

Writing Scholarly Papers: A Window from my Experiences

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Abstract

This article discusses time-tested strategies for scholarly writing to assist early career researchers. It highlights the experiences of the author on how to become a successful scholarly writer. It discusses the need to follow research integrity and excellence required in scholarly writing as well as the essence of conciseness and clarity in research communication as key ingredients of scholarly writing. It examines the significant roles played by professional training, mentorship, and volunteering in giving researchers the skills and knowledge required for scholarly writing. The article assures that though scholarly writing may be seen as an intimidating activity wrought with a lot of challenges, it is an achievable goal for not only seasoned researchers but also early career researchers who are determined to share their novel research outputs with the global academic community.

Keywords: scholarly writing; peer review; mentorship; professional training; volunteering

INTRODUCTION

As an editor and reviewer, I have realized that many scholars struggle writing in a scholarly manner, thereby resulting in the rejection of their submitted manuscripts. I get very downhearted when recommendations are made by reviewers to reject a submitted manuscript. Yet, we can't help it because we are determined to improve the rigor and scholarliness in the manuscripts that find their way into the global academic community. Thus, sharing some helpful tips on the scholarly processes in writing, especially for journal articles was deemed very relevant and timely for this all-important conference. The art of writing is no easy task. Nathaniel Hawthorne, the American Novelist said something that has become a popular quote. He was comparing the art of reading to writing and this is what he said:

'Easy reading is damn hard writing' (Brainy Quote, n.d.).

Ann-Marie MacDonald shares similar sentiment expressed by Nicholas Hawthorne that 'writing is a hellish task' (Brockway, 2014). So, generally, writing does not come easy. It requires dedication, diligence, and perseverance. Tough skin is required to stand the despair, dejection, frustration, and confusion that are likely byproducts of the constant revisions and editing of writeups to be able to meet set criteria for writing. This is even more difficult for scholarly or academic writing

in general. In scholarly writing, original or novel contributions from investigating research gaps or lacunas in particular fields of studies are expected from researchers. It is a critical form of communication (Edmunds & Waldrop, 2018) that is technical, requiring that formal processes are meticulously followed (Pagliawan, 2017). Scholarly writing requires a serious tone in the voice expressed in the writing while heeding to the accepted conventional rules of language, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics (Driscoll & Brizee, 2011). However, despite the difficulty associated with scholarly writing, the desire to solve the perplexing challenges in our workplaces, communities, institutions, and the problems facing the world and letting the academic community know the output of our research motivates many of us to walk the path of scholarly writing.

These are some of the recent scholarly papers I have written within this COVID-19 period. I undertook these studies because I wanted to solve particular challenges confronting some marginalized women at their workplace (Figure 1), address the implications brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic in the fields of culture and education (Figure 2), shed light on the attitudes of local people on a traditional regulating instrument for sustainable tourism (Figure 3) and address the discrepancies in the tourism industry in Iran (Figure 4). The desire and determination to remedy these identified challenges motivated me to pursue these studies and more importantly, letting the world know via their scholarly reports. Thus, irrespective of the difficulties associated with scholarly writing, I was determined to surmount them.

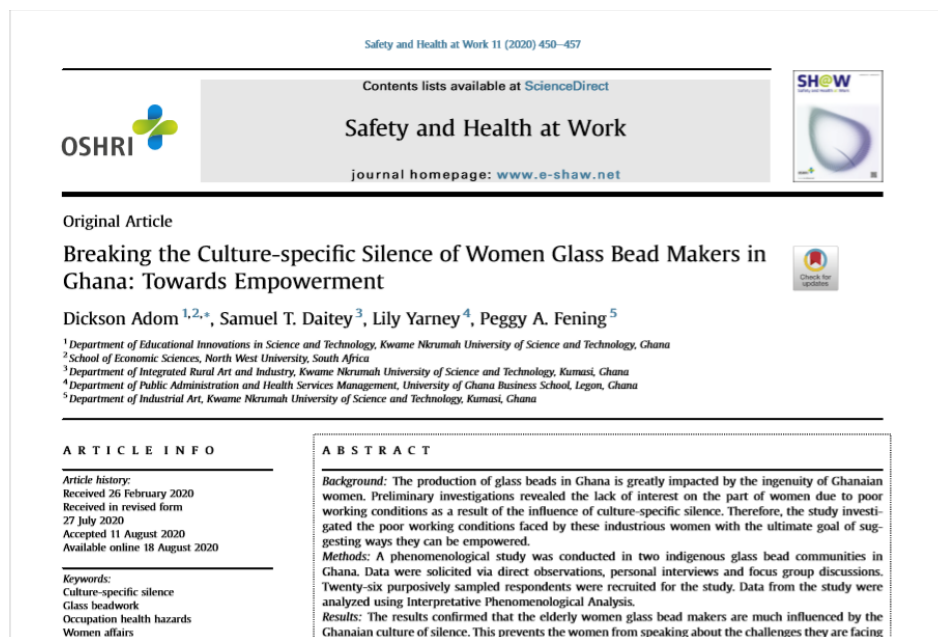


Figure 1: A published article by Elsevier's Safety and Health at work journal written by Dickson Adom and his colleagues

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Cultural and Educational Implications Of The COVID-19 Global Pandemic In Ghana

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Abstract

The study is a qualitative inquiry into the cultural and educational implications of the COVID-19 global pandemic in Ghana from the 3rd of March to the 16th of April, 2020. Thirty-Eight conveniently sampled study participants consisting of teachers, informal sector workers, health workers, and news reporters from the two epicentres of the COVID-19 in Ghana were recruited for the study. Data were generated via face-to-face, telephone, and video interviews and published news reports on the COVID-19. Data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive thematic analysis and document analysis. The

Figure 2: A published article by the RIMCIS journal written by Dickson Adom

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Original Research Article

Local attitudes toward the cultural seasonal hunting bans in Ghana's Bomfobiri Wildlife Sanctuary: Implications for sustainable wildlife management and tourism 

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history: Received 25 March 2020 Received in revised form 24 August 2020 Accepted 24 August 2020</p> <p>Keywords: Bushmeat Closed hunting season</p>	<p>This study investigated the attitudes of the people living in three adjacent communities close to the Bomfobiri wildlife sanctuary in Ghana concerning the observation of the cultural, seasonal closures of hunting. The cognitive and motivational approaches to attitude theory in wildlife management guided, under the phenomenology method, the collection of qualitative data on the importance of the seasonal closure of hunting and its implementation challenges. This inquiry was deemed crucial to improving the disjointed relationship between park management and local communities that often make wildlife conservation and tourism difficult at the Bomfobiri Wildlife Sanctuary. Forty-five key</p>

Figure 3: A published article by Elsevier's Global Ecology and Conservation journal written by Dickson Adom and his colleague



Figure 4: A published article by the Journal of Tourismology written by Dickson Adom and his colleagues

Scholarliness in communicating research calls for the demonstration of research excellence and integrity on the part of researchers. This would help researchers to win the support, confidence, and approval of the general public (League of European Research Universities, 2020; National Academy of Sciences, 2002). Therefore, it is a moral obligation for researchers to meticulously follow the ethics in research communication to the latter. Scholarly writers do not give any room to shortcuts or the lazy approach to writing such as 'cut and paste' jig-saw writing that often leaves such scrupulous writers in the web of academic dishonesty such as plagiarism (using someone's ideas without giving credit), data falsification (manipulating the results or data from the research), data fabrication (making up data or results) and any other dishonest means in the research process (National Academy of Sciences, 2009).

I must repeat that there are no shortcuts to scholarly writing. The long chain of activities must be followed even if that will mean staying in traffic for longer periods. What I mean is, it is better fulfilling each of the elements in the tall requirement list of scholarly writing, than pursuing the deadly shortcut methods that lead to the tainting of the reputation of the author as well as the institution they are affiliated with. Careful application of good summarization and paraphrasing as well as the tactful but sparingly use of direct quotes are indispensable skills needed for scholarly writing (Mulaney & Joliffe, 2005). This does not come on a silver platter. As one renowned Ghanaian pastor, Dr. Mensah Otabil said that 'success is not something you can do once but something you do consistently'.

Similarly, writing scholarly comes with constant practice (Cox, 2015) and it's a lifelong journey (Germano, 2005). When you understand the ethics and learn to write scholarly, writing will be a rewarding and interesting activity even though it is a difficult task (Cox, 2015).

Critical and constructive reading: A window to scholarly writing

Critical and constructive reading is closely knit to scholarly writing (Bailey, 2011). This is because scholarly works must demonstrate in-depth knowledge of previous research in the field (Forgasz, 2019). Critical and constructive reading involves scanning through the information to be read and zooming in to the useful information, asking yourself questions on what you have read and taking notes, whether using the traditional pen and paper format or taking the notes using electronic devices (Edward, 2008). To be able to find the gaps or lacunas in an area of research within a particular field or discipline, researchers must be abreast with the previous studies in the field. Authors with strong knowledge of previous research establish their credibility by having literary justifications, whether theoretical or empirical, to support the arguments they advance (Lee, 2011). I have received advice on this from many senior colleagues who encouraged me to read the articles published in the journals in my field of research, and advice I took to heart. Not only did I come to know the new trends of research in my field but I was able to know the language accepted in my field. The regular critical readings of published scholarly manuscripts in my field enlightened me on how to speak the tone accepted and understood by experts in my field. So, I advise you do the same. Make the reading of scholarly manuscripts in your field a habit and it would lead you to territories of applicable knowledge and skills in scholarly writing that will stay with you throughout your career as a researcher.

Clarity and conciseness in communication is required in scholarly writing

Another important element in scholarly writing is ensuring clarity and conciseness in our written research communication. Clarity and conciseness in writing are the hallmarks of writing scholarly (Shannon, 2011). Speaking of clarity in thoughts as a great characteristic of scholarly writing, Dean (2009) paints the meaning of clarity in his colourful quote:

'When you start to write...imagine how you would describe your favourite baseball game if your listener had never seen baseball played' (Dean, 2009: 133).

Thus, when we imagine our readers as not knowledgeable in the area of study we have investigated and that we need to explain in a way that they would understand us. This reminds me of Albert Szent-Gyorgyi, the Hungarian pharmacologist who won the noble prize in Physiology in 1937. He said: 'Research is seeing what everybody else has seen and thinking what nobody else has thought' (Wikiquote, 2020). If what we have discovered is new, meriting a space in the global scholarly diary or the global academic space, we need to communicate clearly for readers to appreciate the value of the treasure we have discovered. Poorly communicated research in writing often leads to the rejection of the manuscript. This is something I have seen most for

scholars with nationalities with the English language as a second language. Personally, when I started writing and wanting to get published in high-impact journals, I did receive very unfavourable feedback from reviewers on how I communicated my research in writing. Despite the novelty in my research, my manuscripts were denied entry into the high-impact journals. You wondering what helped me overcome this barrier.

I consulted several people to read through my manuscripts before they were submitted. I asked my trusted colleagues, and senior colleagues to read through my manuscripts for me. Peers who give honest feedback on manuscripts (Lee, 2011) we give to them to peruse are gold gems for our professional growth as researchers. I did consult the services of both subject experts and technical experts. As Shannon (2011) mentions, these persons would help improve the content, organization, and clarity of our manuscripts before we send them out to journals. This is crucial if we want to avoid possible desk reject by editors. While the subject experts were rigorously screening the content knowledge, technical experts on the other hand carefully worked on the syntax challenges related to language use. There are very good paid proofreading services and free editing software such as Grammarly, ginger, and others that are available to help in fixing the technical issues. This is just the pre-scrutiny of our manuscript so that it qualifies for editorial screening. After that, the work is again thoroughly reviewed by a certain number of peers invited by the journal editors. Even after working on their revisions and the manuscripts are published, avenues for post-publication reviews are available for some journals and repositories like Publons, all in the attempt of improving the scholarliness of the manuscript. Cox (2015) is right when he said that we gain mastery as writers when we get constructive feedback from others who critique and analyse our writeups thoroughly. Thus, to be a scholarly writer, you must learn to accept comments passed by second readers of your manuscript. We must develop tough skins to be able to withstand the sometimes harsh or brutal comments by some of the people who review our manuscripts. I agree with Roy Peter Clark that authors must learn to develop the right mindset to accommodate all forms of criticism passed on their manuscripts while turning the impolite but constructive remarks passed on their works into gold (Clark, 2006). Even when review comments lead to the rejection of the manuscript, positively channel the comments into improving the state of your manuscript.

Mentorship: A step in learning how to write from successful scholarly writers

It is important to find a senior colleague to serve as your mentor. Mentorship offers great assistance to early career researchers especially in the area of scholarly writing. Mentors are the first point of call who can offer the needed advice, guidance, training, and direction to help them find their feet in the art of scholarly writing. They will be more prepared to voluntarily help edit and review your manuscripts for you and coach you on the ethics in scholarly writing.

Professional training: A way to know the art of scholarly writing

Availing yourself for professional training in scholarly writing is important to writing scholarly. Such professional training would give researchers the platform to learn new knowledge and skills

related to scholarly writing (Antley, 2020). Early career researchers and seasoned researchers who want to be abreast with the current trends in scholarly writing always take the chance to attend professional development workshops, seminars, public lectures, and courses on academic writing. Enrolment in many of these scholarly writing courses. That is what assisted me greatly in learning the new developments in scholarly writing. I read courses on scholarly writing at AuthorAID, Publons Academy, Elsevier Researcher Academy, Coursera and others. I also attended research and thesis clinics in my country and other countries. I invested in my training with the earnings from the menial work I was doing to support myself. Fortunately, there are other travel grants I won for some of these overseas conferences and workshops.

Volunteering: Helping others leads to an enhancement of your scholarly writing capabilities

Volunteering to assist others to improve the level of scientific knowledge in their research manuscripts can offer great learning experiences to early career researchers. Volunteering helps in assisting volunteers in gaining experience and skills in the field of work they have volunteered, thereby enhancing their professional development (Low et al., 2007; Holdsworth & Quinn, 2010). While as a Ph.D. student, I volunteered in assisting MPhil students in my department by coaching them on how to write their research proposals, theses, and drafts of their manuscripts for journal submissions with the knowledge I have acquired in scholarly writing. Moreover, I volunteered as a reviewer for several journals in my fields of research of which I won a top peer reviewer award from the Publons Academy, New Zealand. Since then, I have served on several editorial boards and I am an editor myself. So, it is good to help others.

CONCLUSIONS

Concluding Remarks: You can be a successful scholarly writer

Writing scholarly does not come by chance. It is a product of continuous hard work, diligence, and progressive training. Though it seems a far-fetched, difficult, and quite intimidating experience, when you are guided by the ethics of integrity and excellence while availing yourself constantly to learn and apply the new trends of writing, scholarly writing is very possible. I think it is appropriate to ponder over Stanley Fish's truthful remarks about how to become a successful scholarly writer:

'It may sound paradoxical, but verbal fluency is the product of hours spent writing about nothing, just as musical fluency is the product of hours spent repeating scales' (Fish, 2011: 26).

Yes! The production of well-meaning, aesthetically pleasant music that could get everyone on their feet to dance along with it comes with regular and several hours of working on the music, trying to improve, revise and finetune it. Similarly, successful scholarly writers are not perfectionists who always produce the best sentences in their writeups but rather those who keep on writing and improving their writeups (Friedman, 1993). Scholarly writing comes with constant work on the writeup, trying hard to improve it through several forms of revisions by listening to

the voices of senior and experienced writers while meticulously following the principles that underpin the writing style. When these are done, you can be sure that scholarliness in writing could be achieved.

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