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Writing with Purpose(s): A reflection on different conceptions of academic writing in contemporary higher education

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Abstract

Educational research literature presents three theoretical approaches for understanding academic writing. These are: writing as *text*, writing as *process* and writing as *social practice*. This paper explores these theoretical approaches and presents different ways to consider academic writing with the aim of sharing these ideas among the wider academic community, particularly novice academic writers who find the writing process challenging or unfulfilling. Exploring academic writing from these alternative perspectives is an opportunity to question and to reflect upon how and why we write.

Academic writing is first explored with a textual or product focus. It assesses some of the pervading assumptions relating to academic writing in higher education institutions today, and explores how the importance accorded to the production of texts and performing through writing has created a new narrative for self-worth in the academy. This is followed by an exploration of writing as a process and then as social practice. From a process perspective, academic writing is about the process of development and learning and the final outcome or written text is not valued as highly as the act of creating it. From a social perspective, academic writing is explored in relation to the community from which it derives and also in terms of the relationship between writer and reader.

The paper concludes by looking at the idea of writing as contribution and personal reflections are introduced on how academic writing should be conceptualised: there needs to be a move away from the discourse of *getting* in relation to academic writing - getting published, getting citations or views, getting followers, or getting promoted - and that there should be greater emphasis on writing as an act of *giving*, where academic writing is conceived of primarily as a vehicle for contributing to knowledge, learning and development.

Keywords: Academic Research, Academic Writing, Publication, Social Practice

Introduction

In recent years, there has been greater emphasis on the importance of academic writing as a measure of success - individually as an academic on a career track, and collectively as an indicator of an academic institution's reputation and ranking (McGrail *et al.*, 2006; Kamler, 2008; Murray, 2013). Academic writing forms a key part of the academic's role. Scholars disseminate their research and share knowledge through publication. Woods (1999) noted that publishing can be one of the most rewarding aspects of the academic's job and Sword (2012) talked about the passion, pleasure and sense of enjoyment that can come with academic writing. However, the emphasis on, and motivation for, publishing has shifted somewhat as part of a greater transition to a more business-like and performance-led orientation in academic institutions. This *new managerialism* (Deem, 2001; Lynch *et al.*, 2012) has instigated significant changes in the structure and practices of higher education institutions, and academic writing has become one of the features of this performative culture.

What this means for academic writing and academics who are writing is a persistent awareness, and sometimes palpable pressure to get published. Thomson & Kamler (2013) have written about academics that they meet in their writing workshops who are "stressed and distressed, working within performance-driven university systems" (p.1). The culture of performativity is perhaps increasingly being realised in the positioning of academic writing, the academic's role, and the emphasis placed on extrinsic validations (Ball, 2003). As Woods (1999) also outlined, there are undoubtedly great intrinsic rewards in writing by contributing to knowledge and to society. This return for academic writing has not gone away, but the awareness of these rewards has perhaps been eclipsed by the rhetoric of reputation, citation

and publication, especially among emerging academics who are trying to develop their career and their identity as scholars.

Coffin *et al.* (2003) and Hyland (2009) discussed three theoretical approaches for understanding academic writing. These are: writing as *text*, writing as *process* and writing as *social practice*. This paper explores these three theoretical approaches and presents different purposes for writing which stem from these different viewpoints. Firstly, academic writing as *product or text* is discussed, particularly the related configurations of writing as a measure of performance in contemporary higher education. The view of academic writing as *text* focuses on writing as a textual artefact which is tangible and measurable. Following this, academic writing as a *process* is considered. From this perspective, the focus turns to the act of writing rather than to the output. It places emphasis on individual thoughts, learning and ideas that emerge organically through writing. Thirdly, personal reflections on academic writing as a *social practice* are presented. Academic writing is a social practice because the writer is part of an academic community, and so in order for the writing to be accepted, it needs to conform to the conventions and cultural norms of this community. The act of writing as a *situated* practice is also discussed because the process of writing involves a writer who has a life beyond the page, and whose ideas and assumptions have been influenced by prior experiences and by the context in which they live and work.

Writing as Text

Often academic writing is considered in light of the final text because of its role in assessment practices and the ultimate grading and qualifications that are seen as indicators of students' achievement at university. Similarly, academics are expected to demonstrate their knowledge

and ability to disseminate their ideas through writing and, in recent years, there has been increasing emphasis on the importance of academic writing as an indicator of an academic's performance. As university ranking systems give prominence to the number of citations achieved for their publications, there is growing pressure for academics to reach wider audiences and to have greater impact by getting published in prestigious journals (McGrail *et al.*, 2006). The enhancement of the individual's reputation has become intertwined with the academic institution's reputation. The knowledge shared through the writing has a value beyond the relationship between writer and reader and there are new measures of success which involve reputational, ranking and financial gains (Kamler, 2008).

Lyotard (1979; 1984) predicted a commodification of knowledge in a future society where “knowledge ceases to be an end in itself, it loses its ‘use-value’” (p.4). This commodification of knowledge - where it has a commercial value to institutions - is linked to a changing market orientation of higher education institutions. This has been widely criticised in educational research literature (Meek, 2000; Deem, 2001; Clegg, 2009). On the other side of the debate, those who call upon institutions to act *more corporately* (Shattock, 2000) and to be more *entrepreneurial* (Clarke, 1998) contend that this market orientation ensures the sustainability of higher education. Their argument is about survival in a globalised economy.

Irrespective of the arguments for or against the marketisation of higher education, there is general consensus in the academy that it has resulted in a change in focus in the roles, priorities and interactions of academics (McInnis, 2000; Tight, 2010). Where academic writing is concerned, the emphasis on making a contribution to knowledge as an end in itself

has been somewhat clouded by the focus on performance-related metrics such as citations. Ball (2003) writing about the emerging culture of performativity in education, described how it manifests “where judgement and authenticity within practices are sacrificed for impressions and performance” (p.221). He talked about a displacement of values among teachers as the space for their teaching instincts, and how judgement has been colonised by external validations; he also lamented the reduction in time and space for learning which is not measured. The same argument can be applied to academic writing. Some of the space and time for learning, for the development of research interests, and for the development of writing practice, is potentially being sacrificed to meet demands of being published and of being recognised as doing so.

Thomson & Kamler (2013) described academics who attend their writing workshops as "required to produce...but feeling paralysed and terrorised" (p.1). This sentiment is echoed by some of the findings in a recent unpublished research study conducted on academic writing in an Irish research-intensive university. One postdoctoral researcher reflecting on his writing, related the importance of publication at his career stage: “*articles, peer reviewed articles are king in academia so I mean that is something that I have to keep on top of. It’s pretty challenging.*” A doctoral student in the final stages of her studies also felt the pressure to be published and admitted “*it’s not an easy process, so you really have to stick the head down to get your work published; you need to stick with what’s required of you.*” Similarly, a new academic staff member talked about a sense of urgency in getting published: “*so I am really pushing myself to get a draft of a paper finished so at least I will have something out there sooner rather than later*” (Kennelly, 2017, pp.155-156). The emphasis on producing texts

and performing in their field (in competition with colleagues and/or other universities), has created a new narrative for their self-worth in the academy. This paper is questioning whether this is how it should be.

It is also questioning whether such external pressures to publish diminish creativity and the enjoyment of writing. In his memoir on the craft of writing, prolific fictional writer Stephen King (2000) discussed the conditions conducive to writing regularly and writing well. One of his observations is that fear is at the root of most bad writing. He noted that if you write for pleasure, this fear may remain mild. If, however, you are writing to a deadline for others, the fear intensifies. Arguably this is true for academic writing also, where the driver to write is about being published rather than responding to an urgency to put down ideas and write. It is worth revisiting Ball's comment above about sacrifices that are made for the sake of impressions and performance, and considering what these sacrifices might be. Is it space for learning which is not measured, but is an important ingredient of developing academic writing skills and disciplinary knowledge? Is it a sacrifice to the academic's personal wellbeing? Or is it collegiality as academics work in a more competitive academic space where promotion and tenure are linked to their academic outputs? The answers are not provided here, but the questions are posed for us all to reflect upon and the purpose of this paper is to raise awareness about alternative ways to conceptualise our academic writing.

Writing as Process

There is general agreement in the literature that academic writing is hard work, which employs a vast amount of skills and time (Elbow, 1998; Woods, 1999; Kamler, 2008). It takes physical, mental and emotional effort and involves steady effort comprising thinking,

drafting, crafting, editing and proofing among its tasks. Thomson & Kamler (2013) described writing as both *thinking* and *feeling* work but when the focus is directed uniquely to the final text or outcome, the effort and emotions which were involved in creating it are often discarded or forgotten.

Woods (1999) argued that pain is an indispensable accompaniment to the process of writing. There is pain involved in the shaping and crafting, but it is necessary thinking and editing work which ultimately makes the final text better. He also noted that the pain may involve elements of personal discomfort too since the writer may encounter his/her own memories, limitations and bias through the process of writing and research. He wrote: “it may be helpful to conceive of the problem not so much in terms of what you do to the data, but what you do to yourself” (p.11). Woods’ quote introduces the idea that the writing has a writer and that the writing, as well as being about the production of a text, involves significantly more. It is about a process of learning and crafting, and it is also an act of identity where the writer potentially has internal work to do along the way.

The process view of academic writing shifts it from the perspective of textual production and output orientation to a focus upon the act of writing and upon the benefits that are inherent in this act. The understanding of writing as a process has itself several differing perspectives. The expressivist view conceives of writing as a self-development activity. The cognitivist, and later constructivist perspective, sees the process of writing as a generator of ideas and organiser of thoughts where the act of writing helps to construct knowledge. The third view

positions writing as an act of discovery and inquiry which is itself an instrument of the research process.

The expressivist view positions writing as a vehicle of personal expression, creativity and self-discovery. There is a focus on developing self-knowledge and tapping into individual awareness. Elbow (2007) advocated an approach called *freewriting* as a vehicle for improving writing in academia. Freewriting is a way of writing without boundaries. This approach, he maintained, allows writers to tap into ideas and convictions without self-censoring and allows them to express their thoughts without fear of exposure or fear of ridicule. *Writing with power*, from Elbow's perspective, is about freedom of expression and a freeing from the constraints of convention which he sees as limiting creativity and enjoyment. It is about freedom to think, to feel, to write and then to tidy later. The power in the writing is the process of the discovery and self-knowledge that is found through writing.

It has been argued (Hashimoto, 1987; Stapleton, 2002) that Elbow's ideas of freewriting are more relevant to creative writing and have no place in academic writing. Promoting individual expression is relatively straightforward within the domain of composition studies but it raises questions especially where more traditional modes of academic writing prevail. Some of the rhetoric used by expressivists to *free* writers has perhaps served only to confine it to more creative fields in the academy and has distracted from its value in helping academics (and students) to write. However, it is argued here that it is noteworthy that some of Elbow's intentions converge with expectations and the markers of a successful academic paper. After all, when we discuss the importance of a critical discussion in academic writing, we are

talking about taking a more active role in the formulation and articulation of opinions - just as Elbow advocated.

The cognitivist view of writing as a process highlights the importance of writing as a problem-solving and incremental learning activity (Flower & Hays, 1981). It positions writing as a means of knowledge discovery. Britton (1972) advocated a pedagogical approach called *writing to learn* where learning was facilitated by writing as the brain had to organise thoughts and then communicate them. He claimed that students' understanding and clarity of thought could be enhanced through the process of writing. Similarly, Langer & Applebee (1987) argued that writing activities promote learning better than activities such as studying or reading. They maintained that through writing, students take on a deeper and more complex consideration of their subject. Rose (1985) conceptualised writing as a cognitive act rather than a skill of merely transcribing. He argued: "writing seems central to the shaping and directing of certain modes of cognition, is integrally involved in learning, is a means of defining the self and defining reality, is a means of representing and contextualizing information" (p.348). What this means, is that the act of writing has a direct link to knowledge creation. It involves reflection, judgement and action which are all complicated cognitive activities in their own right.

Similarly, in the constructivist view of learning, writing is considered a process which involves the student's active participation in the construction of their learning. When a student is involved in writing, it demands an evaluation of information, a communication of ideas and subsequent revisions. These sub-processes support the student's understanding and synthesis

of new knowledge. Writing is not merely a tool for communicating the new knowledge but rather is a tool for accessing and, importantly, for making sense of the new knowledge. This happens through engagement with the many sub-processes (e.g. planning, drafting, revising and editing that are at the core of academic writing activity (Applebee, 1984; Hartley, 2008; Murray, 2013).

The notion of writing as *inquiry* moves on the conceptualisation of academic writing in complexity and also in potential. This view situates academic writing not only as a process of understanding and incremental learning, but also as a mechanism for idea development which evolves through different stages of a research or writing process. Becker (1986) argued that writing *is* a form of thinking. The writing process generates ideas and crystallises the thinking. Writing is not an act of textual production but a process of thinking, creating arguments, refining and learning. Becker also argued that much of the advice given to writers is wrong. Students and novice academic writers, he noted, are advised to get their thoughts clear, come up with their argument and then write, a belief, he argues, that is “embodied in the folk maxim that if you think clearly then you will write clearly” (p.16). Like Elbow, Becker advocated for writing to be represented not in terms of the final polished text but more as an iterative untidy process where newer versions of the essay or article emerge gradually. He furthermore contended that writing also helps shape the research and the research design. It aids thinking through ideas and moves definitively away from the more linear notion of research and writing up afterwards. Kamler & Thomson (2014) similarly argued that research *is* writing. They objected to the phrase ‘writing up’ in relation to dissertation writing because, they contended, it camouflages all the work and complexity involved throughout the process.

Richardson (2005) positioned academic writing in the social sciences as method of inquiry. By this she meant that the writing process presents a viable opportunity for learning and discovery about the self as well as the research topic. The writing, she argued, is a method of knowing and is equally a dynamic, changing process that encourages the researcher's reflexivity and self-awareness. Through the practice of writing, the writer undergoes a process of self-discovery, generates ideas, crystalizes thoughts and makes connections. This reflexive practice is about "honoring the location of the self" (p.965) and this entails acknowledging the historical, biographical and contextual influences that interplay and shape the researcher, the argument and the writing. Richardson (2005) also maintained that the writing process has both internal and external value. Internally, she argued, writing brings about an emotional response in addition to the intellectual response. Wading more deeply into her subject through writing increases her compassion for her subject. She commented: "I know that when I move deeply into my writing, both my compassion for others and my actions on their behalf increase" (p.967). As a result, she argued, this enhances the writing and the value for the reader because if the writing has touched the reader, it can potentially change perceptions and/or highlight issues of social injustice.

There are different views presented here and readers can identify with some or all, or indeed none. What is valuable is to consider and connect the processes of learning, understanding, thinking and idea development at the heart of writing. Lamott (1994) writes that perfectionism is the voice of the oppressor. When we try to write for perfection and skip through the processes of learning, revising, making mistakes and allowing for failures, we are losing out on valuable learning and development. Conceptualising academic writing as a creative

process, as a learning process, a thinking process and a process of inquiry in its own right, means valuing the process of writing and considering more space and time for the continuing development of academics as researchers and as writers where they can nurture their writing, develop and refine their ideas and potentially enjoy the act of writing.

Brande (1981) used the analogy of the *slough of despond* which writers enter when they realise that good writing does not come easy, and that it involves countless iterations of work, as well as many moments of despair. Murray (2013) talked about writing for publication requiring a difficult transformation involving several dimensions of change. This current work is not necessarily advocating the slough of despond as a rite of passage for academics, but is questioning whether current drivers and the lack of space within the curriculum prohibit this passage for many writers anyway? Is avoiding the slough an opportunity missed? Is it an opportunity to learn and to overcome, to move from acceptable or good writing to better writing?

Writing as a Social Practice

The act of writing, while potentially executed in a private space, ultimately is not an isolated endeavour. The writing is *for* someone and its meaning will only come to life through its readers' interpretations. Academic writing is looked at here from an identity perspective, revealing that even when looking at academic texts, which are often considered distanced and objective, there is always more than initially 'meets the eye'. Academic writing is also considered as a *socially situated* practice. It is situated because a written text is not produced

in isolation, but rather as one that is inevitably influenced and shaped by its context. It is a *social* practice because the writing involves a dialogue between writer and readers.

Considering identity in academic writing means looking at the representation of the author in the text. Ivanic (1998) argued that writing is about much more than dissemination of content, and that it is a vehicle of self-representation. She maintained that the act of writing itself is an act of identity which is informed by the writer's history as well as the social context within which he/she writes. Ivanic & Camps (2001) discussed "the idea of conveying an impression of self through semiotic resources" (p.4) and argued that in the same way that a regional accent or word choice might indicate a social group or origin in speech, writing choices (syntax or lexicon, for example) construct identity too. From this perspective, there is no such thing as purely impersonal writing. The writer, to varying extents, will be revealed in the text. Tang & John (1999) highlighted the growing trend away from traditional distant and impersonal notions of academic writing towards an acknowledgement of the writer's presence in the text. Exploring identity is integral to the writer's awareness of his/her positionality in the writing process. Creating this level of awareness of identity improves the writing as the writer is more deliberate in his/her choices, and more likely to make more well-informed writing decisions. Exploring identity is equally important to academic reading because it provides the clues and cues on how to read and critically interpret a text. The reader looks beyond the content to the writer, and his/her influences that may have helped to shape the text. The reader thus begins to contemplate the writer's voice in the text and to consider the other voices in the background - that is, the contextual, institutional or political voices that influence the writer's own.

Richardson (2005) wrote "no textual staging is ever innocent" (p.960). Thinking about academic writing from this perspective demonstrates how revelatory it can be, telling a story outside the stated intentions of the abstract or introduction. Academic writing speaks of a time, a place and writer. Beyond the pages, we get glimpses of the writer and the immediate institutional and/or political environment in which he/she writes. Both Ivanic (1998) and Ritchie (1989), discussing the development of the individual student writer's discourse in academic writing, argued that it should not be viewed as unique or individual, but rather that it comprises a mix of discourses that already exist and which are drawn together by every individual in a unique way. They draw upon the evocative Bakhtinian metaphor of a *rich stew* to describe this process. The imagery is powerful as we can imagine a dynamic melting pot of ideas, cultures and institutional influences that play a role in the shaping of a writer's thinking and writing.

In talking about the writing of a doctoral dissertation, Kamler & Thomson (2008) argued that it is an event that involves both *becoming* and *belonging*. They view such writing as a mix of text work and identity work wherein, "texts and identities are formed together in and through writing" (p.508). What they mean is that the process of writing produces a text, but also a doctoral scholar - this is the becoming. The notion of belonging adds an additional dimension to this scholarly identity. It conjures up a community. The doctoral writing process, in this light, is a rite of passage that invokes membership of a particular academic community.

Thomson & Kamler (2013) contended that academic writers need to see themselves not merely as reporters of a piece of work, but as members of a community with something of value to say. As a social practice, academic writing is considered in terms of the relationship

of the writer to his/her surroundings. The academic writer writes as part of an academic community, and within the context of its immediate institutional and disciplinary surroundings. In the same vein, they saw academic writing for journals as a conversation between scholars, and argued that academics need to position themselves as part of a wider scholarly community. This is a key purpose of academic writing and publication - for scholarly conversation and debate.

Kamler & Thomson (2008) referred to the *situatedness* of academic texts. They noted that writing is “embedded in a tangle of cultural, historical practices that are both institutional and disciplinary” (p.508). The disciplinary norms and the institutional and academic conventions also play a part in the act of writing and the *becoming* of the writer. Bartholomae (1986) wrote about student and novice writers needing to learn the *code* of their academic disciplines. Hyland (2002) highlighted the need for writers “to construct a credible representation of themselves and their work, aligning themselves with the socially shaped identities of their communities” (p.1091). Becker (1986) talked about novice academic writers adopting a persona of the established academic by employing “classy” writing to fit in with the “elite” scholarly community. The academic community has expectations and a language so a key aspect of writing involves conforming to the conventions and practices of this community. Hyland (2009) defined this concept of membership as: “a writer’s ability to recognise, replicate and, within limits, innovate, a community’s organisational structures, current interests and rhetorical practices” (p.71).

While Becker (1986) argued for more informality in academic discourse, Thomson & Kamler (2013) offered a different perspective and argued that these internal rules and conventions are important because they bind members of the discourse community together. They argued that “we can think of these shared ‘internal’ understandings and languages as allowing the community to do its work rather than a failure to speak plainly or some addiction to speaking in tongues” (p.30).

Whatever perspective you take, the point being made here is that it is important to think about writing beyond the individual writer and institution. Positioning academic writing as a social practice recasts the streamlined notion of writing as a solitary act of textual production and binds it to a knowledge community. Consequently, the purpose of academic publications as vehicles for scholarly conversation and knowledge contribution can be re-emphasised and citation measurements can be viewed, not merely as measures of success or academic performance, but as indicators of academic curiosity and engagement.

Beyond the writer and the influences that inform the writer’s writing choices, writing can also be viewed as a social and dialogical act whereby the text will be read and interpreted by the reader. This final view of academic writing evolves the view of writing as situated and social by incorporating the relationship that the reader has with the final text. Hyland (2009) observed that writing is: “a joint endeavour between writers and readers, co-constructed through the active understanding of rhetorical situations and the likely responses of readers” (p.31). The meaning-making is contingent upon the different relationships that emerge

between writer and the different readers. Thomson & Kamler (2013) summarised the nature of this dialogue:

The words only become meaningful when they are read and interpreted by readers. The act of reading is, in fact, to enter into a dialogue with the text, bringing what is on the page into conversation with our own experiences. The act of writing is an act of anticipation – it is to create a text which will stimulate a conversation with the reader (p.56).

Readers' interpretations will vary, just as the writers' offering because both levels of meaning-making (in producing the text and interpreting it) are influenced by their immediate surroundings, expectations or disciplinary conventions and epistemologies. Added to this, is the temporal dimension and how the dialogue between writer and reader will inevitably shift over time as knowledge, understanding and cultural norms ebb and flow (Richardson, 2005). This view of writing leaves it as dynamic and unresolved, and displaces the notion of a neatly finished text or product that stands alone or indeed a finished process of writing where the writer metaphorically puts down his or her pen. This view on writing takes it to a different level. It forces us to consider the reader, the future reader, and to see a piece of writing as part of an enduring conversation that will involve others and will evolve in ways that we cannot even imagine.

Conclusions - Writing as Contribution and as Giving

Coffin *et al.* (2003) argued that one of the key functions of academic texts is the ability to persuade readers through well-constructed argument, logical reasoning and evidence. The contribution of writing, in their view, is about moving thinking forward or even changing current thinking. Thomson & Kamler (2013) similarly described academic writing as a scholarly endeavour with a clear purpose which relates to shifting perspectives. Sharing and

disseminating research is about furthering the field of study and the focus of journal articles and publications should be about making a contribution to knowledge.

From a social sciences perspective (and increasingly in other fields), contribution is appraised not just in terms of this knowledge value, but also for its wider impact and societal value. For example, writing about societal issues and airing different perspectives on these issues has an important role in raising awareness and increasing compassion. Woods (1999) highlighted one aspect of knowledge contribution as offering insight into “problems and anomalies one might have experienced in the past in a structured way aligned to general human experience” (p.15). Woods here is echoing Wright Mills (1959) who viewed research as having a contribution to society and to social good. Academic writing in the social sciences is therefore a means of viewing private life and private issues through a social lens. By making these issues public, it raises the consciousness of others and stimulates conversation about important matters that might not otherwise be discussed. Richardson’s (2005) vision for the contribution of writing likewise resonates with Mills’ social agenda, as she described her purpose in writing as one which can “teach all of us about social injustice and methods for alleviating it” (p.965). She is concerned with how to make her writing matter in the world and how it can be used as an agent of change. The contribution of her academic writing is about achieving greater social justice and publication is a means to reach an audience, to raise awareness and stimulate discussion.

This conception of academic writing places the value on the sharing and expansion of ideas for a common good. The publication of a paper is conceived of as a means to an educational

and potentially ideological end. The value of being read widely is not measured in citation numbers for the writer's own good but in the audience reached and the potential contribution to sharing and shifting ideas. Lamott (1994), talked about writing as an opportunity to expose the unexposed. Some of what we expose in academic writing is about the research topic so that we contribute to knowledge in the field but some of what we expose is ourselves. This paper has suggested different ways to think about academic writing drawing from literature in educational research and the social sciences. A number of conceptualisations of academic writing have been presented and a personal, reflective view has been offered which draws together the perspectives in the literature and also exposes personal values and convictions about academic writing which are strongly influenced by the notion of the contribution that academic writing can make.

It is a personal belief that academic writing is an act of *giving* and sometimes this gets lost in the predominant rhetoric of *getting* in the academy - that is, getting good grades, getting published, getting citations or views, getting followers, or getting promoted. Placing more emphasis on the giving means thinking about different purposes for our writing. This can be about considering where it is contributing to knowledge and learning or inviting readers to consider alternative perspectives so that they have benefitted in some way from the text that they have read. The contribution can also be to a community of practice where it can be useful as part of an exchange of ideas and views.

Similarly, it is a personal view that academic writing is a process that is giving to the writer too. Academics can often focus on the pain and sheer exertion of writing, and tend to

undervalue the learning and ideas that we absorb as part of the process. There is a wealth of knowledge, experience and skill that evolves through the process of writing, and as writers we evolve too. There is value to the writer in terms of personal growth and identity development. The process of writing often invokes reflection and a deepened or more conscious awareness of our values and convictions that might otherwise have been left unexplored. Academic writing then gives us a better sense of ourselves, because we have to clarify our own views as we articulate them for others.

Exploring academic writing from alternative perspectives is an invitation to question the different approaches to and rationales for writing. It is an invitation to reflect on our role as academic writers, and our purposes as we set out to write. The intention of this paper is that by reflecting on these purposes, a step has been taken in a continuing an important scholarly conversation. An additional aspiration is that this conversation and sharing of personal beliefs can re-invigorate some academic writers who may have lost their passion for the writing process.

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