How To Become a Productive Academic Writer?
A Book Review on Silvia's How To Write A Lot

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Abstract:- *Written by Paul Silvia, a psychologist, and professor at University of North Carolina at Greensboro, How to Write a Lot (Silvia, 2019) offers helpful tips and insights to academic writers. Comprised of eight chapters, the book offers a pragmatic and behavior-oriented approach toward writing. Silvia has written many books and scholarly articles which can testify to his writing productivity; this also puts forward credibility in the arguments he has made in this book. Also, the narratives and scientific findings infused in the book are of an interesting addition to intimately acquaint the readers. The discussion is not deadening for it is mixed with comical and humorous anecdotes that, from time to time, entertain the readers. Suggestions for its next edition are to curtail repetition in some parts and to include up-to-date research regarding writing productivity. better improve the book's credibility and contemporaneity. This is highly recommended to both beginning and seasoned writers, most especially in the realm of the academe.*
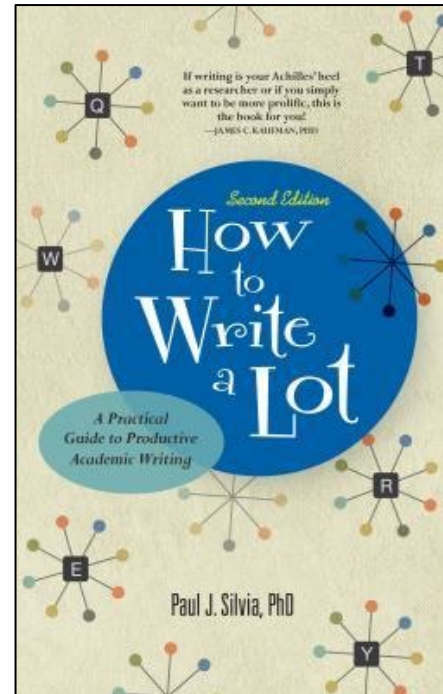
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Introduction

One of the common questions among college teachers, researchers, and students is how to become productive in writing. Many think that it is difficult, but it turns out to be uncomplicated. In *How to Write a Lot* (Silvia, 2019)*,* Silvia provides illuminating tips and insights to academic writers. Containing eight chapters, the book offers a pragmatic and behavior-oriented approach towards writing. Paul Silvia is a psychologist and professor at University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He has written various books and scholarly articles in the arena of psychology (see Silvia, 2006; Feldman & Silvia, 2010). His interests range from but are not limited to, creativity, interest, and self-regulation.

Chapter 1 "Introduction"

It promises the readers to write productively through necessary actions that one can easily do. Here, the emphasis is that productive writers do not have special gifts and that writing is not an inherent trait. Just like any advanced skill, it should be undertaken and practiced. Silvia warns the readers not to write for the sake of publishing. He puts forward that to succeed, one must have a set of concrete behaviors. He also pinpoints that the true companion of people in writing is not inspiration, but regularity. There, good ideas come in.

Chapter 2 "Specious Barriers to Writing a Lot"

This chapter details the commonly cited reasons professors and graduate students use when writing. These specious barriers appear to be legitimate. However, under scrutiny, one can say that they are deceptively false and disempowering.

(1) "I can't find time to write." In academia, this reason is widely famous and has elevated as a guiding life theme. Nevertheless, it is a comforting false belief, most especially if other people have that same kind of reasoning. In order to rectify that, prolific writers make a schedule and stick to it. Binge writing on the other hand is wasteful. When one procrastinates and later devotes an entire day to only writing, the propeller is a combination of anxiety and guilt. When following a schedule, self-discipline must be manifested. A beginning writer may think that he is not that kind of person and that he is not good in sticking to the schedule. That is self-defeating; such dispositional explanations merely avoid change. Silvia suggests allocating time and not finding the time.

(2) "I need to do more analysis first." Silvia pinpoints that it is the most insidious among all the barriers encountered he encountered. At first, it appears reasonable; however, it is not. Some writers use it as a mantra and hence they end up procrastinating for a long period. The fledgling writer needs to separate time for literature reading and writing. Furthermore, the author states that the writer will not be stressed anymore about finding time to read papers because he or she knows already when to do it. Indeed, the schedule is pivotal.

(3) "To write a lot, I need a new computer or other things." The author shares his experiences when he was starting in writing—he used an old computer table and chair which did not deter him from writing. For him, seeking new materials is just a desperate excuse. He is not sympathetic to this kind of complaint. He even accentuates that waiting to have an Internet connection just to write is not a good excuse, instead, it can cause more distraction. He cites other writers who share the same argument.

(4) "I'm waiting until I feel like it." Of all specious barriers, Silvia finds this ridiculous and illogical. He even compares this to cigarette addiction; the author mentions research that pinpoints that relying on inspiration does not work well. Struggling writers defend their own cause of struggles. He even finds forcing people to write strengthens creativity. Many successful writers, regardless of genre, reject the idea of writing when inspired—they just write regularly.

Chapter 3 "Motivational Tools"

Here, Silvia explains the tools to bolster productivity in writing; these tools can combat binge writing. (1) Setting Goals. It is necessary and is part of the writing process. It guides the writer and can help him to stay on track; the goals should be written and must have a specific, measurable, and concrete timeline and duration. (2) Setting Priorities. Any writer should bear in mind deadlines concerning the project he is writing. It may be a self-imposed deadline, or it is given by a professor. Making it on time is worth the effort. Silvia reminds that to collate data is easy but to write about it is not. So, the bottom line still is to manage deadlines. (3) Monitoring Progress. Silvia asserts that monitoring progress can help writers to become motivated. It can help prevent them from being distracted and can aid them to observe themselves which can result in desired behaviors. Lastly, Silvia shares his practice of using spreadsheets and statistics to monitor his own writing progress.

Chapter 4 "Starting Your Own Agraphia Group"

This chapter, meanwhile, explains how to start an agraphia group, which is a support community for people who want to improve their writing skills. This community promotes healthy writing habits and assists people in getting out of the quagmire of binge writing. Complaining is common in academia, as shown by both professors and students. It's usually disempowering, particularly when it's accompanied by specious barriers.

Agraphia essentially pertains to the pathologic loss of ability to write, which encapsulates the experience that many academics and students. Agraphia group intends to aid these people by giving them opportunities to talk about their writing projects, ideas, and hindrances. The meeting should be done on a regular basis. Silvia explains that a group can be a source of constructive social pressure. Binge writers will be pressured amidst a group of scheduled writers. A group can provide positive reinforcement for desired behavior and negative reinforcement for wayward behavior. Such can be utilized as a monitoring tool and can make writing more enjoyable.

Chapter 5 "A Brief Foray Into Style"

The author contends that academic writers are in general bad writers. He cites three reasons: (1) instead of using simple and direct language, they use pompous and highfalutin words to sound smart; (2) their professors in the graduate school perhaps are bad writers too that they do not have good role models in writing; and (3) they do not devote time to practice writing. With the presented problems, he also gives solutions for each respectively—(1) focus on the argument rather than the sophisticated wordings; (2) buy good books on writing; and (3) read those books and practice according to the scheduled time.

Silvia advises academic writers to choose good words. To use words that are pedantic so as to sound sophisticated can hurt readers whose English is second, third, or fourth language. They use the dictionary when reading scholarly papers—if they do not understand a word, they blame themselves. Meanwhile, technical terms should be used wisely and when needed. Also, they must be defined with simple words for easy understanding. Silvia mentions that psychologists prefer using bad words which should not be modeled. He is horrified that professional journals filled with bad words are frighteningly real. He, moreover, shares that in crafting a research article, instead of using *participants;* he uses a more specific term like *parents* or *students* or *children*. Abbreviated and acronyms are discouraged. Deleting parasitic intensifiers such as *actually*, *virtually*, and *basically* can improve the manuscript.

Silvia strongly recommends academic writers write strong sentences; the overuse of one type of sentence can make one sound robotic. Utilizing the three types of sentences—simple, compound, and complex—can reinforce the crispness of the manuscript. Applying a variety of sentences conveys a tone with conviction. Furthermore, the author says that many people shy away from using colon (:) which can be a good ally to establish a sense of balance. He reminds also that dashes can be used in scholarly writing. Em dash (—) can connect phrases or clauses and can enclose a parenthetical expression. En dash (-), meanwhile, coordinates two concepts.

Silvia also presents two maladies in academic writing. (1) *such that virus* and (2) *wobbly compound syndrome*. The first one refers to the overuse of *such that* because of the fear in simple sentences. The second one is about compound sentences in which another clause cannot stand alone. Both maladies can become immense casualties in academic writing. Like other prominent authors in writing, Silvia urges academic writers to write in an active voice, with the rationale that it is the natural everyday thought and speech. Passive writing is vague and evasive—writers tend to use that to sound smart because it is impersonal and stereotypically linked with scholarly writing. Active sentences though can become lifeless, as well, so one should be aware of this possibility. Put into emphasis, Silvia understands that passive writing is also important in discussing concepts, theories, and relationships.

Moreover, Silvia stresses to write first and revise later. Many beginning academics fall into the trap of thinking to do an immediate, pristine draft, or they are paralyzed with perfectionism. This should not be the case the two mentioned cases in their hinder academicians to generate text spontaneously. If one is continually agitated of crafting a perfect sentence, he can't proceed to the next thought. Lastly, the author highlights that paragraph is the basic unit of writing, not a sentence.

Chapter 6 "Writing Journal Articles"

Many researchers have a ton of data in their cabinets that they wish to write about someday. However, because of specious barriers, motivational, and self-management problems they cannot write articles. Many claims that they have a mental block when writing, which in effect they cannot write. Hence, Silvia recommends writing an outline. A researcher can make decisions for the manuscript in advance—length, coverage, structure, etc. The researcher can also prepare the tone and style. Silvia argues that when writing, it is pivotal to bear in mind the audience, a picture of who shall read the paper because it can aid in various writing decisions. The objective is to write like a normal person who has something worthwhile to convey, not too serious neither casual.

For the *Title* and *Abstract*, Silvia suggests a balance of generality and specificity. It should not be so technical and tedious; if the writing is comical or using a trendy topic, future readers must still get the jokes still. The academic community conventionally writes the title and abstract last which can be emulated. For the *Introduction,* giving an overview is a must but it should be succinct too. It must contain the previous and present research under the topic. Significance and context must be evident for a clear path when reading the text. For the *Message* section, it is important to put how the research is conducted. A good *Method section* can make other researchers replicate the study. It should have several subsections like *Participants, Design, Measures, Procedures,* etc. Connecting procedures to past research can reinforce the validity of methods.

For the *Results* section, it is advised to report only the results that are relevant to the problem. Good results create a story. Bad ones just present a list of statistical tests. Results should be discussed in the logical sequence, not in a hurry. The usage of tables and figures can make the section succinct. Meanwhile, for the *Discussion* section, it should be narrower compared to the general discussion—it should summarize the study's findings. For *General Discussion*, on the other hand, it should be shorter than the *Introduction*. Inherent to research are limitations—if a limitation is obvious, there is no need to add it. For the *Reference* section, Silvia cautions to avoid sloppy references and grievous sins against APA style. The author advocates citing one's past research in the new manuscript to see the connection from one's own stream of works. It can also be a way for readers to learn more about the researcher, in case they are interested. When submitting the manuscript, it is fitting to make it as clear and perfect as possible. It is not fine to submit a dirty, rough draft—it conveys unprofessionalism. Moreover, it should be supplemented with the cover letter, a simple one will do.

The decision of editors can either be accepted with minor revisions or declined. It is rare to have a notice of the immediate acceptance even if the researcher did his best and even the editors like the manuscript. Editors want to shorten or explain some aspects there. When it is declined, the editor does not want to see the manuscript again for various reasons. But antagonizing them will not do any help, closed-door rejections can be a way to another journal. Silvia recommends for researchers to have a mindset that a researcher's work will always be rejected. Most journals reject and have a 20% acceptance rate. This mindset may not make the beginning writers motivated but it can help them write better. Rejections are sometimes mean and poorly reasoned. But emailing the reviewers and editors of an embittered letter will not make them change their decisions.

When co-authoring a journal, all authors should approve the outline. But it should not be the only one person who will write the text. As emphasized, setting deadlines is important and equal collaboration is indispensable. On crafting a review article, the common misconception of many academic writers is that they would just give points on a massive body of research. They do not put the original point, which is a must for any review article. A review article is hard to write because there is plenty to read and to digest, but the reflective and disciplined writer must not fear this.

Chapter 7 "Writing Books"

This chapter presents that people are remembered for their books, not really for their journal articles. Writing a book is intellectually enriching since it offers a chance to talk about big questions. Though books take longer to write, sticking to a schedule can make it done. People write books for a variety of reasons—curiosity, wrapping up of research, a summary of contribution to the field, fun. As highlighted by the author, a good book uses everyday language.

On writing a book, Silvia provides three steps. The first step is to find a co-author. He or she should be someone who writes a lot and is helpful in structure and coherence; this approach can make the book finished early. The second step is to write an outline. It must have a well-detailed hierarchic structure. It may take months to craft, but it is worth it. It can be in a form of a table of contents; it should have a specific number of words to be attained per chapter. This is to avoid other parts being narrow or exhaustive. Only dilettantes and fools venture on crafting a book without a definite structure. Additionally, it should have a summary of the focus per chapter so the writer can be truly guided. It can also be used when presenting to reviewers. The third step is to simply write, to set a schedule, and to not wait for motivation to come, the repeated argument of this book; Silvia also advocates to organize ideas and resources by chapter, not by topic.

Chapter 8 "The Good Things Still To Be Written"
Scheduling writing can be joyful for writers. Instead of wishing of writing, they can have more pages that translate to more articles and more books. It can become a sense of pride when sticking to a schedule. When a writer conquers the temptation to put his work to a halt or become lazy, he can have small victories. Indeed, there is no special trait or gene for somebody to write a lot. The key here is making it a habit. One may not like doing it but if it is being repeated, then it can become second nature. Silvia stresses that publishing does not make someone a good person or scientist. Writing and keeping a schedule brings to life a balance; work and leisure are separated. Since the binge writers horribly look for large pieces of time from night to weekend, they find the time. However, that, sadly, is the time that is supposedly allotted for families and friends.

Conclusion
As an academic who struggles in writing, this book has been very helpful to me. Through this, I was able to aid myself combat the misconceptions and excuses on writing. Admittedly, those are prevalent and taken-for-granted in our university, driving many students and faculty to not start or to dilly-dally in writing their manuscripts. Hence, having a knowledge of specious barriers can be a starting point to understanding them and later challenging them. This book is not deadening. In fact, it is engaging. Filled with practical tips that are truly helpful, the book is commendable for it helps readers to add skills in their writing armamentarium.

The narratives and scientific findings infused in the book are of an interesting addition to intimately acquaint the readers. The discussion, as well, is mixed with comical and humorous anecdotes. Though there are points that are repeated, I believe they are intentionally done put emphasis. For me, it is fine which has helped relearning the concepts. What I can suggest is, in its next edition, it is appropriate to include up-to-date research regarding writing productivity to better improve the book's credibility and contemporaneity. Nevertheless, this is not a so-so book that suggests people of empty platitudes. As pinpointed in the book, the approach here is behavioral, not motivational. It has impacted my writing habit that I take action and set routines now, instead of waiting for a spark.

I followed also the suggestion of Silvia to create an agraphia group in our university. I gathered people in our department, and we started an initiative to write research manuscripts. We used the tips and suggestions from this book. Gladly, it was appreciated by the Academics Office. Having a group with like-minded people positively influences our writing. We also helped one another to set structure and to share

ideas in writing productively. I highly recommend this book to writers, professors, academics, and students. Indeed, this book review is a manifestation itself of how to write a lot.

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