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First Things First: Writing Strategies

Marilyn L. Grady

A Mirror and a Teaching Tool

Professors as Writers: A Self-Help Guide to Productive Writing is a useful book for those seeking to unravel their writing challenges. The introductory chapter is a scholarly treatment of writing, the subsequent chapters are hands-on examples and strategies for diagnosis and remediation of writing challenges. The author provides a mirror for anyone who is struggling with the craft of writing.

For those who work with doctoral students, the book is an excellent teaching tool. Often we assume that students coming to the doctoral experience have sufficient skill for the task of writing the dissertation. Unfortunately, many students come to doctoral work with little facility with writing. This book provides a framework for assisting these students. Similarly, many novice professors who encounter expectations of “publish or perish” have limited writing experience. The book can be a key resource for assisting or mentoring junior professors.

The following quotes provide a small sample of the book’s contents.

“Perfectionism overlaps with fears of failure. Perfectionism practiced pathologically, as a morbid fear of making mistakes and of being exposed as mediocre, is little more than a fear of failure that inhibits writing.” (p. 10)

“Professors who try doing writing in brief, daily sessions during busy weeks evidence two benefits. First, they typically produce far more writing than do colleagues who work in binges, and they do so at rates more than sufficient to meet the expectations of tenure/promotion committees on campus. Second, they find writing more enjoyable—in part because it no longer requires substantial warm-up times and in part because they no longer need to take it home to complete it.” (p. 14)

“Free writing teaches writers to delay editing and other parts of the revising process until writing is well under way. Our internal editors tend to get in the way if we let them start work too early.” (p. 53)

Perhaps you recognize the perfectionist, the binge writer, or the internal editor?

Reference

Boice, R. (1990). *Professors as Writers: A Self-Help Guide to Productive Writing*. Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press.