

WRITING LIKE A DREAM
CAIS Conference, 1 November 2019
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We will discuss how to write like a dream.
Remember these words: elegant, simple, clear, and a pleasure to read.

Resources

Docs 1-7 are in the Resources tab, K. Daly's professional page,
<<https://www.griffith.edu.au/criminology-institute/our-researchers/professor-kathleen-daly>>
Scroll down past publications, to the three tabs, one of which is Resources.

A. OPENERS

1. Doc 1: Will Dahlgreen (2015) on desirable jobs in Britain.
For methods, see the url in the reference list.
2. Doc 2: Tim Lott (2015): [Writing is] more like a horror film.

B. GETTING SERIOUS

1. What are the main emotions you associate with academic writing?
Doc 3: Helen Sword et al. (2018) survey of academic writers, including postgraduate students.

2. Two problems for academic writers:

Problem 1: Thinking they must write 'like an academic'

Examples

- Doc 4: C. Wright Mills (1959) on Grand Theory, excerpt from *The Sociological Imagination*, chapter 2 (pp. 25-33).
- Doc 5: Helen Sword (2012), selections from *Stylish Academic Writing*, chapters 1-3 (pp. 3-31).

Problem 2: Not knowing how to write

- not knowing grammar, parts of speech, punctuation
- not knowing one's writing voice and style
- not knowing how to think about writing (by, for example, reading writing guides)

3. Strive to write like a dream, that is, in ways that engage readers and give pleasure and enjoyment.

This applies to all the writing we do.

There are no short cuts. It takes practice, perseverance, and a desire to develop and hone the *craft of writing*. The key element is revising.

What do writing guides recommend?

Doc 5: Helen Sword (2012: 26-28) analysis of 100 writing guides. Unanimous in six areas: the ‘three C’s of clarity, coherence, concision; short or mixed-length sentences; plain English; precision; active verbs; and telling a story’. But differences in six other areas.

What do successful writers say?

Doc 6: Zachary Petit (2012) best quotes about writing.

C. MY EXPERIENCE AND ADVICE

1. Rely on your speaking voice and listening ear. Do not start solely with a blank page.
2. Read all types of writing. Don’t limit yourself to academic writing.
3. Develop your writing style and voice.

When we learn, we emulate what others do. Observe the moves authors make and their overall approach and style. Be aware of what you do and do not like in an author’s writing.

Sarah Cy (2018a, 28 May) says we ‘need mindful, deliberate practice to improve’, not reading and writing every day.

Jared Diamond (2019) describes writing as explaining to others:

... Writing lets me spend time reading up on all [types of] interesting things, going to the effort of trying to understand them and to explain them to myself, and then explaining them to others in the same way in which I have tried to explain them to myself.

4. Know grammar, parts of speech, spelling, and punctuation. If you do not know these, you will forever feel insufficient, awkward, unsure.
5. Find a teacher and work with peers. Use tools such as Sword’s the Writer’s Diet <<http://www.writersdiet.com/test.php>>. Have an editor or professional writer edit a sample of your writing.
6. Read books about writing.
 - Strunk and White (1959) *The Elements of Style* (see my website, under resources)
 - Zinsser (1980) *On Writing Well*
 - Sword (2012) *Stylish Academic Writing* (reviews research on academic writing, gives examples of ‘successful writers’, and suggests ‘things to try’ on pp. 170-172)
7. Consider developing a program. Sarah Cy (2018b, 12 August) advocates this. I do not have a program, but I am aware that others do. I protect writing time by not scheduling meetings in the morning.
8. Remember that success is not a smooth upward trajectory (Doc 7).

References and resources

Cy, Sarah (2018a) 8 powerful ways to increase your writing prowess ...

<https://writersinthestormblog.com/2018/05/8-powerful-ways-to-increase-your-writing-prowess-besides-reading-and-writing-every-day/?source=post_page-----120bf7ba7061----->

Cy, Sarah (2018b). Want to be a great writer? ... <<https://writingcooperative.com/want-to-be-a-greater-writer-then-dont-focus-on-writing-do-this-instead-120bf7ba7061>> (accessed 13 September 2019).

Dahlgreen, Will (15 February 2015). The top three most desirable jobs to have in Britain today ... YouGov. <<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2015/02/15/bookish-britain-academic-jobs-are-most-desired>> (accessed 16 September 2019).

For background and methods of the survey, see

<http://cdn.yougov.com/cumulus_uploads/document/b8ckr90wjr/InternalResults_150206_jobs_Website.pdf>, which can be accessed from the article as a link (as ‘see the full poll results’).

Diamond, Jared (2019). About me. Available at his website <jareddiamond.org> (accessed 7 May 2019).

Lott, Tim (20 February 2015). You think writing’s a dream job? ... *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/feb/20/tim-lott-life-as-an-author>> (accessed 16 September 2019).

Martin, Demetri (2011). *This is A Book*. New York: Grand Central Publishing.

Mills, C. Wright (1959). *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Petit, Zachary (22 June 2012). 72 of the best quotes about writing ... *Writer’s Digest*.

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Strunk, William and E. B. White (1959). *The Elements of Style*. New York: The Macmillan Company.

Sword, Helen (2012). *Stylish Academic Writing*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

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See <<http://www.writersdiet.com>>

Sword, Helen, Evija Trofimova, and Madeleine Ballard (2018). Frustrated academic writers. *Higher Education Research & Development* 37(4): 852-867.

Zinsser, William (1980). *On Writing Well: An Informal Guide*. New York: Harper and Row.