

Editorial

# Supporting First-Time Authors: a Culture of Encouragement

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## Abstract

First-time academic writers often face challenges such as fear, perfectionism, and lack of confidence, which can hinder the expression of their authentic voice. This article explores how authenticity in vocational and practice-based writing is not only valuable but essential for producing credible, impactful research. While tools and academic conventions are designed to prevent bias and improve clarity, they can sometimes suppress individuality. To address this, the article offers practical guidance on using grammar, structure, and accountability tools that support, not stifle, original expression. It also discusses the role of mindset, resilience, and peer support in helping beginner writers grow their skills without compromising their voice. Finally, it outlines how the Journal of Vocational Research and Practice (JVRP) actively fosters a culture of encouragement, supporting writers through developmental feedback, mentorship, and inclusive practices. The goal is to empower new authors to publish confidently, authentically, and with academic integrity.

## Keywords

Encouragement, writing process, vocational research, peer review, first-time authorship.

## Introduction

First-time writers deal with a variety of challenges like fear, mental load, stress (Dunn, 2021), however, the benefits of published research span from increased visibility of a subject, growing credibility and even enhanced career options (Woszczyński and Whitman, 2016). This article discusses the importance of supporting first-time writers and tools that will not just encourage them, but will create an environment where the authentic voices of such individuals is supported.

## Valuing authentic voices

The subject of authenticity in academic writing has been debated by many scholars, who have challenged both the benefits and downfalls of such phenomena, especially

in the light of AI (Allen, 2002; Yeo, 2023). However, it is important to establish that authenticity in academics is one of the most important tools that enables new perspectives, thought-provoking points of view and conclusion-challenging critical mindsets to challenge ideas and come to new research interpretations (Suchan, 2004; Badley, 2008). Therefore, beginner writers have a unique position where their authenticity, whether it is reflected in writing styles or ideas, makes their work stand out (Yeo, 2023; Lillis, 1997; MacKenzie, McShane and Wilcox, 2007; Badley, 2008).

Authentic voices often come not from the writing task itself but from the experiences that are reflected in one's work (Behizadeh, 2014). For instance, writing about subjects that are a point of curiosity to the author has proven to enhance their learning, critical thinking and reflect the writer with a higher sense of integrity (Ed.gov, 2021). The latter often arises from instances where the author identifies their viewpoints on the subject and uses critical thinking and research to challenge those ideas (International Journal of Education, 2023). Such writing not only produces unique results but also makes the author more credible (Lapum, et al., 2019).

Furthermore, in the context of vocational research, writing in one's own style, based on observations or personal experiences and contrasting them against academic findings, allows one to make conclusions that better reflect reality, present a tone of voice that is commonly used in practice, and bridge the gap between academics and practice (Villarroel et al., 2024; Biswas, 2024).

Finally, it is important to note that in many academic environments, authenticity can be discouraged due to already set writing styles and perception of what professional text should sound like (Sotiriadou, et al., 2020; Humanities LibreTexts, 2019). This viewpoint is not completely unjustified, as issues like bias can be common with beginner writers (Dreyer, 2023); therefore, in academic settings, first-time writers are provided with tools to help avoid such mistakes (Ebarvia, 2023). But these tools, as previously indicated, can also crush authenticity (Rathbun and Turner, 2012). This suggests that beginner writers have a great way to make their work more authentic, but a lack of experience exposes them to risks of bias, plagiarism and inconclusive writing, and the tools that help prevent that can also remove that authenticity. The following paragraphs will outline how different academic writing tools can support authenticity whilst encouraging critical thinking for beginner writers.

### **Practical tools for concrete support**

Being a first-time writer has its challenges, like the aim for perfectionism, mental load and organisational challenges (Shah, Shah and Pietrobon, 2009; Merrell, et al., 2011). However, it is important to establish that being a beginner writer does not mean a beginner thinker, therefore, the adoption of useful tools that will help to overcome such challenges can be used to not just produce better outcomes, but also cater writer's development process (Karyuatry, 2018; Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2024). In academics, the aim for 'perfect' output has proven to be both a hindrance and a contributor to the academic development process (Madigan, 2019). What is important to establish is that learning a new skill, such as writing, can be achieved whilst keeping authenticity and avoiding obsessive perfectionism. Tables 1 and 2 outline what online tools and methods support better writing practices, whilst table 3 encourages authenticity and aid overall writing process.

**Online tools****Table 1.** Online tools for grammar and integrity.

| <b>Helps with</b> | <b>Tool</b>   | <b>Reference</b>                          |
|-------------------|---|---|
| References check  | Zotero  | (Zotero, 2019)                            |
| Plagiarism        | Grammarly Plagiarism Checker, Quetext                                     | (Grammarly, 2019; Quetext, 2000)          |
| Grammar           | Grammarly, Hemingway Editor   | (Grammarly, 2019; Hemingway Editor, n.d.) |
| Unethical AI use  | Author declaration + transparency guidelines (e.g. Author's Guild advice) | (The Authors Guild, 2024)                 |

**Writing methods****Table 2.** Structure methods.

| <b>Method</b>           | <b>Helps with</b>   | <b>References</b>                       |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| Freewriting             | Brainstorming, idea generation, reducing anxiety                      | (Li, 2007)                              |
| PEEL / PEE              | Point, Evidence, Explanation, Link – paragraph structure              | (Gibbons, 2019)                         |
| IMRaD                   | Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion – for research papers  | (Sollaci and Pereira, 2004)             |
| Gibbs' Reflective Cycle | Structuring practice-based reflections (e.g. for vocational accounts) | (Adeani, Febriani and Syafryadin, 2020) |

**Table 3.** Voice and creativity support.

| <b>Approach</b>                  | <b>Supports</b>   | <b>References</b>         |
|----------------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| Reflective journaling            | Developing personal voice and clarity of thought                  | (Hubbs and Brand, 2005)   |
| Sentence stems/scaffolds         | Building confidence in constructing arguments                     | (Lee, 2004)               |
| Writing for real audiences       | Enhancing authenticity and relevance (e.g., professional context) | (Johns, 1993)             |
| Personal experience + literature | Encouraging originality while maintaining academic credibility    | (Larsen and László, 1990) |

**Accountability and mindset**

Finding your authentic voice, identifying the topics that are of interest to explore and utilising tools for effective and concrete research results is the beginning of a practice, which can feel isolating and daunting to sustain, especially for beginner writers (Davidoff, et al., 2001; Kaufman, 1998). However, it is important to note that feeling overwhelmed is part of the exercise, which can affect beginners more severely than experienced writers (Magee, 2012). However, with practice and mindset exercises,

this part of the process can not only be minimised, but also be a route to stronger mental toughness and discipline (Zimmerman and Kitsantas, 2007).

To overcome these psychological challenges, it is important to develop accountability, which can be achieved by cultivating relationships with peers and mentors who will check in on the writing progress (Grainger, 2007; Kaufman, 1998). Such reviews will also be a good introduction to the feedback process, which will allow for the development of resilience, composure and open-mindedness for the moments when feedback is provided by strangers (Isaac, M., 2020). Based on research, peer review is one of the more effective ways to improve writing skills (Geithner and Pollastro, 2016). It is useful, however, to use structure (example in table 4) in the review process to ensure the feedback is constructive (Hardavella, et al., 2017). Furthermore, the key to successful writing is not perfectionism, but the ability to develop and refine the text upon feedback without feeling judged. To achieve this, there are many useful tips and practices that allow to develop an open mind when receiving criticism, which include empathising, reflection on why a particular comment may have had a more significant impact, reminding oneself what is the reason for feedback and why it is important (Kang, 2024) (continued in table 4). With time, the more feedback is received, the easier it becomes to take it in and improve the writing accordingly (Jug, Jiang and Bean, 2019).

**Table 4.** Feedback and accountability.

| <b>Method</b>                         | <b>Helps with</b>  | <b>Example</b>             |
|---------------------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| Peer review checklists                | Clarity, structure, early bias/plagiarism spotting                 | (Parker, et al., 2018)     |
| Draft, feedback, revise cycle         | Learning through iteration, skill development                      | (Fernando, 2020)           |
| Writing groups                        | Motivation, deadline accountability, collaborative feedback        | (Wilmot and McKenna, 2018) |
| Mentorship/pair writing               | Confidence, guidance from experienced peers or editors             | (Monnier and Dalal, 2024)  |
| Progress tracking tools               | Staying on schedule (e.g., Trello, Google Calendar for milestones) | (Sturm, et al., 2012)      |
| Exercises when preparing for feedback | Helps to keep an open mind when receiving feedback                 | (Kang, 2024)               |

Finally, as a beginner writer, to remain authentic, whilst developing writing skills can be challenging, but easier to achieve by surrounding yourself with supporting individuals and peers who encourage such a culture. Journals like JVRP foster authenticity, constructive feedback and open-mindedness when it comes to reviewers, making sure that first-time writers keep their unique points of view and writing styles whilst receiving support for enhanced writing practices.

### **How JVRP supports new authors**

Valuing authentic voice requires an objective and open-minded view (Behizadeh, 2014), which is why JVRP nurtures the culture of development. This means that members of the editorial board are focused on encouraging a variety of writing styles,

and their feedback is focused on development of that authentic voice and making it louder, rather than boxing it into specific writing frames. Furthermore, the peer review process is strongly focused on encouragement, mentorship, long-term ambitions of the writer and not rejection of one's work. This is one of the core values of the journal which not only offers peer review and supportive writing workshops but also invites new writers to become active participants in building a community that encourages authenticity and writers' development.

## Conclusion and recommendations

To conclude, first-time writers should utilise the tools that are available to ensure their research is credible, but utilise peers and their authentic voice to deliver strong messages about the subjects that matter to them the most. Finally, lean on JVRP to develop writing skills, build a community that supports new writers and encourages authentic voice.

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