

# **Using a Blended Group Learning Approach to Increase Librarians' Motivation and Skills to Publish**

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*While there is considerable research on interventions to support academic staff in writing for publication, there is limited literature on writing interventions for librarians. This article explores the potential of a blended learning approach to support librarians to develop the motivation and skills to write for publication. The program combines three elements: a formal writing seminar; a structured series of online exercises and mentoring support; and two peer-feedback days. The article suggests that the combination of online and face-to-face activities has the potential to be a sustainable model for helping to develop librarians as academic writers. It suggests that this type of model could provide a context, which is currently lacking, for librarians to develop their identity and skills as academic writers.*

**KEYWORDS** *blended learning, librarians, academic writing, e-mentoring, publication*

## INTRODUCTION

Writing for academic publication is an accepted and expected part of the role of an academic; no such recognition of academic writing as part of the role of the librarian exists. Librarians frequently write outside of working hours and there are no external motivations to publish or rewards for publishing, except in US research libraries where publishing is required in order for librarians to achieve tenure.

Research suggests that structured writing interventions can help academic staff to become more proficient writers (Morss and Murray 2001;

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Moore 2003; Murray and Newton 2009). Writers' retreats, where participants go offsite for a number of days and focus exclusively on writing, can accelerate and improve academic writing in a high trust, collegial environment (Grant and Knowles 2000; Moore 2003; Murray and Moore 2006). However, offsite writing retreats can be expensive and may not suit those with family commitments. Female academics "frequently juggle complex domestic responsibilities that may make attendance at residential retreats impossible" (Grant 2006, 485). Librarianship is a female dominated profession and this may also be their experience. Non-residential retreats, where participants take time out from their daily work, to focus exclusively on writing during "normal" working hours, have been shown to produce many of the same benefits of residential retreats (Dickson-Swift et al. 2009).

Writing groups, in which people meet to discuss and advance writing on a regular basis, have also been shown to increase publication output. Some are library specific (Fallon 2009; Miller and Benefiel 1998; Tysick and Babb 2006; Sapon-White et al. 2004); others are cross-disciplinary and include librarians (Grant et al. 2010).

The model described in this article, which grew out of this author's experience of organizing and participating in cross-disciplinary off-site retreats at the National University of Ireland Maynooth—involving both lecturing and library staff—combines elements from the writing retreat, such as peer feedback and structured support. What is different is the online element. This was introduced in recognition of the fact that while librarians share common concerns with academic colleagues in relation to developing their skills as academic writers, their contexts are frequently different. Writing is generally done outside the "normal" working day; frequently, they do not work in a culture where the dissemination of practice and research output is the norm; librarians may have a clear sense of identity of themselves as practitioners supporting the publishing efforts of their academic colleagues, rather than as active participants in generating scholarly output. Additional constraints include the current economic climate. In Ireland, restrictions on recruiting and replacing staff, put additional burdens on staff in-post, which makes finding time for any type of continuing professional development activity, including writing, challenging.

In the light of these factors it is appropriate to ask whether a blended learning model, combining three elements; a writing seminar, online program, and face-to-face peer feedback, can provide a structured framework to help librarians develop the context, motivation, and skills to write for publication.

Following a review of the literature, this article presents a case study in which a blended group learning approach is evaluated as a method of supporting librarians to develop the motivation and skills to write for publication. The online tasks in the case study are described and interweaved with quotes from feedback received from participants. A review of the soft

and hard outcomes of the program leads to the discussion and conclusions of this article. The preliminary results of this study suggest that the combination of online and face-to-face activities has the potential to be a sustainable model for helping to develop librarians as academic writers.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This section gives a brief overview of the literature relating to academic writing and tenure-track librarianship, formal writing interventions for librarians, the literature offering practical advice on writing to librarians, and literature relating to barriers and motivational factors experienced by librarians in writing for publication.

### Writing and Tenure

Academic writing is more prevalent among US academic librarians than their European or Australian counterparts. This is particularly true with tenure-track library positions, where evidence of scholarship is required, although the amount of scholarship varies greatly (Mitchell and Swieszkowski 1985; Floyd and Phillips 1997; Mitchell and Reichel 1999). With reference to US tenure-track posts for academic librarians, Tysick and Babb refer to the “prevalent academic culture that encourages or requires research, grants and publication in addition to service excellence” (94). She suggests that in a typical tenure-track position, competencies in research, writing and operating in the academic environment are typically acquired within a six-year period, alongside traditional library duties (Tysick and Babb 2006, 94). A study of publications by 59 full-time tenure-track librarians at Penn State University, a highly active Library in terms of research output and scholarly publication showed that each participant spent an average of 20 hours per month on research. This confirms that work environment and the expectation to publish have a strong influence on publication output (Hart 1999). After tenure, the expectation to publish continues and research and scholarly publication are an important part of the librarian’s annual performance evaluation in the US (Fennewald 2008).

### Formal Writing Interventions

The recognition that librarians require support to become productive writers has led to the development of some interventions to support librarians in their academic writing.

An academic writing group for junior faculty librarians was established at the University of Buffalo, in 2002. The group held bimonthly one-hour meetings, with members submitting writing for review before each meeting.

The benefits of the group went beyond the initial purpose of writing and research, and it developed into an academic peer-support group helping new librarians to assimilate into the University (Tysick and Babb 2006). A writing group to support librarians seeking tenure was developed at the Sterling C. Evans Library at Texas A&M University. The group provided advice on presenting posters at conferences, guidance on obtaining university research funds, and training on statistical analysis (Miller and Benefiel 1998). Oregon State University Libraries' Library Faculty Association (LFA) encourages a culture of scholarship in the institution's libraries, by creating opportunities for librarians to discuss research in progress and present completed projects to colleagues, through a writing group which meets monthly. Response to the LFA's activities has been positive and suggests that institutional support is a significant factor in developing writing among academic librarians (Sapon-White et al. 2004). A cross-disciplinary group, which included a librarian, was established in a higher education institution in the North West of England in 2006. The group holds monthly one and a half hour meetings. A variety of topics relating to writing for publication, including when and where to write and giving and receiving feedback were discussed. The group has "enabled new knowledge, confidence and competence in academic writing, evidenced by a collective publication record" (Grant et al. 2010, 58). Formal academic writing workshops for librarians have been run by the Library at the National University of Ireland Maynooth since 2007. The workshops focus on the mechanics of writing and the publication process and have input from librarians who have published. Initial findings suggest that that the workshops have had an impact on publishing output of Irish librarians (Fallon 2010). The Library and Information Research Group (LIRG) of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) offer workshops for librarians on various aspects of publishing.

### Practical Advice on Writing

In addition to these formal interventions, there is an extensive body of literature offering practical advice for librarians who wish to write for publication (Bell 2004a, 2004b; Brewerton 2010; Crawford 2003; Etches-Johnson 2004; Fallon 2009; Gordon 2004a, 2004b; Joint 2003, 2005, 2006; Johnson 2004; Langley 2010; Nicholson 2006; McKnight 2009; Smallwood 2010).

### Barriers and Motivations

Some research on barriers and motivating factors influencing librarians writing for publication has been carried out. Barriers include lack of support and personal confidence, particularly in dealing with issues such as peer review,

article rejection, workplace reorganization, and personal life (Shenton 2008). Being part of a culture where publication is not expected and is not the norm, can also act as a barrier. A survey of a small group of new professionals presenting at the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) New Librarians' Symposium in Sydney in 2006, found that few of those surveyed were required to write or present as part of their work role. Barriers to writing identified in the survey included time, skills, and responsibilities outside work (Bradley 2008). A survey of librarians publishing in 12 library journals and an online survey of 100 additional librarians, identified lack of time for writing as the greatest barrier, followed by lack of confidence in the mechanics and processes of writing and publishing. Time and peer encouragement were the most requested supports. Key motivations to write were the desire to share results, professional development, and recognition for the author and their parent institution (Clapton 2010). Barriers identified by Irish academic librarians include the absence of a culture where librarians are expected to share the findings of their work with others, lack of mentoring and organizational support, and lack of role models of librarians writing within the Irish profession. Motivations included formal writing workshops for librarians and increased recognition of the value of academic writing to the Library and the profession, with the suggestion of an annual prize for publication (Fallon 2009).

Improving practice within the organization followed by personal interest were key motivators in a survey of 130 UK academic librarians' motivation to research and publish (Schlackman 2009). Satisfaction with achievement, responsibility, and recognition were factors identified in an exploration of job satisfaction and publication output among librarians in Nigerian universities (Edem and Lawal 1999).

Both US and other library literature identifies organizational support as being a significant motivator for writing for publishing. The literature would suggest that this is underdeveloped outside large US research universities. This article suggests that a program of structured support, using both online and face-to-face contact, may help address some of the constraints librarians experience in developing as academic writers.

## CASE STUDY: A BLENDED APPROACH TO ACADEMIC WRITING

### Background

The recognition that librarians require encouragement and support to develop their skills in writing for publication led this author to develop an annual workshop at National University of Ireland Maynooth for Irish librarians on writing for publication, under the auspices of the Irish Academic and National Library Training Co-operative (ANLTC). This workshop was presented four times between 2007 and 2010. Over fifty library staff, primarily

but not exclusively, from Irish academic libraries were present, with approximately 12 to 14 people attending each workshop. Workshops were practical in nature, with participants carrying out a variety of writing tasks including developing abstracts, structuring articles, drafting query e-mails for publishers and so forth. The methodology, including the various tasks, is detailed in *The Academic Writing Toolkit* (Fallon 2009).

In 2008 the 2007 cohort of 14 was surveyed. Seven had either published or had articles accepted for publication. Eight reported that the writing workshop had a strong impact on their writing. Two reported that it had little impact and four of the 14 did not complete the questionnaire (Fallon 2010).

In 2011, the model changed to a one-day academic writing seminar; an online program of writing tasks and two peer feedback days spread over nine months. Each of these is described in turn. The model aimed to be both highly structured but flexible.

### Writing Seminar

Twenty-three people attended a one-day academic writing seminar in February 2011. Nineteen participants were from Irish higher education institutions, two were from public libraries, and two were from Health Sciences Libraries.

Guest speakers spoke on writing a book proposal, writing for the Emerald Publishing Group, writing for Irish Higher Education journals, writing a chapter in an edited collection, and approaching undertaking a PhD. Participants were invited to exhibit posters at the seminar with Emerald Publishing Group sponsoring an award for the best poster.

### Online Group

One week after the seminar, the 23 participants were emailed and asked if they wished to participate in an online e-mentoring program with a view to meeting three months later with draft articles. Thirteen of the 23 participants opted to continue.

The 13 included librarians from public, health sciences, higher education, and university libraries.

### Online Tasks and Support

The e-mentoring program can be divided into two stages. Stage 1 (Tasks 1 to 7) took place in the three months following the seminar. This was followed by a one-day peer-feedback day. Stage 2 ran over a five-month period, culminating in a one-day feedback session for final drafts prior to submission.

## Stage 1 (Tasks 1–7)

The seven tasks listed below were emailed to participants.

Task 1: Develop a working title and three keywords for your article.

Task 2: What is the audience and purpose for your article? What journal/conference might you submit to?

Task 3: Write a 80–200 word informative or structured abstract for your article.

Task 4: Draw up an outline for your article.

Task 5: Draft a section in 500 words.

Task 6: Continue draft to 1,000 words.

Task 7: Online peer feedback.

The thirteen participants emailed the completed task to the mentor (this author), who created a Word document and each week circulated the updated document and the next task, via email to the group as a whole. Brief guidance on each task was provided via email.

### TASK 1: DEVELOP A WORKING TITLE AND THREE KEYWORDS FOR YOUR ARTICLE/POSTER

The breaking down of the writing process into small tasks made the process less daunting for participants, and this is evidenced in the feedback. It allowed time to consider a working title and keywords; to focus on one small manageable part of the article without worrying about the article as whole.

Usually my writing projects have involved jumping right in to the writing phase. I rarely gave time to sitting down and thinking about my keywords or title.

Although I'm very familiar with keywords from helping students search databases, I never thought about them until now in relation to my own writing.

### TASK 2: DEFINE THE AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE OF YOUR ARTICLE. CONSIDER WHERE YOU MIGHT SUBMIT

Focusing on a particular journal or publishing outlet from the start allowed participants to have a clear goal in terms of type of article, style of writing, word length, and whether the article should be research- or practice-based or a combination of both.

The group was a useful forum for getting suggestions on possible outlets for articles. This included suggestions on possible conferences to present at, which is a useful precursor to publishing an article.

I appreciated one suggestion at the beginning on possible journals for the article. This made it a realistic goal and definitely helped me focus on what I wanted to say. Before I would never have thought about who the final article was intended for.

Defining the purpose and looking at the audience was more difficult for me as I wasn't au fait with the scholarly journals having been out of academic libraries for some years. Perhaps as part of the e-mentoring process – suggestions could be made and maybe a listing of the possible journal/conferences given with some information on each would be helpful for those who are unfamiliar or new to the process.

**TASK 3: DRAW UP A DRAFT STRUCTURED OR INFORMATIVE ABSTRACT OF BETWEEN 80 AND 200 WORDS. STUDY THE ABSTRACTS IN JOURNALS YOU ARE CONSIDERING. HOW LONG ARE THEY? WHAT TYPE OF VERBS DO THEY USE? HOW ARE THEY STRUCTURED?**

While the draft abstract will change and develop this exercise helped participants further focus their article. The abstract should act as a map, which the writer will return to, throughout the process.

Writing a draft abstract helped me to be more focused.

I found it to be a good discipline to write it [the abstract], and just as interesting and demanding as I'd expected!

**TASK 4: DRAW UP AN OUTLINE FOR YOUR ARTICLE OR POSTER, USING THE SAMPLE OUTLINE FOR A PEER REVIEWED OR A PROFESSIONAL JOURNAL, OR USING A SAMPLE ARTICLE FROM A JOURNAL YOU ARE CONSIDERING**

The literature on academic writing stresses the need to work from a structure. A structure provides a detailed map allowing the writer to order, sift and eliminate ideas; to work on sections in stages; to view the whole outline at a glance and to work towards a specific word count. It provides the scaffolding around which the writing project develops. Taking time to draw up a structure helped participants to see their writing project as “doable.”

The mentor's advice to use the structured headings/sections as a springboard, to dip in and out as time allowed, actually did benefit me as a writer. Before this, I would probably work on entire sections at a time and in chronological order. I never felt I could move on to the next

section until the previous section was complete. Dipping in and out of sections in shorter bursts of time really helps me write more productively.

At this stage (Task 4), 10 people were actively writing in the group. Some were at different stages and were individually encouraged by email to continue to write and not to worry if they were at a slightly earlier task.

At one stage, I felt I may have to opt out as I had fallen behind by two tasks but the encouragement from the mentor kept me “in there.” I know that the article has a long way to go, but I can see where I want it to go.

Writing can be a lonely process. Having an online mentor to enquire how work was progressing and to encourage people can provide the motivation to continue. The sense of being part of a team or community of practice with other colleagues experiencing the same challenges can be motivating.

#### TASK 5: DRAFT A SECTION OF YOUR ARTICLE IN ABOUT 500 WORDS

It was not until Task 5 that people actually began writing a section. This allowed them to build up confidence gradually.

Most of the writing projects were practical rather than theoretical in nature. The importance of valuing one’s experience was stressed and people began to see how they could look more critically at their day-to-day practice and use it as a source of material for future writing.

[I realised] that my experience was what was key. The lit review, analysis, etc., could all be built around that.

I will (and am) look at all my experiences from the point of view of looking at how I can write about them, present them and generally share them—without feeling inhibited.

Participants were encouraged to allow themselves to write without editing; to accept that “bad” writing is okay; and to not look for perfection, but to just write. The knowledge that their writing did not have to be perfect helped participants to get things down and took some of the fear out of writing.

[I realised] that I had worthwhile experiences to bring to the table and that perfection and starting with an expectation of a very high standard was not needed—just start writing and then develop/edit as you go.

Something that stuck with me is that “bad” writing is ok at first to get the article on paper in some form initially.

All your work/ideas are exposed and that can be a very daunting thing.

TASK 6: CONTINUE DRAFTING A SECTION OR SECTION AND AIM TO GET TO ABOUT 1,000 WORDS

Participants saw their work grow, evolve, and change. They learned to be their own editor and critic and to give constructive feedback to colleagues, which was a very important part of the process.

It's amazing how this early work can evolve over the following weeks. I found myself reading back over my work from the early tasks and making changes (to both the article and my structure). More importantly, I found myself justifying any changes I made. It meant that I was considering my changes and why they were occurring. It felt like my article was evolving!

It didn't feel intimidating—or like it was too onerous to complete.

The reassurance of a weekly task, which was made achievable by the way the mentor set it, and encouraged us to complete the task and really get stuck in, without requiring “perfection” or having a totally clear structure and so on, was brilliant and an excellent way of getting the writing process going and continuing.

It was a really useful combination of support and direction so people felt they really should do something but didn't feel overwhelmed by it!

TASK 7: ONLINE PEER FEEDBACK

The team had already agreed to meet face-to-face three months after the seminar. Participants were asked to use the week prior to the meeting to circulate drafts. At this point there were nine people in the group actively writing. One of these completed a poster, had it accepted for a conference, and decided not to attend the peer meeting, leaving eight participants. Participants were given online guidance on giving feedback; they returned the peer feedback to the individual author not to the group as whole.

I never realized the benefit of getting input on my work halfway through completion.

[After the peer feedback] the focus of the article became clearer and I decided to change tack and target a professional journal and write about my own experience. I felt in more control of the article and less stressed.

Participating in a seminar and continuing in a peer group in which everyone has been focused on improving their writing skills through offering and receiving feedback has been a very positive and very worthwhile experience, and will benefit me on all my future writing projects.

## Peer-Feedback Day 1 (May 2011)

Following Tasks 1 to 7, the group of eight got together. Each person had a 30-minute slot, ten minutes to explain where they were in their writing project, perhaps highlighting any areas they felt they needed feedback on; 15 minutes open forum where participants gave feedback, and 5 minutes wrap up. A person from the group acted as scribe for each presenter.

Afterward, participants were asked to write briefly on how they experienced the peer-feedback day and how it would influence them moving forward with their writing. The most valuable part of the day, they reported, was the interaction in the group and taking part in the dialogue. Peers were regarded as representative of the intended audience and their opinions respected.

It was stimulating to hear other people's responses and see the range of opinions in the room. This was energizing at the time and as a group we experienced flow.

Being able to reflect back to group members the value of their work and experience was viewed as rewarding.

It was lovely to see the light in someone's eyes as they realized the worth of what they do, or as ideas and approaches came into view.

The diversity of the group with staff from academic, special, and public libraries added to the learning experience. People were exposed to writing and commenting about topics they did not encounter on a regular basis in their work. They enjoyed engaging with people from different libraries. Because the presentations were on a variety of library related topics, they were different and engaging.

Scheduling time for each writer and their draft allowed for equal discussion on all the work. Participants found it stimulating to be involved in constructive criticism, while noting that it required intense concentration. Through the process they developed their listening skills. There was a high level of trust, openness and support in the group.

Initially, I had thought that I probably wouldn't have needed all the time allocated for my draft, but it's amazing how time passes. The feedback I received on my draft was really useful, and will definitely help progress my draft. It allowed for others to clarify anything in my draft that wasn't clear, and how this could be improved upon.

Giving and receiving feedback is not easy. The participants got guidelines on giving feedback, which stressed that it should be constructive and people presenting had the option of specifying what area of the work they wished

to get feedback on. Receiving a critique can be emotionally daunting. With online peer feedback there is a distance and time to reflect, which is not the case with face-to-face feedback. Receiving and dealing with robust feedback can help to build the necessary resilience needed to deal effectively and appropriately with the journal peer-review process.

I was surprised at my own psychological behavior in terms of acting so aggressively and defensive initially towards the feedback I received. I felt my draft was being torn to shreds by the criticism, which is all part of the learning experience. Their views and feedback were very worthwhile, and provided more focus and elucidation on the sections which needed to be developed.

Getting together as a group provided a motivation boost that people needed

In a way, the peer feedback day felt a bit like the mid-term; it feels like I'm now at the half-way point of my draft, and that the feedback I received on the day will help guide and focus my draft from this point forward.

At the end of the day it was agreed that there was great value in having the online group and that a blended approach—both online and face-to-face interaction—was most beneficial. The group agreed to circulate drafts, with one draft being circulated fortnightly, and after that to meet again at the end of October.

## Stage 2

Throughout the summer, a number of people were on leave and the agreed plan to circulate drafts did not happen. During this period one group participant was awarded first prize at the All Ireland Society for Higher Education (AISHE) conference for the poster he designed as part of the group. A second participant from the group presented a paper at the same conference. One participant, having submitted a paper to a professional journal, formally opted out of the group as she was undertaking a course of study.

## Peer Feedback Day 2 (October 2011)

At this point there were six people actively writing. One could not attend on the day.

The day began with a review of where each person was with their writing. There was then one-hour dedicated writing time. In the afternoon there was a mixture of writing and discussion.

I found the day extremely beneficial, especially the hour dedicated solely to writing. It provided the opportunity to refine and rewrite section of my draft which I had been thinking about. The individual consultation with the mentor in critiquing the third draft was invaluable, since it really focused my thought process in terms of what I was trying to achieve with my proposed article.

While the group agreed to keep in touch informally and to continue supporting each other, Peer Feedback Day 2 marked the ending of the formal program.

## OUTCOMES

A month after Peer Feedback Day 2, the eight people who had participated in Peer Feedback Day 1 were emailed. They were asked to comment on the total process, that is, academic writing seminar, peer-feedback days and online mentoring, in terms of soft outcome (confidence building, motivation to write, etc.), and hard outcomes (papers presented, papers accepted for publication, etc.) They were also asked what supports they felt they would need to develop their writing further.

### Soft Outcomes

It has demystified the process of getting published and taught me how to align writing with the requirements of the journal to which I'd submit an article. The mentoring and the moral support is very motivating and it helped me get down to writing and tackle one task at a time. I've learnt to give things a shot and to put myself forward because the best that can happen is that I succeed, and the effort itself has intrinsic value in learning more about how to shape and present material.

For me the academic writing seminar—the first part of the program—could not have been more timely, I had a project I wanted to write up for publication and was very unsure of how to go about it. It, and the mentoring program, helped me to achieve my goal, and more, lots more. I see now that if I want to write that all I have to do is write, there is an audience for what I'm interested in.

Prior to undertaking the blended writing program, I had some experience with publishing my work. This was usually a lengthy and expansive process, I found the program, and the approaches it took, excellent for making the writer think more about the actual writing process. By segmenting the writing into smaller achievable tasks, writing seemed to be much less daunting, and more manageable. For me, I am now much more aware of the writing process, and the value of taking a systematic approach to my writing. The blended program has impacted me outside

of writing also. Following some of the talks at the original one-day writing seminar, I am considering pursuing a PhD or Doctorate program of study once I have completed my current Masters study in Education.

The feeling of positive support and that my article seemed to interest people was important to me. I still feel I have long, long way to go in the mechanics of writing and the publication process. Also, it was good to listen to others and to hear how they were progressing and the problems they encountered.

I have gained a lot of confidence in writing since going through the process. I have more understanding of the process of writing and that it is possible for me to be a writer. I just need to do it.

I would say, the blended learning process has helped my confidence immensely. The realization that everyone is facing similar problems with their project, the structure of having everyone reach the same goal and the feedback received from the participants helped me to understand the writing process and understand areas where I was going wrong and areas which I needed to improve on. I have also learned about the way submissions for conferences work, the set-up and the suitability of work for specific conferences. This understanding will greatly help when I am submitting in the future.

The most useful part of this process for me was providing a framework within which to address the whole area of writing and presenting - how to do it, how to get started, practical tips for making it happen and being realistic about what was needed (i.e. just get writing and documenting real experiences and not overly concentrating, for example, on the lit review, or having it “perfect”). It was really helpful to have the structure of regular meetings and activities and being involved with other people engaged in the same work so one got useful tips and ideas from their work too. Having someone lead the process was invaluable. Feeling what one was writing about was valuable is key—it’s sometimes hard to see that quite straightforward and practical aspects of one’s work research are worthwhile writing/presenting about and that quite small and focused areas of work are valuable for others to learn from too. That really came across in the sessions we had and will be very instructive for the future.

## Hard Outcomes

I gave a short presentation at School of Librarianship, University College Dublin (SILS) alumni event. I had a plenary paper accepted for an international conference and a paper invited by the related journal to complement the conference presentation. I also have had another paper on a different topic accepted for an international conference.

I have completed a draft of my original paper (reflective practice in librarianship). I have plans to bring this draft to publication in the coming

months. In addition to this, I have submitted an abstract for a short paper at the 2012 LILAC conference based on this paper, and am awaiting the outcome of this abstract submission. In addition to this, I have submitted a second abstract to the LILAC conference on another topic (problem-based information literacy instruction). This abstract is intended to be a long paper, and I am awaiting a decision on this abstract. I also recently had a co-authored paper which has been accepted for publication in *SCONUL Focus*. This paper is based on a small information literacy project, and the article is in press, and expected to be published late 2011 or early 2012. Finally, I have also had a book review accepted for the *Journal of Information Literacy*, and this is expected to be published shortly.

I have an article in progress.

I am currently working on a writing piece and poster themed on my experience of the blended learning process to be used with guidelines for an upcoming ANLTC competition.

I wrote a paper which I forwarded for publishing and I have not heard anything from them since. This has caused me some concern but maybe I need to think of another journal to send my article.

In my case, sadly, there are not really any hard outcomes. My writing partner and I did quite a lot of work on our topic, and had a presentation ready for a conference but due to personal circumstances for both of us we had to withdraw from that conference, which was disappointing. I think had we presented at the conference, this would have allowed us to progress much more easily on the paper. I found the idea of writing a joint paper very challenging—not having written one before; it was hard to decide who would write what, even to agree the structure and focus of the paper was tricky. People had advised me that co-authoring was a good way to start but I'm not sure. I think a more focused topic e.g. about a specific activity or project, might have helped—our topic was rather wide ranging and could have been addressed in a number of ways. On the positive side, it was good to have someone to discuss ideas with and it was really interesting to work with someone on a project like this.

I completed my poster on “E-books” throughout the course of the blended learning process and I had submitted it to INULS conference and to an AISHE conference. It was accepted for both, displayed and it won runner-up prize in the INULS poster competition and first place in the AISHE conference poster competition.

## FURTHER SUPPORT

A peer-mentoring group of some description . . . it was super to find out that there are librarians who like to write, want to write and that there is a librarian who was willing and able to mentor budding librarian-writers.

I found the weekly set tasks to be a huge motivation to progress my writing. I realize that it's probably not feasible to continue to set tasks like these, but I wonder if other participants in the group (as well as previous and future participants) would be interested in an online writing group. This might allow us to share ideas, or writing projects. I imagine that participation in a group like this would motivate me to continue the good work and habits that came about as a result of this program.

I found the process of participating in the writing seminar and program to be very beneficial, and ultimately rewarding. As librarians, we might sometimes neglect to seize and explore the opportunities we have to share our experiences and work. The blended learning program is an excellent way to build confidence and explore some of these avenues.

I think meeting up periodically is good as an online group could become tedious. It would be useful too, to know which conferences and paper requirements are happening around the country and further afield. We need mentors and librarians who will encourage participation. Our profession is all too often tied up with the day to day running of our libraries.

I need a mentor to continue writing. I also need to think about what to write about, which is very challenging. I enjoyed the feedback and the guided processes. I now use these as a starting place when I am thinking of writing.

More guidance on how to get published would be great—I know it was covered a bit but I would still be a bit at sea if it came to writing an article again. Some further guidance regarding thinking of ideas topics to write about and how to judge what is useful or makes for a worthwhile paper/article would be good.

It would be good to have some kind of discussion forum where people could perhaps upload work/ideas for comment and feedback A bit like the network we had through e-mail this time but with a shared space for exchanging thoughts/ideas/drafts and looking for writing/presenting partners perhaps?

## DISCUSSION

The blended learning approach aimed to provide a structure or framework to make it easier for librarians to produce a piece of writing or a poster. For the inexperienced writer it can be difficult to know where to start writing. The small, incremental writings tasks helped to make writing a less daunting process, breaking the process of writing into manageable tasks that would progressively develop into an article. The spacing of tasks, made the process

more sustainable, in that the smaller tasks can be reflected on and carried out either within or outside the workplace, in a reasonably short space of time.

Being part of an online group means that participants are making an active commitment to the task of writing. Sharing work helped develop a sense of being part of a *community* of writers. Participants made suggestions online to their colleagues, thus strengthening the group as a writing community and a source of professional support. There was a collegiality and a support network that helped people advance their writing and discussion—both online and face-to-face—which was stimulating. People shared information and insights about conferences and other possible publication outlets. Putting work out to a small group helped develop confidence. Getting peer feedback was a useful precursor to the journal peer review process. The support of individual group members and the support of the mentor provided ongoing motivation and support.

The online tasks allowed people to choose their own time and space to complete the writing tasks and perhaps helping librarians to integrate writing into their lives and careers. As the network was cross-sectoral and also from across the country made for interesting exchanges of experience.

This model has the potential to address some of the challenges librarians face in developing their academic writing. It allows a significant time period to work on writing projects; there were no costs after the initial course fee for the writing seminar. In a time of severe cutbacks in library funding, online CPD activity such as this offers a means of continuing professional development that does not incur travel costs. Some of the participants were from very small libraries and staffing constraints make attending courses challenging.

An issue this article does not seek to address is what, if any, impact the initial academic writing seminar had on the writing/presentation practice of the attendees (23 in total). It also does not address why 5 of the 13 who opted to join the online group had dropped out by Task 4.

## CONCLUSION

The writing process takes time. The initial seminar was in February 2011. The formal close was October 2011. It is likely that it will take up to a year for some of the outputs from the program to find their way into the literature or conferences. Initial evidence would suggest that there is value in the blended learning approach in supporting librarians to develop at academic writers.

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