

## Teaching Students How to Write

There is a myth with doctoral students regarding their education. For some reason they believe that each paper they write in their programs must be related to the dissertation topic, and that over the first 2 years this topic narrows into research questions—and perhaps even a couple of published articles. This approach does not reveal growth in the student’s ability to think (is the ability to think a learned skill, or something confined to a single topic?). Further, if the student cannot write, this essential skill is not acquired by producing inadequate paper after paper, and somehow learning about the art of writing by adjusting each paper following the instructor’s red pen corrections. The important issue here was, working apart from their dissertation topic for their first semester, an advantage or disadvantage for these students?

For decades, I have written with students, since the first earliest Mac and a projector. The rule was to “talk aloud”, and one student typed. Even if the typing student wanted to add their 2 cents, this had to be done by him (or her) (or their) first speaking the sentence, then typing it, so we would all be in the same wavelength.

My last semester teaching “Theoretical foundations of nursing” was insightful, for partway through the course, students had not even begun to identify their topic for their term paper. Faces revealed some desperation. So, I suggested we write a joint paper. Student selected the main concept — “resilience”. How many articles are there focusing on resilience in Google scholar? Ans: 1,000,000. Oh.

At this point, students made a commitment that if our joint article was good enough, we would publish it, with full understanding that this publication submission process would extend beyond the semester. Our first discussion was to delimit the topic. How was ‘reliance’ used in Nursing? In clinical practice? Applied to various illnesses and patients?

We produced an ‘preliminary’ outline. Each of the 7 students had a clinical area of interest and focused on ‘becoming resilient’ in a patient population within their specialty. Single diseases were expanded to a typology that encompassed several diseases with similar characteristics (e.g., Asthma was an episodic illness—what other diseases are chronic and episodic?). Now such categorizations formed seven classes of types of diseases, sorted by patient problems and symptoms, rather than classifying by pathophysiology.

Now the outline was still developing, and students were reading broadly about resilience. Students were given roles: as librarian, format police, editing illustrations, and as submitting editor. We identified a journal to submit to, *Global Qualitative Nursing Research*, and this provided a target, and placed external boundaries for the structure of our article.

At this stage started writing about reliance as a concept. We continued to develop our outline as our thinking developed. Soon students were asked to each write a synopsis about resilience in their disease category. These were circulated and the formats of these paragraphs edited by each student of fit a similar format. We then identified all the concepts in each set of diseases categories and build our model jointly in class discussion. Now we could see where our article was “going” and from these discussions we made a detailed outline.

Next, we wrote for real. There is no rule that says you must start at the beginning—in fact the first paragraph should be written last, when you know exactly what the first paragraph has to introduce. But we had our outline in the document, so it was actually a process of filling the blanks. I started, “Now, in this section we need to say....” And I would start dictating-and-typing the first sentence—but stop midsentence and call on a student to complete the sentence, and let the student continue. In this way the entire group was thinking together, contributing, and *writing*. By the end of class, I was able to say “Whoops, we have written a page. Careful or will finish before the end of the semester.” Together we created Tables and the model and revising and modifying the text.

Was this approach worthwhile? Students in the past have said that they did not know how to write until they had written with me. This article was published: all students are authors. Was the article a contribution to nursing? Evidently the reviewers thought so. Was this process advantage to the students? Ask them...their names are listed on the opensource reference below:

Morse, J.M., Kent-Marvrick, J., Barry L.A. Harvey, J., Okang, E.N., Rudd, E., Wang, C-Y., & Williams M. R. (2021). Developing *The Resilience Framework for Nursing and Health Care*. *Global Qualitative Nursing Research*, 8, 1-21. DOI: 10.1177/23333936 2110547.

## On teaching writing skills

I believe that one cannot write...

- Until one knows what they want to write.
  - The *thinking* must be complete.
- Complete a reasonable outline
  - It is not carved in stone, but many of the main issues are there.
- Write every day, preferably at the same time, for a block of time
  - (See Table of successful writers, below)
- The first draft is not the final draft
- Have you work informally edited (by your peers)
  - And formally by a professional editor
  - Put the first draft down for a day or two, then read it carefully, out loud

## Writing in groups

Discuss the product very carefully to make certain everyone is on the “same page” with the same agenda. Then

- Produce the outline together to iron out any issues;
- Work jointly, with a large screen or a projector;

- How? Take turns at typing. The persons typing must announce out loud what they intend to type and recite while they type;
- Others may “dictate”;
- Do not interrupt the flow of typing, but breaks may be taken for discussion or corrections.

## Writing an edited book

In the 90s--the early days of qualitative inquiry, there was a dire need for methods books in nursing, as well as other disciplines. I could identify the purpose of these books, and outline their chapters, but not did not have time to write. I identified experts to write these chapters, then, with the support of Dan Ruth, the Editor for nursing books in Sage Publications, submitted a proposal and received the go ahead. My process was as follows: authors who were invited to write each chapter, did so. Every author circulated their chapter to all the other authors, then we met for two days, when everyone had read everyone’s work. At the meeting each author had 30 minutes to discuss “sticky issues” with their topic. In this way each topic included everyone’s ideas and experiences. Some of the discussions were so interesting, I included them between chapters as “Dialogues”. Revised chapters were then compiled and eventually published. These books, several of which received awards, were:

## References

- Morse, J. M. (Ed.). (1989). *Qualitative nursing research: A contemporary dialogue*. Rockville, MD: Aspen Press. Revised Edition, Newbury Park, CA: Sage. (Reprinted 1991, 1992, 1992). [Received 1991 *AJN* Book of the Year Award].
- Morse, J. M. (Ed.). (1994). *Critical issues in qualitative research methods* Newbury Park, CA: Sage. [Received 1994 *AJN* Book of the Year Award]. Translated into Spanish: (2003). *Asuntos Críticos en la Metodología de Investigación Cualitativa*, Columbia: The University of Antioquia Press. Republished Spanish: (2005) *Asuntos criticos en Los Metodos de investigacion cualtitativa*. Alicante, Spain: Universidad de Alicante.
- Morse, J. M. (Ed.). (1997). *Completing a qualitative project: Details and dialogue*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Morse, J. M., Swanson, J., & Kuzel, A. (Eds.). (2001). *The nature of qualitative evidence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

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## HOW REAL AUTHORS WRITE

**THE SECRET SEEMS TO BE TO WRITE AT THE SAME TIME EVERY DAY**

Actual proof. . . .

**Table 1: On styles for writing**

Author	Reference (source)	Work time/productivity	Style	Comments
Nora Roberts	Collins, Lauren. (2009, juen 22 <sup>nd</sup> ).real romance: how Nora Roberts became American’s most popular novelist. <i>New Yorker</i> , 60-69	9am-5pm daily; 1 book every 45 days; total 170 novels.	Works on 3 <sup>rd</sup> floor of house, sips diet coke and crisps	“Put your a*s in the chair”
Walter Mosely	Mosely, W. (2007, August) This year you write your novel. <i>Opra Magazine</i> , p 160-164, 166.  From book of the same name NY: Little-Brown	Writes 3 hours every morning; it’s the first things he does. Writes in a special place; has rituals to start. . .	Drafts are imperfect by definition. Read, rewrite, read rewrite. Don’t stop writing. . .	“It is something you must do every day”.  “The only thing that matters is that you write, write, write.
Steven King	King, S. (2000). <i>On writing</i> New York Pocket books	Writes 10 pages/day <u>everyday</u> . Same time—morning. Good days finished by 11.30; hard days, he still there later in the afternoon.	Writing space: no distractions, no phone, TV, draw the curtain, pull the blind, close the door. But listens to loud hard rock.	The scariest moment is just before you start. After that, things can only get better.
Margaret Mead	<i>Blackberry winter</i>	Well, living in the desert, she wrote sitting in a cool bath		Writes in her “precious hours before dawn”
Carol Shields	<i>Unless</i> (2002)	“I write now in the afternoons.”	“I have a sense that if I am serious about this business. . .”	“. . .willed quietness in my chest might connect me with the points and edges of all I am attempting to get

				out of my mind. Then I switch on my computer. . .”
Margaret Laurence	<i>Dance on the earth</i> (1989)	This was my own rule. . . I worked 3 nights a week from 10.30 until 2 on the morning	I began writing when David was just over 1 month old. The kids had to be in bed asleep before I could begin.	See lack of time (p 157). “impossible juggling act” P 199: I lived in a shack writing constantly. Jack McClelland had a poster printed: “No visitors allowed between Monday and Friday. An important work is going on.”
Barbara Kingsolver	<i>Costco Connection</i> , 24(1), 43.		Now works in a very cluttered office in an old farmhouse, looking through windows onto the forest.	Pregnant with her first child in 1986, Kingsolver suffered from insomnia. Rather than baking, cleaning or counting sheep, she sat in a closet at night and write <i>The Bean Trees</i> , which became an instant success. . .
Sue Grafton	<i>Costco Connection</i> , 24(2), 31.	Reads every chapter 10 times “in a row” before changing a thing. Write 1 book every 2 years. 21 books in the alphabet murder-mystery	Quick morning walk; sits down to write at 8am; break for lunch; works until 3pm	TV writer in 1980s by day; by night “she would lie in bed dreaming of way to do in her ex-husband, with whom she was going through a long painful divorce. Since she figured she would most likely be caught, she decided to write the plots in book form instead and get paid for them.
Kathy McCance	<i>Personal communication</i>	Writes every day, at least 4 hours	“Sometimes I start at 4am and work until 11am, ski, then read. Other times I just do the 4 hours writing”.	Reads in a comfy chair. Has a 2 month break every 2 years.

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**YES! & Listen to: Monty Python Novel Writing**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUKOTXHZ0mw>

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