

— *Academic* —

**RESEARCH,  
PUBLISHING**

- & -

**WRITING**

— — — — —  
**CRITICAL THINKING  
*and* STRATEGIES FOR  
BUSINESS SCHOLARS**



**JOHN DUMAY**

ACADEMIC RESEARCH,  
PUBLISHING AND WRITING

This essential book for researchers, students, and policymakers contains seven chapters from Professor John Dumay on developing critical research, writing, and publishing strategy. It is written in a storytelling style using the author's experience as to how he developed the skills to be an excellent publisher of scholarly work in journal articles, book chapters, books, and the media. This book testifies that writing scholarly work is an art form to be experienced and learned.

—James Guthrie, Macquarie University, Australia

We can all learn from this book. Follow even a fraction of John Dumay's advice and you'll increase your chances of publishing more academic articles that are more engaging and easier to digest by your intended audience. Your papers will be cited more, and you'll have fun while writing them. This book should be required reading for all postgraduate research students and early career scholars, and the rest of us should re-read it every so often to ensure we stick to the success formula John advocates.

—Charl de Villiers, University of Auckland, New Zealand

# ACADEMIC RESEARCH, PUBLISHING AND WRITING

Critical Thinking and Strategies for  
Business Scholars

BY

**JOHN DUMAY**

*Macquarie University, Australia*



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To my darling wife, Jenny, thanks for your patience.

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# PREFACE

## Helen Sword

I vividly remember the first time I met John Dumay. I had been invited to facilitate an academic writing workshop for early career lecturers at the University of Sydney. The topic was ‘Stylish Academic Writing’ (echoing the title of the book I was working on at the time) (Sword, 2012), and I was scanning the room to check how things were going.

I had just asked the workshop participants to tell me what the phrase *stylish academic writing* means to them, and they had responded with the same list of attributes that I’ve heard hundreds of times from researchers across many different disciplines, countries, and contexts. Stylish academic writers, they told me, express themselves with energy, elegance, and flair. They convey complex information using carefully crafted, accessible language. They write like human beings communicating with other human beings, not like robots on Mars.

Whenever I’m teaching or presenting, I try to find at least one person in the room who nods and smiles at everything I say. I call that person ‘The Cheerleader’; they make me feel supported and heard, even when the going gets tough. If I’m unsure whether my message is getting through, I look to the Cheerleader for affirmation. And when I feel the energy in the room starting to drop, a quick glance at my bright-eyed Cheerleader inspires me to redouble my efforts to connect.

As I wrote the words ‘engaging’ and ‘lively’ and ‘jargon-free’ on the whiteboard, I was pleased to see most of the workshop participants nodding in vigorous agreement – a whole room full of Cheerleaders. But then I spotted John across the room, frowning. Or maybe he was actually *scowling*? Either way, it didn’t look good. Even

while I rely on the Cheerleader's smiles for encouragement, I always keep an eye out for anyone who looks bored, confused, or, worst of all, sceptical. I call that person The Doubter – someone whose negative energy I must defuse before it infects the rest of the room.

At the next opportunity, I wandered over to John's table for a chat. Over the years, I've developed a pretty effective technique for dealing with the Doubters. First, I disarm them by listening to their grumbles and enthusiastically agreeing with them: 'That's a great point, John!' Then I air their concerns to the rest of the room: for example, 'John here has pointed out that scholars who write in a personal voice often end up getting shut down by conservative editors and peer reviewers. John, that's so true!' Finally, I execute a deft twist to transform the Doubter into an ally: 'John, what strategies do *you* use for pushing through that kind of resistance? I'll bet that everyone here would love to hear about them!'

But John, as it turned out, wasn't frowning because he disagreed with me. On the contrary – when I asked him how things were going, he told me that he had just experienced a kind of stylistic epiphany, and he was annoyed that it had taken him so long to see the light. Since leaving behind his business career to pursue a PhD in Accounting and Finance, he had been trained to produce the same kind of wordy, wooden, impersonal academic prose that filled most of the journals in his discipline. But now, he realised that the researchers he most admired were 'stylish academic writers' who wrote in the kind of lively, engaging mode I was encouraging. 'They use first person pronouns, they play with metaphor, they tell stories', John told me. 'That's how I want to write too – but I've never been taught how. If anything, I've been actively discouraged from writing that way!'

Thus began a long and fruitful academic friendship, as John set about learning out how to write like a human being, while I conducted research, published books, and developed online tools designed to empower writers like him. From time to time, John would get in touch to ask me a question, invite me to speak at a conference, or let me know about a new article. Eventually, I invited him to be interviewed for my book *Air & Light & Time & Space: How Successful Academics Write* (Sword, 2017). The resulting profile is worth printing in full:

When accounting lecturer John Dumay enrolled in a course on higher-education pedagogy, he and his colleagues were encouraged to become more self-reflective teachers: ‘We had to look at what we were doing as teachers, question why we were doing it, and ask ourselves, “How can I change and improve it?”’ He decided to apply a similar mindset to his research writing:

*I had heard from reviewers that my writing tended to be very abstract, so I tried to change the style and write this really dynamic, personal, me-from-the-first-person kind of narrative.*

His first journal article in the new style received an enthusiastic response – ‘the reviewers thought it was fantastic’ – but then he hit a stumbling block:

*It was all ready to get published, and the editor came back to me and said, ‘Oh, you’re writing in the first person. We only publish in the third person. You have to change this’. I thought, ‘Are you kidding me?’ It took me half a day to go back through it, making sure it was in the present tense and writing everything in the third person. Instead of ‘we’, I would write ‘the researchers’. But I didn’t like that. I thought it constrained what I did.*

The next time he submitted a paper to the same journal, he used personal pronouns again: ‘Again the paper got accepted, and this time, the editor didn’t say boo. So maybe I pushed his buttons a little bit’.

Dumay compares academic writing to cooking – ‘It’s a craft that you hone and you develop’ – and likens a scholar learning the craft to ‘a chef mastering a recipe’:

*You can get the structure right, you can get the ingredients right, but it’s actually how you combine those ingredients and the quality of those ingredients – the quality of the analysis, the quality of the data – that take it to the next level. We can all bake a*

*chocolate cake if we have the right recipe, but there are only a few of us who can bake an absolutely superb chocolate cake.*

As a writer, Dumay now feels that he has now passed his apprenticeship – ‘I can cook some wonderful meals’ – but still has a lot to learn:

*Can I cook that pièce de résistance that’s going to be a hit in the finest restaurant? I don’t think I’m there yet, but I’m certainly working on it.*

‘I don’t think I’m there yet, but I’m certainly working on it’. Reading through this book, I’m struck once again by John’s relentless commitment to learning. A decade and a half after that writing workshop in Sydney, he is now a full professor with an impressive publication record, including several articles *about* writing and publication. But he didn’t become a successful academic writer merely through instinct or osmosis. He got there by emulating the best writers he could find, by challenging his own assumptions, and by asking the same question over and over again: ‘How can I change and improve it?’

Who better, then, to write a book about the scholarly strategies that he has used to achieve such success? John practices what he preaches: you’ll find here relevant anecdotes, playful metaphors, meticulously crafted sentences, and vivid storytelling. Best of all, as you shift outside your comfort zone into the world of stylish academic writing – a place still beset by grumpy Doubters – you can be assured that you’ll have a supportive Cheerleader in your corner.

## REFERENCES

- Sword, H. (2012). *Stylish academic writing*. Harvard University Press.  
 Sword, H. (2017). *Air & light & time & space: How successful academics write*. Harvard University Press.

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# INTRODUCTION

This book is about developing a critical research, writing, and publishing strategy. Using my experience, I outline the specific skills that I believe are essential for academic researchers in the social sciences, and particularly business studies, to develop and execute a personal strategy to achieve their goals and advance their careers.

This book stems from lectures I have been giving for over a decade. These lectures originated during my time as a visiting scholar in Italy in 2011, where many business academics were eager to learn about publishing in prestigious English language academic journals. The pressure to publish frequently and make a significant impact is a global phenomenon known as the ‘publish or perish’ pandemic. This pressure is particularly prevalent in the social sciences, especially within business. The ability to publish regularly and with influence is crucial for achieving academic success and building an academic career.

Throughout my academic journey, I have honed my writing abilities by seeking guidance from mentors, studying examples of successful writing (de Villiers & Dumay, 2013, 2014), cultivating critical thinking and analysis skills, and striving to comprehend the impact of research. However, I have noticed that many of my colleagues overlook or lack these essential skills when conducting and documenting their academic research. I, too, was once in this same position back at the beginning of my career.

Nevertheless, I always approach my research with a well-defined strategy in mind. This strategy includes determining the research topic, evaluating its potential impact, identifying suitable publishing platforms, tailoring the writing style to the target audience, and devising methods to promote the research and get citations after publication. By formulating a strategy before commencing



their research, academics can enhance their chances of publishing in reputable outlets and thus thrive in the demanding ‘publish or perish’ environment.

The ‘publish or perish’ pandemic continues to evolve in academia. In response, academics are under increasing pressure to publish now rather than later. Issues such as open-access publishing, predatory journals and research impact are becoming increasingly tricky pathways and even minefields to navigate. An inexperienced researcher could easily take the wrong step and damage their career forever. As a result, they need a clear and concise guide on navigating the minefields and developing survival skills. Thus, I use my experience from navigating the ladder of success to outline academic research, publishing and writing strategies that deal with the current ‘publish or perish’ world. The book has seven chapters that I summarise below.

### *Chapter 1: Critical Thinking and the IDEALS Framework*

This chapter introduces critical thinking and the IDEALS framework as two core foundations of my approach to academic writing. Critical thinking is essential to research and writing because it causes us to question existing knowledge in a way that allows us to create new knowledge. For this reason, critical thinking is a fundamental part of the IDEALS framework. I teach these skills and this writing framework to my students because, with these tools, they are more likely to produce quality research outcomes and, in turn, get better grades. Moreover, academic authors who apply critical thinking and the IDEALS framework can produce high-quality research suitable for publication in the best academic journals.

### *Chapter 2: Becoming a Critical Scholar*

The first step in becoming a critical scholar is understanding how one’s beliefs, education, environment, and experiences shape oneself as an academic and a researcher. It is a myth that research in the social sciences can be unbiased; what is true is that we all bring our biases to research. As such, this chapter provides a journey of self-analysis from personal recognition to pragmatism to understanding how we can leverage our beliefs to develop research that impacts business, the environment and society. This chapter also

explores the different stages of critical research. Using The Chocolate Scorecard as an example project, it introduces the link between critical research and solving wicked problems.

### *Chapter 3: Developing a Publishing Strategy*

In this chapter, I outline that having specific strategies about what, how, and where to publish is critical to success. In this chapter, I explore strategy and engineering before dispelling some academic myths, dealing with several issues stemming from the ‘publish or perish’ problem, and negotiating the minefield of academic journals and open-access publishing. I then explore how to plan for impact by examining how you can critically participate in academic debates, co-authorship, and testing the waters with your ideas. Armed with this knowledge, you will better understand how to strategically approach academic research, design your research to make an impact and formulate firmer ideas of where to publish your papers.

### *Chapter 4: Undertaking a Critical Literature Review*

The core to developing any research is the literature review. Hence, this chapter explores different types of literature reviews, their purposes and epistemology, and how each is critical in different ways. I build on the IDEALS framework and critical scholarship to develop guidelines for undertaking a critical literature review. I also demonstrate how researchers should link academic literature to practice and current issues. I then link the literature review process to developing a single informed research question or problem important to academia and society.

### *Chapter 5: Designing Research for Reliability, Validity, and Generalisations*

The previous chapter focuses on identifying a research question or problem, whereas this chapter discusses designing your research for reliability, validity, and generalisation. I review the case study as a methodology and primary model for building reliability and validity in social science research. Through these tools, researchers can avoid criticism while presenting research that tells a story based on multiple data sources. I then address the generalisation

controversy in qualitative research and the fallacy that qualitative researchers must apologise for not generalising their research. I demonstrate why such an apology is not needed.

### *Chapter 6: Writing Structure Using Reasoning and IDEALS*

This chapter presents a basic recipe for structuring an academic article in the social sciences. I developed this recipe by researching the attributes of articles published in highly-ranked accounting journals. With this recipe in hand, I then demonstrate how different sections rely on different forms of reasoning, followed by a demonstration of how to write argumentative paragraphs, which are the core means of expressing critical research.

### *Chapter 7: Polishing the Diamond*

This chapter outlines how to write concisely and clearly. I explore several tools to increase your writing productivity, diagnose your writing, help reduce word counts, improve your grammar and punctuation, and increase your writing confidence. I also discuss how artificial intelligence can assist the academic research process and some of its dangers. Last, I discuss why you should have someone proofread all your writing before submitting the paper to a journal for review. Overall, you will learn how to take your ideas, a rough diamond, and apply tools to polish the diamond, which will hopefully shine as a published star.

## **Conclusion**

I hope you enjoy reading the book as much as I enjoyed writing it. I purposely kept the chapters as short as possible because I believe writing clearly and concisely is a hallmark of good academic writing and my success. Learning the art and craft of academic writing is taking me on a journey to places that I never imagined and will continue to take me, and hopefully you, further than we ever imagined.