

LIN 405 - Writing in Linguistics

Summer 2021 - Scott Nelson

How to write...Mathematics?

There is no recipe and what it is

- The basic problem in writing is to communicate an idea
- Have something to say and someone to say it to
- Organize what you want to say and arrange it in that order
- Write, rewrite, re-rewrite
- You must work on mechanical details such as diction, notation, and punctuation

Say Something

- Much bad writing is caused by violating this principle
- Two problems:
 1. Writing many words about nothing
 2. Having something to say, but trying to say too much
- Having something to say is the most important ingredient for good writing

Speak to someone

- Ask yourself who it is you want to reach
- Try thinking of a very specific person
 - Be careful about getting too personal and informal
- Anticipate and avoid the reader's difficulties
- Keep in mind that the audience reached may be different than the intended audience

Organize first

- Organize the material in a way that minimizes resistance and maximizes insight
 - Remove unintended distractions
- Make an outline
- Deciding what to leave out can be more important than deciding what to leave in
- Organize your work around the crucial examples and counterexamples

Write in spirals

- Chapter/Sections/Etc... get written and re-written in the following order:
 - 1,2,1,2,3,1,2,3,4, etc.
- First time writing a section you can violate all the writing rules, but when you go back to it don't edit but instead re-write the chapter
- Final re-write is the point where you can start asking others to look over the draft
- Stop writing for the day when you know what you need to do next

Organize always

- Just like you need to re-write, you should also re-organize
 - Can use the spiral method for this as well

Write good English

- You don't want to distract, confuse, or anger the reader
- The goal is to be completely unobtrusive
- Use correct grammar, correct choice of words, correct punctuations, and common sense

Honesty is the best policy

- Avoid pedantry and fuss without sacrificing precision and rigor
- Do not hide facts from the reader
- Tell the reader why you have made each point

One hour workday

- Focus and regularity
- What are your thoughts on this method?

Student submitted Questions

- When figuring out who we want to write for, can we have multiple target audiences?
- How do we know exactly which group are readers are in? If I am goin to write an article on sociolinguistics, should I focus on sociology or linguistics?
- When specifying the audience of a paper, what is the best way to determine their knowledge so you're not going over their head or dumbing down the topic too much?

- Have you used the spiral method? It seems effective but redundant.
- If two sections can be read in any order, is there a way to know what the best arrangement really is or is it just a matter of opinion and preference?
- If there is no usable recipe for good writing, how are we supposed to know which criticisms we should consider and which ones we should dismiss when writing future papers?

- What is the average age of obsolescence for papers in linguistics?
- How do we determine if we have something to say for a paper since undergraduate assignments aren't usually concerned with this?
- How necessary is it to include counterexamples in papers? Can a counterexample provided in the first section be included in our papers that is disproven in a later section or is this bad organization?
- Does "not using reform spelling" to avoid distraction apply in linguistic writing?

References

Halmos, P. R. (1970). How to write mathematics. *Enseign. Math*, 16(2), 123-152.