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Getting on the Conference Program and Writing a Practical Article: Templates for Success

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Abstract For many early childhood professionals, their initial foray into writing for publication consists of preparing a conference proposal for a workshop/training type of session and producing a manuscript suitable for publication as a practical article in a professional journal. The primary purpose of the article is to provide authors with templates, in other words, specific structures that can be used to accomplish these two tasks.

Keywords Academic writing · Writing for publication · Scholarly writing

Despite all of the writing that graduate students are expected to do, comparatively little of it prepares them for professional publication. Too much of the learning that takes place about writing for publication is left to chance, resting on hopes that powerful mentors will give generously of their time to guide aspiring authors through the process or, conversely, that the most capable students will rise to the top and figure it out for themselves. In 1988, sociologist Meaghan Morris cautioned graduate students, "your prospects later in life may depend on having a convincing number of refereed publications on your CV…sooner or later the moment will come when a selection committee will start counting your refereed articles and comparing them to those of other candidates" (p. 501). Since that time, the pressure to become a productive scholar has intensified considerably and, along with it, the recommendation that scholarly writing should become a prescribed part of the graduate curriculum for all doctoral candidates (Lee and Kamler 2008). There is little question that search committees at universities throughout the world take presentations and publications into account when making hiring decisions (European University Association 2005; Kwan 2010). Indeed, the practice of replacing the traditional, five-chapter dissertation with "multi-paper" dissertations—several published articles in peer-reviewed outlets—is gaining wider acceptance as institutions try to maximize their program graduates' opportunities for success (Badley 2009; Duke and Beck 1999; Francis et al. 2009; Thomas et al. 1986).

The expectations for conference presentations and publication in professional journals are even more pronounced for new faculty members. Teacher/scholars new to academia are fully aware that they need: (1) to have the proposals that they submit to leading organizations accepted by the conference committee and (2) to produce manuscripts that will earn acceptance from anonymous peer reviewers and be successfully published. Most of them exit their doctoral programs with a large, unwieldy dissertation, along with the vague admonition that they should "try to get a publication or two" out of it; however, if manuscript rejection rates are any indication, making the transition from that high-stakes homework called the dissertation to a concise, publishable manuscript is fraught with difficulty (Dinham and Scott 2001; Hartman et al. 2003; Lovitts 2008; Luey 2007). At one time, high expectations for scholarly productivity were the province of major research institutions; however, as other institutions have attempted to ratchet up their reputations and earn accreditation, scholarly productivity has been instrumental to that process—so much so that, even in small

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colleges and community colleges where teaching loads are heavy, faculty are being urged to publish.

The premise of this article is that there are conventions of writing, referred to here as templates, that are rather specific to two major writing tasks confronting graduate students, new faculty members, and veteran faculty members dealing with new expectations for publication. Those two tasks are: (1) making conference presentations and (2) publishing a practical journal article. Just as lesson plans provide a template for the novice teacher, these structures offer a type of support to those seeking to enter the professional dialogue through publication. The focus here is on two writing tasks that frequently are a starting point for early childhood professionals, namely, planning a 1-h, workshop-type of conference presentation and writing an article for a professional publication. The article begins with a definition of a writing template. It then applies this concept to the task of creating a conference proposal. Next, it suggests a template for a practical journal article. The article concludes with a reflection on the importance of contributing to the field through professional writing.

What is a Writing Template?

There is an entire field devoted to the structure of written texts in the field of composition; it is variously referred to as rhetorical modes, discourse, or modes of discourse. Smith (2003) suggests there are five broad, yet distinctive, categories of written texts: narrative, description, report, information, and argument. As we read, we absorb the structure of different writing tasks, even if we are not fully aware of the process. As an everyday example, consider the obituary. Although it is unlikely that most people, other than journalists, have had any direct training in how to write one, we intuitively know what goes in there—the person's name, date/place of birth, report of the death (with as much or as little detail as the family wishes), achievements of which the person would have been proud, listing of family members/brief family history, and details about the funeral/donations—all with an eye toward capturing the deceased's personality. Similar, intuitive understandings lie beneath the surface in professional writing tasks. My anecdotal impression is that a person's writing reflects what he or she reads. For example, when I work with future superintendents, their writing, taken as a group, tends to be more newspaper-like; master's degree students' papers tend to be rather textbookish, and doctoral students' work, generally speaking, starts to reveal vestiges of the scholarly writing they are assigned to read.

Although graduate students learn to plough through massive amounts of information on a quest for content, in order to present and publish successfully, they will need to move beyond the content to consider the process. In many ways, this transition is akin to that of the preservice teacher who must shift gears and consider, not only the material (what to teach) but also to the pedagogy (how to teach). Indeed, the best writers and editors have acquired the habit of examining various pieces of writing in terms of what makes them successful—or not—as the author attempts to inform, enlighten, persuade, or challenge the reader's assumptions; it operates almost like X-ray vision that enables writers and editors to glimpse the organizational structures and logical argument that underlie academic writing tasks.

Template for a Conference Proposal

I recall vividly how, as a doctoral student, we were urged to submit our first proposals for a state-level conference and a kindly faculty member shared an example of an accepted proposal. We seized upon it as a prototype for our efforts, attempting to deconstruct it and apply it to the specific topics we had in mind and were thrilled when we were notified of acceptance. As a starting point of a template for a conference proposal, think about the structure for the brief description of a conference session that typically is printed in the program. Usually, the sponsoring organization specifies a word limit but, beyond that, the writer is on her or his own. When reviewing the published conference program, it is clear that the quality of these descriptions varies considerably, even among those accepted. The true test of a "conference program blurb" would be how well it sets attendees' expectations for the session, and that is even less clear. In my work with doctoral students, I have used a prescribed structure (i.e., a template) to guide them in writing these brief descriptions. Figure 1 describes this structure.

Naturally, it is important to study the organization's guidelines and to skim through some conference descriptions before finalizing what is submitted because this provides a sense of how formal/informal the language of the description should be. It also is helpful to consider if the conference has a particular theme that needs to be echoed in the session. To gain additional practice and see many different examples, consider volunteering to serve as a reviewer for conference proposals.

A second part of the formula for success in conducting conference sessions is to plan something for each of the four audiences identified by Garmston (2005) in *The Presenter's Fieldbook* (Fig. 2).

To that end, I have students plan a 1-h, workshop/training type of conference session. If the writer can plan a minute-by-minute schedule with variety, pacing, and something for each of the four audiences, this is the surest

Fig. 1 A "formula" for a brief conference description

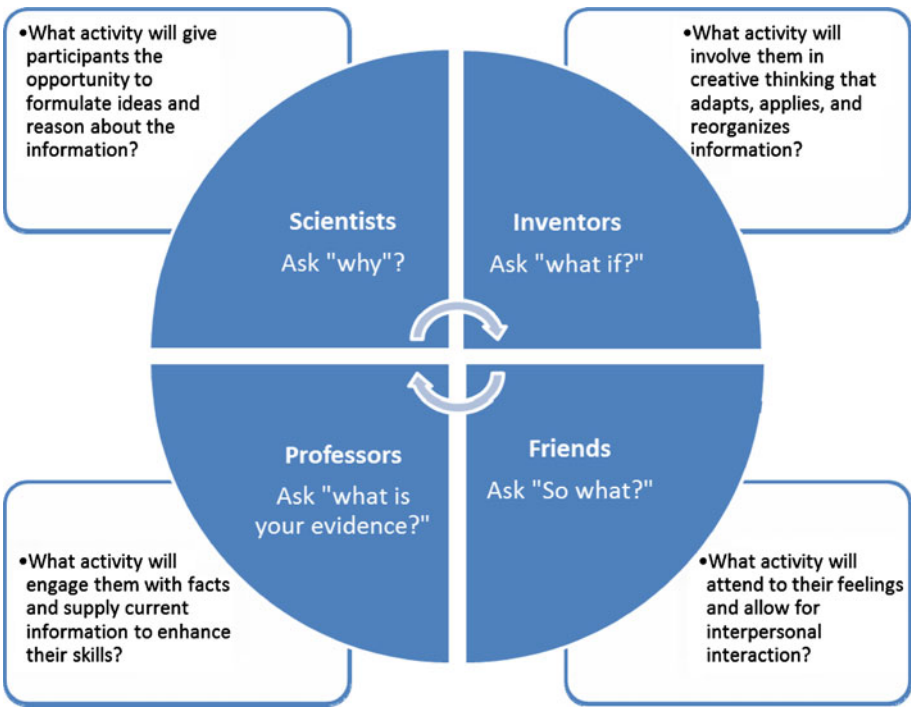

Fig. 2 Meeting the needs of different audiences for a conference presentation. *Based on*: Garmston (2005)

Fig. 3 Sample workshop description and session outline by Megan M. Cicconi

Title:

Using the Web 2.0 Technology Tools to
Increase Collaboration in the K-3 Classroom

Megan M. Cicconi

Session Description:

Collaborative learning increases academic achievement and student engagement while encouraging the development of interpersonal skills. With the advent of free Web 2.0 tools, technology can support collaboration in the early childhood classroom. Participants in this session will: (1) be assigned to groups matched to their level of confidence with technology, (2) create a group wiki on the topic of collaboration, (3) learn to use Voice Thread with students, (4 and 5) work with Skype and Video conferencing, (6) respond to the other groups' work on an edublog, and (7) use Google docs to complete an evaluation of the session.

Time Allocated	**Function**	**Activity**	**Time Remaining**
3 minutes	Introduction	Presenter introduction & distribution of handouts.	57 minutes
3 minutes	Formative Assessment	Participants choose a group based on their comfort level with using technology while teaching. Each group is represented by an icon. Group choices: Level I: Pen & Paper--not comfortable, a friend dragged you to this session. Level II: Typewriter--comfortable using technology, but not as comfortable introducing it into the classroom) Level III: Computer--use technology comfortably in the classroom Level III: iPad/HP Tablet--pro, you could be running this session	54 minutes
12 minutes	Define & Analyze Collaboration	Once in respective groups, participants will individually read a chunked excerpt regarding the theories or current research supporting collaborative learning. Together group members will identify main points of their respective text excerpt, write them on their designated colored post-its and place them on the collaboration poster. Presenter will briefly discuss that each group's article spanned decades and synthesize the key points.	42 minutes
10 minutes	Introduce Session's wiki and Collaborative Tools #1 & #2	Participants will open provided laptops and enter session's tinyurl (a way to condense the site's URL). Brief discussion of usefulness of tinyurl.com in ECE. Introduction of Voice Thread, a presentation software, similar in some ways to PowerPoint. The advantage to Voice Thread is that viewers can record comments on the child's presentation that can be replayed when their icon is clicked (hence, it becomes an auditory, threaded discussion). Participants will use Voice Thread to collaboratively respond to a short video clip, an image, a math problem, and a text excerpt. While the Voice Thread will target adult audiences, it will emphasize its uses with young children.	32 minutes
3 minutes	Provide Additional Examples	Participants will view screen shots of three other ECE Voice Threads to help generate ideas.	29 minutes
12 minutes (6-search, 6- create)	Application of Tools #1 & #2	Participants will create a Voice Thread applicable to their current classroom and curriculum. Create tinyurl for created Voice Thread. Write username, pw, and tinyurl where indicated on handout.	17 minutes
10 minutes	Introduce Tools #3, #4, #5	Participants watch 3 minute "Read Across the Planet" video clip regarding authentic audiences and peer collaboration using Skype & Video Conferencing. Open Linoit from session's wiki and participants identify one classroom project that they would like to share with another grade or school via Skype or Video Conferencing. They then respond to another participant's idea and brainstorm about how it could increase in collaboration.	7 minutes
7 minutes	Evaluation/ Q&A/ Tools #6 & #7	Complete Google Evaluation embedded on session's wiki and post questions to edublog discussion thread.	Session ended

Table 1 Self-assessment of a conference proposal

Element	Target	Acceptable	Unacceptable
1. Develops audience awareness	The presenter obviously has investigated the goals of the professional group/ conference theme; there is a plan in place for learning more about the audience	The presenter is familiar with the professional group/conference theme; there is a plan in place to find out more about the audience	The presenter appears to have a "canned" presentation that does not match the organization/theme; no plan in place to learn more about the audience
2. Establishes credentials	Prepares a written introduction of not more than three short sentences that establishes credibility with the audience and helps them to understand the presenter's interest in the topic; this is printed out in large print and shared with the session facilitator in advance	Plans and prints out the introduction but it does not adequately capture the presenter's qualifications or interest in the topic	Does not plan for an introduction of the presenter or supplies too much detail
3. Engages participants at the outset	Begins with interesting facts, a paradox, a true story, compelling examples, startling statistics, a "quiz", a statement of concerns, or an interesting way to dispel common misconceptions	Begins with a predictable introduction, such as defining the concept, a quotation, a joke/cartoon, etc.	Begins in a routine way with a welcome/ introduction and jumps right into the material
4. Is participant-oriented in approach	Clearly states at least three benefits/ outcomes for participants, at least one of which is differentiated to their situations	Includes three benefits/outcomes for participants beyond getting information	Is more focused on the presenter's activity rather than important outcomes for the participants
5. Respects different audiences	Includes components for the four audiences (See Fig. 2)	Includes components for two of the audiences	Addresses one audience only
6. Shows originality	Invents materials by delving into the literature and integrating an array of current sources	Collects an impressive array of current sources	Copies from a limited range of existing or dated materials
7. Plans for interactivity	Designs materials that stimulate discussion, reflection, and positive changes in the participants	Expects the participants to come up with the ideas in groups without planning the group experience	Relies on lecture/discussion
8. Synthesizes resources	Produces selective, current, and synthesized resources, such as a table summarizing the research findings; all citations are accurate	Includes an accurate, selective listing of resources but does not synthesize	Lists some sources but contains errors or does not synthesize and analyze; fails to accomplish more than what a person could do searching around on the internet briefly
9. Pacing and variety	The schedule for the session reflects a balance of presentation, individual activity, small group activity, and total group response; the time allocated to each is appropriate	The schedule for the session has some variety and the time allocated is reasonable	The session is a "sit and listen" type of presentation

way I've found of a successful session. As one of my current doctoral students, Megan Cicconi, wrote: "I have presented many times and in many venues, but I think this was my most effective presentation. Last week I revamped a few aspects of it with Garmston's types participants in mind! It was a smash hit… thanks for already making a difference in my practice and craft". Figure 3 is a copy of Megan's plan for a workshop-type of training session on Web 2.0 tools for early childhood educators.

After teaching doctoral students to write conference proposals for decades, I have concluded that it is similar to teaching undergraduates how to write a lesson plan. We insist that they write objectives first and link them to standards; however, we know deep down that they are beginning with the "how to" and working backward. So, with doctoral students writing conference proposals, I just give over and let them describe the part they are most enthusiastic about—the actual session. Otherwise, they write a weak description and a proposal that does not match the interesting conference session they've planned. My suggestion for those new to writing conference proposals is begin with the minute-by-minute schedule and then go back and write three or four audience-centered outcomes, make sure that there is sufficient variety and pacing for all four of Garmston's (2005) audiences in Fig. 2, and prepare a conference blurb that does justice to what is planned.

Table 1 is a scoring rubric for a conference presentation that can be used for self-assessment.

Template for a Practical Journal Article

I designed and have taught a course in writing for publication for doctoral students since the 1980s and each year, they are eager to get my opinion about whether they "have what it takes" to become published authors. My perspective is that, all of them wrote well enough to succeed as graduate students; therefore, the ability to write is not the issue; rather, the challenge is expanding their writing repertoires to include less familiar academic writing tasks. My 17 years of experience as editor-in-chief for Springer, along with a wide array of other writing, reviewing, and editing roles (e.g., with the Rockefeller Foundation, National Association for the Education of Young Children, and Association for Childhood Education International, Pearson, Teachers College Press) would suggest that the sticking point with most rejected manuscripts is not the writing, per se. More commonly, it is a mismatch between the writing style of the work and the outlet, a disregard for the audience, a failure to follow instructions for submission guidelines, and a poorly prepared manuscript with multiple errors.

Although it is humbling to admit this, I have noted that, even after my doctoral students successfully complete a semester-long writing for publication course, when they ask me to read something they hope to publish later on it frequently fails to reflect what I taught them to do. I find myself commenting, "Remember what I taught you in writing class…." This year, I tried something completely different. Instead of wading through twenty-something pages from each student, I decided to insist that they learn the template for a conference proposal and a practical article.

Published writing is complicated because it tends to use all five modes of discourse at various times and to various degrees. My template for writing an article is based on the classic structure of the essay in which the introduction is represented by an inverted triangle; this represents that it begins more generally and quickly narrows to the point of the article (Kirszner and Mandell 2010). If you reread the first two paragraphs of this article, you'll see an example of this upside-down triangle. Note that it is not a long preamble. In fact, verbose introductions to articles are the place where the most cutting often is required. The conclusion does just the reverse—it is a right side up triangle that briefly touches upon the main points (that must match the main headings of the piece), and then broadens back out, returning to the issue that began the article. The keystone to the entire piece is called the pronouncement paragraph; this is where the writer lays out everything that will be included in the manuscript; it is intended as a preview of what is to come (Kirszner and Mandell 2010). It too must be in alignment with the main headings of the article. If you read the third paragraph of this article, you will see an example of a pronouncement paragraph. Figure 4 is an overview of that structure.

Here is an article template assignment to support authors in more efficiently producing a practical journal article:

1. Title—make sure it is specific and has a clear focus (it should not sound like a book title!)
2. Introduction—no more than one page of 12-point, double spaced print that uses the inverted triangle

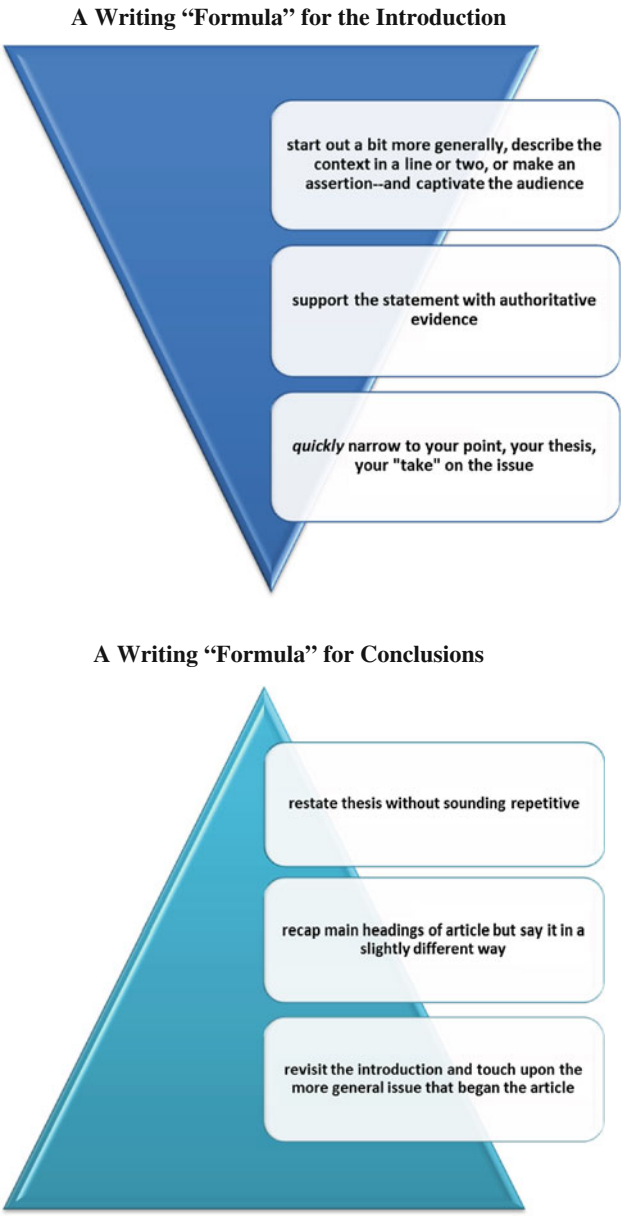

Fig. 4 A structure for article introductions and conclusions

Fig. 5 Example of a successful journal article. *Source*: Branson et al. (2008)

Example of a Successful Journal Article

Note how the title is very specific; the ones submitted by doctoral students tend to be far too general—more like book or encyclopedia titles. It is not possible to treat a general topic adequately in a short piece of writing. You must be specific and you must write for a particular audience.

Community Childcare Providers' Role in the Early Detection of Autism Spectrum Disorders
Diane Branson, Debra Vigil, and Ann Bingham

The pronouncement paragraph previews what is to come in the entire piece. Each item mentioned is perfectly matched to a main heading.

PRONOUNCEMENT PARAGRAPH

In this article, we present a case for the importance of early identification and early intervention by describing the impact of early experiences on brain development and the benefits of early intervention. We use vignettes to illustrate the range of impact autism spectrum disorders (ASD) has on specific developmental characteristics. This is followed by a discussion of research efforts to identify ASD at the earliest age possible. We provide a positive example of a childcare provider who uses developmental monitoring in order to make a referral for early identification of and early intervention for a child with autism spectrum disorders. We conclude by presenting evidence that pediatricians cannot be solely responsible for developmental screening and arguing that childcare providers should also screen child development.

MAIN HEADINGS

A logical argument to define key terminology.

Early Brain Development

Autism Spectrum Disorders

Early Signs of Autism Spectrum Disorders

Table 1: Early Signs of Autism (a synthesis of research)

Current Research on Pediatrician Developmental Surveillance Practices

The authors have incorporated examples from their professional practice; they have not just "talked about" these ideas, they show the readers what developmental screening by caregivers looks like.

Community Childcare Providers and Developmental Monitoring

Figure 1: Flowchart of Developmental Monitoring in Childcare settings

Table 2: Cost efficient and effective developmental screening tools

Table 3 Sharing your concerns with parents

There were numerous, helpful tables and figures included in the piece. Each one of these supports the central purpose of their article: to persuade caregivers to participate in early detection of Autism Spectrum Disorders and provide them with the tools they need to get started. The authors have been generous with advice and resources; they have enabled readers to benefit from their vast experience with early identification of autism.

Fig. 5 continued

CONCLUSION

The importance of early identification of all children at risk for developmental delays, and especially children with autism spectrum disorders, cannot be overstated. There is evidence that early intervention for children with ASD can prevent further abnormal brain development and lead to better developmental outcomes. The mean age of diagnosis for children with ASD is currently too high and it occurs 2–3 years after parents first recognize there is a problem with their child's development (Filipek 2000). Pediatricians have been the group of professionals most often targeted to perform developmental surveillance and screenings to aid in early identification of young children at risk for ASD. Recent research has shown that the majority of pediatricians are unable to follow practice guidelines proposed by the American Academy of Pediatrics in 2000 due to lack of time, lack of training and resources, and inadequate reimbursement for developmental surveillance. It is important that other professionals in the community who interact with young children on an ongoing basis be targeted to help with early identification procedures. It is time to increase attention and resources on developing community-based screening programs that include community childcare providers as partners in the identification and referral of children at-risk for autism spectrum disorders.

Notice how the conclusion briefly recaps the main points of the article, restates the thesis, and returns to the issue that began the article, taking it full circle.

Source: Branson, D., Vigil, D. C., & Bingham, A. (2008). Community childcare providers' role in the early detection of autism spectrum disorders, *Early Childhood Education Journal, 35*(6), 523-530.

structure; it will include the pronouncement paragraph (see item 3)

3. Pronouncement Paragraph—that previews the body of the work and—this is important—*matches* your headings
4. Main Headings—use the same format for each heading (e.g., all stated as questions, each begins with an -ing verb, etc.) and *make them specific to the focus* of the manuscript; no "generic" headings!
5. Illustrative material—at least two figures, tables, charts, graphs, checklists that save words and are helpful for the reader
6. Examples—write four *very* short examples based on your experience; try to pack more than one example into a sentence, such as:

> Yet how does a caring and committed early childhood practitioner negotiate meaningful literacy activities simultaneously with John, who is a native English speaker from a middle class home filled with books; Maya, a recently immigrated Serbian child, whose parents' English is halting at best; and Trevor, a child who is being raised by his functionally literate grandmother after his mother's incarceration for drug use? (Jalongo et al. 2003, p. 60)

7. Conclusion—follow the right-side up triangle structure; begin by touching on the main points/headings, then broaden back out to the more general issue that started the piece

Figure 5 uses an excellent article published in *Early Childhood Education Journal* by Diane Branson, Debra Vigil and Ann Bingham—all faculty members at University of Nevada, Reno—to illustrate how to put these ideas into practice.

The template approach to producing a practical journal article offers several advantages. First, if all of these pieces are in place, an author can write the article around the components. It is far less frustrating than writing page after page, cutting, pasting, and discarding ad nauseam. Second, it nudges the writer to break some writing habits that are almost certain to get a piece rejected, such as failing to find a focus and thesis, neglecting to consider the audience's needs, relying too heavily on quotations and previously published material, listing rather than synthesizing, and weak introductions/conclusions (Jalongo et al. 2003). Third, it results in shorter pieces that can be critiqued by an entire class or group of colleagues in a supportive, writing workshop type of atmosphere rather than twenty-something pages assessed by one or two peers and the instructor. Additionally, authors do not get so wedded to what they've written that they are resistant to major revisions. Fourth, this approach helps aspiring authors to realize that seeking criticism of their writing is a key to improving it rather than an ego-threat. Finally, the public review of others' work also models an experienced editor's think aloud about many different manuscripts. As one student stated, "It really helps me to hear all of the suggestions because I can

Table 2 Self-evaluation of a practical journal article

Article characteristics	Target 2	Acceptable 1	Unacceptable 0
General attributes			
Format/structure	Clearly has the structure of a professional journal article, including the introduction/conclusion, pronouncement paragraph, specific headings, and figures/tables/charts/ graphs as appropriate	Shows some evidence of the transition to the structure of a publishable article	Is written more as a master's-level paper for a class assignment or textbook-type of style
Audience appropriateness	Communicates effectively with the intended audience and supplies the right kind and amount of material	Considers the backgrounds of the readership	Fails to take the diverse readership into account
Logical argument	Begins with expert definitions, clearly identifies the issues, and offers research-based recommendations	Supplies some definitions, explains the issues, and/or makes an attempt at recommendations	Fails to define key terminology, identify the issues, and/or supply recommendations
Content/ originality	Reflects insight, originality, and unique perspectives that serve to advance the field	Offers some fresh perspectives on existing content	Does not advance knowledge in the field and is a rehash of existing publications
Literature review	Review is thorough, includes both classic and current sources; ideas are applied, analyzed, synthesized, and critiqued	Review is sufficient; however, the level of application, analysis, and synthesis is lacking or the review is dated	Review is inadequate and relies extensively on secondary sources (e.g., textbooks) or websites
Evidence/ persuasiveness	Consistently supports ideas with appropriate material from the professional literature, including empirical research	Supports most statements with authoritative and persuasive evidence	Makes statements without marshaling authoritative and persuasive evidence
Organization	Includes specific and helpful headings and subheadings that serve to guide readers through the piece and enable them to preview the entire work; each paragraph flows into the next seamlessly	Includes some headings; however, they are too general or not helpful in guiding the reader; paragraphs are generally arranged as they should be	Is a general discussion without headings that are specific and signal the main sections of the paper; paragraphs need to be reordered
Focus	Has a clear and interesting focus that is evident throughout the entire piece	Has a focus; however, it needs to be sharpened and more consistent	Lacks a consistent focus throughout
Concise	Gets to the point immediately and includes only what is essential	Is relatively concise and gets to the point but requires additional cutting	Wastes words and does not get to the point quickly
Balance	Has major sections that are approximately the same length	Has major sections that are somewhat similar in length	Includes some sections that are much longer than others
Voice	Has an authoritative voice of a knowledgeable professional; the work is scholarly, yet accessible	Has the voice of a graduate student beginning to enter the professional conversation	Has the voice of a student reporting on what was read
Manuscript Type	Makes it clear whether it is primarily a theoretical, practical, or research article in the title, abstract, and throughout the entire piece	Is predominately and appropriately framed as a theoretical, practical, or research article	Is a mixture of article types
Life	Incorporates many excellent examples that demonstrate the author's immersion in the ideas and engage the reader	Supports general ideas with concrete examples that make the work more readable	Includes vague or overly general concepts, making the manuscript dry
Synthesis	Has integrated theory, research, and practice	Has begun to cluster ideas	Reads more like a list of ideas
Specific features			
Title	Has a title that clearly sets the reader's expectations for the content and the approach	Has an acceptable title that still requires revision	Has a title that is too general or not sufficiently descriptive

Table 2 continued

Article characteristics	Target 2	Acceptable 1	Unacceptable 0
Abstract	Includes an abstract that not only summarizes but clearly establishes the focus of the work and does not repeat portions of the article	Includes an abstract that clearly summarizes the entire piece	Includes an abstract that is a repetition of a section of the article
Pronouncement paragraph	Includes a paragraph within the first two pages that is matched to the title, abstract, main headings, and conclusion	Includes a paragraph that previews the article but it is not carefully matched to the main headings, title, abstract, or conclusion	Does not include a paragraph that previews the entire article
Illustrative Material	Carefully crafted tables, charts, checklists, diagrams, student work samples, or other illustrative materials that enhance the overall presentation of the concepts are included and called out in the body of the paper, in APA style	Some tables, charts, checklists, diagrams, student work samples, or other illustrative materials are included	Limited use of tables, charts, checklists, diagrams, student work samples, or other illustrative materials
Mechanics	The manuscript has been spell and grammar checked, carefully proofread, and is virtually error-free	A few errors are evident; however, most of them are due to lack of familiarity with a more scholarly style of writing	Numerous errors are evident; many of them are common spelling or usage mistakes that should have been corrected long ago (e.g., apostrophe use in possessives/plurals, confusion of common words)
Accuracy	Is virtually flawless in terms of APA style, 6th ed.	Contains a few errors in APA 6th; the basics are mastered	Contains numerous APA, 6th edition errors
Conclusion	Gives a clear sense of having come full circle, tying everything together, and sends the reader off more enlightened as a result of investing time in reading the piece	Attempts to conclude by revisiting the introduction/main headings but does not fully accomplish the goal of wrapping everything up	Neglects to summarize by revisiting the introduction/main headings; does not give a sense of completion and simply stops

apply them to my writing too." Table 2 is a scoring rubric that authors can use to self-assess their work.

Conclusion

Teaching graduate students and mentoring new colleagues in writing for publication is an important responsibility of senior faculty members who have amassed experience in these matters. The benefits of mentoring are reciprocal. Newcomers learn how to publish and veterans of academic publishing–many of whom are at the adult stage of "generativity versus stagnation" (Erikson and Erikson 1998)—experience a sense of pride and accomplishment as their protégés succeed. As one small example of this, I supervised three doctoral interns, all of whom were pursuing the superintendent's letter of eligibility; their internship projects were a way of demonstrating their competence to lead. The projects that they devised were truly impressive and deserved wider distribution than being placed on the shelf in a storage room, so I required all of them to write a short article suitable for sharing with fellow administrators. At the outset, they were not pleased and (very diplomatically) pointed out that none of the other students were being required to do this; I persisted with a mixture of cheerfulness and rounds of editing. Months later, all three of the interns were successful in having the practical articles based on their projects published and they couldn't wait to share the good news. They had not only requirements, important as that is, but also had made a contribution to their field that could support fellow professionals striving for continuous improvement. This is what workshop-type of conference sessions and practical articles are all about: they are designed to be helpful. For fellow professionals seeking change, practical articles and conference presentations offer tools that save them time and effort while, for those still undecided, helpful presentations and publications can persuade audience members to attempt the changes that can improve professional practice. Although the templates suggested here are by no means the only way to accomplish these writing tasks, they offer a starting point that can build authors' self-confidence and enhance their chances for a successful outcome in writing for professional publication.

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