



Department of Teacher Education and School Research,  
University of Oslo

*for PhD students at the faculty of medicine*

University of Oslo, 12 December, 2011

true opinions [...] have only to be awakened by questioning to become knowledge

- *Socrates*



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- ▶ **raise** questions
- ▶ **draft** answers
- ▶ **review & improve**

## ∞ The Five Paragraph Method ∞

~ a tool for Academic Writing and Speaking ~

### Course aim:

The main aim of this workshop will be to offer the participants tools *to exercise, to get started* and *to get on* with their academic writing. A selection of simple and common procedures will be presented, that will be highly relevant to the early stages of writing, and to support active rewriting and collaboration. It's a kind of writers gym: to get fit for writing.

With some exercise in this method you will always be able to write a couple of pages in half an hour.

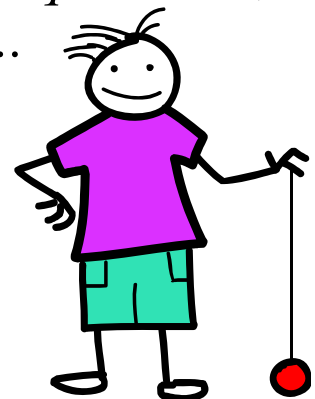
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# BIG or SMALL writing?

- ✓ *For adults; writing = experience + habit*
- ✓ In education writing is most often used for BIG tasks, such as compulsory *reports*, preparatory *tests*, and the *final exams*.
- ✓ After *training* like that for many years, you get into the *habit* of expecting writing to be big, and very serious. And then you keep on writing:
  1. **alone**
  2. **in the last moment**
  3. **with no time for improvement**
  4. **without looking back**
- ✓ *The aim of my writing workshops is to demonstrate SMALL writing activities that are easy to integrate into the daily labor over time: small writing and small steps. Here you get small tools; to get going, to write drafts, to pose research questions, to improve drafts and for restructuring...*

- ✓ *... small gym gadgets, to get hooked on?*





# Get on writing

~ a dialectical method ~

Freewriting and idea forming – in 7 steps:

1. Freewriting
2. Topic sentence (the main aim)
3. The Question
4. Alternative questions
5. Review and evaluate
6. Choose
7. Explain



Each step in this exercise set is an independent *turn*; a minor writing strategy – so the entire set is a kind of collapsible pocket tool.

... and then ...

*just do it: articulating a main question / problem statement is done in 7 minutes*



# Art of Communication

~ the ancient aim of public address ~

Success in communication =  
when you decide in advance  
what the audience remember afterwards

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- 1. Introduction*  
(well meaning & apt)
- 2. Three main points to remember*  
(1 - 2 - 3; clear & consistent)
- 3. Conclusion*  
(important & valuable)



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# The five paragraph sketch

~ to write the next first draft ~

*In half an hour or so you will produce 1-2 typed pages – even on a rainy day. And that's a start:*

- ✓ Write five sentences;
  - 1 *first*: one to state the issue.
  - 2, 3, 4 *then*: make three more, with points to develop the first; each point one sentence.
  - 5 *and finally*: close it all off with a sentence, to get a responsible grip at the end.
- ✓ And then you expand these sentences into paragraphs, by explaining each sentence.

= a five paragraph sketch, with  
*a beginning – a middle – and an end*

<i>Presentation</i> (Ethos)	<i>Body</i> (Logos)	<i>Conclusion</i> (Pathos)
Prove you are considerate!	Prove you are sensible!	Prove you are responsible!



# Five-to-get-going sketch

~ *the Project Note* ~

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1. *What is the **field** you will explore?*

Presentation (brief)

2. *What is your **main question**, and why?*

Problem statement

3. *Which **means of proof** do you need?*

Material

4. *How do you want to **make use of them**?*

Method

5. *What do you hope to **achieve**?*

Conclusion (brief)

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# Five-to-go-on sketch

*~ the Progress Report ~*

- 1. What project are you working on, and how did it come about?*
- 2. What has happened up to now?*
- 3. What is most important just now?  
(your most recent efforts)*
- 4. What do you think will happen next?  
(next major challenge / obstacle)*
- 5. ... and what do you hope to achieve?*



# IMRaD

~ *the Scientific Article* ~

This is currently the most influential format for reporting articles in scientific journals. Here it is operationalized by *questions* and brief *freewriting*:

When done with a project, you'll easily answer me:

## ✓ Introduction

1. *What did you do?*

## ✓ Materials and Methods

2. *What did you use, and how?*

## ✓ Results

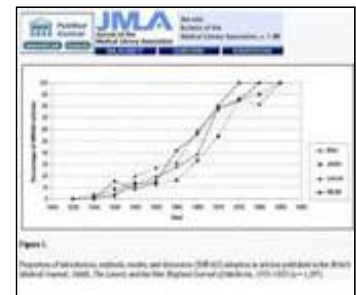
3. *What happened?*

... *and* ...

## ✓ Discussion

4. *What does the result mean?*

5. *What have others said?*





# Response responsibilities

*first + aid: tutorial peer review*

Two *rules of thumb*, when giving constructive comments (e.g. to develop a first draft):

1. Learn to *notice what is achieved*
2. Learn to *make good guiding questions*

✓ NB!

*When giving response:*

- ✓ avoid giving *too much* response
- ✓ avoid *empty praise, bragging* and *pedantry*



*When receiving response:*

- ✓ *do not reply*, but
- ✓ *take notes*

✓ NB!! Cooperation should be established early



# ... a bit about peer review ...

from *sense about science*

## A SHORT EXPLANATION OF PEER REVIEW

When a researcher, or team of researchers, finishes a stage of work, they usually write a paper presenting their *methods, findings and conclusions*. They then send the paper to a scientific journal to be considered for publication.

If the journal's editor thinks it is suitable for their journal they send the paper to other scientists who research and publish in the same field asking them to:

- Comment on its *validity* – are the research results credible; are the design and methodology appropriate?
- Judge the *significance* - is it an important finding?
- Determine its *originality* - are the results new? Does the paper refer properly to work done by others?
- Give an opinion as to whether the paper should be *published, improved* or *rejected* (usually to be submitted elsewhere).

This process is called *peer review*. The scientists (*peers*) assessing the papers are called referees or reviewers.

*[emphasis added]*

(<http://www.senseaboutscience.org.uk/pdf/ShortPeerReviewGuide.pdf>)



# to serve enlightenment

*Why do we need argumentation and discussion?*

1. ***To avoid bloodshed*** [democracy]  
exercising our conflicts with words
2. ***To develop consensus*** [e. g. parliamentarism]  
(common ground in *questions of contention*)
3. ***To educate citizens*** [school]  
able to present their own case
4. ***To remove doubt*** [academia/science]  
(safer ground in *questions of doubt*)
5. ***To illuminate the issue*** [civic discourse]  
- for the common good



*And then a fundamental democratic competence emerge: to accept both counterarguments and even defeat with dignity*



# What did you learn?

- ✓ ½ - 3 minutes oral comment?
- ✓ 3 - 15 minutes oral presentation?
- ✓ 1,5 - 2 typed pages in 30-45 minutes?
- ✓ 30 - 45 minutes oral lecture / presentation?
- ✓ 8 - 10 typed pages on a rainy day?!? **NO!#α!!**
- ✓ Tools to write, to collaborate and to organize?

The five paragraph method works, and I think that is mainly because it is manageable: it *fits the human attention capacity*. (Short term memory can handle 7+/-2 units. So we will always find recipes with 5 or fewer units more manageable.) In addition the method *fits the human attention span*. And (last, but not least,) most instrumental text models will quite easily be adapted to the method.