Reflections on academic writing and publication for doctoral students and supervisors: reconciling authorial voice and performativity

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REFLECTIONS ON ACADEMIC WRITING AND PUBLICATION FOR DOCTORAL STUDENTS AND SUPERVISORS: RECONCILING AUTHORIAL VOICE AND PERFORMATIVITY

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ABSTRACT
The current research context in Australia and other countries such as the United Kingdom (UK) and New Zealand (NZ) is ‘performativity’. This provides opportunities for and obstacles to research higher degree (RHD) students developing their authorial voice. This paper illustrates how to facilitate improved academic writing and increased publishing from doctorates. Using mixed methods, it draws on interviews with eight doctoral students about writing under supervision, observations from a six year project to publish seven books, and six journal articles published from doctoral students’ work. Students experienced supervision as being ‘written over’ by their supervisors, in contrast to the constructive instruction on how to write which they sought, and which would enable them to develop and assert their own authorial voice. Publishing students’ work proved to be a long road, but persistence resulted in a one hundred percent success rate. Edited books serve to boost students’ confidence. Publication does not necessarily arise naturally from research training. The practical implications are that universities should provide more support to students and supervisors about constructive and confidence-producing ways to improve academic writing. Supervisors should negotiate with students on how to provide feedback. Although illuminated from three perspectives, the research is limited to two disparate Australian universities and small samples.

Keywords
Academic writing, doctorates, publication, performativity, supervision, authorial voice.

INTRODUCTION
This paper explores issues in academic writing and achieving publication for doctoral students and supervisors. The main purpose is to add to the literature on practice by combining perspectives from students striving to establish authorial voice and academics aiming to conform to new performativity regimes. The paper partially addresses a practice gap since there is little research that presents students’ voice in terms of how they experience writing under supervision and little published information about what universities do to increase publication from RHDs. Themes include the perceived difficulties of academic writing, the imperative to publish and the possibility of successful publishing with persistence and a focused strategy. The paper looks briefly at literature on research culture and new pressures to publish, students’ experience of academic writing under supervision, feedback from supervisors, students’ versus supervisors’ motivation to publish, and the complex discursive skills required for writing and publishing. The feedback supervisors provide to students about

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their writing is a powerful influence in shaping their confidence and authorial voice. This background on student and supervisor skills and confidence sets the scene for the authors’ experience and analysis of observations made during research with doctoral students and a targeted publications project.

THE BROADER CONTEXT: RESEARCH CULTURE AND PRESSURE TO PUBLISH

Research and scholarship underpin quality teaching and the nexus between teaching/learning and research is a fundamental characteristic of academic work (Boyer 1990). Synergies between the two are essential (Ling, Flood & Green 2007). Research allows for evidence-based and research-led teaching that is fundamental to success.

Government interventions to measure research quality and quantity are relatively new, but they make the old adage, ‘publish or perish’, more imperative. In the UK, New Zealand and Australia research quality regimes rely on scholarly journal publication numbers and journal rankings (Carr 2009; Hodder & Hodder 2010), with a welcome, emerging interest in research impact in the UK (Corbyn 2009). In Asia there is also new interest in academic publications (Kwan 2009). In Australia the quality initiative is currently called Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) and includes (until recently) a ranked list of journals rated on four levels from A* through to C. Thus academic writing and publishing take on fresh significance for academics and their doctoral students in these research ‘performance’ or ‘quality’ exercises.

Should professional doctorate students (such as Doctor of Business Administration [DBAs]) care about academic research and publications? Empirical evidence from Mitra and Golder (2008) shows that they should. The research found that when a business school generates more research, its graduating students’ salaries increase. In more research-orientated business schools, the research profile adds credibility to its brand, attracts quality students and produces higher student evaluations of individual academics. However, there is a basic conundrum between the expectations and goals of doctoral supervisors vis-à-vis professional doctoral students. Each holds diverse expectations about their roles in the supervisor-student relationship. Research on DBA students shows that only around ten percent are concerned with academic publication as most do not see themselves pursuing an academic career. The majority of supervisors, however, are concerned with achieving academic publications from the doctoral project. Students prefer to publish, if at all, in a trade or professional magazine that they believe will increase their personal profile and career prospects in industry, rather than publish in academic journals (Miller, Selvanathan & Meredith 2011). In the performativity regime, academic supervisors are under pressure to publish more frequently. Any strategy developed to increase peer reviewed academic publications therefore needs to balance the competing goals and priorities of doctoral students and supervisors.

For that proportion of doctoral students who seek an academic career, the typical Western trajectory depends on completing a doctorate, which is subject to scrutiny. Supervisors’ roles and training are being challenged (Boud & Tennant 2006; Deem & Lucas 2007). The role of both supervisors and doctoral students in academic writing and publishing is worthy of investigation since supervisors shape doctoral students, some of whom will later become academics. In turn, new academics will experience pressure to publish. Academics who start publishing early in their training continue to publish. Therefore it is worthwhile to develop and encourage publication from the earliest possible stage (Teodorescu 2000), although caution should be exercised in publishing too soon in the doctoral candidature (Aitchison,
Kamler & Lee 2010). Further, doctoral research dissemination contributes to moving the discipline forward (Kamler 2008) and, hence, is a worthy end in its own right. This paper adds to the literature by analysing a project to increase doctoral dissemination.

Skills and attitudes needed for academic writing
Before publication can be achieved, students may need to develop their academic writing skills and confidence. Inculcating doctoral students with the values and skills of academic writing and publication is a significant developmental exercise. Pedagogical and emotional barriers exist for supervisors and students. Publication is a daunting task and students need instruction (Kwan 2009). Students perceive that doctoral writing and publication require tremendous effort and struggle and induce significant anxiety (Kamler 2008). Teaching academic writing may not come naturally to supervisors who, whilst clearly experts in the discipline, may not have the pedagogy for teaching academic writing. The discursive skills needed for publication are difficult for students to master. Submitting papers to journals invites scrutiny, with prospect of rejection. Prospective authors need to be robust in the face of rejection and persistent to conduct frequent revision. Supervisors have a pivotal role in developing the emotional aspects of students’ attitudes to publishing. A paper co-authored by supervisor and student is one effective avenue (Kamler 2008; Kwan 2009).

Supervisor feedback on students’ academic writing
Writing in supervision occurs mostly through feedback. It is thought to be difficult because supervision has its own set of institutionally derived conversations, many of which appear to be present in the feedback provided to students by their supervisors (Knowles 1999). Feedback as a technique to teach writing to students is a largely misunderstood pedagogy. Supervisors should provide students with explicit instructions on writing to assist them in learning how to write in both the language and conventions of their discipline (Knowles 1999; Sommers 2006). For feedback to work as a teaching technique there needs to be agreement between supervisors and students in relation to how feedback works (Knowles 1999; Sommers 2006). Similarly, students must receive supervisors’ comments as assistance rather than personal attacks (Sommers 2006). Feedback should develop students’ writing, asks questions and makes suggestions in relation to the argument being developed in their text (Bharuthram & McKenna 2006; Kamler & Thomson 2004; Sommers 2006). Messages of isolation and indifference are reinforced each time students receive ill-considered feedback that neglects to provide them with supportive commentary (Kamler & Thomson 2006; Sommers 1982).

Academic writing and publishing requires complex skills, including discursive competence (writing in the style, tone, correct English, article structure and reference style of the journal), strategic research competence (rigour, identifying trends and gaps in the literature, identifying relevant and suitable journals), managing the process (timing and quantity of publications; knowing how long it takes to write, submit, receive a decision, act on required revisions, and finally get publication); re-contextualising, reframing, trimming, condensing and restructuring from the thesis to the journal article, and writing for editors, reviewers and the journal audience, instead of just supervisor and examiners. Few universities offer courses in such skills (Kwan 2009).

This paper offers insights into how doctoral students perceive writing within supervision, and how publications can be achieved from doctoral projects even where students are not necessarily motivated by academic pursuits. In doing so it draws on two theoretical concepts:
authorial voice and performativity. The former is what distinguishes one individual from another when generating written documents (Elbow 1981; Stewart 1972 in Stapleton 2002). It implies empowerment and responsibility where the author takes ownership of their text and has confidence in it (American Heritage Dictionary 2009). Thus, the theory of authorial voice encompasses some of the practical points made above about the skills and confidence that students need to develop in their writing. The second is performativity which arises from neo-liberal ideology imported into the public sector (such as in education) where individuals are managed in ways that require focusing on quantitative goals and measurement, rather than values and personal commitments (Ball 2003). Performativity describes and critiques the quality measurement regimes outlined above as the current institutional context in which RHD students’ and academics’ research is situated. The paper briefly explores some of the apparent contradictions that emerge when these two concepts are considered in tandem.

CONTEXT AND THREE PERSPECTIVES

This paper reports three perspectives on the question of doctoral students’ academic writing and publication. The three are: eight interviews conducted with doctoral students by one author whilst completing a RHD; reflections and observation by another author embedded in a university RHD program from which seven books were published; and analysis from a third author responsible for joint student-supervisor publication of six international, refereed journal articles from the same RHD program.

Perspective one: interviews with students

For perspective one, semi-structured interviews were held with eight RHD science students at a traditional, Australian capital city university, based on purposive sampling. The aim of the interviews was to explore how students perceive thesis writing within supervision. The focus on students is to add their marginalised voices to the discussion of writing during the research higher degree. The students were asked questions about how they conceptualise writing a thesis and how they perceive thesis writing within supervision. Students nominated themselves after responding to an email sent via a student list. The interviews took one to two hours. The data was analysed manually using pattern coding (Maxwell 2005, Patton 1990). Interviews were conducted with five females and three males. All had English as their first language, were full-time, on-campus, had passed confirmation, and were mostly about to enter the writing up stage. Names have been changed in the interview excerpts below, to protect confidentiality.

From the eight interviews the broad themes were: RHD student writing; institutional patterns and writing; and supervision and writing. The following briefly explores the first two themes and then analyses the third in more depth. Overall, each student expressed an interest in the topic of writing. In some cases this interest appeared to be generated by the students being several weeks away from beginning the thesis-writing phase. Some described feeling worried at the thought of writing a thesis. Others described becoming interested in writing after receiving negative comments about their writing from their supervisors. The remainder described themselves as enjoying writing, but were concerned that it was not taught explicitly during the RHD. The latter wanted to learn more about the discipline of writing as part of their candidature. Thus, students varied in their confidence in and mastery of academic writing.

Interviews both challenged and confirmed that there was an absence of writing instruction during the RHD and that this absence influenced how some students conceptualised writing. It
emerged that some students were teaching themselves how to write using the principles of research. The institutional pattern of these responses indicate that some students, in the absence of explicit writing instructions, appeared to teach themselves how to write by attempting to examine the writing of other published work in their field. An absence of formal writing instruction was countered by some students conducting their own writing groups. These small informal groups indicated that some were attempting to find a place for writing in the RHD program. Paradoxically, these same writing groups confirmed that the absence of explicit writing instruction influenced how some students conceptualise writing. Students appeared to perceive the writing groups as friends coming together to discuss writing. This is opposed to students conceptualising writing groups as spaces in which the discipline of writing may be learned and practised.

In terms of the third theme—students’ experience of writing within supervision—the main issues were about feedback, style and authorial voice. While most of the students interviewed expressed concern over the lack of useful feedback from their supervisors about writing, the following participant’s comments were selected for the succinct articulation of the theme supervision and writing. The lack of useful feedback was exemplified by Sally who said:

She [the supervisor] will always ask for drafts so, umm, a draft that is reasonable not a rough draft of ideas. You know she wouldn’t want a draft of what I am going to write ‘cos that’s not really any help, a draft that is a finished product but still with a lot of work to be done. She’ll read them for you and sometimes she’ll make a lot of comments and sometimes she’ll write things like ‘this needs help’, which doesn’t always help because I usually know that it needs help.

Sally’s description of feedback is similar to how Knowles (1999) and Sommers (1982) define feedback within supervision. Supervisors may wish to help their students with writing but concentrate on the editing component, as opposed to the iterative component where the students’ argument is developed (Sommers 1982). The problem with feedback being given on grammar and punctuation is that these kinds of editorial comments can thwart the rewriting process because students focus on implementing the corrections instead of rewriting the whole document (Sommers 1982). If the feedback were a writing pedagogy then students might expect to receive comments on their drafts in the form of questions that assist them in rethinking their argument, rather than fixing messy sentences (Bharuthram & McKenna 2006; Kamler & Thomson 2006; Sommers 1982). This is not to say that tending to grammar and spelling is not important, instead there is a request for balancing feedback that developments argument rather than merely fixing mistakes. However, poor grammar and spelling need to be corrected before the thesis is examined and before any subsequent publication—so they need to be addressed at some point. Suggestions on how to do this are made in a later section. Having learned the disciplinary-specific language of writing, Sally’s supervisor might provide feedback that ‘pairs an honest critique of the student’s writing along with very real suggestions on how the student can make improvements to her text in the next iteration’ (Sommers 2006:250). Sally’s supervisor, however, does not have a language for writing. The supervisor’s feedback consists of unhelpful comments.

Alex’s remarks extend those of Sally. He participated because he became interested in writing after his supervisor sent him to a course to improve his academic writing. Alex says:
He [the supervisor] just highlights something and says it just doesn’t make sense or, blah, he just writes blah, and I don’t know what to do with blah, um, so you just read it and read it till you have figured out what is wrong with it, which is a lot easier since I’ve done the [writing] course. Now I know how to look at a sentence and work out what is wrong with it rather than standing there saying it looks like it makes sense to me.

Evident in Alex’s comments, ‘I don’t know what to do with ‘blah’, and Sally’s, ‘which doesn’t help’, is that these students are reading their supervisor’s feedback with an open mind to learn about writing but become frustrated at the kind of feedback they are receiving because it appears empty of information that can assist them in learning what to do next. The supervisors’ comments are classified by Sommers (2006) as being ‘underwhelming’ feedback because it is cryptic and does not assist students to improve. Cryptic feedback confuses the student, whereas explicit writing instruction assists students in developing their writing.

If the academy provided explicit writing instruction to both supervisors and students, it is possible that they would have an appropriate language with which to speak about writing to each other during supervision. For example George says:

> When you write, it is not actually your words on the paper, it is actually your words with others. [Interviewer] What happens if you disagree with something your supervisors might say about your writing? George answers, WELL, it’s hard to [pause] it’s very hard to, arhh, very hard to [pause] disagree [pause], but then hopefully you will be seeing the results like they are seeing them; if they see something else you just create a different version or you just combine both of them [the supervisors and your own comments] so the writing will be just this and this, so I don’t think that there will be disagreement [pause], it’s hard to disagree, I suppose.

It may be difficult for students to disagree with their supervisors not just because they are perceived to be powerful figures, but also because supervision is used as a mentoring paradigm for teaching students how to become researchers (Knowles 1999; Grant 2003). If the conventions of writing were being taught explicitly within the RHD, George may have welcomed the idea of him and his supervisor disagreeing over text because George would be in control of what he wants to say and the language he wants to use to express the argument in his thesis (Elbow 1998). In other words, his authorial voice would be more evident.

There is also the question of style. Mary is a student who described herself as being a ‘technically correct writer’ and who participated in the interviews because she was frustrated at how her writing was being changed in what she considered to be issues of style. For example, she says:

> Oh, gosh, well, I have three different supervisors with very, very, very distinct writing styles and that is a challenge because my primary supervisor, I don’t like his writing style, and I don’t like it when he changes my writing, just because of style issues, so it is tricky.

Mary is frustrated that her supervisor changes her text, not because her writing is wrong, but because it is different. Style here means choices authors can make (within the rules of grammar) about how they write, including, for example, where to put the main point in the
sentence, sentence length, active or passive voice and so on. This is distinct from the concept of style in academic style guides such as APA or Harvard, which are predominantly concerned with reference technique. More specifically, style means the writing conventions of a discipline that have become familiar to the supervisor and the student through the repetitive action of the supervisor reading their discipline’s writing conventions in journals and through repeating the conventions that they read in their own text each time they write (Lea & Street 1998).

Is clear academic writing idiosyncratic? On the one hand a large number of students have been brought up to follow Strunk and White (1959) who provide strict guidelines on how to write and who have been enormously influential (Skarda 2011). Supervisors who have been raised in this tradition may believe that there are commonly accepted rules or guidelines for ‘clear’ or ‘good’ academic writing style. On the other hand, Strunk and White have been criticised by others such as Pullum (2009). Therefore the question of style may not be as clear cut as some supervisors might believe.

It may be that Mary’s frustration is caused by feeling powerless to assert her own authorial voice over that of her supervisors, or the ‘absent masters’, within her own writing, as Grant (2003) indicates. Perhaps some supervisors find it important to change their student’s voice to that of the master’s because the supervisor lacks explicit writing knowledge. Supervisors may need to see and hear replication of their discipline’s topos to know if their student’s writing is ‘good’ enough to pass examination (Lea & Street 1998). Mary should be given the opportunity to consider the types of changes she might like to implement based on the suggestions of her supervisor (Montgomery 1996), thus supporting her authorial voice.

Ill-considered feedback reinforces the message that students must independently find solutions to problems they might have in writing (Grant 2003). When students receive feedback that fails to acknowledge and consult them as authors and academics-in-training, they often experience feedback as a ‘trauma’, rather than a developmental process in their education (Lee & Williams 1999). For example, Sally says:

> Once you get over being hurt that [what you had written and] thought was really good and someone has just told you that they have wiped it as irrelevant, but it is good to have that happen to you because deep down you know they are right.

There are reflections of trauma in what Sally says. In summary, the main findings here were that feedback from supervisors may not always be helpful for students, the pedagogy of writing may be absent in some cases and questions of style may be somewhat idiosyncratic. Having provided some insights into how students experience writing under supervision, the paper now turns to a different perspective gained from achieving publications in a system where publications are measured as part of academic performance.

**Perspective two: publication project including seven books to showcase doctoral students’ work**

For perspective two, a publication project took place in the management college of a small regional Australian university. In 2004, the doctoral program was subject to extensive review, with the aim of developing a comprehensive strategic change process to improve quality and, in doing so, to increase the program’s rates for publication and for other intellectual outputs. One strategy was to develop a series of seven edited books from the program, with its
international partnerships, to document the experience of delivering a transnational doctoral program and to highlight scholarship by utilising case studies of students’ work. A parallel strategy was to employ an experienced editor to assist supervisors and students to publish peer-reviewed, academic publications. It was expected that the research quantum received by the university as a result of publications would more than cover the costs of engaging the editor. In the main, the student, supervisor and editor gained authorship of published articles in that order. Through the publications project, students and staff published at the rates shown in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**
Publication Outcomes 2005-2011 from the Case Study Publications Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Scholarly peer reviewed journal articles</th>
<th>Books</th>
<th>Book chapters</th>
<th>Scholarly refereed conference papers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>Not known</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Miller (2011)

During the period recorded in the table, enrolments in the program remained around 160 candidates. The initial concentration of effort was to develop and submit manuscripts to scholarly peer reviewed journals and refereed conferences. This proved to be most successful. However, once the pool of graduates’ theses had been exhausted, the publication rate slowed and tended to be manuscripts developed from currently enrolled students who were mostly publishing during their candidacy. Publication of refereed conference papers generally remained high however, as most students viewed this form of publication as more relevant to their careers.

Seven edited books (Appendix 1) were published, detailing the program’s international partnerships, the experience of developing and delivering a transnational doctoral program, scholarly contributions from significant staff in the program and scholarship from students and graduates. Four of the seven books were published with the regional university’s own press, one with a partner university press in Malaysia, one with an independent publisher in Hong Kong and one with an independent publisher in the UK. In the main, the books collated doctoral students’ research, presented as a short summary each in their own chapter, as well as reflections by the student and supervisor conveying information about the research itself and also the doctoral journey. The university has several international partner institutions and books were compiled to showcase doctoral research from some of those countries including Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong and New Zealand.

Strategies employed to increase academic publications from the program proved to be effective, not only in increasing individual academic and college research profiles, but in creating a quality, research-led sub-culture. They proved to be a successful way of working
with professional doctoral students and supervisors to achieve academic publications whilst balancing the competing goals and priorities of doctoral students and supervisors with respect to publication outcomes.

The strategies also proved to be useful in mentoring staff and students who were inexperienced in publication and found the thought of it overwhelming. Book chapters in particular were a good method for more senior academics to mentor inexperienced authors and provide them with guidance on the publication process and, ultimately, to give them the confidence they required to branch out into other forms of scholarship on their own initiative. Thus, it provided the emotional support and reduced anxiety considered in the literature to be key to overcoming some obstacles to writing and publication (Kamler 2008; Kwan 2009). It developed students’ authorial voice whilst at the same time accommodating academics’ need to comply with the performativity regime, so in this instance the two were not incompatible.

**Perspective three: six case studies of journal articles from the publications project**

For perspective three, data was derived from the same publications project from another author’s role as publications officer. The express purpose of the role was achieving publications from doctoral students and graduate theses. After gaining permission from students (or graduates, as was more often the case) and supervisors, the thesis was reviewed and decisions made about what might be published. The relevant content was cut and pasted, the abstract written, introduction and conclusion refined, and the literature updated to include current references and references from the target journal. In some cases data was re analysed and in most cases a more detailed discussion was written. In this institution the general convention for publishing from the thesis was that the student would be first author and supervisor second, with a formal agreement documenting this early in the candidature. For the publication project this convention was adhered to, with the publications officer being third author. The degree to which students contributed to preparing the paper varied. Where students were not active in preparing the paper there was potential for conflict between authentic authorial voice of the student and performativity requirements. However, in all cases the third author was cognisant of preserving the student’s authorial voice even while developing the paper to ensure publication and meet performance requirements. It is acknowledged, however, that this process did little to develop students’ writing or publishing skills.

Given that most of the student projects were not in the author’s field of research, extensive analysis of numerous journals was conducted to find the best fit. A one hundred per cent success rate was achieved in that all six were accepted for publication in ERA ranked journals. This was achieved through careful journal targeting, preparing a long list of potential journals and persistence. The list of journals provided psychological encouragement in that it reinforced that there were many options for publication even after rejection. It became clear during the course of the project that at least some part of the students’ theses could be published somewhere, provided the journal was carefully targeted, reviewers’ comments were acted on and the prospective paper was persisted with despite rejection or repeated requests for revisions. Details of the six publications are shown in Table 2.

The following observations can be made from Table 2 and the author’s experience. Four papers were accepted by journals to which they were first submitted (generally lower ranked journals), whereas the other two were rejected by up to three journals before being accepted (in lower ranked journals). It is faster, easier and more feasible to target lower ranked
journals. This of course is true for any academic, but seems to be particularly pertinent for the work of professional doctorate students in this case study. Some lower ranked journals make a point of inviting contributions from inexperienced writers such as doctoral students and early career academics and it seems appropriate to capitalise on this opportunity. Note these lower ranked journals were still international, double blind peer reviewed.

### TABLE 2

Selected Details of Six Journal Articles Published in Publications Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journal rank/final journal rank</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>A/C</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A/C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of months to work on and submit paper</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of months to receive first decision from journal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision from first journal/subsequent journals</td>
<td>Accepted with revisions</td>
<td>Accepted with revisions</td>
<td>Editor sent back for revisions before review, was rejected on review</td>
<td>Accepted without revisions</td>
<td>Accepted with revisions</td>
<td>Rejected 2 x major revisions, further 2 x major revisions (paper withdrawn) /rejected/ accepted with minor revisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of journals submitted to before being accepted</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Months from commencement to publication</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second observation is that it is a lengthy process. Even for the paper that was accepted without revisions, the time between commencing work on the journal article and final publication was one to two years. For two papers that were initially targeted to A-ranked journals and eventually accepted in C journals, the time taken was over two years. Unlike anecdotal reports from colleagues, initial decisions from journals were received in quite a

\(^2\) This paper was highly commended in the 2011 Emerald Literati Network awards.

\(^3\) This paper was accepted without revisions and the editor wrote to the authors to commend them on this (rare) event
speedy fashion, being only one month for 3 papers and an average of three months across the
6 papers. One paper took 8 months, but in this case the editor did not receive the first
submission (which at the time was required to be hard copy).

A third observation is that revisions are par for the course. This fact would be well known to
those who have achieved publication, but since this paper aims to inform those who have not,
a request to revise a paper should be seen as an invitation to proceed with the attempt at
publication, rather than a failure or rejection. The paper which was accepted only by the
fourth journal was probably not of lesser quality or interest than some of the five other papers.
Rather, it may an example of the vagaries and idiosyncrasies that sometimes dog the
publication process, and reflects the ‘war stories’, of which most published academics have at
least one.

LEARNING FROM THE THREE PERSPECTIVES
What has been learned from the three perspectives can be summarised as follows. RHD
students are interested in learning about writing. More explicit instruction about writing
should have a place in the candidature and have a higher status in the institutional setting.
This could empower students to discuss issues such as style and assert their authorial voice.
Constructive feedback on how to improve writing is needed. Instruction, encouragement and
the provision of suitable and ‘safe’ avenues for achieving publication are also indicated.
Conference papers may be more appealing to students who are not pursuing an academic
career. A project focused on books and journal articles facilitated and co-ordinated by
academic staff who are tasked specifically with responsibility for publishing can increase
publication output even where students (or graduates) do not actively take part in this stage of
the process. This may contradict the finding of students wanting to actively learn about
writing during their candidature, however, students have different needs and different
motivations during different stages and not all will pursue publication. For some, the
qualification is the end point or goal, yet they are happy to see their work in print. For other
students, and indeed even some academics, a publication project is a good mentoring
technique and assists to develop a research focus and culture.

Many students are initially intimidated by the process and doubt their ability to make sense of
peer-reviewed research articles (Vaughn 2003). This accords with the authors’ observations
about academic writing and publishing with doctoral students—they seem unable to make the
connection from the research journal articles they use as input to their literature review to
those very same articles being manuscripts they could produce as output from their thesis.

Achieving publication is a complex, intricate, mysterious and daunting process to the novice
writer. Confidence comes from learning the ‘secret academic business’ of publishing in
journals. Yet, when this process is deconstructed, is it remarkably different from writing
university assignments as an undergraduate or postgraduate? The mystery appears to lie less
in the failings of students and more in the idiosyncrasies of academics: in the case of
publications—reviewers, and in the case of student assignments, markers. Creating a 5000 to
7000 word journal article from a 50,000 to 100,000 word thesis needs to be studied,
documented and promulgated at the micro level. It is difficult to articulate the process or
make it teachable. More training, how-to guides and workshops need to be available.
Workshops conducted by journal editors are useful in that they humanise and demystify the
process. Books such as Murray’s (2009) Writing for Academic Journals lay out the skills and
steps in writing academic journal articles, Aitchison, Kamler and Lee (2010) consider various
issues and practices around doctoral publication, and there are other sources as well such as Belcher (2010), Bem (2002), Gilmore, Carson and Perry (2006), and Huff (1999), so instruction is certainly available.

**Implications for supervision**
It could be argued that the status of writing pedagogy should be elevated towards that of research pedagogy in the academy. More universities should institute academic writing courses, which supervisors attend once or occasionally, with students perhaps attending more frequently. Sessions on academic writing and how to improve it may be beneficial for both RHD supervisors and students. Supervisors may need to learn how to teach writing, rather than simply correcting it. That is, supervisors could develop pedagogical skills in academic writing. One obstacle to this proposition is that supervisors may not consider themselves to be English teachers. They may also expect that students, who presumably have already completed an undergraduate degree, should have mastered academic writing. Further, academic writing depends on the discipline, so to help students develop their academic writing requires specialists in both writing assistance and in the discipline itself so that improvements to writing can be set in the context of the discipline discourse conventions (Elton 2010).

Supervisors should offer suggestions and constructive feedback that enables students to improve their writing. They should check with students whether their feedback is helpful. Students and supervisors could discuss the type and extent of feedback that each feel is appropriate or required. In terms of correcting spelling and grammar, there are several options. Supervisors may continue with these corrections, despite Sommers’ (1982) argument that this is not constructive in developing the overall writing and argument, provided supervisors also give additional feedback on the more substantive issues. Students may also be advised to use the services of a professional proofreader or editor who can focus on spelling and grammar. Journal publishers also offer these services to prospective authors.

Supervisors could also consider whether the student’s style, even if different from their own, is still correct or acceptable. Writing groups for doctoral students not only transmit the required skills, they increase confidence and motivation (Ferguson 2009). From a student-centred perspective, the ultimate aim is for ‘alimentar, a teaching process that is both nurturing and dialogic’ rather than ‘infame pedagogy…a practice that is harmful and debilitating to the growth of students’ (Howard & Turner-Nash 2011:23).

In terms of publishing edited books and journal articles, some might argue that publishing with the university’s own press is not as prestigious as achieving publication in a ‘mainstream’, independent publisher. However, there are several benefits from such a strategy including disseminating doctoral research which might not otherwise be published, promoting the doctoral program, encouraging students to publish in a relatively ‘easy’ outlet in the early stages which may build confidence and encourage more ambitious publications later. The books may qualify as A3X (Books edited) or B1X (Book chapters) on the Australian government publication count, thus assisting university research output. Further, journal articles can be achieved with dedicated focus, persistence and a careful strategy to evaluate and target suitable journals. In this way, students’ authorial voice can be heard and performativity demands can be met.
Limitations and further research
As with all research there are opportunities for improvement and further investigation. Qualitative research attracts some criticism. Data collected from one site makes the results ‘unique or artificial’ (Yin 2003). The student interviews about their experience of writing under supervision could be extended to other disciplines and other universities. Triangulation between students, their supervisors and others involved in publishing, in a longitudinal design tracking responses from novice writer to published author would add to the current research. Only two universities feature in this paper so it would be beneficial to expand the study to the experiences of doctoral students and supervisors in more institutions, as well as investigating other strategies that exist in other institutions to provide instruction in academic writing and to increase doctoral publication rates.

CONCLUSION
Research is fundamental to academic work. Recently, governments have focussed on measuring research output, including publications. Research outputs benefit students directly and indirectly including, for example, salaries and perceived quality of the degree, yet doctoral students may not be as motivated as their supervisors to achieve academic publications. The list of skills needed to write a journal article and see it through to final publication is long. There are emotional and cognitive barriers to academic writing and publishing and supervisors may not always be well placed to assist students to overcome these obstacles if they do not have the pedagogical skills. In particular, feedback on academic writing during supervision needs to be more than just a spelling and grammar checking exercise or, worse, a trauma inducing experience.

Much can still be learned by supervisors about how to constructively improve doctoral students’ academic writing and encourage publication. Some students are interested in improving their writing and seek constructive instructions on which they can confidently act. Others may be confident in their writing and seek support to assert their own authorial voice or style. In the absence of specific writing instruction from supervisors or the academy, students may form their own self-help writing groups.

A great deal of effort needs to be extended to achieve peer reviewed publications in ranked journals, particularly for novices. Publishing students work in more accessible outlets, such as edited books published in-house, seems more achievable and certainly increases the impact of this valuable research, as well as the government’s research quality metrics. Peer-reviewed journal articles that might not otherwise eventuate can be achieved if a third party is added to the student/supervisor team and tasked with this objective. Such articles may not be accepted in the highest ranked journals and may take two years or more to achieve, but persistence pays off.

Academic writing and publishing are an extension of the basic process that starts with undergraduate assignments which are subject to scrutiny and correction by assessors. Thesis writing is an extension of this process but more intense, more individualised and more thorough. Submitting a thesis for examination by external examiners is, of course, a form of peer review and it would be helpful for students to grasp (and supervisor to emphasise) the continuity between what are essentially phases of the one process, albeit with more rigorous demands in each phase. This would reinforce to students that they can gradually develop the skills and confidence to achieve what academics consider to be the pinnacle of publication.
success: an article in an international, ranked, scholarly, peer-reviewed journal. In this way authorial voice and performativity can be at least partially reconciled.

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APPENDIX 1: BOOKS FROM THE PUBLICATION PROJECT


