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My best writing space: understanding academics self-professed writing spaces

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Abstract

Research into academic writing has, in large part, focused on the fundamentals of how to write, and as a result, the understanding that writers require a space in which to concentrate on writing is not new. What is lacking, however, is detailed consideration of what influences writing practice and, specifically, an understanding of how scholarly writers construct their writing taskspaces. This paper explored how academic writers organised their best writing taskspaces. The notion of what constituted *best* was self-defined by informants. Informants submitted photographs of their best writing spaces, and these were analysed using a two-part methodology. First, the artistic and structural elements of the photographs were considered followed by analysis of the each photograph's aesthetic qualities to determine the participants' establishment and maintenance practices. The relationship between academic writers and their best writing spaces was categorised around construction and consumption themes. A typology of academic writers was developed from these findings. A four-part research agenda is proposed. This research extends understanding to include the informant's role in creating writing spaces which may guide building and design, renovations and reallocation plans for departments and assist individual academics to improve writing productivity and effectiveness. The findings may also assist managers to ensure that employer-provided working habitats are conducive to effective writing.

Keywords Academic infrastructure analyses · Publishing · Qualitative methods · Promotion and tenure · Higher education

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Introduction

In an increasingly competitive writing environment, many academics are feeling pressure to produce greater quantities of research outputs and publish in higher quality journals. Coupled with this, many universities are altering the manner in which working spaces are designed to maximise efficiency and minimise costs. It is reasoned here that the conflation of these two factors is seen as a driving force behind some of the tension felt by academics. That is, there is greater pressure to publish at a high level but also the nature of their working space is becoming increasingly uncertain. This research looks to understand how academics negotiate this tension by investigating what academic, scholarly writers profess to be their 'best' writing spaces and why they feel these spaces suit their work habits.

Academic writing has been defined as a mixture of both 'rational' (career and progression goals of being published in high-quality, high-impact journals and securing external competitive grant funding) and 'less rational motives' (including self-expression, creativity and personal meaning) (Murray 2013, p. 2). Traditionally, academic writing was 'thought of as a convention-bound monolithic entity that involves distant, convoluted and impersonal prose' (Tang and John 1999, p. 23) and was 'mostly about publication' (Gregson et al. 2003, p. 6). Publishing plays an important role in promotion and tenure decisions, recognition, scholarly dialogue and knowledge base contributions (Hult et al. 1997) with 'many universities' making 'publishing research an essential component for tenure and promotion of faculty (Barnett 2003 cited by Miller 2017, p. 99).

However, the seemingly straightforward goal of publishing is fraught with multiple complexities. First, the writing process is a negotiation of representation (of self and others) within the human sciences (e.g. Barnes 1997; Farinelli et al. 1994; Gregson et al. 2003). Second, when academics write, the results are subjected to the 'discipline of peer review – imagined and known about – and, eventually … to a particular regulatory framework' for each journal (Gregson et al. 2003, pp. 6–7).

Third, there are decisions to be made as to where to submit, with 'many factors influencing this decision, including prestige, acceptance probability, turnaround time, target audience, fit, and impact factor' (Salinas and Munch 2015, epage). Fourth, the acceptance probability, or acceptance rate, and rejection rates may reflect journal quality, and in an increasingly competitive academic landscape, the 'very top journals have very low acceptance rates of around 7–8% for Science and Nature and similar journals' (Elliott 2014, p. 6).

Finally, and of particular importance for academic writing, are the increasingly international nature of publishing and the connection to quality indicators. Participation in the 'global web of scholarship [is] an obligation for academics all over the world' because 'Universities in many countries … require their staff to publish in major, high-impact, peer-reviewed Anglophone journals as a pre-requisite for tenure, promotion and career advancement' (Hyland 2011, p. 58).

While academic endeavour may also include the production of other artefacts, this research focuses on endeavours that must, by their nature, incorporate academic writing. The output of such writing is typically academic journals or grant applications. Part of understanding such outputs requires an investigation of the physical environment in which scholarly writing takes place, in particular, writing associated with research rather than teaching or administration.

Physical environment, namely atmospherics and physical design, has been shown to influence behaviour (Bitner 1992), particularly in the areas of employee morale, productivity and engagement (both positively and negatively) (Chandrasekar 2011) and performance and satisfaction (Vischer 2007). For example, the quality of workplace environments influences

employees' levels of motivation and subsequent performance (Chandrasekar 2011). Further, how well an employee engages with their immediate, physical environment influences 'to a great extent their error rate, level of innovation, collaboration with other employees, absenteeism and ultimately, how long they stay in the job' (Chandrasekar 2011, p. 1).

A plethora of previous work has considered how the physical office building work environment influences employees' perceptions and behaviours (see Kim and De Dear 2013 for a detailed summary). Further work has considered the transition from the conventional private (or cellular) spatial configurations to modern open-plan spaces and the impact of this transition on both occupants and organisations (Kim and De Dear 2013).

For an organisation, the short-term gains in economic benefits offered by the open-plan concept include higher occupant density, increased net usable area and ease of re-configuration (Duffy 1992; Hedge 1982). At the more esoteric level, the benefits of open-planning for organisations were suggested as a means of facilitating communication and interaction between co-workers with a corresponding improvement on individual work performance and therefore organisational productivity (Brand and Smith 2005; Kupritz 2003). However, for employees, the open-plan concept is not an attractive one. Such a work environment is considered noisy and distracting (Yadav et al. 2017) and has been shown to have a detrimental effect on workplace satisfaction (see Hongisto et al. 2016 for a summary of this literature).

From an academic writers' perspective, the authors suggest that the physical environment in which they write may play a role in how well they write, how often they write and how productively they write. For a modern academic, the researchers wondered 'where do academic writers think they do their best writing?' In such a discourse, the changing nature of academic workspaces is worthy of attention. For example, the advent of open-plan spaces, the need to deconstruct ivory towers and the increasing use of technology have led to a call for the 'cellular faculty office' to be revisited (Samson 2013, p. 624) and for more research to consider the dynamic relationship between academic practices (what faculty do), where they work (material place and social space) and who they are (professional identity) (Kuntz 2011).

The modern academic writer has drawn clear demarcation lines between work that is considered to be their own, namely research related, and their administrative and teaching tasks, considered the university's (Kuntz 2011). However, little attention is given to role of space on writing practice.

Extant research, thus far, has focused far more on the 'critical engagement with what is being said/argued by self/others or as the deconstruction of texts…writing then figures, but primarily for what it says rather than as practice' (Gregson et al. 2003, p. 6). Almost 15 years ago, academics were called on to think 'much harder about what we actually do; about the practices we engage in, which defined what we do' (Gregson et al. 2003, p. 6). Two years later, Brown (2005) suggested that all academics (he was specifically referring to the discipline of marketing) are writers and that their careers are advanced, and their reputations are enhanced, by the written word.

However, despite the importance of scholarly writing as a significant academic competency, it is a skill which does not appear to be well understood. This is hardly surprising when you consider that academic writing is rarely discussed—much less written about (Brown 2005). This research focuses on understanding the space, in which writing practices happen, more deeply. In that, this study distinguishes itself from previous research by considering the actual act of writing and the space in which this writing is performed rather than what is being written. The research question proposed in this research is 'Where do academic writers think they do their best writing?'

An analysis of the relevant theories and the conceptual framework is presented next. The intensive exploratory methodology used in this research is described, followed by the results and discussion. The paper concludes with a discussion and limitations and presents a future research agenda.

Academic writing

An increasingly competitive academic landscape means academic staff and research students must write, and potentially write a lot, at very high quality. Silvia (2007) suggested that tensions exist between students and professors needing to write and the struggles inherent in that goal. For example, while writing may be 'viewed in many ways' as the 'act of writing…[that is] generating text', such a goal 'requires the academic to take deliberate action' (Kempenaar and Murray 2016, p. 2).

Further, despite the focus of university policies on research output as the core activity, 'some academics are more productive in writing for publication than others' (Kempenaar and Murray 2016, p. 1). Previous research has identified the characteristics and behaviours of more productive writers (e.g. Boice and Johnson 1984; Grant and Knowles 2000; Lea and Stierer 2000; MacLeod et al. 2012; Mayrath 2008; Murray et al. 2012).

Potentially, the problems with writing are twofold. First, it is hard work, and second, it can be difficult to 'wedge [writing] into a frenetic academic schedule' (Silvia 2007, p. xi). A key problem when trying to write, and write well, is that the act of writing is often in direct competition with other academic tasks and the competition between these tasks can be overwhelming (Hjortshoj 2001). Academics may also experience difficulties in managing tasks to completion (Moore 2003; Murray and Newton 2009).

When considering the physical writing environment, workplace spaces are considered regarding industry standards for safety and ergonomics, and the impact of this environment on morale and productivity (e.g. Roelofsen 2002). Much of the trade and practitioner discussions on developing a working space give priority to organisation, such as de-cluttering the workspace (Carlin and Forbes 2017).

In the academic writing literature, the role of space and place has been considered through the lens of performance of gender and sexuality (Duncan 1996), through boundary constructions between women and men (Hanson and Pratt 1995) and the impact of gendered stratification on status (Spain 1993). Space has been considered as a social construct by defining it as a social product and how humans construct the spaces within their lives (Lefebvre 1991) and through the accumulation and organisation (or lack) of possessions within a home (Belk et al. 2007).

This research aimed to understand academic writers' best writing space. Such a focus is warranted given, on the one hand, the increasing levels of demand pushed on academics to write effectively and successfully (leading to publications) and the erosion of the traditional academic workspace.

Methodology

This research aimed to understand academic writers' self-described *best* (not necessarily only) writing space. Writing, in this context, was explained to participants as being research related, to the exclusion of all other forms of academic work, such as teaching or administrative tasks.

Participants were asked, via an invitation email, to submit a photograph of the writing space in which they do their 'best' writing, with the interpretation of this term left entirely up to them. They were then asked to complete a series of questions associated with their writing space.

In the questions, informants were asked 'what, for you, constitutes "best", when it comes to writing (specifically, writing books, book chapters, journal or conference manuscripts – research writing)?' Two recurring themes emerged from these narratives; the best spaces enabled or engendered focus and productivity, leading to a sense of satisfaction in what had been achieved or enjoyment in the writing process. It should be noted that no third-party validation of productivity or efficacy with regard to writing was undertaken, just that informants felt that this space, for them, was their 'best' writing space.

Photographs were used as a visual representation to not only provide imagery associated with the space being described by participants, but also to help understand the nuances associated with each space that may not be overly relevant to the participant, but can be identified and analysed by the researchers. This use of visual research methods as part of the methodology is consistent with developments in social science research (e.g. Margolis and Pauwels 2011).

A two-part strategy was used to interpret the received photographs: first, using the Bohnsack (2009) method to analyse both the artistic and structural elements of the photographs, and, second, by visual elicitation which focused on the aesthetics of each photograph (Tian and Belk 2005).

Bohnsack (2009) illustrates photograph analysis by focusing on the formal structure of the picture including the composition. For example, what is the aspect ratio? What is in the centre of the photograph? The perspective projection of the photographer is considered (e.g. what is the vantage point?) and, finally, the photograph's 'scenic choreography' (e.g. what comprises the working space and how is it displayed or portrayed?).

Each photograph and the associated descriptions were analysed and coded together for each informant and then compared with other informants by each researcher, independently, resulting in the development of a preliminary coding framework (e.g. Attride-Stirling 2001). In particular, each photograph was analysed to identify the key elements it contained (e.g. desk or working space position, size and location within the space, the presence of books or other (writing-related) resources and incidences of functional and hedonic elements). The spaces were analysed to determine if working routines or other patterns emerged and, in accordance with Bohnsack (2009), the position the informant placed themselves in when taking the photograph was compared as this could be indicative of what they felt were the important elements or focus areas of the spaces.

The term taskspace is used to 'denote a pattern of dwelling activities' (Ingold 1993, p. 152). In analysing the aesthetics of each photograph, the researchers considered the sense of each informant's taskspace through looking at the content, meaning and semiotics that were represented (Tian and Belk 2005). The photographs provided a sense for how participants' self-described *best* writing space was organised or structured. Another photographer could enter the same space and represent it in a completely different fashion. In this way, the projection and presentation of the photograph become as important to the analysis of the elements contained within the space itself.

Themes developed independently by the researchers were then compared between the researchers. Similarities and differences were discussed to refine the themes and develop the final version of the coding framework (Attride-Stirling 2001).

A convenience sample from the authors' networks answered an email invitation to submit a photograph of the writing space in which they considered they did their best academic writing.

The majority of informants are located in Australia and New Zealand. A short list of questions accompanied the invitation asking for descriptions on how space helps with writing and what they would change (if they had an unlimited budget) and influences on the space.

Responses were received from 30 informants. The majority of informants were female (66%), junior academics (41%) followed by professors (6%) and defined their best writing space as a home office (45%) or elsewhere in the home (17%).

Findings

In analysing the photographs, two key themes emerged. First, temporality, or the passage of time, and second, taskspace design practices informants undertook in creating their best writing spaces.

Temporality has been considered in archaeology and social-cultural anthropology as a tool to understand the landscape and the nature of dwellings (Ingold 1993) and for understanding heritage communities and practices (Harvey 2001). In these understandings, temporality has a time relationship, such as a state of existing within a spatial position (Thompson 2016) and is used to analyse people's active, perceptual engagement with their worlds. However, a particular gap has been identified by Ybema (2010) who suggests that temporality has not been systematically explored in terms of how temporal resources are utilised and deployed. That is, a deeper understanding is needed to understand the passage of time in connection with taskspaces, or how space is created and utilised, and thus, is of particular relevance for this research.

Temporality here refers specifically to the temporal durability associated with the space. Temporal experiences differ in their experientiality based on the length of time that is associated with the experience (Pöppel 1978). In this research, the notion of temporality was seen as a recurring theme where some spaces were durable and long-lasting, such as assigned office spaces, while others were short-term, flexible and fleeting, such as setting up to write in a hotel room, café or outdoor space.

In this way, the temporality of space became an important factor in determining how spaces were utilised and the way in which some informants saw temporality as affecting their 'best' writing space. Some informants reported temporary spaces as being jarring and disruptive to their writing practices, while others were able to adapt to a temporary space efficiently enough to report that they found any transient space as being potentially a 'best' space. That is, the temporality for some informants was not a substantively disruptive factor to their writing practices; indeed, some informants embraced the temporary nature of their chosen spaces to create their 'best' writing space. In such ways, the temporality theme applies to all informants.

The second theme to emerge from the analysis of the photographs was taskspaces, and in particular, how the informant's taskspaces were designed which reflected their status as the 'best' writing space. Previous research into the task completion and performance skills has suggested explanations for 'purposive human behaviour' and 'meaningful interaction with an environment' is governed by the 'invariant? constraints' between 'the environment', and 'human actions and their effects' (Rasmussen 1983, p. 258). Rasmussen (1983) suggested signs were 'indicators of the state of an environment' (1983, p. 258) in that they featured in the environment and also connected conditions for action. Symbols were used to interpret these signs, defined as 'other information, variables, relations, and properties and can be formally processed' (Rasmussen 1983, p. 258).

Taskspace as a theme is linked to the temporality theme as photographs provided an understanding of how informants experienced their taskspaces during their time within its borders. In this theme, the underlying recurring images show the physical environmental aspects of informants' best spaces. Organisational aspects included neat versus cluttered, proximity to others versus isolation, noise levels (removal, ambient or purposeful), access to resources and the tools for writing, comfort levels and privacy versus more open spaces. In this study, the taskspace environment was defined by informants, through their submission of the photographs. These environments were then considered through the lens of the practices informants undertook to create and then consume these spaces. Taskspace design was also considered in terms of how such spaces may be used to send messages about the function of that space to others (e.g. perceptions of open and inviting vs closed and avoiding others, exposed vs boundary creation).

When considering the intersectionality of temporality and taskspace orientations, three typologies of informant are identified: first, the co-opters, second, worker bees and third, homebodies (Table 1). *Co-opters* engineer short duration control of spaces (Pictures 1 and 2), *worker bees* craft taskspaces within their employer-provided precincts (Pictures 3 and 4) and *homebodies* crafted spaces within their own home (Pictures 5 and 6). Informant typologies were mutually exclusive, as per the photographs provided. In one case, where an informant provided photographs of two spaces, their description of their 'best' and most preferred writing space was a single environment. In each case, taskspaces were represented in the informants' photographs in ways reflecting an overarching nature of time, or temporality to their spaces and the individual taskspace constructions and consumptions.

For the co-opters, use of these spaces is limited before the space reverts to its primary function. Such spaces are by their ownership, difficult to personalise and the ability to overtake the space with clutter is restricted. Worker bees' spaces are typically of longer duration, for the length of an informant's employment. Homebody spaces are also typically longer duration, available to an informant while they live in the home.

It has been suggested that the modern academic distinguishes between work that is considered their own, versus those deemed to the university's (Kuntz 2011), and this demarcation is potentially evident in the very definite relocation undertaken by both co-opters and homebodies. There is a long academic history of research into geographic relocation. However, it is more commonly associated with movement in employment or residence overall (e.g. Noe and Barber 1993; Starker 1990). In this research, it was noted that co-opters and homebodies have purposefully chosen non-work allocated spaces for their writing and geographically removed themselves from their place of work (rather than opting for a meeting or boardroom, for example). Their creation and consumption of a space outside of their employer-provided one is, for them, the 'best' writing space.

Perhaps these typologies lacked the freedom to build physical boundaries or maintain a desired level of personalisation, or perhaps they appreciated the change in scenery. The reason for the move could be because their do-not-disturb signals are ignored or ineffective.

Stability in space selection is evidenced by worker bees and homebodies who utilise familiar spaces, while co-opters display flexibility or fluidness in their selection of a variety of spaces with a different primary purpose from that of writing. Worker bees and homebodies are, perhaps, making their writing space selections with the need for comfort or security.

Each taskspace construction was analysed regarding the institutional responses possible by these typologies and offers suggestions for institutions seeking to improve writing productivity or train writing effectiveness, or perhaps, reduce the incidences of geographic relocation. The resulting theoretical model, developed from these findings, is presented in Fig. 1.

Table 1 Informant's taskspace orientation

Informant no.	Informant details	Self-described 'best' writing space	Taskspace orientation	No. in orientation
4	Female, early career	Home (husband's desk)	Co-opter	8
7	Female, ex-academic and now marketing manager	Home (couch and coffee table in lounge room)	Co-opter	
8	Female, professor	Public spaces (cafes, airport lounges, terminals, hotel rooms)	Co-opter	
9	Female, junior	Public (café, dining table and a public library)	Co-opter	
10	Female, professor	Home (during the day, in the lounge/dining rooms, late night and early morning, in bed)	Co-opter	
16	Male, ECR	Home (marital bed)	Co-opter	
26	Female, associate professor	Home (follows the sun)	Co-opter	
29	Female, junior	Home (dining table)	Co-opter	
1	Female, student	Work (open-plan)	Worker bee	10
2	Male, student	Work (open-plan)	Worker bee	
3	Female, student	Work (open-plan)	Worker bee	
11	Male, mid-career	Work (office)	Worker bee	
12	Female, mid-career	Work (office)	Worker bee	
13	Male, junior	Work	Worker bee	
14	Female, professor	Work	Worker bee	
15	Female, student	Work (office that used to be a storage room)	Worker bee	
21	Male, professor	Work (office)	Worker bee	
22	Female, mid-career	Both work and home, work identified as best	Worker bee	
5	Male, junior	Home (shared home office)	Homebody	12
6	Male, mid-career	Home (shared home office	Homebody	
17	Female, mid-career	Home (office)	Homebody	
18	Female, junior	Home (home office)	Homebody	
19	Female, junior	Home (home office)	Homebody	
20	Male, professor	Home office geographically removed from rest of house)	Homebody	
23	Female, mid-career	Home (office)	Homebody	
24	Female, professor	Home (office)	Homebody	
25	Male, research director	Home (office)	Homebody	
27	Female, professor	Home (office)	Homebody	
28	Female, professor	Home (office)	Homebody	
30	Female, associate professor	Home (office)	Homebody	

Co-opters

Co-opters access spaces that have a different primary purpose to writing and which, by their very nature, are only available for a limited period, thus defined as short duration spaces. There were eight informants (4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 16, 26 and 29) whose taskspace orientation was defined in this way. Two main types of co-opted spaces were utilised: public and private.

Public spaces included cafes, airports and hotel rooms and offered informants fewer opportunities to control the space or design conditions to suit themselves. Private co-opted spaces included couches, dining tables, the marital bed and a partner's desk and offered more opportunities to influence or control the space (see Table 1).

Picture 1 Co-opter typology (Informant 7, coffee table and lounge chair)

Informant 27 (female, professor) expressed a desire to be close to nature and, accordingly, she will write in multiple locations 'anywhere in the house' as she relocates around her home following the sun. By co-opting the various spaces around her home, she is clearing 'up my mind to engage with the writing', a process she defines as 'actually clearing the space in my head'. Informant 27 rates her work-provided space as 'the worst office I have had'.

Informant 10 (female, professor) supplied photographs showing a small portion of a dining table, including a placemat, and a television in a lounge room with far more focus on what surrounds the writing space than the space itself. The photographs show gardens, balconies, pets, shrubbery and plants (quite a few are flowering) on either side of the taskspace, almost eclipsing the writing zone. This space is encapsulated (and isolated) by the gardens and, given the space is designed around entertainment and dining, is short-term duration.

A longer duration taskspace is exhibited by Informant 4 (female, junior academic) who defines her best writing space as the home study she shares with her husband. The room is safely removed from 'distractions', such as 'television', and includes two desks. This informant is focussed on the task of writing, even to the extent of maintaining a 'separate computer for everything not writing' (including Facebook). This informant preferred to co-opt her husband's desk and that placed a very specific time limit on the desk's availability. This informant also suggested that her husband is 'specific to how he wants it'.

Informants 16 (male, ECR), 7 (female, mid-career academic, Picture 1) and 29 (female, ECR) all access temporarily available spaces within their homes, the marital bed, couch and coffee table, and dining room table respectively. These spaces must revert back to their original functions at a fixed point in time.

For Informants 8 (female, professor, Picture 2) and 9 (female, junior academic), short duration public spaces, comprising cafes, airport lounges and the local public library, are limited in accessibility, and the space must be vacated when the café or library close or the plane boards. Such spaces are also outside the control of the informants, and they must write within the mandates of the owners of the space. Informant 8 suggests an ability to write in multiple co-opted spaces, including airport lounges, on planes or other transitional travel-related spaces (e.g. hotel rooms) is a skill she has learned through 'necessity' as a result of an academic position which requires extensive travel coupled with the distractions they encounter

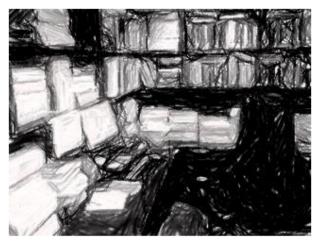**Picture 2** Co-opter typology (Informant 8, coffee shop)

when at work (requests for meetings with students and staff and the other requirements on their time) which restrict writing time in this space.

For co-opters, perhaps short temporal nature of the space adds a sense of urgency to the tasks that must be completed before space is reclaimed or must be vacated. As Informant 4 describes, with regard to using her husband's desk: 'He is … a little neurotic about having his desk cleared by the time he comes home, so I think of it as I only have specific hours to use it. Therefore, I better be productive'. In co-opting space, informants go through the process of selecting the most appropriate writing space at that specific time, which also helps focus on writing. By their nature, co-opters utilise the space available to them and use them as they need, when they need. As such, taskspace design is restricted. There is very little they can do to adapt a café layout or alter their bedroom to complete a writing task. They are forced to keep the space relatively free from clutter because the spaces are, by their nature, multi-purpose. Within a short space of time, they may need to clear all their work so as to board a plane or make way for a family meal. Co-opters do the best with the space they have and the limited time they have.

Picture 3 Worker bees typology (Informant 1, open-plan cubicle)

Picture 4 Worker bees typology (Informant 11, office)

Co-opters must maintain writing focus within a framework of constantly different non-goal-related sets of distractions which could impede their focus. In public spaces, for example, there is limited to little freedom to change the environment. For example, these informants cannot influence temperature settings, put on preferred music or control for other noises. There is limited flexibility to build boundaries or rearrange the furniture. In spaces that have a different primary purpose, such as a lounge chair or bed, such freedoms are also limited. Co-opting spaces may also come with different distractions depending on the time of day, such as how busy an airport lounge or café can become at different times. Changes or turnover of people also co-opting the space may also differ.

Perhaps, the advantages of co-opted taskspaces are these very restrictions. It is possible that because these environmental factors are outside of the control of a co-opter, they can ignore them, or work with them, compared with their work or home spaces. For example, perhaps, writing in work-provided environment brings distractions from people that are known to the co-opter and there are fewer interruptions in a crowded café.

Picture 5 Homebody typology (Informant 18, home office)

Picture 6 Homebody typology (Informant 30, home office)

There may also be an implied public accountability in co-opted spaces. For example, writing in a café or the business section of an airport lounge sends a signal that one is working, surrounded by others who are also working. As such, there is an implied group commitment to focus on those tasks and not create distractions for those around them. It was evident from the co-opter's photographs that they own their spaces for the brief time they are in them.

Worker bees

This category of informant provided photographs of employer-provided office spaces or open-plan spaces. While such spaces lack the full redecoration and personal organisation freedom of the home environment, worker bees can bring in personal items or rearrange their spaces, within the limitations of organisational policies or health and safety mandates. Within these limitations, informants whose best writing space was their employer-provided space created and crafted spaces conducive to writing and appeared to create boundaries around that writing practice, including sending out signals to others that writing was happening. For informants with an office, simply closing their door may signal writing was happening and they were not to be disturbed. Virtual spaces, or boundaries around writing, were also created through paper piles or boxes.

Temporality is typical of long duration because, while the informant is employed by the organisation, they have access and use of these spaces. There are 11 informants who were classified as worker bees, Informants 1–3, 11–15, 21, 22 and 26. Three informants worked in open-plan spaces but had an assigned cubicle while the remaining worker bees had offices (Informants 1, 2 and 3) (Informant 1's taskspace is represented in Picture 3). All three open-plan informants presented neat and ordered spaces in their photographs with minimal personalisation. Informant 2 (male, student) has only their technology, including two large computer monitors, on their desk. They describe it as having 'plenty of space and natural light' which makes him 'feel more energized'. Informant 3 (female, student) believes "When you have a good writing space, you can focus better, be more productive, hence, achieve better results".

Informant 11 (male, mid-career academic, Picture 4) has situated their computer, monitor and keyboard in the very middle of their large L-shaped desk. The desk is overshadowed by large and completely filled bookcases, and the space has no signs of personalisation although

Taskspace Creation	**Co-opters**	**Worker Bees**	**Homebodies**
	⇓	⇓	⇓
Represented as	Co-opting spaces are primarily designed for a different primary purpose (e.g. cafes, marital bed, couch coffee table)	Creation of writing nooks within work provided offices or open-plan spaces	Creation of writing nooks in the home
	⇓	⇓	⇓
Taskspace Design Embodies	Restricted freedom to personalise, do not 'own' the space so cannot control the environment, opportunity to signal, clutter restrictions, single purpose for the time co-opted	Limited freedom to personalise and can be cluttered (within organisational rules), regularly multi-purpose so no separation between writing and all other tasks	Freedom to personalise, control over environmental conditions (safety, music, access to snacks, dress codes)
	⇓	⇓	⇓
Signalling or boundary building practice enhanced by the space	Potential for interaction reduced to strangers in public place, signal that writer is working so do not approach, expectations of space for work (e.g. coffee shop or business section of airport lounge)	Interaction expected by virtue of employer notions of collegiality and/or design of space (open plan, office location), signalling limited to employer-approved methods	Interaction reduced to other home occupants, signalling possibly through freedom of expression in own home
	⇓	⇓	⇓
Need for stability	Fluid or flexible workspaces are preferred or adapted for use	Drawn towards similar, stable and familiar spaces	Drawn towards similar, stable and familiar spaces
	⇓	⇓	⇓
Temporality	Typically short	Typically long	Typically long
	⇓	⇓	⇓
Geographic Relocation	Yes	No	Yes
	⇑	⇑	⇑
Institutional Response	Ascertain if relocation is due to shortcomings in provided space, determine if mandatory 'presence' rules being broken or risk Occ Health & Safety rules	Consider provision of resources to aid in writing focus and organisation	Ascertain if relocation is due to shortcomings in provided space, determine if mandatory 'presence' rules being broken, or risk Occ Health & Safety rules

Fig. 1 Typology of academic writing

every space is filled with books, folders and stationery items. Writing at work offers this informant the option 'to engage with others or not', suggesting his ability to 'barricade in' and focus on writing.

Informant 23 (female, mid-career academic) looks for 'no distractions' which are defined as 'no interruptions by other people' or technology (such as email) in their best writing space. Her work-provided office has clear glass walls, and she finds it distracting 'when you can see movements outside and when people outside can see you'. She considered making changes to her workspace, by putting posters on the glass walls to shield their writing space from passersby, but was unsure if this was 'allowed'. Writing is performed at home where she has control over interruptions and can minimise distractions, while all else is done in the office: 'distraction is not so bad when you are doing other professional work'.

Homebodies

The homebody typology represented informants whose best writing space was at home, most commonly a home office. These informants differed from private space co-opters in that their home space was primarily a professional, longer-term duration space, rather than co-opting space that is designed for a different primary purpose, such as a coffee or dining table.

Homebody taskspaces have the greatest flexibility to personalise and include opportunities for self-expression. Looking at the scenic choreography as represented in these photographs, it was possible to see that homebodies' spaces differed from those utilised by co-opters and, to a lesser extent, worker bees. This difference was especially apparent in the sense of ownership that is present for homebodies, represented through the presence of artwork or collectables and the freedom to spread out through incorporating other elements of the home and arrange and using furniture. In total, 11 informants were classified as homebodies, Informants 5, 6, 17–20, 23–25, 28 and 30 (Picture 5, Informant 18, and Picture 6, Informant 30).

Informant 6 (male, mid-career academic) has created a space at home which, as they describe it, is 'usually messy' and goes as far as to define the perfect level of messiness: 'Too messy is not good, interferes in my concentration. Too tidy is not good either. I feel more comfortable seeing some level of messiness'. In fact, they show a desire for the perfect level of mess and a little disorder can make systems more effective (Abrahamson and Freedman 2013). While the taskspace is cluttered, this is a space designed for a specific function, writing.

Informant 17 (female, mid-career academic) works at both her home and employer-provided office but prefers her home office, even though it is limited in size. She suggests her home space feels more 'conducive to writing' and is safer for 'all-nighters'. Informant 18 (female, junior academic) avoids their open-plan work-provided space and prefers writing in their home-based study in their inner-city apartment. Having ascertained that she 'needs a writing space where distractions and interruptions (especially the noise of others talking) is reduced', her space is organised around this higher level of control. For example, music playing at a constant stable volume to provide cover for other more random, and therefore distracting, noises (Belk and Watson 1998; Tian and Belk 2005). This informant has designed their space to be 'homely and comfortable'. From the scenic choreography perspective, it is interesting to note that her view is action-oriented, there are freeways, high rises, the river; the bustling metropolis that is the city, however, the desk is positioned away from it all and instead faces a blank wall. There is a clear focus on writing at this desk.

Discussion and future research

Previous research has highlighted the important role the physical work environment plays for individual workers, their interpersonal relationships and job satisfaction, work output,

absenteeism and turnover, and ultimately organisation productivity and profitability (see Veitch et al. 2007 for a summary of this literature and a discussion of the tensions). However, research into the creation and consumption of specific writing taskspaces, while certainly relevant in the modern competitive academic landscape, is lacking. This research opens the door to understanding writing taskspace design, in particular, both the creation and consumption of such spaces.

This exploratory study considered how academic writers first situated themselves in a space and then the practices, whether purposefully or not, of maximising those spaces for their best writing (co-opting, organisation, consumption). How effective they truly are in creating effective change in their spaces varies from informant to informant, but this is not to say that many did act in a manner that made them feel their spaces were the 'best' for them.

Potentially, difficulty in moving this research forward stems from three barriers. First, that the 'literature remains scattered and poorly linked to the engineering and design disciplines that might make use of it' (Veitch et al. 2007, p. 177). Second, the lack of a standardised measuring tool to record occupants' ratings of environments, although Stokols and Scharf (1990) provide a starting point. Third, it could be that 'managers continue to see the physical office environment as simply a convenient space to house their employees, rather than an asset that could positively influence their staff' (Veitch et al. 2007, p. 177). This latter point is often reflected in decisions to incorporate or extend open-plan office spaces, shared offices or hot-desking arrangements.

Temporality or the nature of time as a driver for writing productivity was identified. Taskspaces were either set up for short or long durations. Short temporality spaces may improve focus or concentration as there is a time limit on accessibility. Longer temporality may invoke cocoon-like associations as academic writers feel bunkered in the space.

All three typologies created boundaries between their writing spaces and the environments in which they were located. These boundaries helped to channel attention and eliminate distractions. Boundary signals included forms of physical signalling, through creating signs and symbols that writing was at work in the taskspace, and geographic relocation, by removing oneself from their 'traditional' workspace to a dedicated taskspace that was perhaps unknown to colleagues or family or reduced or removed typical interruptions. The idea of dedicated writing taskspaces is intriguing and warrants further attention.

The actual design of the writing space, including the degree of personalisation, the organisation of the space, if the space cluttered or clinical and designed for single use, dedicated solely to writing, or was a multi-task space. Interestingly, no common theme regarding overall design was identified in the taskspaces. Individual, organisational elements differed for each informant, and yet, each was able to clearly identify a space, an environment, in which they felt they did their best writing.

Figure 1 represents the way academic writers created, co-opted or cemented their best writing taskspaces and the role of the institution and individual within each space. It is this creation and consumption of the best taskspace which was further explored in the development of a typology of academic writers.

In this study, asking informants to self-nominate the space they feel is their best writing space offered intriguing insights and the opportunity to develop a scholarly writer typology. By its very nature, the task of academic writing is interactive, cognitively demanding and knowledge intensive. Three suggestions are offered for a future research program: one underpinned by assemblage theory, one underpinned by practice theory and a longitudinal study.

First, a programme that is grounded in assemblage theory (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) and contextualised by the complex nature of academic writing may offer insights into the multiple

functionalities, exchangeability and fluidity required by modern academics in their writing. Focussing on dedicated writing taskspaces could offer insights into the creation and consumption of such spaces, and how the taskspaces informed and contributed to achieving writing goals.

Assemblage theory could also be used to consider the geographic relocation aspect and temporal nature of taskspaces. The writing impetus may come from the pre-planning and setting up stages of short duration spaces, and these physical acts provide a signal for, and commitment to, writing. The virtual or physical distance from other job-related tasks may also contribute.

Second, a programme that is grounded in practice theory (Wiedenbach et al. 1968) could evaluate specific details of how academic writers make, co-opt, design and transform their writing spaces. This research could consider breaking down the variety of writing tasks undertaken at stages of writing practice and incorporate observation of academic writers in their writing habitats. Such research could investigate the links between writing practices and physical space. Boundary building practices and workspace design elements could also be considered in greater detail.

Given the freedoms afforded through modern technology, it was surprising that more academic writers were not situated in public co-opter spaces such as coffee shops or hotel rooms (even beaches!). However, there is evidence of an exchange of workspaces deemed appropriate for informants' best writing as distinct from their other tasks. For example, from practices such as having two laptops, to demarcating writing work and assigning different spaces to it, through to the notions of how such spaces were designed around writing first to create writing zones and physically co-opting different spaces (such as following the sun around a home).

At their core, these varied practices highlight the informants' understanding of how they write and their adoptions of different practices to better support or enable those practices. Given the lack of an overarching common theme with regard to workspace design (differing levels of personalisation, clutter vs clinical, multi-purpose vs dedicated writing and the overall aesthetic and atmospherics elements), some other characteristic is at work.

Perhaps this characteristic, this similarity for academic writers, is a perceived state of mind, the recognition by informants that they need to create a writing taskspace in some fashion before undertaking writing tasks. Informants were able to identify elements that would help them (dress codes, music or other ambient noise, lessening distractions, bunkering, changing location) and incorporated these into their taskspaces. Institutions could more formally allow such acknowledgements and work with staff to identify what is needed.

Third, a longitudinal study could offer interesting insights. Previous research has considered writing and identity from the notion that a writer provides more than just content but also a 'representation of self' (Ivanič 1998, Abstract) and 'our identities and reputations as academics are … formed by what and how we write' (Cloutier 2015, p. 1). A longitudinal study could compare the taskspace organisation and writing practices of academic writers who identify themselves as academic writers before all other academic roles with academics who write as part of some other role or identify. This type of study would also allow an acknowledgement of evolutions of both these identities over time, in conjunction with a deeper understanding of institutional expectations, country requirements for excellence in research, the expected role of research in the community, writing opportunities and career progressions and promotions.

Further, the notion of temporality could also be incorporated into this research. Inextricably linked with identity, temporality explains how a person constructs and experiences their self (Heidegger 1962). Writing experiences and training could be included in this study, for

example, comparing writing behaviours with participation in writing groups or training in writing workshops (either individually or institutionally provided).

An institutional perspective could be considered in a longitudinal study. In understanding the impact that proscribing working spaces that are at odds with a particular typology. Institutions that suggest staff are visible at work or are restrictive in terms of construction of spaces. Disrupting internal needs cannot lead to productivity without fully understanding the impact such needs have on creating effective writing spaces.

For all three research programmes, concurrent quantitative analysis is recommended. Informants' design and construction of taskspaces could be interpreted alongside performance data (for example, publishing quality and quantity or ranking metrics) and definitions of 'best'. Comparisons could extend to scholarly writers who cannot identify a *best* writing space and incorporate institutional metrics and career progression and promotion data.

It must, of course, be noted that the findings within this analysis are constrained by the methods used to contact participants (which could potentially introduce sample bias) and the methods used to generate data about choice of writing space. While we asked for a photograph, we did not have space in this analysis to introduce too much more in the way of further contextual detail of the participants' academic working lives and employment conditions. Furthermore, we were not able to supplement our findings with in-depth interviews, with space only for a few elucidating comments from participants. Future research should investigate these areas and expanded data gathering to provide a more complete picture of the phenomena of creating one's own 'best' writing spaces.

Implications and conclusion

Open-plan spaces helped to reduce costs and maximise profits and efficiency (Laing 2006). The assumption underpinning open-plan spaces in such an area was the encouragement of informal communications between staff (Arnold 2002). However, few informants worked productively in these open, employee-provided spaces, and those that did created evidenced boundary separations. A step away from organisations thinking about space allocations regarding purely availability and standard resource supply terms is warranted.

Research into taskspace design and consumption has implications for workforce organisation and workspace planning at institutional levels. By better understanding the dynamics of writing spaces, human resource and property resource managers and policymakers can better understand writing practices and provide support in more meaningful ways. Institutional constraints and expectations on writing productivity need to be considered from the perspective of individual, co-author teams and supervision/student writing spaces.

Work-provided spaces could also change to better aid good writing practices—for example, in understanding that some writers may be better situated in quieter corridors or in open-plan situations with quieter colleagues. While institutions may provide noise-reducing headphones (which may have health implications), perhaps a better strategy is to allow writers some flexibility in space design and allocation, for example, allowing writers to work together in selecting neighbours or hot desk sections, or incorporating noise level designations (similar to quiet train carriages). The rules for personalisation could be relaxed to allow tools and materials that create better, more focused writing spaces, for example, flexibility in furniture arranging, allowing or providing access to more unusual or non-standard items or permitting personal accoutrements to be displayed in non-standard fashions (such as wall hangings or partitions).

It may be possible to support writing proclivities and provide individual space/design solutions for academic writers. New staff and students could be nurtured through the provision of systems and practices designed to help with long-term career success, under-performing writers could be assisted to improve or train better more productive writing practices and high-performing writers better supported so they can continue.

This paper explores the construction (co-opting or creating) of spaces which may have enforced, enclosed or encouraged academic writing. Despite university attention directed at writing techniques and writing performance (either through professional development programs or the emphasis placed on writing outcomes for promotion, tenure or other career advancement), little attention has been given to the actual consumption of writing spaces and their impact on writing. In an increasingly competitive and output-driven profession, research into the consumption of writing spaces and their impact on writing is relevant, yet lacking.

Previous research into academic writing has primarily focused on what is written—rather than on where the writing is performed. The research presented here is a unique study in the 'best' academic writing spaces as created by academic writers. The research is timely given the increasingly competitive landscape of the modern university. Understanding the drivers behind writing taskspace design could assist academic writers to develop systematic writing practices and inform taskspace design at the institutional level. It should be reiterated at this point that an academic's best writing space may be different depending on how the notion of best is defined. A manager may consider a space where the most writing is completed as being 'the best', while an academic may define best as where they feel the most creative, focused or driven. They may not write as fast or as much in this space, but they enjoy the process more and feel it is representative of their writing aspirations.

Such differing perspectives and definitions for the *best* construct should be incorporated into any thoughts regarding space design and the potential tension between individual writer freedoms and academic management. An enforced policy on working hours in the office may allow a manager to feel they have more control over the productivity of the faculty but does this practice necessarily lead to the *best* work. Further, the academic market is increasingly a very competitive hiring market in many parts of the world, and such a policy, where academics are forced to write in spaces they do not feel are best for them, may lead to higher attrition as they are not encouraged to stay as engaged and productive employees. Focussed future research is essential.

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