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Writing for research
vs
Writing for practice

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The difference is Deakin University
Workshop aims:

• Practical and ‘hands-on’
• Acknowledge different forms of writing / audiences
• Discuss advantages / limitations of publishing in research journals and conferences
• Make informed choices about the options available to publish / disseminate insights
• Understand how to effectively present work to different audiences
Small group activity:

• Reflect on something you have done that you would like to either tell others about, or take a bit further

• It might be something that was spectacularly successful, or something that resulted in an outstanding failure

• Share with a colleague, then write one or two sentences about it
My PhD thesis opens with:

‘In my experience people who are confronted with Training Packages struggle to understand the language in which these texts are written.’

(Grace 2005, p.14)
‘Intelligent observational practice’:

• VET practitioners have useful ideas and insights into things they have tried in their own work

• There is value in sharing these ideas and insights with other practitioners and researchers:
  ▪ Sharing experiences adds to professional knowledge
  ▪ Receive positive feedback and the sense that your contribution is valued
  ▪ Intelligent observational practice can contribute significantly to research agendas
Where can we take the insights drawn from our intelligent observational practice?
Pursue as issues about practice:

• Put a recommendation to RTO management
• Discuss with colleagues at a team meeting
• Write an article for a professional journal or RTO newsletter
• Run a workshop at a conference or PD event
• Develop a proposal for funding from a VET professional development program
Much of what you do, thought about in a different way, would be great research.
Pursue as research questions:

• Use your insight as the basis of a university assignment or research paper / thesis
• Develop a submission for an NCVER research project
• Write a refereed conference paper or journal article
Writing for ‘practice’ vs ‘research’:

Often involves:

- Different audiences
- Different content or structure
- Different review processes
Different audiences

Different content or structure

Different review processes
It may be helpful to consider:

- The consultant practitioner’s role is to propose solutions / find answers

- The researcher’s role is to problematise / ask questions.
People struggle to read Training Packages:

A consultant practitioner might look for solutions or opportunities such as:

- Developing resources to provide guidance for RTOs on reading and interpreting Training Packages; or
- Reviewing what the Training Package development handbook says about language.
People struggle to read Training Packages:

A researcher might ask questions like:

• Is this true?
• For whom is it true?
• Why is it true?
• What evidence is there that it is true?
• What other studies have been done in this area?
• What theories might help explain what is happening?
• What are the implications of this being true?
A practitioner audience:

- Typically very busy
- Looking for information to guide their practice
- May be very familiar with the context but less familiar with related research and theories
- May have limited interest in reading long reports or exploring detailed issues about methodology
- Interested in strategies to achieve successful outcomes
A research audience:

- Needs to be quite certain about the research
- Is familiar with reading research and will ask questions as they read
- Wants to know about methodology, was data generated in a way that makes it as accurate as possible?
- Wants to know what other research has been done? What does the literature say?
- May be interested in what can be learned from exploring spectacular failures
Think about the sentence you wrote:

• Where do you want to take this from here?
• Who might you tell about it?
• What would a practitioner want to know about this as a guide to their own practice?
• What questions might a researcher ask about it?

• Choose your audience, then structure your message to tell them what they need / want to know
Different audiences
Different content or structure
Different review processes
Practice: A Reframing the Future Report

1. One - two paragraphs or a series of dot points on:
   - Project Description
   - Knowledge Creation and Management
   - Methodology
   - Anticipated Outcomes
   - Evaluation
   - Promotion
   - Timeframe
   - Risk Management
   - Participants’ skills

2. Copies of any products/materials

3. Financial statement
Research: An AVETRA conference paper

- Abstract
- Introduction
- Literature review
- Research method
- Findings and discussion
- Conclusions
- References
Different audiences, different expectations:

**Practitioner audience:**
- What did you do?
- How did you do it?
- What did you learn?
- What did you produce?
- How did you use the $?

**Researcher audience:**
- What did you do?
- Why did you do it that way?
- What literature did you consider?
- What issues came up?
- What does this mean for others?
- (Maybe) Where do you go from here?
Different audiences
Different content or structure
Different review processes
Everything / almost everything that we write for public distribution is subject to some kind of review process.

How that review is conducted, when it is conducted, who conducts it, what they are looking for, and the form of feedback provided are all determined by the type of writing and the intended audience.
Reviewing a report written ‘for practice’

- Reports reviewed and redrafted prior to public release, can be a lengthy process with several stages
- Often a series of reviewers: immediate supervisor, RTO management, perhaps a funding body
- You know who the reviewers are, and they know that you are the author
Reviewing a report written ‘for practice’

- May be looking for:
  - Accuracy in detail and presentation
  - ‘Image’ portrayed is consistent with policy or corporate goals
  - May be a preference for reports of successful outcomes
  - Evidence that funding support has been appropriately used
  - Recommendations / models to guide future practice
Reviewing a report written ‘for research’

• Finished journal articles and conference papers are reviewed prior to acceptance
• Two or three researchers working in the field of study
• ‘Blind’ review – you don’t know who the reviewers are; they don’t know who the author is
• Each review process will have its own criteria
• Feedback typically a recommendation to:
  ▪ Accept without change
  ▪ Accept with minor / major changes
  ▪ Reject
Example: AVETRA review criteria

- Issue/problem: clearly stated, in context of policy, practice or theory
- Literature review: comprehensive, analytical well-synthesised, relevant
- Research methods: clearly described, appropriate
- Analysis / conclusions: clearly described, supported by the evidence
- Implications: for practitioners, teacher educators, historical, theoretical or policy purposes
- Quality of writing: clear, unambiguous and concise
- Presentation: conforms to instructions on AVETRA website (e.g., referencing etc.)
Research reviews can be optional

• ‘Peer reviewed’ / ‘Refereed’ – the finished paper has undergone a review process
  
or

• ‘Non-refereed’ – generally a conference paper or presentation where the *abstract* has been reviewed before acceptance, but the *finished paper* has not undergone a review process
Why submit a paper for ‘peer review’?

• Benefits if you are building a research profile
• May be little benefit if you are seeking to share insights but not pursue a research agenda
• ‘Peer reviewed’ does not necessarily mean ‘better’ – it means that the paper has met the formats and expectations for research papers
• If you decide to submit a paper for peer review, you may need to rewrite some sections first
What have you already written about the issue you identified earlier?

• Who was the audience you were writing for?
• What was your purpose in writing about the issue?
• What format / structure did you use?
Changing a report written for ‘practice’ into ‘research’ writing – content:

• Consider other literature – Read more widely than just policy statements. Has any relevant research been done by others? What did it say?

• Reflect on your methodology – Why is it appropriate for your study?

• Review your conclusions – Do they apply more widely than your immediate context? Does your evidence support this?

• Do you need to address any unresolved issues? Are there issues that were left out of your initial report, but which still need to be explored?
Changing a report written for ‘practice’ into ‘research’ writing – style:

• Use sentences and paragraphs to argue your case rather than relying on lots of simple dot points.
• Subheadings are generally acceptable and useful.
• Explain any jargon and acronyms that may be unfamiliar to your research audience.
• Question your own assumptions and generalisations.
• Be clear and concise. Good research writing does not involve waffle or obscure language.
Different kinds of ‘research’ writing:

My interest in the language of Training Packages:

• A PhD thesis

• Several papers for research conferences – some peer reviewed, others non-refereed

• A number of professional development workshops and presentations for practitioners

• A press release, which led to two newspaper articles.
Different kinds of ‘research’ writing:

Peter Smith / Jenny Dalton Learning Styles research:

• NCVER report – 54 pages + support papers online
• NCVER ‘Getting to Grips’ report – 24 pages
• Reviewed journal article
• A newspaper article in *The Age* Education supplement
• ‘Peer Reviewed’ or ‘Non-Refereed’? It’s your choice. But remember:

• A very good report written for ‘practice’ but rejected by the review process of a research conference or journal is still a very good report – it’s just been written for a different audience with a different set of requirements.
Discussion

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