



Academic Writing Feedback

GRS Writing Group – FRI 5 OCT 2018

Academic writing feedback may be confronting

Some of the emotions you may associate with academic writing feedback include feeling upset, ashamed, inadequate, anxious, embarrassed or defensive. Toor assures us this is normal and “Even those who make it look easy – whose work is good and well published – are still struggling with issues of how to get it done, and with the shame of not doing it, or not doing it well enough, or quickly enough, or whatever they think is enough.”



Rachel Toor. 2011. Shame in academic writing. *Chronicles of Higher Education*.

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/Shame-in-Academic-Writing/128483>

Academic writing is difficult at the doctoral level because you are learning about your topic, your discipline, and the requirements of doctoral research and simultaneously trying to improve your academic writing skills. It is normal to feel anxious when writing and receiving feedback on your writing.



Rachel Cayley. 2013. *Explorations of Style Blog*. Confronting the Anxiety of Academic Writing

<https://explorationsofstyle.com/2013/12/18/confronting-the-anxiety-of-academic-writing/>



Rachel Cayley. 2013. *Explorations of Style Blog*. Shouldn't I already know how to write?

<https://explorationsofstyle.com/2013/02/06/shouldnt-i-already-know-how-to-write/>

The nature of the feedback you now receive may be different to the feedback you have received in the past. The feedback is usually formative rather than summative – aiming to improve your writing rather than evaluate it. So instead of receiving a 90% mark and excellent written underneath with a few exclamation marks or possibly a gold star, now you'll have a page covered in red ink that focuses on the 10% that needs improvement. Some supervisors may forget to tell you what was good about your writing.



James Hayton. PhD Coaching. How to cope with harsh supervisor feedback. <https://jameshaytonphd.com/how-to-cope-with-harsh-supervisor-feedback/>

Aitchinson describes the process of giving and receiving feedback as “an interplay of power, responsibility and personality”. You’ll need to develop bolster your sense of self-worth and develop your resilience and coping skills. You might event need to sharpen your diplomacy and negotiation skills. Most importantly you’ll need to open your mind to criticism and the potential it has to improve your writing.



Aitchinson. Doctoral Writing Special Interest Group (SIG) blog. Feedback in doctoral writing: Why is it so different?

<https://doctoralwriting.wordpress.com/2014/02/01/feedback-in-doctoral-writing-why-is-it-so-different/>



Thesis Whisperer. 2014. Why does feedback hurt sometimes?

<https://thesiswhisperer.com/2014/05/28/why-does-feedback-hurt-sometimes/>

Feedback may be difficult to interpret

In addition to the emotional difficulties associated with academic writing, you may experience difficulties in interpreting your supervisors’ feedback. Hill suggests supervisors usually have five different agendas when giving feedback. These agendas include helping you to:

1. Correct your errors
2. Understand and apply the rules/norms of your discipline
3. Improve your critical reflection
4. Pay attention to broad issues across your thesis
5. Think from an examiner’s (or other audience’s) perspective



Geof Hill. 2012. [Giving feedback on student drafts](#).

<https://thesiswhisperer.com/2012/07/20/giving-feedback-on-student-drafts/>

Feedback may be contradictory

When you have feedback from multiple supervisors, you may need to manage conflicting advice. Better to avoid sending off multiple drafts of the same version to supervisors simultaneously. Send them sequentially – or possibly send different parts to different supervisors according to their area of expertise. Then when seeking a second perspective, send the original with markups so each supervisor can see the other supervisor’s feedback.



GRS Writing Group: Co-writing strategies

http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/3084093/GRSWG_Cowriting_020218.pdf

Feedback may be wrong (but give the feedback some serious thought before dismissing it)

If you feel the feedback you have received is wrong, make sure you give it some serious thought before dismissing it completely. Even when feedback is misguided, it often has an element of truth – possibly that what you want to communicate is not as clear as it should be.

Vitae have some useful tips about negotiating with supervisors if you feel your writing should not be changed. They suggest you:

1. Plan carefully your negotiation with your supervisor and “pick your battles wisely”
2. Separate people from problems. Avoid being personally critical of your supervisor and focus on the ‘facts’.
3. Ask questions to understand your supervisor’s motivation and/or reasoning for their position.
4. Aim for an outcome that addresses the needs of both you and your supervisor.

Feedback can be limited and may take time

If your supervisors are focusing on lower order editing concerns (grammar, typographical errors) and you would like them to focus on higher concerns (structure, logic, depth) you may wish to consider reducing text down to your main points using a reverse outline technique and discussing the outline verbally.

This technique may also be useful if feedback is slow because it will ensure you know you are “on the right track”. If this isn’t working you may need to resort to some “supervisor wrangling”.



GRS Seminar 2018. Academic writing revision strategies: reverse outlining.

<http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/students/resources/seminars> , specifically

http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/3085542/SeminarSlides_ReverseOutlining_Handout.pdf



John Finn. 2018. The art of supervisor wrangling

<https://clutter.errantscience.com/2018/05/07/the-art-of-supervisor-wrangling/>

Next session NOV 2: Overcoming Procrastination

Find further details of the UWA GRS Writing Group, including advice sheets to download, see:
www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/students/resources/communities#writinggroup