

Reflections and trends

We must write differently

Precisamos escrever diferente

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“Writing is hard work. A clear sentence is no accident. Very few sentences come out right the first time, or even the third time. Remember this in moments of despair: If you find that writing is hard, it's because it is hard.” (Zinsser, 2006 p. 12)

1 INTRODUCTION

There is something that always happens when I have a few days off to write. It can be that week with no exams to grade, classes to teach or to attend, no meetings, with a really free schedule. I plan to advance on an article that has been stuck for a while, or finish the theoretical section of another article, or maybe get to finish the results and discussion section of another. Then the week days arrive. On Monday, I turn on the computer and start... doing everything but writing. It is lunchtime and I have not written a single line. During the afternoon I do a lot of other unplanned things, solve some problems that demand my attention, and the day goes by.

On Tuesday, the situation does not improve much. For example, I can spend practically all morning organizing my workspace. I organize the books that are scattered, then I put my computer folders and files in order. By Tuesday mid-afternoon I realize that practically two days have gone by in which I did everything but write. Toward the end of the afternoon I actually start writing, and manage to finish a few paragraphs. I feel like there is a flow of words coming in, and I wonder why it took me so long to get started. At the end of this free time, which should be dedicated to writing, I can even advance in some texts, but always much less than I expected.

If you have identified with the scenes I have described, you probably know that I made an optimistic representation of the situation virtually all of us face when we write. It often takes a few days before we can really pick up the pace of the text. And, like me, you must have already been bothered by this, you must have already had the feeling that the lack of discipline means that you cannot achieve textual production at the level you could achieve, both in terms of quantity and quality.

Indeed, we can improve our writing discipline. However, what many do not know is that there are five forces to write, one negative and four positive (Murray, 1978). The negative force, as we well know from experience, is called the Law of Delay, or resistance to writing, or even “whatever can be deferred will be” (Murray, 1978). It is a paradox that intrigues many of us who make writing a part of our lives: we have a need to write, but we do not want to get started. What is important to understand is that this resistance does not occur because we are fundamentally lazy. To a large extent, this delay is part of the writing process (Murray, 1978), and it is an overlooked aspect of our understanding of the writing process.

In relation to the positive forces for writing, I believe it is not too much to say that we all know one of them as intimately as the law of delay: the coming of the deadline (Murray, 1978). Between these two forces there are three others that are probably less well known and which, if handled correctly, can help us write more and better. I will address them in this essay. In addition, I discuss here other aspects that can influence the quality of our

textual production, such as the writing habit, the correct attitude when writing a nonfiction text, issues of style and own voice, and the development of the ability to review our own texts. There is a fundamental question, however, that precedes efforts to increase our textual production. It refers to the style of our manuscripts. We write in a way that contributes to the academy isolation from other sectors of society. The next section discusses this issue, which permeates the vast majority of articles in the field of accounting and organizations.

2 WE MUST WRITE DIFFERENTLY

Writing is a skill, not a gift, as no one is born a great writer (Sword, 2019). Skills are the result of a combination of theoretical knowledge and experience, and so it is surprising that we have virtually no writing courses in our graduate programs. We have research methodology courses, but we do not teach our master's and doctoral candidates to write, as we believe that people will learn through trial and error (Sword, 2019). And so, adds the author, it took us a long time to learn to write as badly as we write.

The result is that, even writing more and more, we remain terrible writers (Badley, 2018). This is certainly one of the reasons our texts are ignored outside the academy. Surprisingly, in the very academy, there are studies suggesting that 50% of the articles we publish are unread, and 90% of them are not cited (Marinetto, 2018).

It is legitimate then to ask, why do we write? Badley (2018) responds that we write because in these neoliberal and neo-managerial times we are told that we must write. We need to publish to secure resources and reputation for our universities, and we need to gain recognition of the impact of our production for ourselves and our departments (Badley, 2018). Government agencies, such as Capes, for example, increasingly implement initiatives aimed at increasing the productivity and accountability of graduate programs, and thus there is a growing demand for professors and students to produce measurable results. In other words, we write to achieve goals, we write assuming that probably no one will read it anyway. No wonder we write so badly.

Badley (2020) is even more forceful in his analysis of how researchers write, especially in the areas of human and social sciences. The author maintains that we produce turgid prose, gratuitously contaminated by jargon, in an apparently erudite style, but which is actually pompous and needlessly complex. Apparently, we believe that writing crookedly is a prerequisite for academic success, namely, getting published. There is a widespread perception in the academy that writing simply and clearly is a sign of inadequacy, inability and lack of merit (Billig, 2013). And so a vicious circle is formed in which students and beginner researchers are encouraged to imitate the "rotten" academic writing style (Badley, 2020).

One of the most damaging consequences of our academic writing style is the establishment of barriers to a wider audience, which in turn prevents us from being able to stimulate social change from our work as researchers (Badley, 2020). I return to the point that, outside the academy, our intellectual production is practically ignored. There are several reasons for this (see Hermanson, 2015; Baldvinsdottir, Mitchell, and Nørreklit, 2010), but this essay central premise is that we need to write better to increase our ability to communicate our ideas inside and outside the academy. We need to write better, find our style and our voice, and break with the practice of producing texts that appear to have been written by no one and for no one.

The first step in this is to change our habits and our attitudes towards writing.

3 "WRITING LESSONS" AND THE RIGHT ATTITUDE TO WRITING

As we know from our own experience, it is very common that, even wanting to write, we end up postponing the writing activity until such time as we feel pressured by the proximity of the text delivery date. How to break this pattern?

One of the most interesting suggestions I found for those working with academic writing is to treat the writing task as a course that we need to teach, in the case of teachers, or take, in the case of students (Silvia, 2019). Typically, an undergraduate or graduate course takes between four and six hours a week. Thus, Silvia (2019) recommends that we set aside at least four to six hours a week in our schedule for writing. We must see the commitment to writing routinely as a course we have to teach, so we do not have the option of missing out. It is our "writing class", and we can divide it into two or three sessions lasting two hours, but with a fixed timetable on pre-defined days of the week (Silvia, 2019). We can even set aside an entire morning of the week and do four hours of writing. The important thing is the habit, the regularity of writing on the days scheduled every week (Silvia, 2019). It is a simple suggestion and directly related to our academic practice, whether as professors or as students, that is why I really believe in its potential.

Something that can happen to someone who is really serious about the idea of allocating calendar windows for “writing lessons” is that the person starts the session not knowing what to write. Once again Silvia (2019) offers useful advice for dealing with this challenge, by suggesting the creation of an inventory of writing projects. The author suggests that we make a list of everything we would like to write in the next two years, without pre-judgment. Such a list may include empirical research reports, systematic literature review articles, theoretical articles, essays, books and book chapters.

Finally, Silvia (2019) recommends that we have goals for our writing days. The goals must be concrete enough so that we can define whether we meet them or not, such as:

- Write at least 200 words.
- Write the first two paragraphs of the discussion section.
- Read the draft sent by our co-author, make changes and return.
- Elaborate the schematic structure of the next article we will write.

In order to unlock our textual production potential, in addition to adopting a writing routine, we also need the right attitude. A very common attitude in nonfiction writers is the pressure to know everything and have the final word. As much as we are aware that no article completely solves a problem or ends a discussion, it is very common that when we are going to write an article, we feel an agonizing obligation to have to demonstrate absolute authority over what we are writing about. This can force us to spend an inordinate amount of time trying to map every article that has ever been published, knowing everything that has ever been written, spoken, argued for, pursuing the unattainable goal of 100% certainty about what we are going to write. There is no room for doubt, for speculation, for questioning. We need certainty.

Zinsser (2006) calls this attitude the definitiveness complex, the obligation to have the last word, and points out that it is something that afflicts most nonfiction writers. But the author reminds us that what we think is definitive today, when writing, will no longer be so tomorrow. Thus, the writer who pursues this goal of knowing everything about a particular subject before writing is doomed to never start writing. It is a posture that stiffens us, puts pressure on us unnecessarily, makes us insecure and dare not explore the subject.

To change this attitude, we need to accept that no text will be the final word on any topic, and every article we write is a contribution to an ongoing conversation among professionals (Murray, 1986). Our written output will develop when we accept that all we can do is speculate, question, argue, suggest models, take a position, define a problem, make observations, and propose solutions, in order to participate in a written conversation with our peers (Murray, 1986).

One way to alleviate the pressure of writing definitively is to sufficiently delimit the topic we are going to write about, so that we can strive to cover the subject as best we can (Zinsser, 2006). The author emphasizes that, by establishing appropriate limits for the subject of our text, it is easier to maintain high levels of energy and motivation to write, and we will very likely discover, at the end of the process, that we are able to say everything we wanted to.

Still, it is worth emphasizing that we can allow ourselves to know “something” without having to claim that we know everything, and that having partial, local and historical knowledge is still knowing (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2017). With such an attitude, we can risk writing earlier, we can start writing to discover, writing to investigate (Murray, 1986; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2017). In this way, writing stops being an activity that scares us and becomes attractive, as we can write to find out what we have to say, and so we end up writing more than we intended, we manage to go further (Murray, 1986). The author also defends that we must write quickly and intensely, so that we are driven to unexpected possibilities. Then, during proofreading, we learn from what we write, and thus become students of our own texts (Murray, 1986).

I strongly believe in the liberating potential of abandoning the obligation to have the final say, and needing to know everything before writing. I invite the reader of this text: let us explore our knowledge, let us find out what we have to say.

4 FORCES TO WRITE

Knowing about the forces to write can also help us be more productive. As I have already mentioned, the force that opposes writing is called by Murray (1978) the Law of Delay. Or, in Zinsser's (2006) words, a writer will do anything to avoid the act of writing. Again, I want to emphasize that this is not purely because we are born

procrastinators. Writing is difficult, there is nothing wrong with admitting it to ourselves. And the fear of writing is instilled in us from a very young age, and we will probably never get rid of it (Zinsser, 2006).

Thus, we can assume that when we conceive an outline for a new text, there will be a natural and necessary gap between the initial impulse to write and the act itself. Murray (1978), for example, describes that when he has an idea for a poem, an article, a short story or even a lecture, he feels that he consciously seeks procrastination and postponement. The author explains that it is necessary to nurture the idea before starting to write.

However, at some point we need to start writing. We need to put down on paper what is being so energetically nurtured in our mind. But how do you know when the idea is gestated enough, when it's ready to be confronted with paper? How to avoid real procrastination and make writing happen? In part, it is a matter of attitude. We have to change the key, as no one will do it for us (Zinsser, 2006). But knowing the other forces to write can also help us out of the trap we are experts at setting ourselves up: indefinitely putting off writing because we do not think we are ready yet.

One of the forces that drives us to write is the approximation of the due date (Murray, 1978), whether from a work to a subject, the filing date of the dissertation/thesis project, or of the dissertation or thesis itself. However, despite being a positive force for writing, it also adds levels of stress and worry that are likely to hamper the process. Furthermore, if we are close to the delivery date of a text, it is more difficult to review it calmly and carefully. To leave the pattern of writing only under the deadline pressure, we can use the other three positive forces to write to our advantage.

One of the impulses to write is the amount of information we acquire about the subject of our text (Murray, 1978). From the moment we decide to write about something, our attention turns to the topic, and we become magnets of specific details, facts, descriptions, statistics, connected ideas, and references (Murray, 1978). According to the author, this stock of information presses us towards the first draft of the text. It is interesting to note the connection between this force and the definitiveness complex mentioned earlier. On the one hand, we have to accept that our texts are speculative, tentative, and present provisionally valid statements. On the other hand, by drenching ourselves with information about the subject we want to write about, we will naturally be compelled to write. This second positive force for writing, the increase in information about the subject, combines with the next, which is the growing interest in the subject of our text.

The more we know about a subject, the more we care about it, and we want to organize and share our knowledge with others so that initial interest, which is relatively vague at first, can become an obsession until be communicated (Murray, 1978). Finally, these two forces combine and leverage the next positive force for writing, which is the awareness that there is an audience waiting for the text (Murray, 1978). The author explains that as we become increasingly aware that there are potential readers who would like and/or need to know what we have to say, we feel compelled to write.

Reflecting on the forces to write reveals that managing them consciously can help us not to swing between the extremes, which is to procrastinate until we have to write under deadline pressure. If from the moment we decide to write about a subject, we are able to increase the intensity of the three forces presented by Murray (1978), there will be a natural increase in the pressure to write, to put out, to share the constructed knowledge.

Now that we know how to handle some of the most important circumstances surrounding writing, we are ready to increase our textual output. We can then focus on the quality of our writing, which is the subject of the next section.

5 OWN STYLE AND VOICE

If we open any article from an accounting and organizations journal, what style of text will we find? Most likely, it is indigestible, impersonal, abstract and jargon-filled prose, just as it occurs in other areas, such as education (Sword, 2012). Admittedly, we are terrible writers.

Silvia (2019) argues that ignorance is one of the reasons why our texts are so indigestible for the reader. The author points out that we are not taught to write in graduate courses, which always have space for a course on obscure topics of interest to professors, but rarely offer courses focused on writing.

Another probable reason for the low quality of our texts is vanity (Silvia, 2019). The author suggests that academic writers want to appear intelligent and brings a German aphorism to illustrate: if the water is dark, the lake must be deep. Thus, instead of using simple words, we chose to write something like water bodies characterized by minimal transparency are more likely to be characterized by higher values in the depth dimension ($p\text{-value} =$

0.032) (Silvia, 2019).

The result is that our standard academic writing style makes readers, including our academic colleagues, suffer to understand what we write. Badley (2019) reinforces a point that should not be necessary to remember: academic texts are attempts made by human beings to convey ideas clearly to other human beings. And we failed miserably in that mission, because our academic writing became a view from nowhere, no one's point of view in particular, as if it were a text in which the author disappeared (Badley, 2019). We need to undertake a new way of writing, post-academic writing (Badley, 2016). It is academic because it seriously addresses a topic of interest to a specific discursive community, but it is also accessible because it can be read and understood by people from other, broader communities (Badley, 2016). Speaking directly: post-academic writing is human writing for human readers (Badley, 2019). And if we are going to write like human beings, it is inevitable that we are going to write like the human beings we are, individually unique. In other words, we have to put our humanity in the text, which implies that we have to write authentically, in our own style.

It is ironic that if it took us so long to learn how to write as badly as we write (Sword, 2019), we now need to learn to write humanely and, probably most challenging of all, write with style. However, style is not something that can be acquired, because it is intrinsically linked to the person who writes (Zinsser, 2006). We have to find our own way to add humanity to our texts, and not just try to write in a stylish way, because we would lose the naturalness, we would lose what makes us truly unique as writers (Zinsser, 2006). The author reminds us that the reader quickly notices when the style of a text sounds forced rather than genuine, and recommends: be yourself. For that, we need to understand what are the characteristics that make a text human, with its own style and at the same time pleasant to read.

Sword (2009) investigated the perceptions of researchers in the field of education about what makes prose more enjoyable, inviting, pleasurable, and even elegant. The author argues that, despite these objectives being abstract, they can be pursued through the application of very concrete, specific, and replicable principles and techniques. These principles and techniques were formulated from a survey of more than 70 academics from different fields, as well as consultation of style manuals, and a textual analysis of books and articles written by 10 academic writers widely recognized by their peers for their style of writing. Next, I will present a summary of the characteristics, mapped by Sword (2009, 2012), which make up a well-written, stylish, original, elegant, imaginative, and creative text.

Academic writing with style, elegance, imagination, and creativity? This seems so unscientific! However, in addition to the reasons cited above for the predominance of the “rotten” style of academic writing (ignorance, vanity, lack of training and imitation), Sword (2009) believes that academic authors assume they need to write in standard academic form, without style, because journal editors and reviewers will not accept anything different. However, many editors want published articles to reach readers beyond academic boundaries and are enthusiastic about rigorously developed but accessible research reports, especially as such research has the potential to engage even non-specialist readers. (Sword, 2009). The author argues that the status quo will only start to change when more and more academics dare to write differently, replacing the impersonal style of research reports with a more narrative style, more like a story being told.

So, let us go to the suggestions that can be useful for us to write in a more natural, more human, and pleasant way.

5.1 Interesting and attention-grabbing titles and subtitles

Let us take as an example two titles of articles recently published in an accounting journal:

Into the woods of corporate fairytales and environmental reporting.

Product market competition, disclosure framing, and casting in earnings conference calls.

Which one seems most intriguing and inviting to read?

Sword (2009) argues that titles that convey the feeling that the article will tell a story have greater potential to capture the reader's attention. These are titles that not only suggest the presence of a plot, but also characters or concrete objects (Sword, 2009). In addition, the composition of titles and subtitles allows the articulation of the subtext that surrounds them, that is, the message that lies between the lines. For example, choosing a serious, functional title with careful use of specialized terminology, as in the case of the second example, sends the reader the message that “you can trust my results, as my research was carried out in accordance with the highest scientific standards” (Sword, 2012). On the other hand, it also sends the message that the text will be informative and lucid,

and likely tedious. Thus, the careful choice of the title of an article can convey different messages, such as (Sword, 2012):

- "You will have to struggle to understand what I have written" in the case of a title full of technical terms.
- "I want to entertain you" in the case of a humorous title.
- "I want to make you think" in the case of a provocative title.

Of course, each choice has benefits and risks, as the same subtext that attracts one reader can drive others away (Sword, 2012). The author also highlights that candidates for master's and doctoral degrees tend to choose the title of their dissertation or thesis thinking exclusively to satisfy a very restricted group of readers: the board. And so, they opt for titles that seek to convey, between the lines, the following message: "I am one of you now. I know the rules of the game, please accept me into your academic fellowship" (Sword, 2012). Although the option for more conservative titles is understandable, if we want our works to reach audiences wider than a small portion of academy, we need to consciously choose the subtext messages we want to convey with the titles of our articles, books and lectures (Sword, 2012).

5.2 Attractive opening paragraphs

If the introduction is probably the most important section of an article (de Villiers & Dumay, 2014), the first sentence is the most important of all, because if it does not prompt the reader to continue reading, the article is dead (Zinsser, 2006). Obviously, the second sentence should motivate the reader to proceed to the third, and so on, until, without realizing it, the reader was captured by the text, and the writer managed to construct what, in journalistic language, is called a lead (Zinsser, 2006). The author emphasizes that this first paragraph should grab the reader's attention immediately, and force him or her to continue reading; it must stimulate through freshness, novelty, paradox, humor or surprise; by presenting an unusual idea, an interesting fact or question. And so, readers will be eager to find out what is in the rest of the text. The text should then be constructed in such a way that each paragraph amplifies the previous one, deepening the reasoning, bringing more details and entertaining the reader even more (Zinsser, 2006). In this process, the writer must pay special attention to the last sentence of each paragraph, as it acts as the springboard for the next paragraph (Zinsser, 2006).

Thus, exemplary academic texts in terms of style feature opening paragraphs that tell an interesting story, ask challenging questions, dissect a problem, or otherwise capture and hold the reader (Sword, 2009). Below, I present three examples of opening paragraphs that show their authors' ability to capture the reader's attention:

Are we academic writers really that bad? Do we really stink (see Pinker, 2014)? And if we do, why do we bother to write at all? Also, if we still want to write, then how could we make our writing less awful? (Badley, 2020 p. 1).

Are most accounting academics and professionals excited when they receive the latest issue of The Accounting Review or an email of the Table of Contents? When I was a doctoral student and later an assistant professor, I looked forward to receiving new issues of top accounting journals. But as my research horizons widened, I found myself less interested in reading a recent issue of an accounting journal than one in a nearby discipline (e.g., Journal of Law and Economics), or even a discipline further away (e.g., Evolution and Human Behavior). Many accountants find little insight into important accounting issues in the top U.S. academic journals, which critics allege focus on arcane issues that interest a narrowing readership (Basu, 2012 p. 851-852).

As academics, we have a responsibility to act as conscience, critic and counselor of society. In fulfilling this public interest responsibility as accounting academics, we are primarily concerned with how accounting, accountants and accountability regimes facilitate more democratic institutions and processes that serve to enhance economic, social and environmental justice (Dillard e Vinnari, 2017 p. 88).

Despite the importance of starting a text well, articles that start with engaging paragraphs are actually rare (Sword, 2009). In contrast, the author noted that the five most common ways to start an article are:

- Declaring the urgency of a topic, either because of a change in context or a growing interest in the subject. For example: "Recently, there has been a growing effort to understand..."
- Describing the historical and/or organizational context of the situation to be analyzed. For example: "The impact of publishing firms' accounting information on the capital market has been evidenced since the seminal studies of..."
- Quoting excerpts from other works. Example: "Management control systems comprise combinations of

rules, practices, values and other mechanisms for individual and social control (Chenhall, 2003)".

- Describing the article's objective, its theoretical or methodological aspects. Example: "This study aimed to understand, through social identity theory, how auditors reconstruct their identity after a critical event..."
- Starting with a comprehensive and obvious statement, such as "Writing is a core activity of research in accounting science."

It is likely that many readers find it normal to start an article with sentences similar to the ones presented, and this shows how used we are to reading texts that seem not to have been written to be read.

5.3 The text tells a story

This is probably one of the most difficult characteristics to be incorporated in an academic text, especially an article directed to a scientific journal. As a rule, journals impose a standardized structure composed of a sequence of sections: title, abstract, introduction, literature review, theory, methods, results, discussion and conclusion (Patriotta, 2017). However, the author highlights that, from a semiotic perspective, all academic articles are similar not only in terms of structure, but also because they tell a story: the search for a solution to an enigma. Thus, scientific articles are usually motivated by a theoretical question that generates an investigation process and produces a solution, so that the answer to the original question is the article's contribution (Patriotta, 2017).

Our challenge then is to write an article using our creativity and our own style, but at the same time following the conventional structure. As much as the conventions help us, by providing meaning-making mechanisms that allow us to guide the reader's interpretation (Patriotta, 2017), strictly following the conventions results in tedious and arid texts, like those we are used to finding in journals. Thus, we need to develop writing strategies that balance innovation and convention, deviation and reproduction, surprise and predictability, to varying degrees (Patriotta, 2017). One way to follow the conventions and at the same time add our individuality is to make our voice sound in the text, which is one of the characteristics that give a human character to a text.

5.4 The author writes with a distinctive voice

The writer Haruki Murakami (2010) states, in his book on writing, that the fact that he is who he is, and not someone else, is one of his greatest assets. Along the same lines, Zinsser (2006) argues that the merchandise he has to offer as a writer, no matter what he is writing, is himself. And recommends: do not change your voice to fit the subject you are writing; develop a voice of your own so that readers will recognize you when they hear you in your pages, a voice that is pleasing not only in its musicality but also in avoiding tones that degrade it. The voice is the force that moves writing, it is the expression of the author's authority and interest in the subject (Murray, 1973/2013).

It is certainly not easy, after so many years in which we were forced to write texts "without an author", to find our voice and make it sound in what we write. One of the sources of tension is that, on the one hand, our voice appears more naturally when we write in first person, and on the other hand, our "I" is not always welcome in a text (Zinsser, 2006). In Brazil, it is very common for students to be prohibited from writing in the first person, from their scientific initiation projects to graduate school. On the other hand, in international journals published in English, the use of passive voice with omission of the subject is frowned upon, and thus the use of first-person is preferred. However, Sword (2009) observed that authors of articles in the field of education use the first person singular or plural impersonally, that is, they are able to write in the first person and yet their texts do not present a distinctive voice. In the author's view, many social scientists still believe that writing impersonally gives an image of objectivity and scientific superiority to their texts.

One way to incorporate our presence in the text is to write the draft using first person and then, in proofreading, suppress it (Zinsser, 2006). We can also adopt a posture of writing for ourselves and not worrying about finding out what the reader wants to hear, but about finding out what we have to say and the best way to say it (Murray, 1986). The author reinforces the point that, although academic writing conventions often induce the production of dry texts, most journal editors want to receive well-written texts.

We can seek to achieve elegance in writing by using listening to write. Hearing one's voice in the text is what makes most writers keep writing, it is the element that adds meaning beyond words, that allows the writer person to communicate with the reader person (Murray, 1986). When we read a text marked by the writer's voice, it is much more likely that we feel like we are talking to someone, rather than watching a lecture centered on tedious slides, as it is the writer's voice that conveys passion, personal commitment and engagement with the subject

(Sword, 2009).

The central message I want to leave here is that we do not need to compromise the quality of our writing a priori, just because we are used to reading lifeless texts in the journals we consult. We can and must dare. Especially in early versions of our texts, we need to muzzle our inner censor so that we can be ourselves in what we write. After all, a text is never ready in the first version. There will always be numerous rounds of revision, in which we will be able to polish our text and remove any excesses.

6 REVIEW

Of all the myths surrounding academic writing, one of the most persistent is the belief that some authors write easily, that texts naturally come out of their fingertips (Sword, 2017). However, writing a text is a craft work, which requires a lot of effort over dozens of proofreading rounds. In practice, producing a single, high-quality academic text can take two or three years, or even longer.

Thus, no matter how laborious it is to produce the first version of a text, finalizing it signals that the work of writing is just beginning (Murray, 1973/2013). Most of the work comes later, and consists of eliminating from each sentence everything that is unnecessary, until only the essential components for the message are left. And this reasoning holds true not only at the sentence level, but also at the document as a whole. The writer must constantly ask him/herself “what am I trying to say?”, then read what he/she has written and assess whether he/she can actually say what he/she wants to say, and try to put him/herself in the shoes of a reader who encounters the text for the first time (Zinsser, 2006).

Usually much more time is spent on proofreading than on producing the first version of the text. I tend to proofread a text at least 20 times until I feel it is ready to be read by someone else. Something Murray (1973/2013) documents to be common is that by the time we get to the final version, we will likely have revised the early part of the text many dozens of times. Often it is just details, such as rearranging the order of words, placing commas, distributing sentences, among other things, always seeking maximum clarity and coherence. In this search, one of the central elements is unity, as it prevents the reader from straying and getting lost along the way (Zinsser, 2006). Thus, we must pay attention to the choices we make during the construction of our texts, seeking to maintain cohesion between the elements. Unity is manifested in the following choices (Zinsser, 2006):

- Pronouns: writing in first person as participant, or third person as observer.
- Verb tense: writing in the past or present.
- Mode: adopting a casual or formal tone.

Any choice is acceptable, as long as there is no alternation between them (Zinsser, 2006). Among the many excellent suggestions by the author regarding the unity of the text, one that I consider to be the most important is the unity of argument. Every high-quality nonfiction text should present the reader with one, and only, provocative thought that he or she has not had before (Zinsser, 2006). And so it is up to us to discover, in each text we write, which is the new idea that we want to leave in our readers' minds. Once we have discovered this idea, it will be much easier to decide whether to write in first or third person, past or present, in a more formal or informal tone (Zinsser, 2006).

One of the biggest difficulties I have observed graduate students face in proofreading their manuscripts is being able to read the text itself as a reader, as someone who has not written it. The point is that we need to develop this special kind of reading skill if we are to be able to revise our text as often as necessary in order to make it increasingly informative and clear (Murray, 1973/2013). We will only be able to count on the criticisms and contributions of other readers when the text is sufficiently developed. Virtually all the proofreading work, all the reflection about the changes that need to be made to the text, needs to be done by ourselves (Murray, 1973/2013).

We need to be able to read our own text critically and at the same time constructively, cutting out the bad parts and preserving what is good (Murray, 1973/2013). To do this, understanding how experienced writers work can help us hone our skills in proofreading our texts. Murray (1973/2013) noted that good writers:

- First, they scan the document to find major problems related to content and form. As they solve these problems, they start to do more and more detailed readings as they rewrite;
- Then, they assess the amount of information presented in the text, as well as the degree of specificity, precision and potential interest that the information may arouse in the reader. At this stage, it is important to identify the questions that a reader would make in relation to the arguments presented, so that the text must

implicitly or explicitly address such questions and answer them;

- The next step is to analyze the text structure in the order in which the subjects are presented. A well-written text is solid both in terms of argument and narrative. Some writers use an outline that helps them visualize the sequence of subjects that make up the text. At this stage, experienced writers assess the degree of development of each section, as well as its size relative to the text as a whole;

- Finally, the question of voice. Good writers make sure they hear their voice in the text itself, as a well-written text is always characterized by a consistent and unique voice.

In this way, proofreading begins with an overview of the text and deepens to the point where the writer engages in line-by-line editing, paying attention to sentences, words, and punctuation (Murray 1973/2013). In this process, the writer-reader changes a word and turns his/her gaze to the sentence, then to the paragraph, always looking for variety and balance, structural firmness, coherence, unity and emphasis, whatever is necessary to give clarity to the message he/she wants to pass (Murray 1973/2013).

The writers who are able to revise their own text do so because they are able to divide themselves into two (Murray, 1982). The author explains that, while one writes, the other reads, but he/she does so in a more sophisticated way than ordinary reading, as the reader “I” monitors the writing before it happens, while it is happening and after it happens. This monitoring involves identifying opportunities for change while the text itself is being written, and when a change is made, the text is read again to assess the outcome (Murray, 1982).

The writer, in proofreading, reads fragments of text and reads the entire text; reads what is on the page and what is not, sees what can be excluded and what is missing (Murray, 1982). As we can see, this is a set of reading skills that are different from those we apply when we are not writing, as they involve (Murray, 1982):

- While the writer-self writes, the reader-self records the text evolution;
- As the text is modified by the writer-self, who adds, cuts, and rearranges, the reader-self keeps track of how each change affects the text;
- The reader-self records in his/her memory the problems faced, the solutions already tried and rejected, those not yet tried and those that are in operation at the moment;
- The reader-self is continually evaluating whether the text as a whole “works”;
- The reader-self also encourages, supports, and acknowledges the progress made.

It is evident that the review is a time-consuming, thorough, and exhaustive process. Very often, after reviewing every little detail of our text, the question remains: when is it ready? When is it good enough to be subjected to the scrutiny of a qualified reader? Well, in this respect we have to accept the fact that a text is never done. We deliver it on time, with a mix of feelings of accomplishment, frustration, pride, and shame (Murray, 1982). And if we do not have a deadline, there comes a time when we simply need to drop the review, with the confidence that we have done our best. We must allow our text to be read by other people. But we should only do this when we are sure that we were able to value our reader's time, as we invest countless hours working on the smallest details of our text.

6 CONCLUSION

Writing is an activity that represents a very significant part of our training, and whose weight and importance gradually increase as we advance in our academic career. From graduation to master's, then to doctorate, and now as university professors and researchers, the level of expectation and demand for our intellectual production only increases. The pressure to fill our resume with publications can lead us to confuse publishing with writing. It may also lead us to believe that publishing is the same thing as writing.

I hope that in this essay I have been able to make the distinction between the two activities clear. If writing is one of the most important activities in our professional practice, and it is how we communicate the results of years of our research efforts, does it make sense to continue writing texts in which we do not appear, texts without a voice? The vast majority of scientific articles that we read do not have a distinctive character in their writing. But academic writing may be different from the standard that currently prevails. Throughout my career I have often found myself reading articles from very pleasant journals, in whose texts I clearly heard the author's distinctive voice. And I have always admired this ability, which until then was seen by me as something intangible, perhaps unattainable, an innate superiority of those writers. Until I found the authors cited in this essay, and I believe, perhaps with exaggerated optimism, that they helped me to understand and systematize a little better

the knowledge and practice of producing accessible, pleasant, humane, and yet academic texts.

"Don't mistake people with a lot of publications for people with a lot of good ideas. Our aim is to write up what we're passionate about while still having a life." (Silvia, 2019 p. 8)

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