

# Writing for publication: are you standing in your own way?

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Journals are replete with formulae, tips and recommendations for writing manuscripts for publication, yet for both experienced and newer writers, getting started can be a challenge. So while any novice writer can easily get their hands on some helpful publication guides, what about this phase before we put pen to paper? Are you standing in your own way?

When recently preparing a masterclass on writing for publication I began to contemplate the myriad reasons that my colleagues, students and I sometimes struggle to get started and progress with writing. This may be pinned to our own cognitions and feelings regarding sharing our work with others and receiving criticism, self-doubt or procrastination. I realised that we may well be standing in our own way when it comes to writing for publication.

Jane Jones, a writing coach, describes writing as an emotional labour where we have to manage our emotions in our outward facing roles and in our interactions with others<sup>1</sup>.

In her writing coach role, she found people were constantly handing in things late, avoiding writing and then apologising and feeling bad about their feelings<sup>1</sup>. Internalised thoughts and feelings such as perfectionism, resentment, self-criticism and fears of criticism from others, as well as concerns regarding collaborators can all be impediments to writing and lead to procrastination.

Procrastination may be grounded in feelings of self-doubt, fear of failure or being unprepared and these feelings are often exacerbated by going it alone<sup>2</sup>. In my conversations with colleagues who are avid writers and editors, we agree with this premise that writing should not be an individual pursuit. Of course, if you are an esteemed professor you may well approach writing with the wisdom of years of experience. However, for the beginning writer, one of the best pieces of advice I can offer is to find a mentor or supportive team of people around you who can guide you in not only writing your manuscript but overcoming obstacles to getting started. Your mentor(s) can give you encouragement and positive

feedback and you will be able to learn from their experiences of manuscript development and critique. They can also hold you accountable to get started despite your own self-doubt and procrastination.

Another important strategy to get out of your own way when writing for publication is to develop a 'growth' versus 'fixed' mindset. When teaching childhood growth and development over the years, I often touched on 'helpless' versus 'mastery oriented thinking'. Mastery oriented individuals believe their efforts bring about success and tend to be motivated, focused and have future expectations of success, even when experiencing failure.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, those with helpless thinking worry about being judged for mistakes or poor performance and may develop a sense of helplessness.<sup>4</sup> Although Dweck and colleagues researched in this area in relation to child development, more recently Dweck has written about growth versus fixed mindsets and how these affect behaviour.<sup>5</sup> People who have a fixed mindset believe that intelligence is static and avoid challenges, give up easily when faced with obstacles, consider efforts to be futile, tend to ignore useful negative feedback and feel threatened by others' success.<sup>5</sup> If you have a growth mindset you believe that intelligence can be developed, welcome challenges and persist when faced with obstacles.<sup>5</sup> Those with growth mindsets consider their efforts lead to mastery, learn from criticism and are inspired by others' successes.<sup>5</sup> Research among university students has shown that mindsets are malleable<sup>6</sup> and this means that we can shift toward a growth mindset. Thus, I encourage you to develop a growth versus fixed mindset in relation to your writing. I find this to be invaluable for overcoming self-doubt. If you are focused on growth and believe in your ability rather than thinking your knowledge and skills are fixed, then you will have confidence in your capability to develop as a writer. As I often say to my students, academic writing is a learning trajectory that continues to develop over time.

The last piece of advice I offer emerging writers is to try to become comfortable with critique and to view feedback as a way to improve your manuscript rather than as a personal criticism. Learning from criticism is a key part of improvement when approached with a growth mindset. Try to seek out, expect and welcome all feedback, even when it may be negative. This will ultimately enable you to craft a better manuscript.

I hope you find a supportive mentor and work on your growth mindset in relation to developing your writing skills for publication. Overcoming unhelpful thoughts, feelings and

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self-doubt and being receptive to feedback will help you to open up your own path towards publishing success. I look forward to seeing your submission to our journal in the near future.

Warm regards,  
Elizabeth

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