


Chapter 5

Discipline–Focused Revision Practices: A Context–Specific Example of Revising Dissertation Writing

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors present a conceptual framework grounded in a comprehensive review of the literature that discusses disciplinary writing and scholarly identity, specifically focusing on the role that revision has in both the scholarly writing process and the formation of scholarly identity. A review of the revision process is described, followed by the impacts of discipline and context factors on that process. An example of this process in the social sciences for doctoral students is provided to illustrate the application of the ideas described in the chapter. This discussion concentrates on novice writers such as graduate students and early career researchers. Finally, research-based strategies for providing scholarly writing instruction to graduate students are described with regard to improving students' revision processes.

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INTRODUCTION

Becoming a scholarly writer is a never-ending journey. It is an ongoing process where one learns through revision not only to improve writing ability but also to gain disciplinary knowledge. Writing in the discipline helps one to learn the discipline (O'Brien, Marken, & Petrey, 2016). Learning disciplinary conventions makes novice writers more comfortable about entering the scholarly discussions in their fields, especially via publication (Kirkpatrick, 2016; Perry, 1998). However, novice writers find publishing a challenge (Bowen, 2010) which is concerning given the importance of publishing. There is need for recent graduates to have published before graduation because positions in academia are competitive (Badenhorst & Xu, 2016). In addition, doctoral publishing before and after dissertation is related to later publication record (Kamler, 2008). Further, some doctoral programs require students to publish for program completion (Habibie, 2016; Jalongo, Boyer, & Ebbeck, 2014; Kamler, 2008).

Despite the importance of publishing and the need to guide emerging scholars as they write within the discipline, doctoral programs typically do not explicitly address the writing and publication processes (Badenhorst & Xu, 2016; Bowen, 2010; Cameron, Nairn, & Higgins, 2009; Paré, 2011; Starke-Meyerring, 2011). Instead, learning how to write and publish is often perceived as “tacit knowledge... that is acquired through a combination of informal mentoring experiences and the individual doctoral candidate’s initiative, diligence, and persistence at publication” (Jalongo et al., 2014, p. 242). In addition, doctoral programs are faced with striking a balance between timely degree completion and adequate immersion of students in scholarly study (Carter & Kumar, 2017). The culmination of most doctoral programs is the dissertation, a genre of academic writing requiring an intensive study into some new aspect of a discipline and field of knowledge (Kamler, 2008; Paré, 2011). Doctoral students need to be prepared to produce a quality dissertation for their own professional growth and to further the knowledge in the discipline. Doctoral programs are where the torch is passed in a discipline with regard to scholarship. For these reasons, transference of knowledge about scholarly writing should be intentional and even a focus for doctoral programs.

Novice writers lack the experience to understand that extensive and repeated revision of a scholarly work is a normal part of the process (Jalongo et al., 2014). They find this “*feedback loop*” to be an “iterative process [with] seemingly endless revisions” (Murray, 2010, pp.107-108). Obviously, haphazardly addressing revisions makes the end product of lesser quality, prolongs the process of finalizing the product, and increase editorial costs. But in addition, the revision process advances one’s scholarly writing and should be embraced and not rushed. Making revisions allows one to learn from mistakes, so the focus should be on both improving writing and

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