WRITING HUB | VIRTUAL SEMINAR
Building Writing Muscle

Transcript

21/10/20

Video link

00:13
Dominik Lukeš

So, the topic is about building your writing muscle and sort of using some metaphors to help us find out we could use deliberate practice for that. And as I said, it's a fairly new topic.

So, just a quick word on the session came about. Me and Kirsten were having a conversation about six months ago now and I said, "You know what, I've been thinking about this idea of writing muscle" and she said, "Well, that would be something maybe that might be interesting for other people to hear." And it's come about from me thinking about deliberate practice and helping students develop their study skills and writing across all levels for a few years now. So it's been on my mind for quite a while. And also, I've been having more and more interactions with the writing coach community, including some blog exchanges I'll mention later. So that's how it came about.

[Breakout rooms to discuss one thing that makes writing easier and one thing that makes writing harder: see video at 1:02 for written contributions]

So it appears that the harder column is a bit longer than the easier column, but I think that subject expertise and planning in particular seems to be coming through for what makes writing easier. There's also clear structure and that's related to that. Yeah. So breaking down into sections, all of these things, obviously are good ideas.

And the anxieties and all difficulties are also not unusual. And I think some of these, we may be able to address through the topic, but obviously it doesn't necessarily mean it will stop being difficult, but perhaps we can find strategies and ways of overcoming some of those difficulties. And I like the comment in the chat saying that the reason they the harder column is longer is that that's why everybody's here. So I hope that we will have given justice to your needs and reasons for coming.

Well, okay. So that was great, thank you. So what I want to do next is to essentially start talking about what is one of the aspects that makes writing hard. Not necessarily writing overall, but one particular aspect of writing that we need to focus on when we want to start thinking about how to practise it. And that's what I'm calling "the multiple articulation of writing".

3:34
About a year ago, Thomas Basbøll, the writing coach (I really like his blogging for methodology) wrote a blog about how to write a paragraph. It was very popular: really well received, well written. And then somebody asked him, “Can you write one about how to write a sentence?” And he did. But it was a much more difficult task, he acknowledged, and I'm not too sure that he succeeded.

So I wrote a much longer blog post (more like an article) in response a while after that: how to actually write a sentence. And one of the aspects of that I was thinking there that was missing is that a sentence is a much more difficult thing to write and actually (to use Thomas’s point) it's more - much more challenging to write something like a sentence in a paragraph and that's because in language (and this comes from a linguistic theory) there's a thing called double articulation. The idea is that we articulate meaningful segments by articulating little smaller segments that don't actually have meaning, but we have to kind of do those things at the same time.

4:31
So for example, if you have a word like this [pʰ̥ɻʷɛʔtsɬ̩], if you know your phonetic alphabet, would you guess what that word is? And we can simplify a little bit. What about now? What about now? And now it's <pretzel>. So you want to say “pretzel” but actually all of this stuff is happening in your mouth. So you're putting aspiration on the /p/, you're devoicing the /r/, you’re labialising it because it's following the /p/, you’re putting a glottal stop in there probably, depending on the dialect, you’re syllabifying/darkening the /l/ and so on. So all these things are happening. And as Thomas said in his thing about the sentence, “It's much harder to tell somebody how to walk than to tell them how to get to the City Hall.” And so “Sentences to paragraphs are kind of like from doing steps to going somewhere”.

But in linguistics we talk about the dual articulation or double articulation. But actually in writing there are so many things to articulate: you have to start from the mechanics, typing. You have to have the habits of where you’re sitting, your environment, the tools you're using. But then you have the linguistic articulation: spelling, grammar, vocabulary. But you’re also composing things: you’re choosing words from the right genre or register, formulating sentences, composing paragraphs. And then finally, you are also planning things: you're outlining, you’re sort of composing, you're revising, you’re editing. All of these things actually are skills that have their own articulation, so to speak. You have to do something to achieve them.

5:56
So, even at the level of a sentence, of just sort of academic language, this is quite difficult. So here's a sentence I made up that you may say [5:58]: “I came home, I made some dinner, then I read for a while. But I was so tired I fell asleep in literally two minutes.” So that's the sort of thing a person might say. So what are some of the things that we may want to change if we were writing. That we might re-articulate when we're writing. Well, there are some things like the “I”s. “But” and “so” are probably problematic. There's some words that we’ll probably want to reformulate. And there's some more. So ultimately, we had this common sentence, but ultimately nothing is left of that because I may want to rephrase it

as something like, "My arrival at the place of residence was followed by the preparation of the evening meal. Subsequently, I embarked on a brief period of reading. Due to my tiredness, this may have been interrupted by my entering a state of sleep within the approximate span of two minutes". So pretty much everything I had to replace, and the things that are not coloured are the things I had to add to make it all hang together. So all these additional things. So I use things like indirectness, nominalisation using nouns instead of verbs, overt marking of causality, using more formal vocabulary, lots of hedging. So you can see the comparison, there's lots of things happening.

And of course, that's not even it, because these things change in genre, in different fields and over time. So I don't know if anybody would like to hazard a guess who actually wrote this piece of awful non-academic writing? That was Mr. Darwin in the 'Origin of the Species'. That's pretty much what it reads like; it's hilarious when you read it from the perspective of what academic writing should look like. Because of course he changed the world of academic thinking, but the academic writing was appalling by today's standards. He would have 'citation needed' all over the place in 'The Origin of the Species'! But the citation itself is an example of something you have to articulate. And students, as you know, find it difficult to know where do I need to cite something? Which kind of statement do I need to back up? And here's a nice little tool that you can go to: 'Citation hunt' and it will give you all these examples from Wikipedia where somebody thought a citation was needed.

7:53
So what I'm trying to sort of get at with this, is that writing is not just writing words down. It is a complex activity with many components and any one of those components actually can be susceptible to difficulty. So it could be even at the level of reading - academic language is famously impenetrable. So this is a famous sentence that's a paragraph. A sentence by Judith Butler who won the Bad Writing Award in 1999 because it appears to be impenetrable. But actually, there's a very interesting paper by Cathy Birkenstein. She wrote, "You got the wrong gal," saying that actually Butler would not have had the wide impact she had if she was not able to actually make recognizable arguments, so that her readers can identify, summarize and debate. So actually, she was able to articulate these things, but she was doing it at a different level. So what we can learn from this that we as a writer - our job is to help our readers identify, summarize and debate our argument. So that is the job of writing - so articulating that. But to achieve that articulation we have to be able to do all those other things. So the premise of this is that this sort of articulation is a sort of a skill and that as a skill it can be learned. And when it is learned, as any skill, it can be learned by practice. So that's by way of prefacing why I think thinking about how we *practise* writing is important, rather than just thinking about what the writing is like, or how to do it. But I think, how do we actually get to practise it.

9:35
So I have another - I want to sort of ask ourselves what is practice? I want to sort of make the distinction here between two kinds of knowledge. There's procedural knowledge and conceptual knowledge and that's actually quite often mentioned in questions of learning and education. So the difference is that conceptual knowledge is things like knowing what are the definitions, we're making comparisons, knowing the history and things like

literature, strategy. Those are just sort of things you can learn by just reading or going to lectures or discussing them. And, on the other hand you have procedural knowledge, which is the sort of thing you need to be able to do mathematics - actually *do* it not just talk about it. How to speak languages, perform surgery, do sport or actually just read or write. And those are things that you can only really acquire through practice.

So when I talk about practice, what is practice for? So I'd like to run another poll and ask you, what would you say the main point of practice is? Is it acquiring fluency or automaticity, acquire or improve a skill, overcome the limitations of working memory, develop stamina, solidify long term memory?

10:50
Okay, so we have some winners and some less popular options. So the most popular option was 'acquire or improve skills' and these actually are not - there's nothing wrong with that, it's true. In a way, all of them are right – 'acquire fluency and automaticity' is also one, but I want to make a different point, that I think we can, if we start thinking about it slightly differently, we can benefit from. I can see in the chat also 'can increase confidence' and I think that that's also important.

So I'd like to present this quote from a book called 'Peak' by Anders Ericsson who's one of the main researchers whose work has led to the development of the theory of deliberate practice. And he says that the key to improve mental performance of almost any sort is the development of mental structure that makes it possible to avoid the limitations of short term memory. And that allows us then to effectively deal with large amounts of information at once. So he says that is really the main benefit - main purpose - of practice: to overcome the limitations of short term memory.

11:57
What does that actually mean? So let's try this. Let's see what it feels like to have limited short term memory. So I'm going to show you some numbers only for three seconds. And you try to remember as many of them as you can and get ready, type them in the chat, but don't cheat. Don't type as you see them. Type them after I finish. Okay, so I'm going right now. So we have 1 -2- 3.

All right, so type in as many as you can in the chat. How many can you get? Alright, so we're getting some okay good, right, I'm not going to go for a competition, but okay. Perfect. Alright, so some people getting quite far along. I don't think anybody's really quite right. So, okay, let's check in. Okay, so who got it right? Anybody will admit to getting it right. I don't see anything in the in the chat. All right.

Okay, so for those of you got quite far along. What was one of the strategies that you will have used to remember the numbers? And the most common strategy that people use? I mean, some people say they visualize them as numbers but Michelle typed in the most common strategy, which is chunking. Right. So you think of them as 345 680 081 796 or something like that and that will do that. So, someone said screenshot! Looking for patterns. Repeating in my head. And actually so this was 12 numbers. So how about, do you think you could remember 51 digits? So 12 was difficult, can you do 51? And I bet you can.

So I'm going to give you five seconds for this one, to remember the next 51 digits. 1 -2-3-4-5.

Okay, anybody would like to write down them all in the chat or have some of them at least? This was actually quite do-able. Again some people gave it a very good try. All right. Some people are getting very close. Very good. I'm seeing results. Yes, very good. Claire. Yes. So by the way before I give you the answer, the world record is 616 but it took five minutes to memorize. So no, nobody can do 616 in 5 seconds, but that is the current holder of the world record. And of course, the solution is this [14:08]. If you could recognize a pattern, then all you have to do is look at the first year and the last year because it's years starting from 1919 to 1930 and never remember this little bit.

So you can actually, if you can develop a mental representation, a chunk of sorts, you can remember them better. This actually corresponds quite nicely with the most famous paper in the history of psychology, called 'The magical number seven, plus or minus two' which talks about the limits of working memory, or back then Miller was calling it immediate memory. And it's quite a funny paper. For example Miller says, 'I had been persecuted by an integer'. But that's not the important bit! The important bit is that the number of chunks that can be constant in immediate memory, or working memory as we would call it today, is constant. There's only - and it's roughly in the experiments anywhere between seven and nine or five and the current consensus is that is probably quite a bit less. But the really important thing - people so often quote that - we have a very limited working memory. There's nothing we can do about it. What they often don't say is that it does not matter how large the chunks are. So we can have only so many chunks in our working memory at any one time. But it can be really, really large. And actually we overcome those limitations, by increasing the size of the chunks that we have. And actually, paradoxically, making the chunks bigger makes them easier to remember. So when we, when you think about mnemonic devices. Well, you're actually remembering two things to remember one. So making them bigger and richer, the chunks that you're trying to remember, actually often makes it easier.

15:36
So, for example, we've all heard about, or many people have heard about, Memory Palaces. And that's - you can read this great book called 'Moonwalking with Einstein' by Joshua Foer who wrote about how he became the US Memory Champion and he talks about the different techniques for memorizing things in Memory Palaces and stuff like that. I don't necessarily recommend it to get tips on how to get better memory, but it shows how the process works.

But it all works on different things than just numbers. So, for example, can you tell me, at a glance, which of these Chess positions will go into draw or check or mate? I couldn't do it because I'm not a chess player beyond just knowing the moves, but any professional even moderately competent player will tell you that the first one goes to check, next one to mate and the last one to draw. They can even look at a board like this at a glance, and a grand master will look at and they will tell you, this is the xxx position and they can even recite the steps in this way.

So what is it about that? They still have the same working memory limitations that we do, but they actually were able to develop these much bigger chunks that they can operate on when they look at something like this. And that is the important thing. How we can tell an expert at something from somebody who's a novice is they have much larger mental chunks that they can work with. And they can actually remember things better - just know - just going to perform better because they remember things better.

And so I would say this. Actually, if we think of this as a goal to learning and we can think these sort of chunks - mental representations - are the core to learning, particularly learning procedural knowledge. And so I've been using the word ‘chunks’ and ‘mental representations’ interchangeably, and pretty much stay with that and I'm not going to go much further with that. But just to say, when I use ‘chunk’ and ‘mental representation’ I mean kind of the same things.

So essentially the two questions we need to ask ourselves for learning is, how do we identify the chunks that we can operationalize and then how do we acquire them? How do we actually make them into chunks? How do they become one thing in our memory? So when we're dealing with something online - not on the web, but as in, in a moment of action - how do we actually acquire these chunks?

17:46
And so there's a caveat. I asked whether the purpose of practice is to acquire automaticity. And we've also seen this hierarchy of competence, where we want to go from unconscious incompetence to unconscious competence. But that actually is not right. You don't want to. Unconscious competence is not the goal. And the original paper actually was not was not claiming that that's what we want as the goal. And what comes from Erickson's work is that the actual expertise is never completely unconscious. Being an expert doesn't mean that you act without thinking, but you're thinking with bigger chunks and with bigger mental representations and that is actually what you're aiming for. And that actually is the quote from Erickson. Is that your mental representations guide you to guide your performance. They allow you to monitor and judge that performance. And that's actually something that you want to do.

And there's another piece of evidence for this from the famous Dunning Kruger effect where you see that improving the skill of participants increases their metacognitive competence and helps them recognize the limitations and their abilities, much more than people who are less skilled. So that's the Dunning Kruger effect: that the experts often are much more sceptical about their skills and abilities than people who are not experts.

18:56
And also from Reflective Practitioner literature we have that distinction between reflection in action versus reflection on action. And so we're aiming for the reflection in action. So this, this should be our aim. So we need to sort of think about all those levels of articulation. How do we actually get them to - that we think of them as one action as opposed to - so we're not writing a sentence word by word, we are writing a sentence, and that's what we want to get to. And so how do we develop these representations and then

again we have Erickson's work on that, is that he says we need to improve our mental processes, but this is what he says about what he's calling purposeful practice and which is kind of a kind of deliberate practice for our purposes, anyway.

It's good. Get outside your comfort zone but do it in a focused way with a clear goal a plan and reaching those goals. And you also need to find a way of monitoring your progress and figure out a way to maintain your motivation and so we have the cycle that I summarize in this cycle. We start with, you need to identify the performance goal and that is often overlooked. We need to decide what is actually this thing that we want to gain as a performance ability. Then break that goal into graspable chunks. So we can actually practise before we develop the higher level articulations. And then we focus on making those chunks manipulate as one and we do that essentially through repetition through focussed repetition. And then we need to reflect and then use the feedback that we got from the reflection and repeat the process - or 'rinse and repeat'.

And but it is important. The reflection and feedback are essential. Repetition is not enough. And that's the point of deliberate practice, you can just get better at something by repeating it. You need to do it in a focused way and get the feedback from what you're doing. And here's the quote from Erickson: 'The purpose of repetition is to figure out where your weaknesses are' rather than just repeating. And you need to try different methods to improve until you find something that works. So that's, that's his message and the other important thing going back to the idea of motivation. He says that, actually, no matter how many sessions you have with an instructor, most of the effort will be spent practising by yourself and that means that you will actually – it will not always be fun. And then you need to find a way of getting some positive feedback and finding motivation.

So those are kind of the main things that we need to know about deliberate practice.
The process. And so this is for example from a slide that I share with our students. What can you do? You can record yourself, you can measure the changes in your writing, you can note the struggles. You also need to ask others and get feedback from other people as well as your coaches. You can leverage the Dunning Kruger effect to get more time on task. What I mean by that is that you may feel you're better at it than you actually are, but use that feeling to do it more and that hopefully will help you develop some more recognition.

21:49
Now, how long does it actually take to develop a useful mental representation? How do you, how long does it take to get from where you are articulating everything word by word or sound by sound to where you're actually saying whole words or whole sentences? And there's another book which is much less research based but I find it quite interesting, called 'The First Hours' by Josh Kaufman, and essentially he talks about, actually within 20 hours you can achieve some very useful tangible benefits by developing these larger chunks in your head. And it sort of makes sense if you think about 20 hours. That's roughly sort of four to eight weeks' worth of work and that's the time that we can move from not being able to do something to being able to do it a little bit. And then again, 'rinse and repeat' and go on.

22:32

And so he talks about the steps in the 20 hours, what you should do: identify the mental models and mental hooks; eliminate distractions; create scaffolds and checklists; make and test predictions; make dedicated time for practice; do it in short bursts - maybe minutes; focus on practicing as much as you can while you're doing it, don't just do it mindlessly. So those are important things.

Now there are some caveats about this as well. When you identify the chunks and when you perform - when you are practicing them - you need to practise in the context of performance and there's a- my favourite joke about the jazz pianist is somebody (a famous jazz pianist) was playing drunk in a jazz club and a fan came to him afterwards asking, 'How could you play so well when you're drunk?', and he said, 'That's because I practise drunk'. And I think it's kind of a good illustration of why you need to think about what context you will be performing in, because one of the things about representations is that they're not very easy to transfer from one domain to another. So, for example, Erickson says, 'You don't train your memory; you train memory for strings of digits or for collections of words'. So that's why, for example, it's not useful to learn how to memorize digits if you want to memorize words. And the same way you don't train to become a doctor, you train to become a surgeon or pathologist.

The lesson we can learn from this is that writing for class or writing for an exam or writing for publication are very different tasks as well. So when you're writing you think, what am I actually practicing the writing for? I'm going to be doing it in a stressful condition of an exam, or I'm going to be doing it for a friendly audience of the lecture or of my peers or am I doing it for, you know, for the vicious and brutal world of peer review. So those are all things that you have to keep in mind, and you have to learn sort of slightly different things for that.

So, what does that actually - how does it actually all apply to writing? How can we apply these ideas, these principles to writing? And I think metaphors can help us. So I'd like to share a link to a V-vox poll. So I just put it in the chat. If you can click on that and put in the (And I started the poll.) If you can write in there to say, what is it that you think writing is. It could be 'writing is like' something or 'writing is...'

24:51
Alright, so these are the results. So we have writing is like expressing, writing is like writing! We have communication. Somebody said water, puzzle, exercise - yes. Running, yes, treacle, okay, I can see where that's coming from. Struggle is important, yeah. Emptying the mind, falling, reflection. Consuming. Okay, so we have all of these things. Flowing is another interesting word. So, these are all the words that come up in answer to the question of what is writing like.

I'd like to offer 4 metaphors that are going to help us identify what we can think of writing as in terms of deliberate practice. And so one of the ways that you can think of writing is as a foreign language. And in many ways, writing is literally a foreign language. It has its own vocabulary. It has its own idioms, as we saw earlier, it has its own specific structures. It's the grammatical ways that can sometimes be almost as different as from a different language for somebody who's a native speaker of English. They have to learn a lot of these

things. And you can't just memorize the elements. You have to actually do them. It's not something that - everybody who has tried to learn a foreign language has had the experience of going abroad and not being able to say anything - be so tongue tied. Because again, you knew it in the class, but you don't know - all of a sudden all the words are gone, because you're in a different context or you just knew the list of words, but not how to use them. So those are all very similar things that many people might experience while they're writing. And we also have some good ways of sort of helping us get better at foreign languages.

26:23
Now there's a book that really has an awful title, 'Fluent in three months', but it's actually a good book. Has lots of very good tips on how to get better at foreign languages and he talks about things like having scaffold phrases, visualizing the situation of speaking, learning the mental language. So to help you develop but focusing on the performance first. So those are some very good ideas that can help a student of a foreign language as well.

And so that's one metaphor. Another metaphor that we can think of is writing as a musical performance. So how is writing like a musical performance? So it requires a certain amount of fluency. You cannot just write letter by letter or word by word. You kind of have to compose it in certain levels: in sentences or clauses, at least, or phrases. You require some accuracy. So you cannot do it very sloppily. At the end of it, it has to have something that has some sort of accuracy. You cannot miss notes or miss words.

And in order to get successful at it, you must do it in large chunks and if we, for example, look at the writing of dyslexic students who struggle with writing, you will find that they struggle exactly at that. By the time they get to compose a sentence, because they're struggling so much with spelling or just finding the right words they forget what they're trying to say because all of their working memory is swamped by the effort of retrieving those underlying elements. So we must require all of these things. And of course, writing has editing. So you may think, okay, writing has editing so it shouldn't be as difficult as performance, but the editing can only work if you got to the place of writing something editable. And so you still need to have some level of fluency in writing. So, and I like Kevin's point [in the chat]: 'developing a rhythm is important'. Yes, and I will actually get to that.

27:59
So here's an example. For example, what jazz pianists or jazz musicians do. And they've been transcribing solo so they listened to a solo and they write these down note by note and that helps them identify the different elements they can then focus on for their own practice. And so, so that is something that we might think is a bad idea, but copying somebody's writing would actually be very beneficial. So that's what we can learn from that. There are some very interesting links people talking about how you can develop better skills at music. And music is actually one of the areas where deliberate practice has been applied most successfully so I like this. There's this YouTube channel called 'Become a piano superhuman' and it actually talks about the routine that's very much similar to the one that you might want to adopt as a writer. So, so that is the so that is something that you can you can talk about.

28:49
The last one (actually not - the one before last) is writing as a physical activity. So writing is obviously literally a physical activity takes place in time and space, requires focus and attention. And it also benefits from certain stamina, being able to sit down. You have to be able to do it for a certain amount of time, you can't just do it in a moment. So it requires some of those things. So that's kind of what - writing actually has those components. And maybe we can learn from some of the areas in which people get better at physical activities.
And so one of the famous ones – famous programs - many people have heard about. It's called 'Couch to 5k'. And it gets you from literally not being able to run it all (and I know, I've done it, that it works) to being able to run five kilometres in nine weeks. And essentially, the first week you run three times a week for total of 20 minutes (but only run one minute and then walk for a minute and a half, and then just repeat it for 20 minutes). So that starts very slowly at a very basic level of just very short chunks and then developing it later on into bigger chunks. So again, deliberate practice works really well for physical activity. And so we can think of - we can maybe take some ideas for that for writing practice.

30:10
And the final one is writing as translation. And here's a quote from Steven Pinker that we have all had the experience of authoring or writing a sentence and then stopping and realizing that it wasn't exactly what we meant to say. So that's kind of - we've all had that experience, right. I certainly have it all the time. And if you translate a lot (and I have) that's very much what often happens when you're translating. You realise that your translation has all the elements that were in the original but it's missing something or you have to add something. So I want to think of us as translating as being this process of translating from mentalese, mental language, to 'written-ese'. And we're discovering these inconsistencies often in the original or in this case in our thinking, and to get over that we need to sort of reflect on these different elements.

So I actually wrote the long blog post called 'Writing as translation: why is academic writing so hard?' So, the link again is available in the overall links so we can start thinking about these different elements. So for example, what the translators do to get better at it, they develop these larger chunks, again, of parallels between the two languages so they can operationalize it in one go. As opposed to translating word by word.

31:27
So what does that mean for writing programs - actually putting this together in a program? We actually have a hint of that from Erickson himself - just one hint about writing. He gives a quote from Benjamin Franklin or an example of Benjamin Franklin how he was learning to write. And what he did (I'm not going to read the quote but I'm just going to summarize what he did), he read a paragraph by a writer he liked and then he wrote down a short summary of it, trying to get as close to the original language as possible. And then he checked did he get very close. And that's how he developed being one of those sort of permanent stylists of his time, by literally doing what the jazz pianists are doing. So if you remember the jazz pianists writing down solos. That's what he was doing for writing. And

that's kind of an interesting example of how you can build up these bigger chunks, through which you can speak.

32:25
Now, I want to look at some actual writing programs and see how we can think about them through the perspective of deliberate practice. So there's a process approach that probably everybody has heard about but I also want to talk about some lesser known programs and then suggest one of my own. So I want to talk about Thomas Basbøll's writing process reengineering then I want to talk about academic writing frameworks which is completely unknown, as far as I know. And then, and it's something I tried to put up for our students, called the 'Academic writing boot up'. And so this is the process approach. So essentially you have this long process. Again, I'm not going through this slide [33:07]. It's just to show you - it essentially describes the cycle of drafting, reflection, revision, additional research and idea generation and going back round the cycle of reflection. One of the things is that you don't find the right thing approaches in any more detail how to actually develop the skills, it just describes the process of doing this. But what it has to do with the best practice is the reflection part is really crucial. To think about reflection. So again, I'm going to show you just - I wrote something similar about that in my blog post about how to actually write a sentence, how important the reflection is when you think about sentences. I'm not going to go through the contents of it, just going to show you that it exists: there's a link to it in the document if you want to go have a look.

33:56
So the process approach is very interesting because it makes us think about reflection and the cycling of building up larger skills, but it doesn't mention the details of how you actually do it. It just says, this has to happen. So Thomas Basbøll has this process, this approach, because he's calling the writing process 'reengineering'. And essentially, it boils down to this. He says take eight weeks. Schedule 30 minute slots in your calendar. Expect to write one paragraph within each of these slots. Make sure that you have a key sentence in mind before you start writing. Establish what he's called 'the writing moment' and find enjoyment in the process. So he talks about how you can actually make something like that into an operational program for getting better. And so he talks about things like: book these hours into your calendar one half hour at a time, don't go for longer; make sure you know what you're writing the next day, the day before, so write a key sentence for each paragraph that you want to write tomorrow, the day before. So you don't waste that time by - don't overwhelm your working memory by thinking about what you're going to write about. And then at the end of the eight week period you want to count how many things you've written, reflect on your plan and learn from this and then do it again. And that's how again, if you think about this, this is how we get to those hours that we heard about earlier, so that you can actually get these chunks of 20 hours roughly.

But he also does this really important thing here: he says stop once every once in a while and notice what the moment of writing is like. Establish what he's calling 'the writing moment' and find ways of thinking about it as an enjoyable process. So you can, as he says, enjoy the craft of writing. So get away from the idea of writing as being a stressful thing. And he has this really great sentence that I like: 'enjoyment is a trainable skill'. So part of your practice is actually to find ways of enjoying the process. And if you remember Erickson

said the practice is never actually fun. The practice is repetition, because you have to repeat things that are not inherently fun. But all the best experts, the expert players, performance sports people, they all actually report that they don't find it fun, but they can find enjoyment in the process. So that's kind of the difference between that.

36:15
So I will mention one more idea, which is 'Frameworks for academic writing'. This is a book that I found just very recently, as I was looking for some examples of frameworks of writing and it's self-published and it's available on the web. Again, the link is in the document that I shared. He starts with the idea that they were running a program and the students were requesting, 'Can we have our writing teachers present while we're writing our drafts, not just look at them afterwards but be there during that time?' And he says, well, actually one of the students said, this is kind of like athletic practice. So we're practising while the coach was around to break steps down into smaller elements. To help us learn the skills in real time. So that's very much what a coach will do when you're when you're practising lifting weights or running or whatever physical activity. And their class in this program has students sitting at computers writing their answering prompts. They're not just writing from nothing and they have the coach - the teacher's around to help them if they got stuck. And the prompts look something like this. [37:21] So they have - you see in bold the things that are the structures and the students are writing different elements in between these words. So this gives them the structure of what they're trying to say. So this is for example for making a certain point. The book contains a number of these prompts, a large number of these points for different types of academic writing. And then you can use them. So I find it very useful to think about this as a way of building up the lower level articulation skills. So whereas Basbøll is thinking about more the process, this one is more about the structures that you do.

37:56
So one thing that I tried to do for our students as a suggestion how you can combine some of these things, I evolved this framework I'm calling 'The Writing Boot Up' essentially as a kind of a boot camp idea. And I use the idea from Basbøll and the 'Couch to 5k'. And essentially, I think, 'Okay, let's work in six weeks or eight weeks. And roughly get the 20 hours in by every week have two one hour reading sessions and then four half hour writing sessions'. And again have the same idea from Basbøll. Make sure you schedule your time in the diary, find a place that you can always do it in, prepare the reading ahead of time, set a timer, measure your progress. And this is roughly one suggestion for what a typical novice writer at the sort of postgrad - at the Masters level may want to go through. So start with outlines, read 2 papers and just make outlines. Don't necessarily write too much, just make outlines. Get used to what the structures are. Start reflecting on what's in the papers. Then maybe just read one paper in detail and write summaries of all the paragraphs. Then write summaries of sections from that same paper next week. The week after, again, write a one paragraph summary of the entire paper. The week after, write two papers, two summaries and so on and so forth. And then at the end, try to use that week to write the seven paragraph essay during those half hour sessions. So in a way, you can use that time to slowly build up your stamina, the ability, the idea of - you're not sitting down in front of a blank page and not being able to do anything. Just like when you start running and you don't think, 'I'm running these five one minute awful moments' - five kilometres of awful

one minute moments - I'm running five one kilometre sections. So that's kind of the same idea.

39:42
There are some suggestions I gave them. Find an accountability buddy. If you're doing it on your own compare your results. And I got from the Writing Hub of the virtual writing study space. So I use the same ideas that you use here and I thought that was really good. So the students quite like that idea of how to organize that time. So I've given it to students just last month, and I've heard some good feedback. They quite like the ideas as a way of thinking about it. Some of them started little groups and they're doing some things like that.

So what are the benefits of this deliberate practice approach? First it is structured so unlike most of the writing approaches that I know, the idea here is that you actually have a structure. And it's cumulative in that it cumulates learning on top of each other. And it's personal, because it thinks of the person. Everybody starting from a slightly different point. So the timeline that I showed you earlier was a suggested timeline. Well, that will actually be different depending on - somebody maybe can already write the paragraph quite easily of a summary of a book. So they need, they can go to bigger chunks and start from that and go higher. But it is suitable for people who have blocks at any level of articulation. So maybe you're struggling with just typing. So maybe that is the thing where you need to develop that ability to create larger chunks.

And if you actually look at the words ‘cumulative, structured, personal’ well that is very similar to what in the dyslexia world is known as ‘synthetic phonics’, that's how it works. So if you're actually dealing with somebody who is dyslexic as a writer or has some other difficulties, but you can actually help them through this process of overcoming some of these difficulties, you can think of this as a synthetic phonics approach to academic writing. Even though it's a metaphor, but you know, you could think of it that way.

Kirsten Hall

There was a question earlier, which was, ‘Isn't reflection in action reflexivity? How do you see the difference between the two concepts: reflection versus reflexivity?

Dominik Lukeš

You see, I think there's a big difference in that sense. I think Schön is very much misunderstood. I think he was actually an epistemologist; he was making a very different point than most people think. He wasn't talking about thinking about thinking, he was talking about being able to operationalize your non-academic knowledge into ways that you can - that help you reflect on what you're doing. And John Elliott wrote this great book called ‘Thinking where the action is’ kind of critiquing the idea of just thinking about things. You have to be in action. And I think that's what Schön meant as well, in the reflective practitioner mode. So I would say, it's very much the same thing that Erickson was talking about in the idea of being able to - in that moment - use your practical knowledge, but use it at a higher level to help you monitor what you're doing. And actually develop further skill

so that's what I think Schön actually was driving at with his Reflective Practitioner. But I know that's not how people have been thinking about it.

Irmgard Huppe

Dominik, can I ask a quick question, please?

Dominik Lukeš

Yes.

Irmgard Huppe

I mean, all this structuring and planning and setting it all up. Does that not also have a little danger in it to *stifle* your writing?

Dominik Lukeš

Well, let's go back to the music metaphor. I think it potentially can, but if you look at the best performers in the world, they spend most of their time practicing scales and arpeggios. Things that are - in very structured ways and then they add the expression on top of it. So, actually not being able to articulate at the lower levels gets in the way of being able to express yourself, what you want to say. So if you learn to play the piano you very soon find out if you haven't done your practice, you can’t actually express the things you want to express musically. And that's the same with writing, so you definitely need to have that expression moment as well. But you do need to be - but without having those blocks that you can express yourself with… Remember experts think with bigger chunks so you need to be able to write with bigger chunks.

Irmgard Huppe

Thank you.

Kirsten Hall

Great. Thank you so much, Dominik for such a stimulating hour. There's lots for us to go away and think about. I think we'll all be coming back to the recording and looking at all the slides and spending a bit of time with some really interesting material there. Not least the enjoyment of writing that that you're encouraging us to rediscover. So thank you so much for that; we'll all keep applying it!