

MASTER PROGRAMME PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES

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How has that feeling changed nowadays (if it did)?

It did not change that much: Writing is still hard work and sometimes very painful. But nowadays I enjoy it (to a certain degree). The difference is that I am now much more experienced in scientific writing that makes it a lot easier.

What do you like most about scientific writing? What keeps you writing?

I like most to really dig very deep regarding scientific topics I am interested in. I am fascinated by the idea to create some new knowledge by "just" writing. What keeps me writing? The knowledge that there still exists a lot of questions and scientific problems that are unsolved (and a lot of coffee, chocolate, and sometimes beer or wine, as well).

Which aspects of scientific writing are rather challenging or exhausting for you?

To find enough time to write a lot. And still the question of how to begin a paper, what are the best first words. And very often having to cut down the length of papers to stick to a journal's rules.

Are there any rituals that you follow when writing a scientific paper?

Yes, I cook coffee, and use the time of the day at which I expect the least disturbances or own distractions. Unfortunately, in my personal situation this is often in late evening or night times. But as well I try to establish some rewards for myself if I manage to write the lot that I intended. This could be watching my favourite TV shows (Northern Exposure, Big Bang Theory, Homeland, Chuck, Stranger Things, if anyone wants to know) or enjoying a free day afterwards. To sum up: Rituals are very important and help you to achieve your personal writing goals.

Are there any methods you use during your writing process that you want to recommend to your PACS students?

Yes, one of the most important methods is very simply: just write. You can only learn to write scientifically if you begin writing. The more you write the better it gets. The most difficult thing is always to begin simply write something, you can change it again later on anytime. And what helps as well is to think about what is the main question you want to answer with your paper? What is the topic you like the most? Try at first to structure your arguments, then the paper. Try to write down a first structure of the paper then begin writing. Another very good strategy is reading scientific papers. Read famous (or not so famous) papers in your field and check in which aspects these pieces are great, do they even have weaknesses? What could be improved? Reading a lot does well help a lot to improve own writing abilities. Discuss your papers with your fellow students, review their papers and let your papers be reviewed by them that helps a lot because you will see that you are not alone with typical writing problems. And of course, drink a lot of coffee, eat chocolate, and establish a system of rewards for yourself in case you achieve your writing goals.

Lastly, is there anything else that you would like to tell your students about scientific writing?

If you struggle with scientific writing, always be sure that you are not alone. And scientific writing is, like other crafts, an ability that has to be learned, practiced and brought to perfection in a long time. It is by far nothing you just "can". I recommend as well to read very good books on writing:

Paul A Silvia: How to Write a Lot: A Practical Guide to Productive Academic Writing, APA.

In German: Narr, W.-D./Stary, J., Hrsg. (1999): Lust und Last des wissenschaftlichen Schreibens. Hochschullehrerinnen u Hochschullehrer geben Studierenden Tips, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp
