

## Writing as a Satisfying Endeavor

### *Commentary*

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Browse academic guides, check the library, or look on the Internet. Any inquiry about scholarly writing—in any field—will likely result in some advice toward achieving some seemingly fixed standards of quality prose, perceiving the task as less intimidating, and practicing regularly enough to achieve a so-called scholarly voice. It is rather ironic that in the field of communication and media studies—well aware that getting any message across is neither that simple nor boring—this is also true. A quick perusal reveals that much of this writing advice is geared toward producing conference papers and journal articles and focuses on style and grammar—composition, if you will. Little is found on what it means to communicate—to successfully convey one’s ideas—beyond the task of publishing findings, let alone how one can enjoy doing it. (Hint: Work with people who enjoy what they are doing, too.)

The communication of scholarly knowledge should be something worthwhile to those who consume it and an endeavor enjoyed by those who produce it. It should be a gratifying experience for authors—more so if it has to do with one’s work and contributions to the field. And yet much of the literature about scholarly communication addresses matters of disappointment, struggles, time management hardships, and exhaustion—which hardly seems a rewarding path for one’s career, even though these are all quite central to academic life.

This is why Pablo J. Boczkowski and Michael X. Delli Carpini’s essay is so refreshing. They discuss the craft of writing and candidly review “the rules of the writing game.” They acknowledge that writing is a very personal practice, that goals and tasks vary from one format to another, and that there is no one suit of communicating scholarly knowledge that fits everybody. Thus, rather than aiming for a unifying approach to writing in communication and media studies, these authors tackle the oft-ignored matter that there is not one correct way of doing this kind of work.

This idea is not stressed enough elsewhere. There is no such thing as a proper fashion of scholarly writing and communication, and trying different approaches can be fruitful. There might be more traditional venues for publishing, but that does not mean that communicating one’s work is akin to a fill-in-the-blanks exercise. Questioning the expected and doing things differently can also be fun and, more importantly, satisfying and energizing. It is important that such diversity is valued and recognized. As a discipline, communication is hardly static and done. Why should sharing our knowledge about it be wooden or fixed? If anything, novel approaches have improved our understanding of the field, and creative ways of conveying such knowledge to different audiences would go far in making our contributions easier to grasp. A little more humor would not hurt either.

### Diversity and Plurality

Publication dynamics are much more complex than academic guides and job or promotion committees tend to suggest. As Boczkowski and Delli Carpini describe, there are different rewards for different approaches. The hardships and timelines differ as well. The experiences and personalities of scholars are varied, and contextual constraints are unique. For those in or from the global South, for example, language barriers often deter scholarly research from this region being widely known, with contributions largely ignored in the Anglo-centric and English-language academic world—which is frustrating to say the least (Bachmann & Proust, 2019). Not surprisingly, scholars from the global South try to bridge the gap by being fluent in the academic languages and standards of the discipline, which often means transitioning to a different academic culture and premises. In feminist research, for instance, authors such as Wöhrer (2016) and Das (2017) have argued that attempts to fit into Western canonical requirements for publications favor Northern scholars' hegemony and results in Western scholars looking at non-Western scholarship—and their diverse scholarly traditions and debates—as being low quality rather than simply different (see Bachmann & Proust, 2019).

In their essay, Boczkowski and Delli Carpini also warn about the increasingly formulaic approaches in writing for what is often deemed to be the substantial part of academic writing—especially with regard to peer-reviewed articles—and underscore the proliferation of more popular formats that are not necessarily aimed at academic audiences but rather society at large. One format they do not mention are thematic encyclopedias, a venue that has expanded in the last decade. Communication encyclopedia entries are a very particular kind of publication that, admittedly, lacks recognition among some scholars and institutions but can serve both the wider academic community and any given reader interested in a particular topic. It is a rather unique space where both established and emerging scholars can share their expertise on and insights into the comings and goings of a constantly evolving field, and where there is room for less well-researched domains—geographically, but also intellectually. While this kind of work tends to take several years to get to the point of publication, encyclopedias by definition strive for diversity, inclusivity, and collaboration in a process that is quite rewarding.

There is still a long way to go in making scholarly writing more satisfying for all, but there are signs of improvement. The issues tackled here are increasingly being addressed and discussed in academic conferences, mentorship instances, scholarly publications, and more popular venues such as social media. The fact that the *International Journal of Communication* has granted space for such a discussion is a contribution in itself and, one hopes, a first step toward a much-needed debate.

### References

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