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The Write Stuff

by Thomas E. Cronin, Princeton U. & Colorado College

In recent years I've supervised countless undergraduate research papers and numerous senior theses. Not surprisingly, I repeat myself about basic research and writing hints, suggestions, and outright warnings. This handout, "Write Tigers Write!" prepared for the "tigers" at Princeton and The Colorado College (the mascot is the same), attempts to help the novice researcher and is, as well, an act of self-protection.

What follows are suggestions and cautions for students writing a research paper. My suggestions are merely that. They are personal, general and speak more about writing than about research.

Make no mistake about it. Research and writing are demanding work even for the professional. You won't hear professional scholars or writers boast about the easiness of their craft. No matter how much they love it, and they often love it more than anything else, they find it demanding, exacting, lonely and often painful—if they really work at it. "Writing, at its best," writes Ernest Hemingway, "is a lonely life...."

For a true writer each book should be a new beginning when he tries again for something that has never been done or that others have tried and failed. Then sometimes, with great luck, he will succeed. How simple the writing of literature would be if it were only necessary to write in another way what has been well written. It is because we have had such great writers in the past that a writer is driven far out past where he can go, out to where no one can help him.

The joy of research and writing comes from the challenge of being out on your own, rethinking the explored and the whole unexplored realm of human relations and vision. Writing itself is one of the grand, free human activities. Working back and forth between experience and ideas, evidence and imagination, data and theory, a writer has more than space and time can offer.

One more word about Hemingway. The intensity of his concentra-tion was such that a few hours of writing literally exhausted him. A day's work seldom exceeded five or six hundred words.

As in the mastery of any ability, writing a research paper requires self-discipline. If you already know how to use time effectively and can ruthlessly stick to a schedule, you will find research paper writing relatively easy. You may even enjoy it. Most of us, however, are easily diverted and are accomplished procrastinators. A research paper assignment can overwhelm you if you let it. Yet it can, planned carefully, strengthen your self-discipline and do more to sharpen your ability to manage time wisely than any other part of your college work. Be prepared to retreat and devote several hours a day and even two or three weeks to uninterrupted, focused concentration. For those of us who are extroverts, this is often like being sentenced to solitary confinement. If you are going to take pride in your research, however, you had better resign yourself to devoting the time to the extensive reading, rigorous analysis and intense thought, not to mention the hours of writing and revising, a research project requires.

Selecting A Topic

First you will conduct a search for a worthy topic. What are your criteria? Perhaps something has been puzzling you, or a topic has been inadequately covered in an earlier course or short paper assignment. Topics arise out of discussions with friends, teachers, parents or from your observations gained in job or intern experiences. Curiosity is the source of many topics—the urge to understand something better, to re-

Computers and Public Administration

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The United States is increasingly becoming an information society. Over half of the labor force is now engaged in work requiring some level of information processing. Computers are the "engines" powering this information society and consequently, their diffusion is considerable and growing (Kraemer and Northrop, 1984:2).

University professors, especially those who teach the social sciences, recognize that an understanding of computerized society is not enough. Students should be prepared to use these "engines of the information age."

For those of us who teach public administration, especially on the graduate level, the task of preparing our students for the computerized world is even of greater urgency and somewhat different in nature. Professors of public administration are not only preparing students for a computerized future, but more importantly, a computerized present. In most cases public service organizations, such as hospitals, health care and government agencies, have been computerized for at least five years. "From the beginning of the computer age," state Kraemer and Northrop, "government has been at the forefront of computer utilization" (1984:2). Based on 1976 data, Kraemer and Northrop report that 97 percent of municipal governments in cities with populations over 50,000 used computers. In 1978, 71 percent of municipal governments in cities with populations less than 50,000 also reported using computers. State and local governments each spent close to 2 billion dollars a year on computer and information systems in 1980. As of 1981, the federal government was expending approximately five billion dollars annually to operate an estimated 16,000 computer systems (1984:2-3). Finally, The International City