

**Workshop:*****I'm a Scientist, Not a Writer!*****Asking Whether Writing Style Changes the Impact of Research  
in the Natural Sciences**

In this workshop, international experts from several disciplines – ranging from bio-physics over linguistics to psychology and literary studies – will explore the importance and intricacies of writing style in research articles. Is it just the quality of the research results that influences the impact of an article? Or does style play a role, and if so, which stylistic features are important?

The workshop will take place online on Wednesday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020. There will be lectures from colleagues from Heidelberg University and international guests from Great Britain and the U.S. Since discussions online tend to be exhausting, we will have generous breaks. In addition, it is possible to listen to (and participate in the discussion on) selected lectures.

If you would like to attend, please write an email to Aurora Natella ([aurora.natella@h-its.org](mailto:aurora.natella@h-its.org)); we'll then send you the link for participating in the discussion.

**Schedule**

<b>10.30 – 10.45</b>	<b>Frauke Gräter:</b> Introduction
<b>10.45 – 11.15</b>	<b>Vera Nünning:</b> “On the Importance of Style for the Communication of Scientific Research”
<b>11.15 – 11.30</b>	<b>Coffee Break</b>
<b>11.30 – 12.00</b>	<b>Michael Strube:</b> “Re(de)fining Readability: A Quantitative Approach”
<b>12.00 – 13.00</b>	<b>Daniel Shea:</b> “Edit Your Doctoral Thesis”

- 13.00 – 14.00**      ***Lunch Break***
- 14.00 – 14.45**      **Ken Hyland:** “Writing Is Researching, Not Something We Do When It’s Finished”
- 14.45 – 15.00**      ***Coffee Break***
- 15.00 – 15.45**      **Danny Oppenheimer:** “Contagious Academic Writing: Lessons From Viral Media, Urban Legends, and the Marketplace of Ideas”
- 15.45 – 16.30**      **Kathryn Cochran:** “Writing, Readers, and the Functions of Text: The Link between Analysis and Revision”
- 16.30 – 16.45**      ***Final Discussion***

**Vera Nünning**

(English Philology, Heidelberg University)

**On the Importance of Style for the Communication  
of Scientific Research**

The Victorian *enfant terrible* Oscar Wilde was quite sure that it is style that makes us believe a thing – nothing but style. Looking at the last four years of US-American history, we might be inclined to agree: facts don't seem to be of overall importance when it comes to persuading people of the truth or significance of anything. Though it would be presumptuous to claim that the style of scientific writing is the only important aspect of scientific publications, it is worth asking in what way style can guide and influence the reception of research articles. This brief lecture will approach this question from the perspective of literary studies and present a few criteria that are worth thinking about when turning research into words and sentences, titles and abstracts. I will argue that several groups of criteria should be heeded, some of which are mentioned again and again in the numerous guidebooks on academic writing style, while others are usually neglected. Starting from the premise that writing is a process of communication, I ask which purposes scientific writing can fulfil, and how these can be correlated to stylistic criteria that can be used to evaluate different writing styles. A few examples taken from the abstracts of articles published in PLOS Biology will illustrate some of the pitfalls and possibilities of scientific writings.

**Daniel Shea**

(Writing Program, Heidelberg University)

### **Edit Your Doctoral Thesis**



Being a writer entails being an editor. You are already editing in your head whenever you manipulate script to write:

*I ~~really enjoy~~ had a really good time ~~with you~~ going out*  
***I had a really good time going out last night.***

And that's just the sort of editing that goes on in your head when you write a text message to a friend. Any text longer than a quick thumb-tapped message will involve more editing, and there will be more editing again for every little bit of value a text acquires in your world. A message to a friend is one sort of text in your world, but the doctoral thesis you submit to a professor is an entirely other sort of text in your world, not least because your doctoral thesis will be edited by not just you. Your doctoral thesis is one step taken into the world of academic publishing.

Daniel Shea opens two views on editing:

The first is the view inside your head. Since, as the text-message example goes to show, you're editing anyway when you write, why not carry through onto the page what's going on inside your head and bring the whole process more under your control? *You write, therefore you edit.*

And the second view is the view forward, the view into your future as a publishing academic. Your research articles will have real flesh-and-blood editors, and those editors will touch their minds to every sentence of your texts. Meet your editors halfway and edit yourself yourself. One way or the other, your writing's going to get edited, and besides, when you furnish a professional editor with a better text from the start, a professional editor can then furnish you with your best text in the end. *You write, therefore you edit.*

## **Ken Hyland**

(Applied Linguistics, University of East Anglia)

### **Writing Is Researching, Not Something We Do When It's Finished**



This presentation challenges the widespread view that writing is somehow peripheral to the more serious aspects of doing research – like collecting data, deciding on methods, and analysing results. Instead I argue that research is inseparable from writing. We don't sit down to 'write up' research but carefully craft our study as we do it. This is because science has no voice to speak for itself. Results have to be interpreted and readers persuaded, and this shifts attention from the lab to the page. And this is not all there is to it as we have to craft our paper to the expectations of journals gatekeepers and disciplinary colleagues. Simply: physicists don't write like philosophers nor lawyers like linguists as we have to choose our words to connect our ideas with our disciplines. Drawing on some of my research over the past 20 years, I will explore these ideas and argue that writing is central to constructing knowledge and negotiating a professional academic career. Ultimately, and in an important sense, we are what we write, and we need to understand the distinctive ways our disciplines have of conceptualising issues, addressing colleagues and presenting arguments to be successful researchers and recognized academics.

## **Danny Oppenheimer**

(Social and Decision Sciences, Carnegie Mellon University)

### **Contagious Academic Writing: Lessons From Viral Media, Urban Legends, and the Marketplace of Ideas**



What causes ideas to spread? Scholars of the marketplace of ideas have long been interested in why some fake news, urban legends, and advertising campaigns go viral, while other (often more accurate) information does not. In this talk I apply the findings of this field to academic writing and thus provide a framework for understanding what academic writing is likely to be well cited and broadly impactful, above and beyond intellectual merit. In particular, I will use an in-depth case study of metacognitive fluency, showing it's widespread generalizability and implications for academic writing specifically.

**Biographical Information:** Danny Oppenheimer is a professor at Carnegie Mellon jointly appointed in Psychology and Decision Sciences who studies judgment, decision making, metacognition, learning and causal reasoning, and applies his findings to a diverse array of domains, such as charitable giving, consumer behavior, education, electoral outcomes, and how to trick students into buying him ice cream. He is the author of over 50 peer-reviewed articles and books including "Democracy Despite Itself: Why a System that shouldn't work at all works so well" and "Psychology: The Comic Book Introduction". He has won awards for research, teaching, and humor, the latter of which is particularly inexplicable given his penchant for truly terrible puns.

## **Kathryn Cochran**

(Writing Program, University of Chicago)

### **Writing, Readers, and the Functions of Text: The Link between Analysis and Revision**



It makes sense, intuitively, that writing (among other factors) might affect a journal's Impact Factor. Without question, writing (text) does have effects. Texts can turn readers away, because readers find it difficult to read, or do not see the point of reading. But texts can also motivate readers to read, and make reading a do-able and productive task. How is it that writing has its effects? And what functions must be accomplished if writing in the sciences is to succeed for readers? What are the mechanisms of language on the page that scientists should understand, and use, to help readers see the value of their work?

This presentation is a pragmatic one, informed by the assumptions that language *does things*, and that writers can revise to make it do the right things for particular readers. It introduces the relationship between writers, readers, and the functions of language, using the example of a significant function of writing in the sciences: the construction of value. It will also introduce the skill of *analysis* of one's draft: how writers can analyze a text to understand whether the language will function—or not—to convey a sense of value, for specific readers. The hope is that if writers can analyze, review the data and make findings about what readers will perceive, and then revise as necessary, they may be able to more reliably contribute to a journal's Impact Factor.