

Write, write, write... right?

By Ryan D. Stewart

| April 15, 2022



Photo courtesy of Adobe Stock/fizkes.

As scientists, we must write in order to communicate ideas, methodologies, results, and impacts. As my career has progressed, the time I have spent writing has increased while the time spent on other work has decreased. One must be able to write in order to be an effective scientist. A resource that I've found particularly useful is *The Science of Scientific Writing* (Gopen & Swan, 1990), which was given to me by my adviser and I now pass on to my graduate students.

Writing can be challenging, and in many cases, finding motivation can be the single biggest obstacle to overcome. Writing can feel lonely and nebulous. Therefore, I am passing on some tips and suggestions for improving the writing process that have been given to me.

It Gets Easier with Practice

The first suggestion is to practice. Like any skill, writing gets easier the more you do it. Along those lines, writing may seem less daunting if you find a consistent block of time to do it each day. It can be especially effective to set aside a block of time in the morning (even 30 minutes) and try to get as much down on the page as possible. After that time, sometimes the writing will be going so well that you won't want to stop. Other times, you will not have found any sort of groove and will be ready to move onto something else immediately. Both outcomes are fine; it's the effort that counts. It can also be helpful to think of writing as being similar to exercise—those first few minutes can be agonizing, but after you warm up and get in a rhythm, everything can start to flow. And just like exercise, once you start getting fatigued, it is a good idea to take a break and do something else.

Another good technique is to not stop at a hard point. If we aren't sure what to write next or how to describe something, it's a natural inclination to stop writing and move

onto something else, hoping that inspiration will strike in the future. What actually happens is that, knowing we are stuck, we find it much easier to procrastinate and not work on writing at all. If you find yourself in this situation, it can be helpful to get yourself back into a writing groove by working on another text or a different section. I've also found that a well-timed walk to the water fountain or coffee pot can be the perfect means to figure out how to tackle a challenging piece of text.

Good Readers Make Good Writers

Finally, it's been said that one of the best ways to be a good writer is to be a good reader. So, read as much as you can. This effort may entail reading good papers from your own field, textbooks, magazines, fiction, or whatever interests you. The more broadly you read, the easier you may find it to express your ideas.

To recap, there are many strategies one can use to become a more consistent and motivated writer. Some of the most important include: read a lot, write a lot, write even if you don't feel the motivation to do so, write if you aren't sure what you want to say, but above all, just write!

This column is brought to you by the Early Career Members Committee (ECMC), which serves members beginning their careers—new professionals and graduate students in agronomy, crop, soil, and environmental sciences. The ECMC consists of members from each of the three Societies who serve three-year terms. Learn more at www.crops.org/membership/early-career.

Improve Your Writing By Attending These Annual Meeting Sessions

There will be two sessions at this year's Annual Meeting in Baltimore in November that are targeted to early career researchers and graduate student attendees to help them with writing.

The first session is titled, "It's Time to Publish My Work! Where Do I Start?" In this session, attendees will find out answers to some common questions: What is a predatory journal? What should I consider when selecting a journal? How do I prepare an article for submission? What do I need to know about publishing from a dissertation? What are my funding opportunities? How can I work effectively with my adviser?

The second is titled, "Writing Manuscripts for Publication." It will provide an opportunity to learn about the manuscript publication process from current editors of the Societies' journals. These editors will discuss their journal's aim and scope, expectations of submitted manuscripts, and the peer-review process. A question-and-answer session with the editors will be used to discuss various other aspects of the manuscript writing and publication process.

Please check the meeting website (www.acsmeetings.org/) for more information as the program details are announced.

More careers and education

Back to issue

Back to home

. The authors. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Except where otherwise noted, images are subject to copyright. Any reuse without express permission from the copyright owner is prohibited.