Writing to Publish

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Lunch w/ NEMA
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Agenda

• Value of writing
• How to get started
• Making a point
• Components of effective writing
• Voice
• Writing for magazines and peer-reviewed journals
Writing is Thinking

“I write because I don’t know what I think until I read what I say.”

~Flannery O’Connor

*Girl Writing, 1941*
Milton Avery
Phillips Collection
Writing is Power

_Louisa May Alcott_
Suffer from writer’s block?
Dear Boss:

Why don’t you ever answer my emails?

Sincerely,
Cynthia

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- Museum Studies (course information and certificate program): [http://museumstudies.tufts.edu/](http://museumstudies.tufts.edu/)
- MA in Museum Studies and Art History program: [http://sse.tufts.edu/art/graduate/maArtHistoryMuseum.htm](http://sse.tufts.edu/art/graduate/maArtHistoryMuseum.htm)
- MA in Museum Studies and History program: [http://sse.tufts.edu/history/graduate/museum.asp](http://sse.tufts.edu/history/graduate/museum.asp)
- Tufts Graduate School of Arts and Sciences: [http://gsas.tufts.edu](http://gsas.tufts.edu)
How to Email Your Professor (without being annoying)**

Every semester, I see the tweets and Facebook posts. My professor friends, they are annoyed. Their students do not know how to write emails, they say. What they really mean is that their students don’t know how to follow the conventions of email etiquette in the academy. I used to be exasperated by student emails too. Until I realized that there was a simple explanation for why they didn’t know how to write them—they’ve never actually been taught how.*

But now, clueless students have no excuse, because they can read this post. Profs, share it with your students. Students, share it with your friends. Or don’t, and be the one person in the class your prof enjoys receiving email from.

10 Elements of an Effective, Non-Annoying Email

Here’s a template you can follow in constructing your email to a professor. Each element is explained further below.
How do you find your way?

Girl in White in the Woods
Vincent Van Gogh
Koller Muller Museum
Organize your writing around a point
A point, is a claim, is a premise, is a thesis.
A point, is a claim, is a premise, is a thesis.

Email etiquette is an important professional tool to master.

or

Supervisors must bear the responsibility of facilitating two-way communication.
A point, is a claim, is a premise, is a thesis.

The increasing use of picture-taking in museums is decreasing visitors’ attention to art and objects.

or

The increasing use of picture-taking in museums is increasing visitors’ engagement with objects.
Write to your readers
Structural components of writing

• The point (premise, thesis)
• A problem statement (what problem does your point address?)
• Context (what does the reader need to know to understand your point and the problem?)
• Evidence (to back up your point)
• Argument (persuading with evidence)
• Parting thought relating to thesis
Writing is a major form of currency in the academic world. It’s obvious that scholars write books and articles to express their expertise and are rewarded for doing so, but students too must engage with this currency to succeed. The savvy student learns how to read the writing of others critically and actively, in conversation with the author. This student is also rewarded for clear writing that effectively expresses ideas and demonstrates learning.

Although some might argue that universities are over-reliant on writing as a way to assess students’ progress, since many occupations don’t require that skill, I defend writing. “Writing is thinking. To write well is to think clearly. That’s why it’s so hard,” said historian David McCullough (Humanities, July/Aug. 2002). The act of writing forces the writer to make choices and put thoughts in order. It helps the writer clarify opinions and find evidence to support claims. I think it make sense to hone these skills in school, for who doesn’t benefit from strategies that support clear thinking once out in the work world?

Moreover, most museum jobs demand excellent writing skills. Curators write research-based essays that support exhibitions. Exhibition developers write label text. Collections managers must be meticulously correct in word choice and spelling or collections will be unsearchable; essentially lost. Educators write lessons plans and create written materials for teachers, students and visitors. Marketers write press releases. Everyone writes grants, which must be convincing and error-free.

I hope that you can grow to love writing (if you don’t already) and launch into assignments at school and in museums with enthusiasm, creativity, and expertise. It’s a skill that you can continue to develop and enjoy throughout your life.
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The personal blog voice

“I felt inspired to visit the Museum of Sex in the middle of my third trimester partly because I liked the visual of a pregnant lady wandering its halls trying to put two and two together (“So if we… and then he… ohhhhh”)…”

http://www.youbeauty.com/fitness/museum-of-sex-while-pregnant/
The informal blog voice

“…Just recently though I noticed a little wooden tree hung with soft pretzels on top of their pastry display case thing. While I think of soft pretzels as hot dog cart food more than I do as fancy restaurant food, I thought: hey I’ll try a fancy pretzel.

And holy crap, guys. They are, I think, the best soft pretzels in New York City. They are flaky, but I think that is at least partially coming from the consistency of the shaved (is this possible?) salt flakes on the buttery dark brown pretzel skin. Pretzel skin haha copyright.”

Jason Polan, “Tell ‘Em Jason Sent You: Pretzels at Layfayette,”
“THE APPEAL OF the road trip, or the long through-hike, or the pilgrimage, is that the “point” is so deliberately minimal — to arrive at, you know, the end — and the decisions involved so banal (stop for gas now, or in a bit?) that the distinction between signal and noise is blurred.”

Develop your voice

http://www.bluecatscreenplay.com/articles/you-are-the-box-office-smash-the-personal-screenplay/
Why write for a museum newsletter, magazine, or peer-reviewed journal?

• More permanent than blogs
• May reach a well-defined audience
Writing for magazines

- Great exposure in the field...
- ...but often short-lived (not indexed)
- Relatively low threshold for publication
- Types of articles: show-and-tell, how-to, opinion, current issues
Refereed Museum Journals
Why go to all that extra work?

- Participate in an evolving conversation
- Contribute ideas and research that may be used for decades
- Benefit from the publisher’s reach and resources
What is the structure of a journal article?

• Abstract
• Introduction
  o “Problem”
  o Thesis
  o Context, gaps in literature
• Body
  o Support, explain thesis
  o Evidence, results
• Conclusion
• Sometimes....
  o Bibliography
  o Biography
  o Acknowledgements
  o Figures (photos, charts)
How can I publish in a journal?

• Have something to say
• Know what others have said
• Do your homework
• Follow the rules
  o Deadlines
  o Formatting
  o Citation style
What else matters?

Follow the rules!

- Word count
- Grammar, spelling, punctuation
  (educator’s rule,
   educators rule, and
   educators’ rule
   all mean different things)
Get the word out

Social media /posts and reposts
Talks and workshops
Have something to say
Write to your readers
Add your voice to the discourse
Questions?