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The Writing Issue!

In this issue we tackle one of the biggest challenges for undergraduate students: *How do I write like a scholar?*

**Writing Like A Scholar**

What does “good” writing mean? Rather than just looking at commas and quotations—which are very important—think of writing as a meaning-making tool and a way to participate in a conversation with other scholars. It’s important to understand the conventions of your discipline, because these are the vehicles to that allow you to communicate effectively.

How do I “write like a scholar?” Is it the same as writing for an audience in a specific field? “Writing like a scholar” means writing to other scholars in your field—so, in a sense, a specific audience. It also means using the vocabulary and style appropriate to that audience. Reading research in your field will help you understand what kinds of work are published, and what kinds of writer you’re going to be. You can do it, Scholars!

**Why We Write and How We Do It**

Dr. Heather Neff, McNair Director and Professor of English

As experts in the use of Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook and Reddit, you already know the importance of expressing your thoughts in writing. Writing opens up global dialogues about life, politics, science, culture and social change—and gives us the chance to communicate our ideas and leave a lasting record of our accomplishments for generations to come. Every student struggles with the challenges of “finding the ‘right’ words,” using formal grammar and mastering the seemingly endless rules of punctuation. As overwhelming as it might seem, there are several simple things you can do to learn to “write like a scholar:”

1) **READ.** Read anything and everything and find a way to read *constantly*. Use your phone to read the news everyday (the BBC.com has an extraordinary free app with international news!). Use your favorite social media sites to learn about different points of view and engage in conversations. Get books from the library on things you know nothing about and read them just because you’re curious about the content. Read before falling asleep every night (you’ll sleep better!) and read while you’re having coffee, or lunch, or dinner. Share a book with your best friend and **talk about it** afterward. Read “classics” to see why they’re “classics,” read detective, romance, and horror novels, and be sure to read history. **READ BECAUSE IT WILL MAKE YOU A BETTER WRITER,** without even trying!

2) **DON’T BE AFRAID TO READ RESEARCH IN YOUR FIELD.** It’s hard at first, but it’s also important. Make a “Power List” of words you don’t know and look them up later. Use your “power words” in your own papers and soon you’ll be speaking—and writing—like a scholar!

3) **A DRAFT IS NOT A FINISHED PAPER.** Accept it—you’re going to need to rewrite it, maybe even several times! Don’t give up if your first attempt to write feels frustrating or “misses the mark.” Every author, journalist and professor knows that a good paper, article or book needs to be edited, polished, even rewritten from scratch—often several times!
From One Scholar to Another
Dominique Canning, EMU McNair Senior and Linguistics Major

During my first year of college I thought my writing was fantastic. I look back now and think it's okay—not bad, but not great either. I'm okay with that, though, because that means my writing has changed for the better. It means I've actually managed to learn something.

I used to be very, very resistant to anyone reading my writing before it was finished. Getting feedback during the writing process feels awkward, and it's awful when the feedback isn't "this is the best thing I've ever read!"—but that means there's an opportunity to improve.

I hated editing. It's frustrating, but really, my McNair paper would've been an absolute mess without the (at least) 15 edits I did with my mentor, Dr. Eric Acton. The feedback I got and the editing I did helped ensure that my paper was accessible to people who didn't have a background in Linguistics or Queer Studies. That being said, the thing that's probably most helped my writing is practice.

It was uncomfortable, but I ended up with a paper I'm proud of and excited to share. In the past year, I've learned a lot about my writing. The most important thing I learned was to trust myself and my ability to write.

A Dive into Shark Infested Waters: Surviving Graduate School Interviews with Top-Ranked Universities
Shahana Chumki

Taking a tip from Mr. Spock: one does not simply walk in and become captain of the Starship Enterprise. One does not simply “ace” interviews, either. Sure, there are no space wars or alien attacks to worry about, but the graduate school challenge is just as risky, and just as important to your survival. In order to be given that precious offer of admission and funding, graduate candidates must not only be able to determine whether the school is a “good fit,” but to also demonstrate that they have the necessary qualifications the university is seeking.

Lesson #1: Universities interview more individuals than they plan to admit. So what does that mean for me, or other candidates? COMPETITION! (continued below).
In order to be remembered, I had to market myself to show that I would be great addition to the host university’s graduate program. So, I went to work!

Lesson #2: Collect as much information as possible about the research of your faculty interviewer, and prepare LOTS of questions. By going in with prior knowledge about the faculty research, I was able to engage them in an enjoyable and interactive discussion. Not only do you prevent yourself from responding with confused looks, but you demonstrate to professors that you are engaged and have initiative. It’s also important to note that these visits are a time to ask questions that you may have about the program, the environment, and especially funding. Do not be shy to ask, because more often than not, faculty are happy to answer.

Lesson #3: Be ready to break the ice. Unfortunately, being a wallflower leads to epic failure at grad school interviews. With meeting current graduate students, directors, and numerous faculty, it is always essential to talk about your experiences as a student and researcher! Practice describing your research in an interesting way, so the school can get an idea of your interests. In other words, always put your best face forward!

Lesson #4: Manage your nerves and “close with class.” Always get a good night’s sleep so that when the day arrives to meet with potential mentors, you are sharp and focused. Thank the interviewers, graduate students, and the director for their time, and always convey your appreciation for the invitation to visit. Remember, you are always on interview mode, until you fly off for home. So practice talking with your EMU mentors, peers, and faculty until you feel at ease. After all, it takes an entire crew to run the Starship Enterprise.

Shahana Chumki, EMU Presidential Scholar and McNair senior, works in Dr. Anne Casper’s lab. Shahana’s research examines genomic instability in chromosomal fragile sites. Shahana has received offers of admission to doctoral programs in Biomedical Sciences at Michigan State University and the Biological Sciences at Wayne State. She is currently waiting to hear from several other doctoral programs.

Graduate School Ticker...We’ve been admitted!!

Tiffany Browne (Dr. Ramona Caponegro, mentor):  M.A. Programs in Higher Education / Student Affairs at Eastern Michigan University, University of Indiana, University of Michigan and Bowling Green University

Shahana Chumki (Dr. Anne Casper, mentor):  Doctoral Programs in the Biological Sciences at Wayne State University and Michigan State University

Diamond Jones (Dr. Maria Milletti, mentor):  Doctoral Program in Chemistry at the University of Iowa

Rosaly Maldonado (Dr. Yvette Colon, mentor):  Master’s in Social Work Program at the University of Pittsburg

Mikki Smith (Dr. Janet Okagbue-Reaves, mentor):  Master’s of Social Work Program at Wayne State University

Summer Research Opportunity Program:  Brandie Bentley, University of Nebraska