, are increasingly using journal management systems. While these systems can be pricey, the benefits are manifold. First, these systems are designed to streamline the publishing workflow, ensuring that your manuscript

makes it through the review process without falling through the cracks. Second, many of these journal systems provide preservation mechanisms, ensuring that your work will be available and accessible for years to come. If the open access journal you are considering has not invested in a journal management system, you may want to consider whether you want to invest your scholarship in that journal.

Benchmark. Instead of trying to find out if a publication is “good” or “bad,” use existing information about a journal you already respect and trust to evaluate an unfamiliar open access journal. Two free tools for comparing metrics across print and open access journals are CiteScore (<https://www.scopus.com/sources>) and Scimago Journal and Country Rank (<https://www.scimagojr.com/>).

Reach out. If you're not familiar with a publication, reach out to colleagues. Ask fellow faculty if they are familiar with the journal to which you are considering submitting work; if they are, ask them about their experiences with the journal. If you have access to an academic or professional listserv in your discipline, query its members for additional insights and experiences.

Recruit a librarian. We might be a little biased when it comes to this tip, but we strongly recommend enlisting the *continued on page 7*



Pearson's "Digital First" Announcement: A Legal Perspective

Interpreting, Adapting, and Amending Textbook Publishing Contracts in a Changing Publishing World

By Zick Rubin and Brenda Ulrich, Archstone Law Group, P.C.

In announcing its new strategic commitment to digital courseware and its dramatic break from the traditional model of successive print editions of textbooks, Pearson addressed a letter "to our author community." In the letter, Pearson emphasized its ties to "our authors and partners" and declared that "together we can provide updates, enhancements, and digital functionality to respond more quickly to changing customer expectations, demands, curricular shifts and developments in your field."

One thing that Pearson did not address in its letter to its authors is how it proposed to interpret or change existing publishing contracts in order to be able to go forward in a "digital first" world. It's what the contracts say that counts, and many of these contracts are very difficult to apply in the changing publishing world.

Interpreting or adapting existing contracts to fit comfortably in the world of digital courseware is a tricky challenge for Pearson and its authors. Some Pearson contracts were entered into decades ago when "digital courseware" was beyond both publishers' and authors' wildest imaginations. Other contracts were entered into between authors and other publishing companies, with Pearson later acquiring the contracts through acquisitions, mergers, and other transactions with other publishers. Many of these contracts say nothing about digital courseware.

Pearson is not the only publishing company that is pivoting toward a "digital first" strategy. Although this article is spurred by Pearson's dramatic and highly publicized announcement, the questions we raise and our takeaways for authors apply to the moves of other publishers, as well.

Pearson's "digital first" commitment raises central issues about the compensation to be paid to authors—or, as they are beginning to be called in some quarters, "content providers." Most traditional textbook contracts pay royalties to authors based on the publisher's receipts from sales of books. The contracts are often much less clear about authors' compensation from the sale or license of digital products that may be based in whole or in part on the author's work or that may combine the author's work with the work of others.

Pearson's plan to largely abandon the traditional "edition" model presents additional complications. Successful textbooks have typically been revised every few years, with a "First Edition," a "Second Edition," and so on. Many aspects of author participation and compensation are keyed to these revision cycles. These include authors' contractual obligations to provide "revisions" at certain times, decreasing or "drop-down" royalty rates for retired authors or their estates, and increasing royalty rates for new or revising authors, all of which are typically keyed to successive editions. If there are no more "editions," how will these provisions be interpreted? What will an author's participation in a "revision" look like when the concept of a "revision" itself is changing?

Pearson and other publishers contemplating changes to the traditional model of "editions" will likely propose their own answers to such questions, involving legal interpretations of existing contracts or proposed amendments to them. In many cases, publishers may ask authors to sign entirely new contracts. In evaluating any such interpretations, amendments, or new

contracts, however, textbook authors should affix a mantra to their keyboards: It takes two to contract. Any interpretation or amendment of a contract must be agreed to by both publisher and author, and cannot be imposed unilaterally by either party.

With this background, here are three takeaways for authors, applicable to contracts both with Pearson and with other publishers:

1) The application of your existing contracts to the world of digital courseware may be far from clear. A publisher may have its own interpretations, but you are not bound by them. Until and unless it is amended by mutual consent, your existing contract remains in force, and needs to be interpreted by its terms. In some cases, publisher and author may readily agree on the interpretation. In other cases there may be arguments and even litigation.

2) A publisher may urge a particular interpretation of your contract on the grounds that "our lawyers say so." Publishers have resourceful lawyers and they may be right. But your own lawyer may have a different interpretation. Various legal principles can help to interpret ambiguous contractual language. One such principle is the doctrine of *contra proferentem*, Latin for the idea that an ambiguous provision should be interpreted against the interests of the party who proposed it. Under this principle, because your publisher (or its predecessor company) undoubtedly drafted most of your contract in the first place, it should be held responsible for any ambiguities. In addition, authors' and publishers' communications with each other over the years – their "course of dealing" – may shed light on the intended meaning of provisions that would otherwise remain hazy.

3) If your publisher asks you to sign an amended or new contract "to take account of our new model," don't rush to sign it. Make sure you understand how the new contract will work, and seek legal advice if you have any questions or concerns.

In dealing with publishers, both large and small, remember: It takes two to contract. ■



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For related articles visit: <https://bit.ly/2Z5eMft> and <https://bit.ly/2Z9nB44>

Dear Katy:

Tips & strategies on setting boundaries *By Katy Peplin*

So many of the questions I am asked by my clients, colleagues, and friends boil down to boundaries. And no wonder, the world continually invents more ways for us to be connected across time and space all while our professional lives demand that we write, write well, and write quickly. To discuss this issue, I've rounded up a few questions I've received about boundaries to answer here, to both fulfill my lifelong goal to be an advice columnist (🙄), and also to illustrate that boundaries are important for all of us, no matter our title, rank, or experience!

Q: "I am a newly appointed chair of my department, and my manuscript is due at the end of 2019. I know that campus will not be a useful writing space for me, but I'm also not the best at writing at home, or in other spaces. How can I make this work for me?"

I'd imagine that lots about your working life will change, and not just how you fit your writing in. I would identify some blocks in your schedule where you will be available for meetings, for drop in chats, etc., and then communicate those blocks clearly to the relevant parties. So when you do need to write, or better yet, when it is your appointed writing time, you can easily and quickly redirect with a sign or in person, such as: "I'm not available at this moment, but I will be responding to emails at 3 pm today, and will follow up with you then." Having a regular time where you are inaccessible makes it easier for everyone involved—you can plan for it, and your departmental colleagues can as well. Clear communication is the key!

Q: "My best writing time, between 3 to 6 pm, also happens to be the time when my family needs the most attention. How can I balance finding the zone with my other important jobs?"

This is a tough one, as your zone is probably something that you've found to work well for you through trial and error. Two things that I know from personal experience:

1) for most people, there is some flexibility, but not a ton, around writing times, and 2) families need attention when they need attention! Try experimenting with one or two days a week where that block is protected, maybe you call in help from a family member, or maybe you strike a deal with your family members that they'll have your undivided attention after 6 pm. Experiment with shifting that writing time to another, easier time of day. What about that 3-6 pm time feels so good to your brain? Is it the amount of light, or the distance past lunch, or the music you have on, or the fact that your office is quiet? Look for other times where some of those elements are at play—a writing session that is only 60% in the zone might still be a useful thing!

Q: "Every time I sit down to write, without fail, I receive email that needs to be dealt with. How can I be better about protecting my writing time when there are legitimately important, time-sensitive things in my inbox?"

Some emails are 100% time sensitive and need to be dealt with right away. But there's a difference between "this email needs a response before the end of business today" and "this email needs a response in the next 30 seconds." Can you experiment with checking email every hour, or every two hours, and responding to immediate concerns in 15-minute

blocks? Can you circulate a policy that you respond to emails between 1 and 5 pm each day, so that people know when to expect responses from you on time-sensitive material? Equally important is creating a triage system for yourself where you trust your gut about whether or not an email needs an immediate response, or a delayed one, and you give yourself a moment to pause and say: "Am I answering this email because it truly needs a response, or because I do not want to write?"

Q: "I work in a department that values open-door culture, but I can't focus while people are walking in the hallway, or stopping by to catch up. How can I still be part of our community and get my work done?"

As a person with the attention span of a goldfish, I could have written this question myself! Ultimately, I came to recognize that I needed to make two categories of activities—writing, and community building. So it might be that your office, with the door open, will never be a space of productive writing for you. Are there other spaces in which you can write nearby? What activities can you do with some amount of distraction? Perhaps you write in the library, but you grade and do email in your office with the door open. Learning what activities you CAN accomplish in your office will let you still be a part of that community, while also providing yourself a space that is conducive to your writing!

The key to boundaries is communication: communicating with yourself about what you need, and what you need to protect, and communicating with those impacted so they can adjust. The simple act of saying "I'll be writing until 4 pm and will call you back then" allows the person to know they are important, and gives you the space to keep working. Just like our writing process, setting, maintaining, and communicating our boundaries are a professional (and personal!) skill that we always practice and never perfect. As our roles change, our lives change, and our needs change, our boundaries change too—another chance to communicate what we need and start the process all over again. ■

Katy Peplin is a coach, editor, and community builder who works with academics at all stages of the pipeline. From her community of graduate students, Thrive PhD, to her courses on mindfulness and resilience, she works to provide tools and resources to help anyone manage the demands of an intellectually rigorous life in a decidedly human, imperfect world. thrive-phd.com



Analog contracts in a digital world *continued from page 1*

No hard and fast rules or formulas exist as to how industry standards were set in the textbook world, but royalty rates were meant to reflect a fair distribution of gross profits between publisher and author.

In the trade world, this split of profits works out to be fifty–fifty. In higher education, the split appears to be a bit more in the publishers' favor.

Gross profit is simply sales less the cost of goods sold. Higher education publishers consider royalties, printing, paper and binding, as well as some allocation of prepublication costs in calculating gross profit.

The trade publishing industry dealt with the question of eBook royalties in the early 2000's finally settling to a royalty rate of approximately 25% of net receipts to the author. Authors have argued that this amount should be as high as 50% to more closely mirror the effective gross profit split discussed above, but because of most favored nation clauses in many agreements, the industry has largely settled on this rate. The higher education publishing industry has not dealt with electronic royalty rates as uniformly and is left trying to answer questions such as "What is a unit?" and "What is the work?" Some of these questions are addressed in new contracts but many are left trying to apply the terms of a royalty agreement for print books to electronic versions of textbooks and other materials.

One can point to a number of reasons as to how we got to this point, and arguments can be made as to why the standard rates should or should not apply to electronic materials.

Higher education publishing differs significantly in that authors typically do not have agents, so negotiations are largely individual, there is not one agent pushing for better terms across a wide author constituency. Textbooks in eBook form came onto the market more slowly than trade books. Reproducing a photo rich textbook into electronic format is more complicated than a text only novel (not to mention all of the current adaptive learning components that are part of many textbook offerings). Further, the market was slower to accept electronic versions of textbooks, even today, studies suggest many students prefer print over electronic formats. Finally, many publishing agreements were finalized before electronic versions were even contemplated. Higher education textbooks go through many revision cycles, but the original publishing arrangement still governs.

Given the lack of information regarding the cost of electronic textbooks and related materials and the variation in offerings amongst publishers, it is difficult to advocate for a standardized electronic royalty structure similar to the trade industry.

Let's touch on some of the ways royalties may be impacted by older contracts that don't address electronic rights. A hypothetical contract has a tiering clause when a certain number of unit sales are achieved. The publisher's royalty system may be set up to capture the cumulative sales of print units in order to trigger the higher royalty rate but may not include the sales of eBooks. Authors should read their contracts to determine what types of sales should count toward each tier and review royalty statements carefully to ensure that correct royalties are being paid.

Foreign sales typically have a lower royalty rate because of higher

shipping costs and greater price sensitivity in overseas markets. Understanding the basis for lower foreign royalty rates, one should consider these royalty rates in connection with eBooks and electronic materials. Many older contracts simply do not distinguish between print and electronic sales, and thereby apply the stated royalty rate for all sales of the work in a given market (i.e. domestic, foreign or high discount). Thus, the foreign sales of an eBook could pay half the domestic rate. Authors should consider that once the eBook has been developed and produced, there is little to no incremental cost associated with the sale of that eBook. The publisher is in effect sending a master file of electronic content to the distributor or directly to the student/customer. This begs the question, should the foreign sale of an eBook pay a lower royalty than a domestic sale?

The elephant in the room is the question about what constitutes a textbook and how should authors and publishers share in the revenues and costs of new electronic versions. Electronic versions of textbooks come in many forms depending on the publisher and may be packaged with a print book or only sold as an electronic offering. Publisher pricing strategies now charge less for electronic offerings than print, making the purchase of a new print textbook less attractive to customers. Some print packages contain electronic access to materials that may never be used by students. It is unclear how royalties are being calculated on the thousands of combinations of packages available to students including digital offerings. Royalty statements do not provide enough information to determine the value ascribed to an author's work in a package versus other elements. Some publishers deduct a portion of the revenue base to cover the costs of developing new platforms.

There is no denying the shift in the higher education textbook publishing market has created ambiguity in existing publishing agreements with respect as to how authored materials can be distributed and how royalties should be paid. Authors are always wise to check their contracts, review their royalty statements and ask publishers how their contracts are viewed in light of the ever-changing electronic landscape. It may be prudent to amend contracts to clarify the understanding between author and publisher, or existing contracts may contain more favorable terms than what publishers are currently willing to offer. ■



Juli Saitz, CPA, is a Senior Managing Director at Ankura, leading the contract and royalty compliance practice. She has extensive experience serving clients including textbook authors as well as multi-national corporation licensors.

Juli has helped authors and corporate clients recover millions of dollars in asserting their audit rights related to licensed copyrights, trademarks and patents. She is focused on the shift in the publishing industry to electronic content delivery methods and adaptive learning platforms and the resulting effect on author royalties.

TAA's Fall Webinar Series

All webinars are free to TAA members. For more information on these webinars and to register visit TAAonline.net/webinars.

A Second Bite at the Apple: Getting Rights in Your Book Back

Date: Thursday, October 17, 1-2 pm ET

Most publishing contracts are for the life of the copyright, so how could an author ever get their rights back? Brenda Ulrich, Partner, Archstone Law Group PC, will discuss the role of reversion clauses in publishing contracts, which allow rights in a book to revert to their authors under certain circumstances.

Writing Your First Book: Developing Your Dissertation Into a Manuscript

Date: Thursday, November 7, 10-11 am ET

Publishing your first book is imperative for many early-career scholars, but turning your dissertation into a book can be a confusing and difficult process. Margaret Puskar-Pasewicz, margaretedits.com, will discuss practical strategies for bridging the gap between completing your dissertation and writing a compelling book manuscript. She will discuss some of the most common mistakes that she's encountered in her years as an academic editor and writing coach.

Responding to Reviewers' Comments

Date: Tuesday, November 19, 1-2 pm ET

In this webinar Mark Pedretti, Director of the Center for Writing and Rhetoric, Claremont Graduate University, will discuss strategies for engaging with reviewer's comments—both positive and negative. He will explore ways to figure out the importance placed upon comments in a given publishing context, the relationship between editor and reviewer, and whether comments are in fact "make or break." The goal will be to equip webinar participants with a set of tools for navigating the unspoken rules of the review process.

Practical Strategies for Collaborating with Peers

Date: Tuesday, December 3, 2-3 pm ET

Author and coach Janet Salmons will show how the approaches described in her book *Learning to Collaborate, Collaborating to Learn* apply to peer collaboration for writing, editing, or other projects. Join this webinar to learn practical strategies you can use when planning and participating in complex collaborations, including creating workable agreements, selecting technology tools, and dealing with setbacks.

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Safeguarding your scholarship *continued from page 3*

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Review the work and trust your gut. Finally, trust your gut. If, after reading the work published in the journal, something still doesn't feel right, honor your intuition and step away. ■

Danielle S. Apfelbaum is a Senior Assistant Librarian at Farmingdale State College, where she serves as the Scholarly Communication Librarian. Her primary responsibilities include but are not limited to assisting faculty and staff with navigating copyright, fair use, open licensing, and open access publishing. She received her Creative Commons Certification in October 2018.

Derek Stadler is an Assistant Professor at LaGuardia Community College in Long Island City, serving as the Library's Web Services Librarian. His library research has been published in the *Journal of Library Administration, Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, and *The Journal of Interactive Technology and Pedagogy*, an open access publication. Derek is also a co-editor-in-chief of the open access journal, *Urban Library Journal*.

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Ten tips on getting writing started

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4) Plan your next session

Plan the agenda for your next writing session at the end of the last one. That way you will know what to do when you sit down to write. This will also help you stay focused on your article as a series of small tasks.

Some authors even recommend that you always stop in the middle of a sentence, so that you have somewhere to pick up. “Deliberate interruption” can spur your motivation to return: “an almost done project lingers in memory far longer than one that is completed” (Carey 2014).

5) Start with ancillary writing

Start by writing something else. Some academics begin by typing a quote from their reading. Others write a plan for what they would like to do in that writing session.

6) Start by writing badly

If you can’t get started because your first sentence has to be perfect, this method can be useful.

For fifteen minutes, write down every thought you have about your article without stopping to edit. Just let it all hang out. Celebrated writing guru Anne Lamott coined a famous term for this: “a shitty first draft” (Lamott 2007), which may sound offensive, but gets at the real feelings of shame and revulsion many have about writing. If you set out deliberately to write something horrible, this roadblock is erased. Again, eventually you write a sentence or have an idea that, despite your best efforts at producing ghastly work, sounds pretty good. And then you are on your way.

7) Get social support

Arrange with another prospective author to agree to write at the same time. Start up your video call when you are supposed to start, encourage each other, and then get started writing with the video call still on, so that you can hear them typing and they can hear you typing. It helps knowing that someone else is going through the same horrible suffering, I mean, wonderful process that you are. It’s more helpful than meeting at someone’s house to write together, which often ends up being a talking session rather than a writing session.

8) Keep your writing file open

If you are in an extremely busy period, open your article every day and do one thing to it. Sometimes people find that the idea of even just fifteen minutes a day shuts them down. Instead, you can decide to develop this practice of opening your article every morning and doing whatever occurs to you when you glance through it—changing a word, adding a citation, or cutting a sentence. You should find that at least a few times a week one thing develops into fifteen minutes of writing, but the main aim is to be sure to at least look at your article every day.

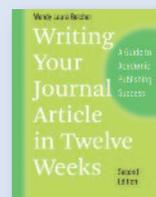
9) Connect to the pleasure of writing

Academic writing guru, Helen Sword (2017), argues that if you want to become a productive author, you need to take greater pleasure in writing. Her evidence is empirical, interviews with one hundred successful scholarly authors, whom she identifies as having four characteristics, including “emotional habits of positivity and pleasure.”

It’s easy to give ourselves lots of negative messages about writing. Because some aspects of academia are dreadful, we get in the habit of complaining about writing as well. However, productive scholarly authors are often those who look forward to writing and see it as a privilege.

10) Use WYJA

Finally, many scholars have developed better writing habits by using my *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks: A Guide to Academic Publishing Success*, which provides daily writing guidance. The book breaks writing down into manageable step-by-step tasks for each of five days a week—you simply open it up and do what it says. Hundreds have written to tell me the book got them into the habit of starting writing every day. ■



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