

Professional and Scholarly Writing: Advice for Information Professionals and Academics

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ABSTRACT

There has been an explosion of new research and writing about all aspects of the information disciplines. Nevertheless, both academics and practitioners often find it difficult to engage in successful writing strategies. Indeed, writing is hard work, and doing it in a way that leads to publication is an even harder task. Since reading is essential to good writing, the challenges of learning to write are obvious. In this essay, I am drawing on many years of experience in writing and publishing, as well as considerable reading of writers' memoirs, advice books on writing, literary studies, and other perspectives on the experience of writing in order to offer a set of approaches that can be pursued over a lifetime of scholarship and practice. Writing is a craft or art to be learned, and learning demands paying attention to the audience, having clear objectives, being an avid reader, and possessing the ability to accept and learn from criticism. While information professionals and scholars incessantly write for each other, there are large segments of the public and other disciplines who they ignore. Fortunately, the tools and resources for improving one's writing are both broad and deep; discipline and realistic strategies are all that are required to improve one's writing and, ultimately, to achieve success in publishing.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Let's begin with the obvious. Writing is rewarding and interesting, but it is also difficult work. It is a craft that is learned through experience, experimentation, and exercise. It is something that cannot be developed by following some simple formula, although there are plenty of books suggesting just that. We become writers often by just giving it a go and learning by getting feedback, figuring out what it is all about by having our work critiqued, analyzed, and rejected. The focus of this essay is on scholarly and professional writing, not research, especially concentrating on books in addition to journal articles, conference papers, and reports. What I am presenting is a very early version of a project to write a book about scholarly and professional writing; as such it is a very preliminary discussion.

This essay has two parts. First, I have gleaned a set of observations about scholarly and professional writing from a systematic rereading project (one that is far from done) from my extensive personal library accumulated over the last three-plus decades. Rereading itself is a recognized area of research and observation (Lesser, 2007; Sparks, 2011). Second, I am commenting on some important needs the academic community must address regarding its professional and scholarly literature, ones that are particularly relevant for those in faculty positions.

We might, first, pause and ask, why do we write? This is a question basic to both scholarly and professional work, but especially relevant for those of us in the academy. If I ask this question at a professional and academic conference, most would assume that the answer is simple – to get tenure and/or a promotion. The old publish or perish threat hangs over our heads. However, while this may be a practical response, it is a very limited way to think about writing. We write because we want to be remembered and desire to have an impact. It is why libraries and books are so often targeted for destruction during wartime and times of societal unrest (Knuth, 2003). Humans are driven to write. It is why there are so many books still being published every year, despite the conviction of many that the printed book is dead. One way in which I assess my own career is through the books I have written, one reason why I keep them neatly arranged on my university desk. They remind me of events in

my life, students I have taught, professional issues I have wrestled with, my hopes for our profession, and, as well, of the books I have not had time to tackle and books I have not had time to write. Books are the exemplary means by which to convey knowledge.

2. LEARNING TO WRITE: PRACTICAL ADVICE

For many of us, learning is a painful, arduous process. One of the hardest things to learn about writing is how to take criticism. Much of it can be brutal, and we need to develop the ability to learn from even the harshest comments about what might help us make it better. Roy Peter Clark, considering creative writing, states that having the “right frame of mind can transform criticism that is nasty, petty, insincere, biased, and even profane, into gold” (Clark, 2006, p. 236). Let me reassure you that this is easier said than done. My experience in my own field is that archivists are tough critics, and they can be as nasty as reviewers in any field (they might even be worse than most). Let me also reassure you that reading criticism never gets any easier over time; I get as irritated now as I did forty years ago, but I almost always walk away with a better essay or book as a result. Or as writer Bret Lott acknowledges, “even the worst rejection I ever got taught me something” (Lott, 2007, p. 147). I can affirm this.

Learning to write is not just about learning to accept criticism; it is also about practice. As anyone knows who plays a musical instrument, endeavors to create art, or participates in sports, practice can be deadly dull. Stanley Fish reminds us that writing, of any variety, is a form of artistic expression, requiring practice and experimentation: “To be sure, your eventual goal is to be able to write forcefully about issues that matter to you, but if you begin with those issues uppermost in your mind, you will never get to the point where you can do verbal justice to them. 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, p. 26). We should write every day, tuning and fine-tuning prose, perhaps working on a long-term project like a book. Even if you throw it in the trash, something I don't recommend you do, you will gain confidence about the

effectiveness of writing and something of publishable value may emerge. But we need to take chances if we hope to have an impact, and increasingly, academics are conservative in their written work. We need to write differently, and better, in order to do this, since there seems to be a difference between what is recognized as good writing and what academics do. Helen Sword offers, however, ways to correct this problem, such as the advice “academics who care about good writing could do worse than to study the opening moves of novelists and journalists, who generally know a thing or two about how to capture an audience’s attention” (Sword, 2012, p. 27). Steven Pinker, a cognitive scientist and a self-professed avid reader of style manuals, has given us a practical guide for writers who want to write better, meaning clearer and in a manner that reaches an audience of non-specialists, describing the importance of style in this way: “Style . . . adds beauty to the world. To a literate reader, a crisp sentence, an arresting metaphor, a witty aside, an elegant turn of phrase are among life’s greatest pleasures” (Pinker, 2014, p. 9).

What all academics have in common is the agony and ecstasy of the dissertation. However, in terms of a career of research and writing, you must move on beyond the dissertation. Forget the dissertation. I don’t mean this literally, since writing the dissertation and having it accepted is a necessary part of finishing the doctorate and acquiring the academic position one wants. But I am not completely sure that what we convey to a student about the dissertation is useful for future scholarly writing (it is useful for the research process). As we all know, very few dissertations are ever published and when they are they generally don’t look much like the original dissertation. William Germano, an experienced editor, tells us that graduate students probably received little advice about writing, so he offers it as part of his book about revising the dissertation into a book: “Writing is a lifelong occupation, an avocation, a battle, and in it we find out what we think and who we are” (Germano, 2005, p. 128; see also Luey, 2003). Learning about ourselves is, perhaps, what makes writing so hard.

I urge the emerging generation of scholars to focus on a book. The focus of the academic scholar today, at least in the information professions, seems to be on the journal essay, not the monograph, mimicking science (but not all that we do falls within a scientific para-

digm). Archivists, stressing that their field is a science, believe that journal articles in a scientific style are the way to go. Jerome McGann explains what is happening in his field, acknowledging that the

dissertation work in literary and cultural studies... is now regularly shaped to short-term market demands, which respond to a calendar that has little relation to the fundamental needs of humanities research and scholarship. Important work is not being done, is positively shunned, in graduate programs because academic presses will almost certainly not publish it any more (McGann, 2014, p. 129).

I think the same has happened in fields like archival studies. Seeing themselves as a new aspect of the information sciences, they have been attentive to publishing formulaic articles in top-tier journals. While this might result in tenure and promotion, it might not do much to build greater attention from other information fields, as well as the historical, literary, and social sciences – all fields interested in the archival record or document.

It is easy for academics to get stuck in formulaic writing, when what they need is an outlet for creatively discussing their research and insights. Umberto Eco provides a glimpse into such frustrations: “One could say that, creativity aside, many scholars have felt the impulse to tell stories and have regretted being unable to do so – and that is why the desk drawers of many university professors are full of bad unpublished novels” (Eco, 2011, p. 6). While I am not issuing a call for academics to write novels or short stories (although they can be fun), I do think that the many great stories trapped within archives and even within our varied information disciplines could perhaps be better presented with a bit more flair than what we normally see in our literature, perhaps because we do not see ourselves as writers. There is an entire field of creative non-fiction we can and should learn from.¹ We need to break out of the traditional, safe box of our professional and scholarly literature.

We have been bombarded by claims that all research and writing is now collaborative or theoretical. It is not. Many writers of fiction and creative nonfiction have commented on how and why writing is a solitary pursuit (see, for example, Duras, 2011). The solitary nature of writing is sometimes made more difficult by

the persistence and labor that is required to achieve any amount of success. It also seems to be the case that Theory is the primary driver of much of our research. This can be seen as a positive development, but it also has resulted in much impenetrable writing that seems to be more about the theory than the research topic. Theory, grand and not so grand, has emerged as a driver in many research and publication projects across disciplines. But theory can obscure as well as illuminate. Robert Alter laments how theory has been substituted for the study of literature, arguing that we need to regain our passion for and pleasure from reading literature. He also comments on how the shift to theory as the focus of literary research has led to the acceptance of bad writing (Alter, 1996). Other fields have had individuals express similar concerns, such as Bender's worries about history: "As historians eschewed biography, narrative style, and large topics, our writing also became analytic: an explanation of the nature of the sources, methodology (often quantitative), and particular findings. We began to imagine not a general reader but fellow specialists at our elbow" (Bender, 2015, p. B5). Writing clearly ought to be seen as an asset in academic writing, although it is often not. Cornelia Dean, considering scientific writing, argues, "When you start to write a science story, imagine how you would describe your favorite baseball game if your listener had never seen baseball played" (Dean, 2009, p. 133) Good advice. The stress on theory in literary studies has been burdensome for some. Denis Donoghue tries to call us back from the precipice, noting, "Any system can become a prison: a tradition we have inherited, a style we have adopted, an official terminology that tells what to think" (Donoghue, 1998, p. 182). Since we are involved in a professional community, we must always have some focus on practice and other aspects of work that is generally more like a craft than a science.

One story we all possess is that about ourselves. There are times when we should embrace our own stories. Although clearly we have to be careful when and how we do this. Twenty years ago, William Zinsser

described our time as the "age of the memoir" (Zinsser, 1998, p. 3), and I don't think much has changed since then. Besides, being objective is not all it's cracked up to be. Patricia Hampf and Elaine Taylor May observe something all archivists know, that "the record always retains blank spaces – whether the record emerges from archival sources or from personal memory" (Hampf & May, 2008, p. 3). At the least, we should be trying to fill in the blanks about ourselves, using our own experiences to speculate about what should go in those spaces. This is especially relevant for those of us who are at transition points in our lives and careers, such as nearing retirement (my personal situation), when our observations may be useful or, at the least, interesting to others in the field. Most of us think of ourselves as information professionals, but that can put us into genres of writing that are stultifying. As Marilyn McEntyre observes, "What stories offer is, in a sense, the opposite of information, at least in the ways they invite understanding" (McEntyre, 2009, p. 121). As an archivist, I am interested in something different than information; I am focused on evidence, memory, accountability, and justice (among other things).

One challenge that we all face comes from the growing pressures on academics to publish and to publish regularly. Most academics probably measure success by whether they achieve tenure or not, although this is becoming more problematic as the number of tenure stream positions are shrinking and, in general, tenure seems destined to disappear. A variety of writers provide other interesting measures. Bonnie Friedman keeps it simple, stating, "Successful writers are not the ones who write the best sentences. They are the ones who keep writing" (Friedman, 1993, p. xiii). It may be a sad commentary that academia seems now to put a premium on quantity or frequency of publication rather than on its quality or impact (of course, many will argue that the objective is *both* quantity and quality). But the real goal should be in developing a broad audience for our work. Richard E. Miller, for example, observes that "If there is to be lasting hope for the future

¹ We need to explore and exploit the notion of creative non-fiction, defined by Gutkind and Fletcher in this way: "The word 'creative' refers simply to the use of literary craft in presenting nonfiction – that is, factually accurate prose about real people and events – in a compelling, vivid manner. To put it another way, creative nonfiction writers do not make things up; they make ideas and information that already exist more interesting and often more accessible" (2008, p. 12).

of higher education, that hope can only be generated by confronting our desolate world and its urgent, threatening realities. The only way out is through” (Miller, 2005, p. 27). In other words, we need to focus on the bigger picture.

When one reads writing advice books, there is always a section on the setting up of personal space for writing. Personally, I like to work surrounded by my library of physical books, while connected to a wealth of other resources via my computer. As so many commentators on the debate of the future of printed books have said, the role of printed books for shaping personal identity and meaning, as well as serving as reference sources, is essential (Bonnet, 2013, p. 112). We must build a personal library and place to work quietly and in solitude (except for all those voices whispering to you from behind their spines), counter to those who assert that the only important research is collaborative (my own research is collaborative in the sense that it is based on a wide range of reading and reflection across multiple disciplines). Of special relevance for archivists is the recognition of the materiality of writing, whether we use pen and ink or keyboard. This kind of materiality has caused some to see that the printed book will remain, despite whatever new digital technologies emerge. Alberto Manguel adds some perspective:

For many years now we have been prophesying the end of the book and the victory of the electronic media, as if books and electronic media were two gallants competing for the same beautiful reader on the same intellectual battlefield. First film, then, television, later video games and DVDs and virtual libraries have been cast as the book’s destroyers All readers may be Luddites at heart, but I think this may be pushing our enthusiasm too far. Technology will not retreat, nor, in spite of countless titles predicting the twilight of the printed word, do the numbers of new books printed every year show signs of diminishing (Manguel, 2010, p. 193).²

Every academic needs to develop their own distinctive style and voice, while learning that different journals, book publishers, and research genres often require a particular kind of style. What is style? Ben Yagoda defines style in this way: “Every time we write a word, a phrase, a sentence, we have to choose from what seems like an infinite number of acceptable candidates. Then, just as significantly, we choose how to link the sentences together into paragraphs. Together, these decisions constitute a style” (Yagoda, 2004, p. 29). Yagoda thinks of style like a writer’s fingerprint. Academics and scholars often don’t think of style, but they usually are mimicking a certain style, sometimes tailoring to those of particular disciplines and journals. This is not always conducive to helping us gain a broader audience or to have a more significant impact.

Learning about style (and other aspects of writing) requires us to be readers. Nearly every book or essay about writing asserts that good writers are good readers; indeed, there is almost universal consensus about this. Reading books is a critical element in forming our characters. Franchine Prose, a prolific fiction writer, adds, “Like most, maybe all, writers, I learned to write by writing and, by example, from books” (Prose, 2006, p. 2). There is no reason not to believe that academics and professionals other than novelists and short fiction writers also can learn to write in this way.

Becoming familiar with the book format requires us to develop some knowledge about the technologies of publishing. Authors now have many options for publishing, but their responsibilities for pursuing such a venue have become complicated, as seen in a study about the erosion of online footnotes, requiring that authors maintain detailed records about their sources in ways not expected before now. Michael Bugeja and Daniela V. Dimitrova worry that “vanishing online footnotes undermine the building blocks of research, and their disappearance raises concerns about the reliability and replicability of scholarship” (Bugeja & Dimitrova, 2010, p. 8). These authors consider that “simply by changing and renaming servers, computer tech-

² Piper (2012) argues that we need to cease worrying about the book’s future and focus our attention on its meaning. Darnton adds, “Whether printed on paper or stored in servers, they [books] embody knowledge, and their authority derives from a great deal more than the technology that went into them” (2009, xvi).

nicians routinely destroy for citation purposes entire archives on a scale as disastrous as the legendary but mysterious fire at the ancient Library of Alexandria” (p. 72). This is a reminder that all writing involves the use of tools and each new generation of tools brings challenges and promises (D. Baron, 2009, p. 72).

The nature of publishing is intimately connected to essential matters like authorship, reading, and, in academic circles, the future of faculty and their roles within the university and society. Kathleen Fitzpatrick handles a variety of such issues, such as the future of the monograph, the changing circumstances of peer review, basic writing principles, the nature of texts, and how we preserve texts. She argues that new digital publishing technologies call into question the idea of authorship:

Everything published on the web exists, in some sense, in a perpetual draft style, open to future change; we need to recognize both the need this creates for careful preservation of the historical record of the stages in a text’s life and the equal importance for authors of approaching our work openly, thinking about how our texts might continue to grow even after they’ve seen the light of day (Fitzpatrick, 2011, p. 72).

Such notions have huge implications for how academics think about the task of writing, especially for e-publishing. Fitzpatrick surmises, for example, that “until scholars really believe that publishing on the web is as valuable as publishing in print – and more importantly, until they believe that their institutions believe it, too – few will be willing to risk their careers on a new way of working, with the result that that new way of working will remain marginal and undervalued” (Fitzpatrick, 2011, p. 10). Fundamentally, publishing in electronic form can transform our notion of the final text. These are all issues you must think about as you build an academic career.

Discussion about the future of publishing and the book can be stressful, exaggerated, and nasty. A balanced perspective can be found with Naomi Baron’s recent study, concluding that “The future of publishing seems headed for a hybrid model. One possibility is that fiction, or at least light fiction, will become heavily digital, while nonfiction and maybe fiction classics stay

largely print” (N. Baron, 2015, p. 222). Baron teases out the differences in digital and analog writing and reading, with such assessments as “screens hasten us along. Print invites us to linger” (N. Baron, 2015, p. 157). Some of Baron’s concerns are particularly relevant for scholars and academic researchers, since “even writers who embrace digital media are worried about the effects of eReading on people’s willingness to engage with involved ideas” (N. Baron, 2015, p. 165).

There is universal agreement about other aspects of learning to write. An important one is the need to have a mentor. Reading writing advice books also requires that you pay attention to the acknowledgements these authors give to other authors and editors. It is important to develop a relationship with trusted colleagues who can provide blunt input into your writing. But I wish to extend this a bit, in a way that connects this to the larger task of reading. Haunt bookstores. If you are lucky, and have a good bookstore in your area, you should be a frequent visitor. Novelist Pat Conroy describes his discovery, after moving to Atlanta, of a secondhand bookstore influencing his reading and writing:

I had stumbled upon the secret watchman of the most profound and illustrious intellectual life I would ever experience. Thousands of books roared out my name in joyous welcome when I entered that shop for the first time. Their presence both attracted and intimidated me. Already my calling as a writer had altered the course of my life, yet the two books I’d written seemed anemic to me, boilerplate at best, and I lacked the understanding, the sheer depth of culture I’d need if I were to touch the sourceless, incandescent seas that roared inside me (Conroy, 2010, p. 110).

When I enter a bookstore I don’t see lots of books, but I perceive thousands of others wishing to provide advice and assistance in my writing. Years ago I stated that wandering through every section of a bookstore will uncover different perspectives on the nature of archives and documents; this is equally true for writing. We can learn by example as well as by self-help books. Everywhere there is someone wanting to help me; I just need to look.

I have one final piece of advice to offer. Keep teach-

ing. Those of you pursuing faculty positions in research universities may be so interested because you enjoy research and publishing and see teaching and other responsibilities as burdens to be overcome. Instead, you need to search for ways to mesh your teaching and publishing in ways that support each other and enrich both activities.³ There is no better way to learn about how to communicate than to teach a group of disgruntled, agitated, and distracted students about the area you are committed to and see as important. Teaching is not just a performance; it is a form of writing. One helps the other, and with a little imagination and energy both can be meaningful.

3. A GRANDER PERSPECTIVE ABOUT PROFESSIONAL AND SCHOLARLY WRITING: SOME PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS

As I suggested at the beginning of this essay, I also intended to address some needs related specifically to the realm of archival studies, the area of research and teaching with which I am most familiar. Not that long ago, this field lamented the lack of people producing a theoretical and research literature about all aspects of records, the archival impulse, archival institutions, and so forth, as spelled out in Frank Burke's oft-cited essay on the topic (Burke, 1981). No one now can deny that the literature is not richer and deeper than ever before, with both archivists and other scholars and professionals studying archives and the archive in new and interesting ways.⁴ Burke's arguments have been used as ballast for both the movement to strengthen graduate archival education and to produce a more rigorous scholarly and professional literature. Burke's essay was part of an important debate about the nature, extent, and relevance of archival theory, and as such it worried some in our field that the increasing emphasis on theory might not build or reinforce a wall between archival

academics and practitioners (Stephenson, 1991). For the moment, I do not think this is something to worry about, as the publication of basic textbooks has increased in both quantity and quality and there are even some indications of textbooks building on research to offer a richer and better informed practice manual.⁵ It is worth some additional thought about how well the textbooks and professional journals are reflecting the newer research, but that is a topic requiring more research and debate.

What is the lingering problem we still face with our literature? It is clear writing about archival issues (or those of other information disciplines) in a way that reaches the public. It is a need for what some have called public scholarship. What is public scholarship? Steven Pinker, who describes himself as a public scholar, gives a practical description of what this is about:

The curse of knowledge is the single best explanation I know of why good people write bad prose. It simply doesn't occur to the writer that her readers don't know what she knows – that they haven't mastered the patois of her guild, can't divine the missing steps that seem too obvious to mention, have no way to visualize a scene that to her is as clear as day. And so she doesn't bother to explain the jargon or spell out the logic, or supply the necessary detail (Pinker, 2014, p. 61).

Given the importance of archives or information in our society, past and present, one might wonder why we do not have a greater public scholarship about it. There are many other scholars and freelance writers who have written about these topics in a manner reaching people outside of the field and the academy, suggesting the potential for such an effort.⁶ We have had some publicly accessible volumes that have come close to archives, just to focus on this aspect of the information disciplines, in a manner we could support;

³ I have explored this issue more fully in my "The Ethics of Teaching."

⁴ Caswell's *Archiving the unspeakable* (2014) is the best recent example of new archival scholarship emanating from within the archival profession.

⁵ The Society of American Archivists has continued its commitment to publish basic manuals with various versions of the Archival Fundamental Series. For an example, in my opinion not completely successful, of harnessing research and theory to a set of practical principles and processes, see Oliver and Foscarini, *Records management and information culture* (2014), whose book represents a good start in the right direction.

⁶ I explored this in my "Accountability, public scholarship, and library, information, and archival science educators."

Matthew Battles' recent books on the library, books, and writing come to mind (Battles, 2004, 2015; Battles & Schanpp, 2014).

There are many scholars and academics from numerous disciplines who have become effective public scholars and can serve as role models. Henry Petroski has come from engineering, not a field one would think of in terms of clear and accessible writing, but has written wonderful books on design and technology concerning topics such as the pencil and toothpick (Petroski, 1992, 2008); I have used the book on the pencil in my archives courses and it certainly could be used in a course on information science. Witold Rybczynski, architect and architectural critic, has revealed for us the nature of architecture and design, in a series of fascinating books (Rybczynski, 2002, 2013, 2015). And the late Neil Postman, a professor of communications and media, gave us a series of important books on issues of technology, media, and education, many of which remain in print and are considered classics (Postman, 1993, 2005). What all these books have in common is that they tell compelling stories about important matters without obtuse jargon or theory. They give both hope and models for us. But doing this will require a new generation of scholars who see this as an important task, doctoral programs which will orient the next generation of faculty to take this on (in addition to their other requirements for teaching, research, and publication), a professional community which will provide a stimulating forum for nurturing such work, and an academy that recognizes and rewards public scholarship. This is a tough agenda.

4. SOME WARNINGS AS A WAY OF CONCLUDING

Some of what I have written may seem impractical. I am essentially arguing that in order to be successful academics and professionals we need to produce, at least a portion of our scholarship, in a manner and venue that is accessible to the public and practitioners. It is essen-

tial for us to do so in order to support our professional missions as well as to build a publication record that is useful for the education of future archivists and other information professionals. There have been examples of broadly appealing texts on aspects of information and the information society, but these, while useful, often have been written by individuals outside of the academy and focusing on controversial or contentious issues (Cox, 1998).

So, why has this not happened? Besides the obvious ever shifting nature of the university and its professional schools toward becoming impediments to some of this, in the case of archivists we have been busy over the past generation or two in laying the foundation for a new, more rigorous graduate education (and because so much of what now goes on in higher education works against loftier goals and more idealistic agendas) (see, for example, Graff, 2003). This has required us to make the case that we are legitimate faculty scholars, by producing a wide range of peer-reviewed and other research, and colleagues, by doing administrative and other service tasks. However, we are now at the point where we could produce some of this kind of public scholarship, as well as to argue that it is a legitimate element for tenure and promotion. This kind of scholarship could take the form of traditional publications but also community events, blogs, museum exhibitions, documentaries, Web sites, and anything that explains our work and connects us to the public and the practitioners in our own field. Everyone could benefit from this. I know there are individuals who possess both the character and the skills to do this.

This will not be easy, especially as the academy continues to evolve and faculty face more pressure to take on a variety of demands in an environment of increasing public scrutiny and political pressures.⁷ The greatest challenge we will face in managing our careers is having a strong commitment to reaching a broad professional and public audience while fulfilling the expectations placed upon us as faculty. The academy, with all of its traditions and other issues, is slow to change. Paul Dickson, an adjunct lecturer in the humanities in Australia,

⁷ Just another reason why every aspiring, young, and veteran faculty member ought to be regular readers of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and its excellent news coverage and opinion pieces of all matters academic. Its coverage is both balanced and broad.

gets to the heart of the matter when describing his experience while on the job market, noting the reactions he received when stating his ambitions to reach a public audience with his writings. Dicken states, “One way or another, we as academics have ceded the public communication of ideas to journalists and celebrities and other nonexperts,” lamenting how the university has not delivered on this aspect of serving a greater public good. Why? Because “writing for a popular audience does not count toward tenure.” Dicken then concludes with the obvious, “If we really are committed to the old-fashioned ideals of education and the pursuit of knowledge – and in today’s corporate environment, that is no longer a given – it seems that we should be rewarding the attempt to reach a broader audience” (Dicken, 2015, p. A60).

Each faculty member needs to become competent in setting their own career objectives, based on a personal sense of calling to the university and understanding of the university’s place and role in our society and culture. Other individuals in the information professions have similar tasks. I believe there are ways to do this, again, of course, requiring hard work and a steady commitment. Each person needs to understand what is required of them to achieve tenure and promotion or, in circumstances where they are on a contractual arrangement basis (which is where an increasing number of people will be in the future), renewal and reappointment. What they also need to comprehend is that as long as they satisfy or exceed such requirements they will be able to do other things (you might get some negative feedback about some of this, but that is the nature of the academic village and its tribal customs).⁸ In other words, you do not need to give up on your greater convictions about playing a role in society while also functioning in the university or in some particular part of the information professions.

What I hope will happen is that we will be able to change some of this. Universities and their culture do change (although not always for the better). What you may have to do is to demonstrate the importance of

good clear writing, addressed to both a coterie of specialists and peers and to the public and others in the real world, for the time when you are in a position to make changes for the better (such as rewarding public scholarship, understanding teaching as a form of research as well as being dependent on research, and including involvement with community and the public as essential aspects of being a professor). Let me finally add, doing this can be personally rewarding *and* fun.⁹ And, at least, you will sleep better at night for having taken this path. Included with this essay is a brief list of print resources for assisting in improving scholarly and academic writing and some advice for such advice. You will develop your own lists as you gain experience.

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⁸ For a tongue-in-cheek exploration of the nature of academic relationships and institutions, see Adams, *The academic tribes*.

⁹ We have not had enough writing about the fun and rewarding aspects of academic careers. For a classic assessment of such aspects of work in the university, see Axtell, *The Pleasures of Academe* (1998). A sense of humor also helps; see Lang, *Life on the Tenure Track* (2005).

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Appendix A

Resources for Scholarly and Professional Writing

Below is a brief list of some readings intended to serve as resources for improving scholarly and professional writing or, at least, to promote reflection about the nature, audience, and strategies for such work. It represents a sampling of the kind of print materials one can find to help.

Naomi S. Baron, *Words Onscreen: The Fate of Reading in a Digital World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *Planned Obsolescence: Publishing, Technology, and the Future of the Academy* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

William Germano, *From Dissertation to Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, *They Say/I Say: The Moves That Matter in Persuasive Writing* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2007).

Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* (New York: Anchor, 1995).

Steven Pinker, *The Sense of Style: The Thinking Person's Guide to Writing in the 21st Century* (New York: Viking, 2014).

Andrew Piper, *Book Was There: Reading in Electronic Times* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

Stephen J. Pyne, *Voice and Vision: A Guide to Writing History and Other Serious Nonfiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

Richard Rhodes, *How to Write: Advice and Reflections* (New York: Quill, 1995).

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

Appendix B

Some Tips for Scholarly and Professional Writing

What follows is a miscellany of tips about scholarly and professional writing intended to stimulate thinking about this activity; the tips are in no particular order.

Develop the right attitude in taking criticism, so as to learn from it and use it to improve your writing.

Practice, practice, practice. Experiment, experiment, experiment.

Forget the dissertation. It was a learning exercise. Move on.

Focus on the book. Use journal articles to get writing experience and to stake out your research territory.

Tell stories. Stories will always be remembered and leave an impression.

Embrace solitude. Set up a space for writing, surrounded by your own personal library and writing tools.

Use theory as a framework, not as the focus. Theory is usually a means to an end.

Use simple, clear language but develop your own unique style. You should want your work to be accessible to other scholars, practitioners, and the general public.

Don't be afraid to write about yourself; you are often part of the story.

Develop personal objectives for measuring success in research and writing.

Understand the technologies of publishing so that you understand your options.

Wander regularly through bookstores, looking for advice and inspiration. Bookstores are an essential part of the academic and professional diet.

Read broadly and deeply and keep reading.