

## **Writing: Collaborating for Increasing Success**

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### **Abstract**

Writing is critical for faculty and student success in higher education. This paper presents a writing model designed by participants during a collaborative session at the Adult Higher Education Alliance Annual Conference. The Gray (2010) model used by the author at her home institution to create faculty writing groups served as a foundation. While the initial goal of the session was to create a model for faculty use, participants at the session wanted to design a model that could be used by faculty and students. The discussion and design proceeded with this as the revised goal. The model consists of 20 strategies that are divided into the categories of: (a) preparation, (b) beginning, (c) in process, and (d) ending. The model can be used by individuals and on-going writing groups.

*Keywords:* higher education, faculty development, faculty writing

## **Writing: Collaborating for Increasing Success**

As adult education faculty teaching in higher education, we are expected to publish our work in order to be successful. Faculty are expected to be productive writers throughout their careers even after receiving tenure (Stivers & Cramer, 2013). However, writing is typically a solitary activity and can be slower than hoped for in delivering a product ready for submission (Boice, 2000). In a study conducted of hundreds of new faculty at different institutions, Boice (1992) found that the majority of them struggled with writing during their first two years, and two-thirds of them produced little that “counted” towards their success in being retained and gaining tenure. Even more discouraging, their difficulties continued into years three and four. He lists four main reasons for these problems: (a) they did not learn how to write in graduate school, (b) what they did learn they learned in isolation, (c) writing seems difficult and mysterious to them, and (d) they strive to write like how they believe “experts” write rather than follow more efficient and simple ways of writing (Boice, 2000). He recommended that faculty use a nihil nimus, or nothing in excess, approach by beginning to write before they feel fully prepared, writing with calmness and patience, working in brief and regular sessions, practicing timely stopping, and moderating negative thoughts about writing (Boice, 2000).

Tara Gray, a national and international speaker on faculty writing, developed a simple model for faculty to follow. Her model included: write 15 to 30 minutes a day, keep a log

of writing time, organize around topic sentences, share work early with non-experts, and share later work with experts (Gray, 2010). Additionally, she advocates that faculty “kick writing out the door” (p. 73) to submission rather than striving for perfection.

### ***Background and Purpose***

Using the principles developed by Gray, the presenter of this Adult Higher Education Alliance (AHEA) 2017 Annual Conference workshop and author of this paper created writing groups at her own institution beginning in fall 2012 and has continued creating new groups each semester. A total of 20 writing groups have been formed since 2012. An assessment conducted in late 2014 revealed that individuals in the groups reported increased writing success with numerous journal and books published and grants received (Lockhart, 2015).

One of the primary lessons learned over the years by the author of this paper in working with the groups was that adults can learn about additional successful writing approaches from one another. Therefore, the goal of the session was to create a one-time writing group opportunity for attendees. The presenter anticipated that strategies and ideas shared during the session would expand upon the Gray (2010) writing model and build a new model for successful faculty writing and subsequent publication. The newly constructed model could then be used by participants individually in their own writing and to create writing groups at their own institutions to produce new avenues for increasing success. The purpose of this paper is to report the new model created during the AHEA session.

### ***Methodology***

The session began by the presenter asking participants why they attended the session. Unexpectedly, they stated they wanted to learn ways to (a) improve their own writing and (b) improve the writing of their students. Because of these two goals, the brainstorming and discussion during the workshop included faculty and students as anticipated users of the new model. Next, participants were asked to share their own successful writing strategies, challenges they experience, and how they overcome these challenges. Additionally, participants shared strategies they had observed as helping or hindering students’ writing in their classes. Last, the Gray writing model that was used by the groups formed at the presenter’s institution was given. Since the keynote address made by Dr. Dominique Chlup earlier that morning provided tips for establishing and maintaining a writing habit, participants were encouraged to add these to the model as well.

## ***Outcomes and Model***

The model created during the session consists of 20 strategies that are divided into the categories of: preparation, beginning writing, in-process writing, and reviewing. Dr. Chlup (2017) is referenced for principles that she gave in her keynote address and that were referred to during the session. Additionally, the author of this paper talked informally about writing with another presenter at the conference, and one of her recommendations was incorporated into the presentation and into the model. She is referenced within the model as well.

### *Preparation*

1. Determine the type of writing that you are doing. For example, ask yourself “Is this academic writing?” “Is this business writing?” Also, consider the discipline for which you are writing as different disciplines have different expectations.
2. Think of yourself as a writer (Chulp, 2017). As a faculty member, we are paid to write. As a student, you must write to be successful and graduate.
3. For faculty, read published articles or books and look for topic sentences to help learn organizational structures used in writing. For students, give them overviews and subsequent quizzes about organizational structure and topic sentences to help them learn to write.
4. Just do it! Get started! Getting started provides motivation and alleviates the guilt and anxiety of not writing.

### *Beginning*

5. Do not pay too much attention to style format, such as APA, when you start, as this can slow you down. You can review for proper style later.
6. Pay attention to the organizational structure. Composing an outline can really help to organize paragraphs and the entire work. Inserting headings early in the process helps to organize writing.
7. Organize paragraphs around topic sentences. Topic sentences let the reader know what will be covered in the paragraph. There is one topic or key sentence for each paragraph and these are usually located early in the paragraph. For students, a topic sentence as a first sentence makes it clear what that paragraph will be about and helps organize what to write next. More experienced writers can locate the topic sentence later in the paragraph. However, topic sentences located relatively early in the

paragraph can direct the reader's attention and create early understanding of the purpose of the paragraph.

8. If you form a writing group, establish ground rules such as "the purpose of this group is to motivate and encourage each other to write more," and "we will provide positive feedback first and then go to what we would like to see and finish with something positive." Ground rules will help to ensure productive feedback to each other.

### *In Process*

9. Write frequently to practice your writing skills. Every day or almost every day should be a goal.
10. Write a draft first rather than going back and doing a lot of editing as you write. Do the majority of your editing after you have written the entire first draft. Early extensive editing can keep the writer from making significant progress and be discouraging for this reason.
11. Chunk your work by breaking it down into smaller portions, such as a title, paragraph, purpose, section (Chulp, 2017). Focusing on smaller portions can help prevent being overwhelmed.
12. Write in relatively small time blocks. You can make progress when writing 15 to 30 minutes on a frequent basis.
13. Keep a log of how often you write and for how long. Keeping a log helps you to see progress.
14. Share your work with a colleague. Peer review in small groups can be extremely helpful.
15. If you form an ongoing writing group, share your writing log and progress for the week before you share your writing.
16. Sometimes it is helpful to write the introduction last. The rest of the writing can help to form what should go in the introduction (K. King, personal communication, March 9, 2017).

### *Ending*

17. Stop for the day when you are still motivated and before writing for longer than three hours.
18. Make a plan for what you will work on during the next writing session (Chulp, 2017).
19. End with the weightiest word possible (Chulp, 2017).
20. Read what you have written out loud.

## Discussion

This session at the AHEA conference yielded a model that expanded the current Gray (2010) model currently used by the author in creating ongoing faculty writing groups. Session participants agreed that the new model could be used by individuals and by ongoing writing groups. Placing the strategies of the model into four categories provides an organizational structure that follows factor #11, “Chunk your work by breaking it down into smaller portions,” which should make it easier for users to incorporate into their thinking and practice of writing.

Unexpectedly, participants at the beginning of the session wanted the new model to be one they could share with students in their classes. Their goal formulated much of the discussion during the time period. Participants reviewed the strategies at the end of the session and all agreed that the model could be used by faculty and students. Hopefully, participants at the conference and readers of these proceedings will find this information of value and incorporate the writing components of the new model to increase faculty and student success in academia.

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