

Writing for a Professional Audience (and Like a Pro)

1 The Goal

Produce work that is clear, accurate and poses and/or answers questions that are important.

2 Writing Habits that Tend to Work—Meghan Edition

1. Chipping vs Bingeing. If you chip at a project, you work in small-ish (several hour) bursts over the course of many days. If you binge at a project, you work in a few long, uninterrupted chunks. There is some research to suggest that chippers are overall more productive, less stressed, and more likely to finish big career projects (i.e. dissertations, books etc).
2. Writing vs. Revising. Writing from scratch should take up comparatively little time compared with revising, adding, subtracting, reforming, etc.... Crank out a first draft, but take it as a no shame draft, subject to complete overhaul. I will go through 50-100 drafts of a paper from beginning (idea) to end (publication). Jeff?
3. Lit Review—Before vs. During the Writing. When you are first starting off, you need to do a lot of reading to know where the debates are and how to adequately explain them. But it is best to be writing *while* you are reading, rather than *after* you feel like you have read the relevant literature. (1) You will never have read enough of the relevant literature. (2) It is easy to lose track of your question, your animating idea if you get swamped with literature. Writing while you are reading will make it easier to keep your voice. How do you know if you have been scooped? While philosophy is not like news reporting—very rarely does some have your *exact* same take on an argument or an idea. But early on talking with faculty is a great (and cheap!) way to get a feel for what the literature is like, what is worth reading, and what isn't.
4. The Post-Mortem— Any time I give a paper at a conference, or share it at a workshop, or get a referee report even just have an extended meeting with someone about it, I conduct what I call a *post-mortem*. I make a list of the weak points in the paper (where and how did it die this time around?) Next to each point I decide what I will do—bite the bullet, rewrite section, drop that point, read more about X... Then I redraft the paper, ideally before the body gets too cold.
5. Finding Your Voice—Your papers ought to be clear and persuasive. Far and away the best way to check for this is to read your paper aloud to yourself and really try to listen to how you sound on paper. Journal articles shouldn't be overly conversational. But the reader should feel like they can dialogue with you, and that one point easily flows to another, that sentences are able to be scanned etc.

3 Writing Habits that Tend to Work—Jeff Edition