

Book Review

Thomson, P. & Kamler, K. (2016). *Detox Your Writing: Strategies for Doctoral Researchers*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Paltridge, B. & Starfield, S. (2016). *Getting Published in Academic Journals: Navigating the Publication Process*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan.

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In an era of increasing pressure to publish and complete doctoral degrees as quickly as possible, all while managing heavy administrative workloads, it likely comes as no surprise that do-it-yourself (DIY) doctoral supervision tools are becoming increasingly prolific (Kamler & Thomson, 2008). Perhaps these materials are a response to a growing friction between time needed and time available for doctoral supervision, as well as between the crucial place writing occupies in a doctoral researcher's life and the often tacit nature of apprenticing to become an academic. As both a doctoral student and a writing coach that works with other doctoral students, I am keenly interested in resources that can support me in both roles. Recently I picked up two texts to aid me with navigating my first attempts at publishing an article and with facilitating a doctoral writing workshop: Thomson and Kamler (2016), *Detox your writing*, and Paltridge and Starfield's (2016), *Getting published in academic journals*. Both texts are geared toward a doctoral audience, though master's level students and supervisors may equally appreciate the texts for their practical strategies. The texts are complementary as well. Where Thomson and Kamler focus mostly on the journey toward producing a dissertation, Paltridge and Starfield pick up from there to discuss how and why to consider publishing articles from the dissertation.

For those working on a dissertation or supporting others who are working on theirs, Thomson and Kamler (2016) are companionable guides. Each of their chapters address common sticking points experienced by many doctoral researchers such as feeling lost in the literature, finding and standing one's ground, writing the researcher into the text, as well as strategies for handling revisions. Drawing on the "detox" theme, the authors attempt to purge doctoral researchers' misconceptions about writing, as well as habitual ways of thinking and acting. The authors instead offer strategies to reframe thinking by providing a "big idea" at the beginning of each chapter, as well as practical

tools that doctoral researchers can put into practice. They visually organise their text via the use of frames (text boxes) to highlight experiences of other writers and provide samples of writing. A quick scan of the table of contents or index might be enough to direct readers who need to troubleshoot specific challenges. I particularly enjoyed the strategies the authors offered for structuring the dissertation (pp. 134-148). Thomson and Kamler argue that one of the main issues doctoral researchers have with writing is not, contrary to what may be a popular opinion, a lack of understanding surrounding the need to make a contribution. Instead, it arises from a lack of understanding surrounding *how* to argue the contribution “from start to finish” (p. 135). In response, the authors suggest a bottom-up storyboarding strategy which is useful for those struggling to find patterns in data, literature reviews, or ideas in general. Using sticky-notes and whatever information they have on hand, writers are encouraged to write one to three sentences per sticky-note. Then, writers group together related sticky-notes, give each group a name, and transfer to a piece of paper for further writing and reflection. Another strategy the authors give is to consider writing in *chunks*, not chapters. Chunks are, according to the authors, tentative groupings around main ideas or topics (e.g., methodology, key ideas, and data). One might have documents of chunks rather than chapters. This strategy might relieve some of the tension that arises for some writers who are finding it difficult to fit their writing into any sort of familiar structure (such as the introduction, methods, results and discussion structure many are already aware of).

If you are working on navigating the process of publishing, or are supporting others who are, Paltridge and Starfield (2016) offer a quick, insightful, and supportive read. Each chapter of theirs is intended as a guide through the process of publishing, beginning with setting out an understanding of why it is important to publish in the introduction, to factors to consider when deciding which journal to publish in, to understanding who your readers are, and how to receive and respond to the peer review process. Like Thomson and Kamler, Paltridge and Starfield draw on their experience as authors and editors. This is particularly helpful for new writers who are still learning to understand what editors and peer reviewers want and expect, as well as how to address peer review feedback (p. 85). The authors model several ways to interpret, respond to, and disagree with peer review feedback.

While there is no index, this book has a detailed table of contents that makes using the text as a reference fairly straightforward. And though not a focus of the book *per se*, if you have finished your dissertation, and would like to work toward publishing it, this book may still be useful insofar as choosing which journals to publish in and things to think about in terms of reorienting your work for

the audience you have selected. Paltridge and Starfield discuss strategies that new writers can use to guide them through the process of publication. For example, they provide strategies for evaluating which journals to publish in and why (see pp. 36-40). New writers may also appreciate the authors' discussion of journal types (e.g., disciplinary, regional, field, interdisciplinary), which is helpful for those wishing to be strategic in communicating their research to different audiences. For instance, Paltridge decided to publish in a regional teaching journal instead of a different journal because he wished to become acquainted with the region's teachers. I appreciated this point because it repositioned my choice of journal for my own publishing. Because I am a novice researcher, I decided that a national journal would be a good place to begin, as it might be a better way for me to network with other researchers in my community. Finally – and not to be missed – throughout the text, the authors offer plenty of reasons to persist with publication and deal with rejection.

Overall, these books complement each other well. Where Paltridge and Starfield assume the reader has a good final draft of a paper to prepare for submission, Thomson and Kamler coach readers toward producing a final product. Both texts may be accessed as standalone companions for novice writers or adapted for use in workshops or courses on writing and publishing. Both foreground applied strategies but remain theoretically and empirically driven. Both books refrain from being overly prescriptive, instead offering from their collective experience as authors, editors, peer reviewers, and supervisors. However, though the authors of both books challenge prevailing assumptions that doctoral students will “figure it out” and demystify the writing, research, and publication process, neither pair fully acknowledge the power and privilege that their positions as successful academics afford them. Indeed, these books could be interpreted as further attempts to coax new writers and researchers into working within an established and hegemonic system. Having said that, challenging prevailing assumptions could be seen as a critical response in and of itself, and these books were written with the intention to make transparent the writing, research, and publication process that doctoral students encounter. With such provisos in mind, I recommend both texts as excellent references and starting points for further reflection and application.

References

- Kamler, B., & Thomson, P. (2008). The failure of dissertation advice books: Toward alternative pedagogies for doctoral writing. *Educational Researcher*, 37(8), 507-514.