

Facilitator Notes

# Approaching a Writing Project

These notes accompany the PowerPoint presentation of the same title by Barbara Gastel.

For a longer module, this one can be combined with the next one, which is on ethical issues. In that case, ‘Knowing the ethics’ can be inserted as the second bullet point in Slide 2 of the current presentation (thus yielding five bullet points), and appropriate slides from the next presentation can be inserted in the corresponding section.

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| Module Title | Approaching a Writing Project |
| Course title (or analogous information) | This module can be presented alone or as part of a workshop or course. It can serve, for example, as* a freestanding presentation
* a session early in a research-writing workshop lasting in total anywhere from a half day to several days
* a session early in a research-writing course consisting of multiple meetings, for example throughout a semester
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| Unit Title | Not applicable |
| No. of Unit | Not applicable |
| Session Day/Time | Not applicable |
| Length of Session | This module typically would run about 50 minutes to 1 hour.  |
| Aim | This module is intended mainly to prepare participants to learn about specifics of research writing by (1) bolstering their confidence and (2) providing guidance on the writing process. |
| Learning Outcomes | By the end of this module, participants will be able to (1) prepare effectively to start writing, (2) efficiently draft pieces of writing, and (3) consider appropriate aspects of revising drafts. They also are likely to have more confidence in their ability to tackle a writing project. |
| Facilitator Profile | Ideally, this workshop would be facilitated by someone who has experience with research writing (for example, as an author of journal articles or as an editor), because such an individual can enrich the content with examples from his or her experience. However, the slides are designed to be relatively self-explanatory, and so a less experienced facilitator also can present the module. Also, the module can be presented jointly by a facilitator and a co-facilitator who provides additional commentary. |
| Participant Profile | This module is primarily for early-career researchers who are starting to publish their work. It also may be useful to mid-career researchers who wish to improve their approach to writing or increase their ability to mentor others in research writing. In addition, it may be helpful to some editors and writing instructors. |
| Pre-workshop Activities | No pre-workshop activities are required for this module. |
| Room Layout | Ideally, this module will be presented in a room layout facilitating interaction—for example, with several small tables, with tables in a U configuration, or with a conference table. However, this module also can be presented in a traditional classroom or a lecture hall. |
| Number of Participants | For optimum discussion, the number of participants should be limited to about 10–15. However, the module also can reasonably delivered to about 25 participants.  |
| Files and Materials | PowerPoint file: 01\_Approaching a Writing Project |
| Visual Aids and Resources | Computer with PowerPoint; projector for PowerPoint presentation; Internet connection if possible |
| Potential Embellishments of the PowerPoint | To keep the file small, the presentation consists almost solely of text. Images can be added to make it more visually appealing. For example, decorative images can be inserted between major sections to signal a change of subtopic and provide visual relief. Also, relevant images can be added to selected slides. For example, a clipart image of a calendar or clock could be added to Slide 9. |
| Learning methods and activities | The following notes may help facilitators to (1) elaborate on the content of some slides and (2) elicit group participation at suitable times. In the PowerPoint presentation, similar notes appear in the notes sections below the respective slides.* (Slide 1 is a title slide.)
* Slide 2 (“Overview”)
	+ Note the topics that the module will address.
	+ Note the module’s overall aim, which is stated earlier in this facilitator’s guide. (Feel free, of course, to frame the purpose in the way that the group is likely to find most relevant.)
* Slide 3 (“Establishing the Mindset (Attitude)”)
	+ It may be helpful to keep in mind that a purpose of this part of the module is to bolster attendees’ confidence.

The point should be made that since the purpose of research writing is to communicate rather than to impress others with one’s writing, the wording should be kept simple (which can be a relief to group members who are not native users of English).* Slide 4 (“Establishing the Mindset (Attitude) (cont)”)
	+ It may be helpful for the facilitator to add an example of an instance in which he or she received helpful constructive criticism on writing.
* Slide 5 (“Exercise”)
	+ This exercise is intended to reinforce the point from the previous slide and encourage participants to make good use of constructive criticism of their writing.
	+ The instructions on the slide are fairly self-explanatory.
	+ It can be helpful to read instructions for exercises aloud, or to have a group member do so, to help ensure that everyone follows.
	+ If time and conditions permit, some small-group members can share their observations with other subgroups or with the group as a whole.
	+ In total, about 5 to 10 minutes probably should be spent on this exercise.
* Slide 6 (“Preparing to Write”)
	+ This can be a chance to note the importance of obtaining and following journals’ instructions to authors and to ask group members about their familiarity with such instructions.
	+ If appropriate, the facilitator might ask what style manuals, if any, group members are familiar with.
	+ If the module is being presented in a setting where one or more such style manuals are available in hard copy or online, it can be good to note that availability.
	+ If time permits, it can be worthwhile to follow the hyperlinks to one or more of the listed style manuals and show the range of content.
* Slide 7 (“Preparing to Write (cont)”)
	+ Now can be a good time to ask group members how they go about organizing content and to mention some possibilities (for example, making lists or outlines, drawing concept maps, using color coding, or writing ideas on cards or self-adhesive notes and moving them around to achieve an effective structure).
	+ It can work well for the facilitator to say a little about how he or she prepares to write.
	+ With regard to the last bullet point in the slide, perhaps joke that “for a while” does not mean 6 months.
* Slide 8 (“Exercise”)
	+ This exercise is intended to help participants become more aware of how they prepare to write and how that process could be improved.
	+ The instructions on the slide are fairly self-explanatory.
	+ In total, about 5 to 10 minutes should be spent on this exercise.
* Slide 9 (“Doing the Writing”)
	+ Note that almost all of us are busy (for example, with research, teaching, and personal responsibilities) and thus that if we waited until we had ample free time, we would not get anything written.
	+ With regard to scheduling specific times to write, perhaps suggest
		- Writing down one’s usual weekly schedule and blocking out some times to write
		- Scheduling the writing times for times of day that one tends to function best
	+ With regard to starting with whatever part one finds easiest, perhaps ask the group what part of a journal article they find it easiest to start by writing. (Common answers include the results section, the tables and figures, and the references. The facilitator might also tell the story of the graduate student who had terrible writer’s block and so began by writing the acknowledgments.)
	+ It can work well for the facilitator to note his or her experience regarding one or more items on this slide.
* Slide 10 (Exercise)
	+ This exercise is intended to help participants start considering establishment of a writing schedule.
	+ The instructions for this slide are fairly self-explanatory.
	+ If time permits, some participants could share their responses with the group as a whole.
	+ In total, about 5 minutes should be spent on this exercise.
* Slide 11 (“Revising Your Work”)
	+ Perhaps tell the story of the guest speaker (a researcher known for submitting excellent journal articles) who, when asked whether he revises his manuscripts before submission, replied: “If I’m lucky, only ten times.”
	+ In conjunction with the point “Consider having an editor help you,” perhaps mention the possibility of seeking an AuthorAID mentor.
	+ Now can be a good time for the facilitator to discuss his or her experience with revision.
* Slides 12 and 13 (“Questions to Consider in Revising”)
	+ Perhaps ask the group for potential additions to the list.
* Slide 14 (“In Conclusion”)
	+ If time permits, include a question-and-answer session before ending.
	+ Perhaps do one or both of the following:
		- Ask each group member to write down three points that he or she is taking away from the session. Then have people share the points—either with those sitting near them, with the full group, or both.
		- Summarize the session.
* Slide 15 (“Wishing you much success with your writing projects!”)
	+ End by expressing the hope that the session will be helpful and by providing additional encouragement.
	+ If this module is part of a workshop, course, or series, perhaps note what is upcoming.
	+ Perhaps encourage group members to share points from this session with others.
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