Write Well, Publish More: A Workshop for NIU Faculty
23 May 2014 | Capitol Room HSC | 8:30 am- 4:00 pm

I. Personal Inventory: Who are we, as writers?
“For writing, just like critical thinking, research, and problem solving, immerses us in the world of ideas. It draws on our creativity, disciplines our thinking, and forces us to engage with those who share our interests and those who challenge our assumptions” (Rankin 1).

Activity #1: We’ll begin today by filling out a personal inventory of scholarly writing that we’ve done, are in the process of doing, or hope to do. Then we’ll use the information from our inventories to draft a writer’s bio and profile, to introduce ourselves to our colleagues.

II. Efficiency Analysis: What are our writing habits?
“Whether you work systematically or depend on intuition and serendipity, it is important to know yourself as a writer—to recognize the barriers that impede your writing and the factors that help you succeed” (Rankin 78).

Activity #2A: We’ll continue by describing a recent or current writing project. Here are some questions to guide you:
- What project, reason for writing it?
- Who was the reading audience you had in mind?
- Kinds of feedback you got—useful or not?
- Your quirks, writing needs, habits?
- What problems did you have, and why?

Activity #2B: Then we’ll fill out a personal inventory that sketches our usual writing process. After that, we’ll use a self-evaluation tool to identify three areas in which we could improve our efficiency.

III. Tenure and Promotion: What scholarly writing does your discipline value?
“…his department supported him…but the college and university committees regretfully turned him down…. [H]is record of publication was a little thin” (Rankin 88).

Activity #3: We’ll draw up a list of scholarly writing that our discipline, departments, and colleges value most. We’ll then consider forms of authorship (single/multiple/editorial). To see the big picture, we’ll construct a professional timeline.
- Scholarly books/monographs
- Critical editions/ translations
- Journal articles
- Chapters, edited collections
- Review articles
- Grants
- Book reviews
- Education newspapers/ bulletins
- Textbooks
- Conference presentations/ proceedings
- Editorship of journals
- Other

IV. Publication Venues: Where can we publish and get funding?
“Once you do make a decision about where to submit your work, it should be relatively easy to adapt the generic proposal to the specific questions the publisher or sponsoring agency wants you to address” (Rankin 23)

Activity #4: Successful scholarly writing includes research on journals, publishers, and foundations most likely to accept and support our work. What publication venues exist in our respective disciplines? What kinds of funding sources are available? We’ll sketch out 4 points of our current project:
1. Hypothesis or research question
2. Method to achieve objectives and evaluate impact
3. Contribution of project to our research or artistry program
4. Plan for disseminating the results

V. Power drafting: How can we focus our energy and time?
“From the publisher’s perspective the proposal is a useful screening device…. From the writer’s perspective it is useful for other reasons… writers are forced to see their work in its larger rhetorical context” (Rankin 23).

*Activities & materials of this workshop adapted from E. Rankin, The Work of Writing, Jossey-Bass, 2001
Activity #5: Our glance at NIU sources for grants showed us points we need to cover in proposals. Building on those points, we’ll do an exercise in “power drafting” a proposal about the 4-page excerpt we brought. If you didn’t bring an excerpt, please sketch out a project you’re considering (e.g., article, book chapter, review). Others will be reading your draft.

******BREAK FOR LUNCH*****

VI. Rhetorical Checklist: What elements of writing count?

“Effective academic and professional writing is writing that makes a significant contribution to the ongoing conversation in the field” (Rankin 26)

“...writing is first and foremost a job to be done for a particular audience” (Rankin 51).

“Even though readers of academic and professional writing expect to be addressed in a respectful, professional manner, they also appreciate hearing a human being behind the prose” (Rankin 74)

Activity #6: First, we’ll do an “after-draft outline” of the 4-page draft we brought and assess paragraph quality. Then, we’ll use a checklist to identify important elements in our 4-page drafts. We’ll share some insights the outline and checklist helped us gain. This exercise will also help us come up with 2-3 questions we want readers to address for later development.

VII. Getting support: How can colleagues help?

“As long as we know what we’re reading, we can give useful responses” (Rankin 97)

Activity #7: First, we’ll “workshop” a colleague’s short piece to get a sense of what we’re about to do in our informal writing groups. Then we’ll break into pairs or groups of three. One writer will go at a time for a 15-minute turn. Here are the guidelines:

A. TIME KEEPER: Please monitor your group closely, to stay with the schedule below!!

B. WRITER: 2 minutes to give context and ask no more than three questions (refer to your “Power Drafting” summary and your “Writer’s Checklist”). Then let your readers take over.

C. READERS: 5 minutes to read the writer’s 4-page draft. Use your “Reader’s Checklist.” Then take 8 minutes to provide the following:
   1. Tell the writer one specific thing you like—something that works for you.
   2. Respond to the writer’s questions.
   3. Give additional suggestions or questions to help the writer revise.

VIII. Editors and Reviewers: How do we use feedback?

“Remember that many pieces you see in print went through the ‘revise and resubmit’ process first. If there’s potential in your manuscript, trust a good editor to see it and help you improve the piece” (Rankin 90).

Activity #8: As we look over a sample of a reviewer’s comments on a submitted manuscript and a journal editor’s “translation” of those comments, we’ll discuss what is usable feedback.

IX. Future Projects: What next? When do we start?

“We’re all professionals; we got where we are by succeeding more often than we failed. Paying attention to the strengths, techniques, and habits of mind that helped us thrive in the past builds the confidence we need when we take on new writing projects” (Rankin 78).

Activity #9: Inventory time again. After we answer another brief set of questions about possible future projects, we’ll write a short “contract” with ourselves about potential new projects.

Then, we’ll open the floor to questions and answers based on our collective experiences as scholarly writers.