



Writing for Different Audiences

**In: The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Business and
Management Research Methods: History and Traditions**

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Pub. Date: 2019

Access Date: May 16, 2020

Publishing Company: SAGE Publications Ltd

City: 55 City Road

Print ISBN: 9781526429261

Online ISBN: 9781526430212

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526430212>

Print pages: 532-545

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Writing for Different Audiences

Michael D. Myers

Introduction

Having conducted qualitative research for almost 40 years, I have now reached the conclusion that the writing up phase of any research project is probably the most important phase of all. The reason for this is that the only thing that most people see or learn from your research project is what you write about it. It is the written account of your project that lasts, long after the project has finished. Borrowing a concept from hermeneutics, the concept of autonomization says that, once words are inscribed in text, the text takes on a life of its own. It becomes objective. Hence the written account of a project is what lasts and is the only thing which most people see. Unless you write about it, everything else that you did tends to be forgotten over time.

Of course, there are other ways to learn about your research project. For example, if you present your findings at a research seminar or in a lecture, then I agree that some people will learn about your work without having to read it; they will hear what you say about it instead. But the fact remains that only those who attend the seminar will learn about it (Myers, 2013). And realistically, most people will not remember much about your presentation later on. Of course, as a supervisor of PhD students, I have sometimes visited the research site and even met some of the people there. However, my visits have always been for a short time only, and certainly no other researcher has ever visited the research site. Hence the primary way in which I or anyone else learns about a research project conducted by one of my PhD students is what they say about it in their write up. I believe the same point applies to all qualitative research projects.

Therefore, it is almost impossible to over-emphasize the importance of good writing. What is written becomes reality – it becomes the objective story that is told. Of course I am exaggerating a little, since it is possible to write a second edition of a book, and people might disagree about the meaning of the printed word. However, the point remains that once the article or book is published you have little further influence on how others interpret your work. Once the story is in print, that's it.

This suggests that qualitative researchers need to give careful consideration to writing. As Wolcott (1990) points out, writing up for a qualitative researcher is absolutely essential. But if we are going to write, we need to write well. This means trying to keep a few things in mind. First, we should try to ensure that what we write is interesting. Caulley (2008) discusses how qualitative researchers can make their writing more interesting through creative writing techniques, while Ely et al. (1997) discuss how research writing can be useful, believable and interesting. Second, since writing itself is a creative process, we need to decide what story we are going to tell. When we write we create a particular view of reality and decide what (or what not) to say (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). As Grills (1998) explains:

[i]n the writing, we make decisions about the story we will tell – how the tale will be made theoretically interesting, what questions we will engage with our work, and what aspects of our research will be presented and what will be set aside. Through this process, lived research and the experiences that accompany it are represented and mediated by text. (p. 199)

Third, what is considered to be interesting, the story that we tell, and the style we use to tell it will vary depending upon the audience we are writing for (if you are interested in different writing styles, Van Maanen (1988) discusses the various styles that can be used in ethnographic studies, including realist, impressionist and confessional styles). In this chapter, therefore, I want to discuss writing for different audiences, focusing on those audiences that are especially important for qualitative researchers in business and management.

Different audiences, different outputs

Although there are various ways to categorize the different audiences for our writing (Richardson, 1990), I suggest there are five main audiences for qualitative researchers in business and management. These five audiences are academics, students, business professionals, institutions/organizations and the general public. Each audience tends to read a different kind of output, as summarized in [Table 31.1](#).

Table 31.1 Audiences and outputs

Audience	Sub-groups	Preferred outputs
Academics	Researchers, teachers	Journal article, conference paper, book, thesis
Students	Undergraduate, postgraduate, MBA and executive students	Textbook, teaching case, journal article
Business professionals	Professionals in one's own disciplinary area; professionals in other areas	Newspaper article, magazine article, book
Institutions/organizations	Civil institutions such as trade unions, companies, and government and non-government organizations	Report
General public		Newspaper article, magazine article, book

Academics

For most academics, the main audience for our research work is fellow academics in our own discipline. These academics might be researchers or teachers or a combination of both. The outputs for an academic audience include journal articles, conference papers, books and book chapters, theses, case studies and various teaching-related materials. When writing for academics, one of the most important things to bear in mind is that these people are likely to be experts in, or at least reasonably familiar with, qualitative research. This means they will be expecting you to demonstrate your own familiarity with the qualitative research

literature and your expertise with your chosen qualitative method.

Students

A second audience for our research work are students. The students can be undergraduate students, postgraduate students, and/or MBA or other professional students. The outputs for this audience include textbooks, teaching case studies, and possibly teaching notes for the instructor. Of course, postgraduate students should also be reading academic journal articles, particularly if they are studying for a research masters or PhD.

Business Professionals

A third audience for researchers in business and management are business professionals, and especially those working in the same discipline (e.g. professionals working in human resource management if you are an HR academic). Since business professionals are always busy and are easily bored with the academic style of writing, the preferred outlet for this audience is the magazine article. Business professionals might read a book on the plane or when they are on holiday, but in this case the book still needs to be practical and engaging, not too laden down with theory. Of course they will also read newspaper articles. Since most business professionals like stories, probably the best qualitative research method to talk about with this audience is case study research.

Institutions/Organizations

A fourth audience for researchers in business and management are various institutions and organizations. These institutions/organizations might be companies, civil institutions such as trade unions, and government and/or non-government organizations. The preferred type of output for this audience is usually a report. This report is often commissioned by the organization. The report might be confidential for a certain period of time, particularly if the entire research project has been funded by them. For government funded research agencies, there might be no restrictions on publishing the research findings, although they will still want to see a report on the research project by the due date.

General Public

A fifth audience for researchers in business and management is the general public. Like business professionals, the general public like stories, so probably the best qualitative research method to talk about with this audience is case study research. People like to read stories, particularly if the case study findings are about a reasonably well-known person or organization. The newspaper article is probably the output of choice for communicating with the public, although magazine articles and books might also be useful.

As well as the outputs I have mentioned, there are many others: for example, blogs, websites and various

social media outlets such as Twitter or Facebook. Each of these types of output has its own writing style and genre. Depending upon your chosen field and institution, some writing styles, genres and outputs may be more acceptable or valued than others.

A Writing Plan

Regardless of the audience and the type of output, I have found that it is always worthwhile to have a writing plan. One possible writing plan is to use a modified version of the template that I mention in my book (Myers, 2013). This modified template lists nine items that should be considered at the start of a research project (Table 31.2). I suggest that you attempt to fill out this template as soon as possible, before you even begin collecting your data. This is because the template helps to focus your mind on the end product (the written output). Collecting qualitative data is very interesting, and I find it one of the most enjoyable aspects of doing qualitative research, but the template should help you to stay focused on the ultimate goal. Your ultimate goal should be to write up your research in a research output of some sort (e.g. a thesis or conference paper), and then publish it (if appropriate). The questions included in the template are designed to help you stay focused. Lack of focus is one of the biggest risks in doing qualitative research (Myers, 2013). In my experience as an editor, lack of focus is also one of the main reasons why manuscripts are rejected for journal publication.

Table 31.2 A writing template (adapted from Myers, 2013)

Nine questions	Description
1 Title?	What is the title of the thesis, article or book?
2 Purpose?	What is the purpose of the article or book?
3 Authors?	Who are the authors of the work and what is their contribution?
4 Audience?	Who is the intended audience for the work?
5 Method?	What research method am I planning to use?
6 Publication outlet?	Which journal, conference or book publisher will I submit the work to?
7 Theoretical contribution?	What is my proposed theoretical contribution?
8 Practical contribution?	What is the practical relevance of my work (if any)?
9 Materials included?	What materials should be provided?

1. **Title?** Can you come up with a title that captures the purpose and contribution of the work? Is it catchy? Is it sufficiently interesting to entice readers to start reading the rest? Sometimes I come up with three or four alternatives before deciding.
2. **Purpose?** Can you describe the purpose of the article or book in one sentence? If you cannot describe the purpose of your research in a succinct manner, the most likely reason is that you are not entirely clear about this yourself. In qualitative research, one of most common

purposes is to explore a relatively new topic in depth or explore a previously existing topic area from a new angle. It is less common for a qualitative piece to test a theory or to claim that it provides a definitive answer to a longstanding problem.

3. **Authors?** Who are the authors? This question is not appropriate if you are the sole author of the work (e.g. a thesis); however, if there are multiple authors, it is very important to discuss who they are going to be from the beginning. It is best to sort out authorship and the order of authors early, to avoid disputes later. I think it is very important for at least one of the authors to be very familiar with – if not an expert in – the qualitative research method used.
4. **Audience?** Who will read the output? Once you know, then you can write for this audience. For example, if you are writing a PhD thesis, then the most important person is your own supervisor or committee, followed by potential examiners. It is very important that these examiners should have some expertise in qualitative research; if they do not, then the danger is that these examiners might use inappropriate criteria to judge your work. I hope that your supervisor is able to nominate the appropriate people. If you are planning to write a journal article, then take a look at the editorial review board and see what kind of research the journal publishes. It is always a good idea to have specific people in mind when writing up. In fact, if you are able to suggest reviewers, I strongly recommend doing so. Just as with the examiners for a PhD thesis, you want the people reviewing your work to be sympathetic to – and have expertise in – qualitative research. If you are writing a commissioned report for a government or non-government organization, you need to be very clear about the scope and focus of the report required. This might require meeting with the people concerned at the start and possibly when you have written your first draft. It is quite common for government officials to want to be briefed on the findings and possibly have some input to the final report before it is made publicly available.
5. **Method?** Which research method will you use? You need to have good support for whichever research method you are planning to use in your own institution. This includes having a good supervisor, i.e. a person who is ‘qualified’ and has the experience and expertise to do the job. It also includes having the right research training before you start the work, e.g. perhaps being able to take one or more courses on qualitative research.
6. **Publication outlet?** What is the most appropriate publication outlet for your research work? If you are considering writing up your work as a journal article or conference paper, then I suggest you start thinking about writing for that particular outlet from the start. This will affect the sort of topic you choose, your research method and the style of writing. For example, the style of writing for an academic journal is very different from that required for a magazine or newspaper article. In a journal article it is generally frowned upon to exaggerate or make any claims that are unsubstantiated by any evidence. In magazines and newspaper articles, however, it is more important for the written piece to be short and sharp and to grab the reader’s attention. This often means it is impossible to provide all the evidence (e.g. references), which can be seen as boring by the editor and readers. They just want the

findings without all the detail.

7. **Theoretical contribution?** What is your theoretical contribution? This question is important because it is a requirement of most of the top journals in business and management for research articles to make a good contribution to theory. As Siggelkow (2007) points out, a purely descriptive study is a hard sell. Needless to say, business professionals and the general public are unlikely to be interested in your theory.
8. **Practical contribution?** Is there some practical relevance to your work? If you are planning to write up your research solely for a top academic journal, this may not be so relevant; however, I think it is still a useful exercise to think about practical relevance. Practical relevance is of course essential if you are writing a magazine or newspaper article.
9. **Materials included?** What materials do you need to include? If you are writing a PhD thesis or an academic journal article, then you definitely need to include an extensive set of references. I recommend using a bibliographic software program such as Endnote, Mendeley or ProCite to help organize these. The examiners and reviewers of a qualitative piece will also want to see some qualitative evidence. For example, if you have conducted interviews, then it is always a good idea to include some pertinent quotes from interviews in your article; if you have conducted an ethnographic study, then it is a good idea to include excerpts from your field notes. By contrast, if you are writing for a business magazine or newspaper, you definitely do not want to include too much detail. In a PhD thesis or book you would also be expected to include a table of contents, list of figures and tables, references and possibly an index, but you would definitely not want to include any of these items in a newspaper article.

I am sure there are additional questions that can be considered when writing up your research, but I believe the nine questions listed in [Table 31.2](#) are the most relevant questions for qualitative researchers in business and management (Myers, 2013). How you answer these questions will help to determine the format and style of writing you adopt. For example, if your research method involves analysing data thematically, then the way you write up your findings will be different from someone who has analysed their data chronologically as a series of events. The former is likely to write up their findings organized by topic, whereas the latter is most likely to write up their findings as a narrative. If your publication outlet is a conference paper, then the length will usually be shorter than a journal article, which in turn is much shorter than a book; a newspaper article might just be one or two pages. If your work makes a limited theoretical contribution, then a top academic journal might not be the most appropriate outlet; on the other hand, if your research makes a good practical contribution, then a magazine or newspaper article for business professionals or the general public might be best. Hopefully all nine questions will help you to focus your work appropriately and succeed in writing well.

Writing for each audience

I will now discuss in detail how to write for each audience. Fortunately, I have been able to write and publish my own work for all five audiences and been involved as an editor and reviewer as well, so hopefully I can

pass on something that I have learnt along the way.

Academics

For most academics, the main audience for our research work is fellow academics in our own discipline. If you work in a research-oriented university, the most important output in all the business and management disciplines is the peer-reviewed journal article. Although in some disciplines other outputs such as books and conference papers might be highly regarded, in business and management it is the peer-reviewed academic journal article that is the most important. The journal article is the currency for promotion and tenure, with the more highly ranked journals counting the most. In many countries there are ranking lists of journals and in some cases these ranking lists can have a significant influence on someone's academic career and/or determine the amount of funding the university receives from the government.

The first point I want to make is that manuscripts submitted to academic journals are, as a general rule, read by academics only. Hence the audience is relatively small, usually limited to those academics with a particular interest in the same subject area. This means at least one of more reviewers will be very familiar with – if not an expert in – your chosen qualitative research method.

The second point is that all articles submitted to an academic journal go through a process of peer review. This process is often double-blind (i.e. the author does not know who the reviewers are, and the reviewers do not know who the author is). This peer-review process exists in virtually all academic disciplines and is assumed to give some assurance of quality. If the findings are judged to be significant and robust by one's peers (other 'experts' in the field), then the manuscript will be accepted and published as a new contribution to knowledge. If the findings are judged to be insignificant and not robust, then a manuscript will be rejected. The peer-review process varies from virtually nil in lowly ranked journals to very tough in the highly ranked journals.

There are a few important points to note about the peer-review process. First, by definition the peer-review process is a social process. Peer review involves having your work evaluated by other people. Second, the peer-review process is subjective. When a reviewer reads a paper, they bring their own background and experience to bear on your work. From hermeneutic philosophy we learn that everyone has their own prejudices (Myers, 2016). Third, these subjective reviewers, especially at the top journals, are likely to be regarded as experts in the topic and/or the research methodology by researchers in the field. Some if not all of them will have published in that same journal before. Fourth, the reviewers are appointed to their task by the editor in charge of your manuscript. In my experience editors tend to appoint reviewers who they know and trust to do a good job, i.e. those who have already published a paper in the journal and/or have reviewed for the journal before. These reviewers understand the style of the journal and the standard of research work that is required. Of course, who is chosen can make a big difference to how your paper is evaluated.

Taking all these points together, I suggest a journal can be seen as something like that of a social club: the people involved in a particular journal as editors and reviewers have all paid their dues, they tend to know

each other reasonably well, and they know the current state of play. There are exceptions, but the same people seem to crop up over and over again as authors in the same outlet. They are members of the club in good standing.

If you accept the metaphor of each journal being like a social club, then the most important question becomes: how can you become a member of the club?

The first way to become a member of a club is start playing the game. Playing the game is not limited to submitting your own papers; playing the game also means offering to review the papers of others. Many PhD students and junior faculty members make the mistake of thinking that they are too busy to review papers by other people, since they really need to spend as much time as possible on their own work. They think to themselves that they do not have time to review papers for journals. But this is flawed logic. It turns out that the benefits are counter-intuitive. The more reviews you complete, the more you get to know your audience and the review process; the more reviews you do, the more you get to know the current state of play in your field; and the more involved you get, the more you get to know what the editor and other reviewers think. Also, the more reviews you do, the better you get at writing your own work: you get to know your audience and you get to see the common mistakes that people make in their writing. Seeing the mistakes that others make helps you to eliminate these mistakes in your own writing.

The second way to become a member of the club is to pay your dues. Writing a good review, one that the editor and author will value, takes time and effort. Writing your own paper also takes work. Paying your dues means that you have contributed sufficiently to that particular journal that your efforts are recognized by someone more senior than yourself (e.g. by an associate editor if you are a reviewer, or by a senior editor if you are an associate editor).

The third way to become a member is to socialize with the other members of the club. You need to join the conversation and become a part of it. In my own case I consider it essential to attend a few conferences each year, where I know that the best qualitative researchers in my field will be. I have met all of my co-authors and virtually all of the editors of the journals in my field at these conferences. And while I might not know all of them very well on a personal level, at least I know what kind of qualitative research they do (if any) and what they are currently interested in. Amongst this group of people some topics and methods are fashionable, whereas others have ceased to be interesting. I highly recommend the article by Gerard Cachon about what it means for a research article to be interesting (Cachon, 2012). Although he mostly talks about his experience in the field of operations management, his article is relevant for all the business and management disciplines.

A fourth way to become an active member of the club is to team up with someone else, ideally someone who is already a member. I have found collaborating with other scholars to be very rewarding, from both a personal and scholarly point of view. Each person brings a different set of skills and experience to the game. I don't think I could ever have published in the top journals in my own field if I had not collaborated with others, others who were more senior than me and already well experienced in playing the game.

All these ways of becoming a member of the club will help you to understand your audience better: what they like, and what they don't like. Hence I consider it essential to know who the editors are at a particular journal, and while I might not know exactly who the reviewers are, at least I like to have some idea as to the kind of person they are likely to be. A good guess is people who have published on a similar topic and/or method before in that same journal. I like to know what kind of research they do, the style of paper published in that particular journal, and what topics are currently fashionable (or might be in the future). In a similar vein to what I have just said, Clark and Thompson (2016) suggest five tips for publishing qualitative research in high impact journals.

One thing that all the best peer-reviewed academic journals in business and management like is theory. Every top-tier journal in business and management requires a good contribution to theory, otherwise the paper will be rejected. Making a theoretical contribution means more than just being a part of the conversation, but actively shaping it (Corley & Gioia, 2011). In qualitative research we rarely test theory; rather, we tend to use it as a sensitizing device to make sense of the findings. Alvermann et al. (1996) discuss some of the problems in distinguishing between levels of theory when writing up qualitative research.

Another thing they like is a good literature review. A good literature review does not simply summarize everything that it is possible to know about a topic, but is focused on identifying a gap in the literature. Typically, a paper will then seek to 'extend the literature' or 'fill this gap' identified in the literature review. As long as the literature has identified an interesting problem or gap (and not all gaps are interesting), then the literature review has fulfilled its purpose. An alternative to finding a gap is to 'problematize' something that has, until now, been taken for granted. Problematizing involves thinking differently about a commonly accepted 'truth' in a particular field and turning it into a (perhaps unwarranted) assumption. An interesting paper questions this assumption.

A third thing they like, especially important for qualitative work, is for the findings to be credible or plausible (Klein & Myers, 1999). A qualitative researcher needs to demonstrate that they have a good understanding of the social and cultural world that they have studied. Clifford and Marcus (1986) discuss how this can be achieved when writing about culture. Pratt (2009) says that to write a compelling and focused account for an academic journal, qualitative researchers need to write an article that (1) honours the worldview of informants, (2) provides sufficient evidence for claims and (3) significantly contributes to extant theory (Pratt, 2009). He suggests that authors need to make sure their research methods section includes the basics, they need to show data in smart fashion, they should think about using organizing figures and they need to tell a story (Pratt, 2009). I have found that one way of demonstrating plausibility is to include at least some direct quotations from interviews. Reporting verbatim what someone said gives a certain amount of credibility to your work and as long as they are selected carefully, such quotations can help to make the story more interesting (Myers, 2013).

A fourth thing that all peer-reviewed academic journal articles like is the corollary of the previous point, i.e. qualitative researchers need to make sure that the purpose of their paper is crystal clear. A common problem with writing up qualitative research is that the researcher ends up with far too much data, only a fraction of

which can be included in a relatively short journal article. It can be challenging trying to figure out what to include and what to exclude. A common mistake is trying to cram the 'the whole story' into just one article. If such a strategy is adopted, the article tends to have many purposes, not just one, and ends up being a mishmash of many ideas with no clear point. One solution to this problem is to tell just one part of the story in one particular paper. For example, if you are writing up a case study, then you have to decide what angle you are going to take. The advantage of this strategy is that it then becomes possible to write a few papers from the one study, each written from a different angle. If we combine the previous point with this one, then the key thing is to write a paper with one clear purpose, while providing just enough evidence to convince the readers that your findings are plausible. If you provide too much evidence, then your reviewers might get lost in the detail; if you provide too little evidence, then your reviewers might say your findings lack depth.

A fifth thing that all qualitative academic journals like is for the researcher themselves to demonstrate reflexivity, a certain self-awareness of their own subjectivity (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). This adds both to the credibility of the work and the researcher.

There are differences in the requirements for an article in a top-tier academic journal as contrasted with more lowly ranked journals. Pratt (2008) says that for the top-tier North American journals, there are three major tensions. These are:

(a) the need to both break away from and be firmly embedded in extant theory; (b) the need to both provide enough data so that a reader can draw conclusions, while also providing enough interpretation of that data; and (c) the need to be both detailed and transparent with regard to one's methods, while also fitting one's research into the format of a top-tier North American journal. (Pratt, 2008, p. 485)

For other types of journals, I have found that there is often no requirement to break away from extant theory – it is perfectly acceptable to use existing theory. I have also found that the requirement to interpret the data is not as stringent as for a top-tier journal, and that the description of one's research methods need not be as detailed.

To summarize, if you are considering writing a journal article, you need to be socialized into the social club of whichever journal you are targeting. Research is a social as well as a rational scientific process and therefore you need to become a part of the conversation. Becoming a contributor to the conversation means at a minimum knowing what the current debates are and who is actually conversing. Hence it is not a great idea to submit a paper to a journal when you do not know the people at all and you have not actually read any of the papers that the journal has published. Editors get frustrated when a paper is submitted by an author who has no real understanding of the style or standard of research expected. If you are still unsure about the fit of your proposed research within a particular journal, then ask someone who has some experience with that particular outlet for some advice (Myers, 2013).

Another output that is important for all academics is the PhD dissertation. The PhD is regarded in most

countries as the entry qualification for an academic career. Although PhD students spend a few years on their research project, at the end of the day only a few people actually read the thesis: your advisor/supervisor(s), the examiners (often just two people), and a close friend or relative who proofreads it for you. Hence the audience for a PhD thesis is even smaller than that for an academic journal article. However, the same advice that I have given earlier about journal articles applies to a PhD thesis. In other words, you need to know what your supervisor likes and does not like, you need to have a good literature review and identify a good problem/gap, plus you need to have a good theoretical contribution. Typically, the examiners will be people who have published before in your area, hence the process will be much smoother if you are already a member of the club (by doing some of the activities mentioned above). Your supervisor should make sure that these people are sympathetic to – if not experts in – your chosen research method.

Although not everyone agrees with me, in recent years I have become an advocate of the ‘thesis with papers’ model. Unlike the traditional book format, a thesis with papers requires a student to write three to five papers. These do not necessarily have to be published beforehand, but they should at least be good enough to submit to a journal and/or conference in the opinion of your supervisor. Of course, the thesis still needs to be a coherent body of work with an introduction and conclusion that ties everything together, but the main contribution of the thesis is contained in the papers. One advantage of this new model is that if the papers are submitted somewhere beforehand, the student learns about the peer-review process and gets some external feedback. One disadvantage is that there tends to be some repetition amongst the papers, since each paper needs its own literature review, research methods section, etc. But overall, I think the advantages of a thesis with papers outweigh the disadvantages.

If you are a postgraduate student writing a thesis, I suggest you look at some of the recent theses produced in your own department or school. Ideally, I suggest only looking at those that are considered to be excellent examples. Previous examples are always helpful in showing what is required (Myers, 2013). Another suggestion I have is to write out an extended table of contents. I would show this table of contents to my supervisor to make sure that you are on the right track.

Other outputs that might be produced for an academic audience include conference papers and books. In most disciplines conference papers do not count for much, but in the field of information systems (like computer science) they are regarded as important. In such a rapidly changing field, conferences are where the latest thinking is presented (since a journal article usually spends a few years in the review process). The immediate audience for a conference paper are the program chairs, track chairs and reviewers. Once again, I cannot emphasize enough the importance of knowing the people involved, i.e. at least knowing what sort of research they do, the current debates they are involved in, etc. For qualitative researchers this means attending conferences where excellent qualitative research will be featured, such as the International Federation of Information Processing Working Group 8.2 conferences in information systems, or the Critical Management Studies conferences in management. Earlier in my career I made the mistake of attending the wrong type of conference, conferences where very little qualitative research was presented. But at the right conference, you might be inspired by other qualitative researchers and, even better, some of them will turn

up to hear your presentation. I have often found a future potential co-author immediately after a presentation (theirs or mine). If we discover in subsequent conversation that we have similar or complementary interests, this can lead to future collaboration.

Another output is a book. Books typically represent an in-depth treatment of a particular research topic or methodology, or contain a set of chapters by various authors looking at a topic from different perspectives. Hence in a book it is important to demonstrate depth, for example by including quotes from interviews, or if you have done a grounded theory study, by showing how the findings emerged from the data. I have found that the review process for a book is completely different from that used for a journal. Often a book publisher will ask you to write a proposal for a book, and then they will obtain reviews from other qualified researchers on your proposal. I have found these reviews to be very helpful. However, once the book is finished, often there are no reviews at all, or at most a review by an editor. The peer-review process thus occurs right at the beginning stage for a book, rather than at the end.

If you work in a teaching-oriented university, then a few other outputs might count in addition to conference papers, journals and books. Textbooks, case studies designed for teaching, and other teaching-related materials may count as well. These outputs can be an important contribution to knowledge dissemination. Although the main audience for these works will be students, fellow academics are also an important audience since they are the ones that ultimately decide which readings to recommend. Academics are the gatekeeper for their own syllabi. Personally, I consider teaching-oriented materials to be very important since this is one of the ways in which our research findings are translated into practice. Assuming our curriculum is up-to-date, then all our students who graduate should be familiar with the latest techniques and ideas and, hopefully, they will use some of these when they get a job (or create their own).

Students

A second audience for our research work are students. The students can be undergraduate students, postgraduate students, and/or MBA or other professional students. Most outputs written for students tend to be teaching oriented such as textbooks and teaching cases.

The ideal person to write a textbook is someone who is actively involved in teaching at the appropriate level. In my own case, for example, I used to teach the introductory first year course at undergraduate level and at the time wrote some teaching cases to accompany the textbook. But since I have not taught this course for almost 20 years, I would not be confident writing for this audience today. I am no longer plugged in, as it were, to that age group or social network, and so really have no first-hand knowledge of what they like or do not like. My sources of information are all second hand.

On the other hand, I am familiar with current postgraduate students, since I continue to teach at this level at my own university. My previous experience as associate dean for the entire business school also helped me to become familiar with many of the students in all the business disciplines, not just my own. This experience gave me the confidence to write a textbook for this wider audience (Myers, 2013).

MBA and/or professional students are probably little different from other business professionals, so I tend to think that the same points I make below about the latter apply to them. The only proviso I would make is that I think our professional students should be encouraged to read academic journal articles so that they can understand some of our theories. If all doctors are expected to keep up with the latest medical research and use the latest treatments, then why should business professionals be any different? We might not be treating patients, but we often do make recommendations that will affect the life of an organization. For MBA and professional students, therefore, while case studies might be very appropriate, I think case studies that illustrate a theoretical point are even better.

Business Professionals

A third audience for academics in business and management are business professionals. Usually the ones that might be interested in our work are those working in the same discipline (e.g. professionals working in human resource management if you are an HR academic). There are many business magazines, from well-known global ones such as the *Harvard Business Review*, to local ones such as *The Business Magazine* in the United Kingdom.

Articles written for business professionals need to be written in a different style to those written for an academic audience, but the general principles are the same. That is, you need to be aware of the current fashions/debates amongst the practitioner community. Business people have their own conferences which they attend, and so just by looking at the agenda of the latest conference you can see what the hot topics are. I like to attend these conferences from time to time so that as well as knowing what the current topics are, I get to meet them as well.

Business professionals tend to prefer practical articles rather than theory-laden ones. This is not to say that theory is completely absent, but it just needs to be treated in a different way. It needs to be explained clearly without going into too much detail. The usual academic style of writing – of being guarded, tentative and not dogmatic – does not go down well with practitioners. They like to see us make some recommendations or at least spell out the implications of our work (Wolcott, 1990).

Business professionals also like case studies or brief examples that they can relate to. This means that qualitative researchers need to write a good story. This story should be interesting and compelling for the audience; it should grab their attention and make them want to read the article from start to finish.

In summary, when writing for business professionals, you need to be familiar with your audience. It certainly helps if you are teaching in the MBA or another executive program, but if not, attending a practitioner conference is certainly a worthwhile investment. Anything you write also needs to be engaging for this audience and relevant to the current topics of the day.

Institutions/Organizations

A fourth audience for academics in business and management are various institutions and organizations. These institutions/organizations are companies, civil institutions, and government and/or non-government organizations that tend to commission a researcher or research team to write a report on a specific topic. The institution/organization will usually specify the focus and scope of the project and the timeframe within which the project should be completed.

In writing such a report it is important to consider the audience and follow the guidelines for the report carefully. For example, if you are writing a research report commissioned by the government, you may be required to submit a draft first and brief the relevant government officials on your findings. If you are writing a report for a company, they may require the results to be kept confidential. These kinds of situations can lead to ethical dilemmas, especially if the findings are somewhat critical of government policy or company strategy, etc. Since most academic researchers want to publish their findings, keeping the written report a secret can go against the grain.

Therefore, I think it is important for researchers writing such reports to consider the consequences of doing so right at the start; make sure you know the audience for the report, and make sure that their requirements and your expectations are aligned.

In my own case, since my overriding interest is always to publish the findings, I make a point of clarifying this requirement at the very beginning of any research project. If needed, I am happy to change names and various details so as to hide the identity of the organization, but for me the goal of most projects is to publish and contribute to the ongoing conversation in my discipline. I acknowledge that this may not always be the case for everyone writing a commissioned report.

General Public

A fifth audience for academics in business and management is the general public. I define the general public as anyone who is not a business professional in our area of expertise, e.g. if you are a marketing academic, a lawyer.

The newspaper article is probably the output of choice for communicating with the public, although magazine articles and books might also be useful. Once again, if you are thinking of writing a newspaper article, it pays to know your audience. That is, it pays to be familiar with the current topics and debates in the mass media. If your chosen research area is directly relevant to a current hot topic, then now is an ideal time to write a newspaper article. Hopefully your article can provide a different spin or some insight on an important topic. The key to a newspaper article is to keep it snappy and relatively short. The main point should be crystal clear. Newspaper editors are not fond of writing that contains too much jargon, is not well focused and is too long. Newspaper editors also tend to like stories and opinion pieces, especially one that will grab the public's attention.

Personally, I think it is important for academics to contribute to public debate, especially if the government is

thinking of introducing some new policies. We should contribute and not stay silent. Of course, the politicians might not agree with us, but we should at least contribute to public debate if we have the expertise and opportunity to do so.

Badley (2015) makes a few useful suggestions about how qualitative researchers can make their research more accessible to general audiences. For example, he says that qualitative researchers should avoid writing in a way that is 'lumpy, heavy, and pretentious' if we want to enter into a fruitful dialogue with a wide range of readers.

Dunleavy (2016) explains how it is possible to write a blog post based on a journal article in just a short space of time. He says that a blog post helps to create external impact for one's work amongst a far wider audience than just academia.

Conclusion

Writing is a creative process that involves telling a good story that is relevant and interesting to a particular audience. As authors, the challenge we have is knowing what might or might not be interesting to someone else. What is interesting and relevant to one audience might be boring to another, and vice versa.

I have suggested that becoming part of the academic social club is one of the best ways of getting to know the academic audience. A qualitative researcher is someone who contributes to the field and is engaged in a conversation with fellow academics. But this does not mean that we can write fiction. As qualitative researchers, we rely on qualitative data and we have an ethical responsibility to report our findings honestly. We also have the responsibility of providing a plausible or credible account of the social and cultural world that we have studied. This does not mean that we have to agree with everyone in the club. In fact, as I said earlier, one of the ways to make a contribution is to question one or more taken-for-granted assumptions. We might be able to point out problems with current thinking and move the field forward. Hence we do not have to agree with everyone.

It goes without saying that writing for students is also important. Nowadays students are our 'customers', especially in countries where they pay high fees, plus they also need to be taught the latest thinking in a particular discipline. Students are potential future business professionals and a few of them might become academics.

As well as academics, we can write for business professionals. Although the academic audience is the most important one in terms of promotion and tenure, it is also important to write for business professionals. This is especially so in a management or business school where we need to develop good relationships with the business community. Writing for this audience is one way of helping them to stay up-to-date with the latest research in our chosen field, but can also lead to engaging with them in other activities (e.g. participation in a future research project, sponsoring a research centre or participating in a careers evening for students).

It can also be very worthwhile writing for various institutions and organizations. These (usually commissioned) reports can make good use of our expertise and can make a contribution to public policy or help a company in some way.

Not all academics will have the inclination or the temperament to write for the general public, but those that do often find it a rewarding experience. It can be a way to inform public debate and to let people know what you and/or your research centre is doing.

No matter which audience we are writing for, however, we do have to write well. If our writing is poor, whatever we say will be misunderstood or ignored. One of the secrets to writing qualitative research in an interesting and engaging way is to be clear about your purpose and to have a good idea as to why your topic is important for your audience.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526430212.n31>