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The Graduate Student as Writer: Encouragement for the Budding Scholar by Shuyi Chua (review)

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(Review)

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best we can' (61). See Joli Jensen, *Write No Matter What: Advice for Academics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

10. Given the references to ninja and bonsai, learning via anecdote that Sarnecka taught English in Japan after graduating from college comes as little surprise.

Shuyi Chua. *The Graduate Student as Writer: Encouragement for the Budding Scholar*.

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Reviewed by NICK J. SCIULLO

Shuyi Chua's *The Graduate Student as Writer* is an encouraging, thoughtful, short book that would be an asset to any graduate students who are nervous about writing or are having trouble thinking of themselves as a scholar. As someone who has written about peer review and graduate education (and someone deeply interested in the scholarly writing process), I was intrigued by this book's title because it seemed like a necessary antidote to much of the stress my colleagues in graduate school experienced over the writing process; it seemed like a book that would assist the graduate students I've worked with, formally and informally, in applying to graduate school, supervising theses, co-authoring, and co-presenting. Author Chua marshals her experience as a recent graduate student (having earned a Master's in 2015), a published scholar, and the leader of a workshop on graduate student writing. Chua brings her expertise as a writer and the ethos of someone with a good grasp on today's graduate school experience.

The 'publish or perish' mantra is increasingly prevalent in graduate school, where faculty, committees, and even one's graduate student colleagues seem to be convinced that publishing is necessary to avoid irrelevance and unemployment. Obviously, for many who are hoping to gain tenure-track employment, this rings true. But we can still encourage young scholars to publish without making it seem as though it is the only option to avoid peril. While it is common to lament the inadequacies of graduate writing education, the sometimes questionable ways that peer review works, and the tendency for publish-or-perish pressure to destroy

work-life balance and distract scholars from teaching, this book intercedes with practical advice that is, above all else, reassuring.

The book is divided into an introduction, twenty-two chapters, and a bibliography. The chapters are (in a book of only seventy-two pages in all) short. Because this is not a rigorous academic study of graduate writing education, the chapters are quick to read and filled with an optimism that never comes across as inauthentic or exaggerated. It seems, perhaps, dismissive of the book's content to write so much about its tone, but this positive tone is tremendously important for helping graduate students become scholarly writers. Rest assured: if graduate students take this book seriously, it is difficult to imagine them not becoming more confident, better writers.

The book's chapters address common negative thoughts about writing, the writing process, one's first journal article, fear of writing, reasons for publishing, when to publish, and publication outlets, along with many other topics. Rather than discuss each chapter, I focus in this review on those chapters I think are most important for graduate students, because this is a book about graduate students succeeding. One word of caution is necessary. Depending on one's discipline, committee members, and career aspirations, some of the book's advice will be more or less relevant. As much as we may like to think that all graduate faculty are advising their students with the most current information, we know that some faculty discourage certain types of publication and rush or delay their students in pursuing publication. For individual graduate students, it makes sense to balance the advice in this book with the realities of their own graduate faculty's views and their own professional objectives.

Chapter 6, 'Each Conference Presentation = One Journal Article,' is an important reminder that there is indeed a home for almost everything one writes. One might extend this advice further: 'each seminar paper = one journal article.' The idea is that if one has committed the energy and time to producing a paper, then one should push it up the chain of scholarly production from seminar to conference to journal. If, at each step along the way, the graduate student revises, edits, and proofreads, the result will be a compelling paper that can be published somewhere. Graduate students should not let their work go to waste by regarding it only as a seminar or conference paper. This advice is particularly good for graduate students who are entering their first faculty job and are under much pressure to publish. An accumulation of seminar and conference papers can

be a first year's worth of publishing as one gets acclimated to a new role. The point is a simple one: one should take one's work seriously and not limit its possibilities because it does not seem good enough.

Chapter 8, 'Start Small Where You Are,' is an important reminder to graduate students that one's most impactful article or top journal placement may not come in graduate school. It also may not come before tenure. That, though, should not dissuade graduate student writers from writing because publishing less impactful work helps one develop as a writer and scholar. An example: publishing a short article in one's state or local journal will not guarantee a career as an endowed chair of a department, but it will connect one with other local scholars doing similar work. It will also help graduate students develop an authorial voice, by testing out ideas and writing styles, and allow them to pursue avenues of scholarship that may be interesting, even if they are not a part of their thesis or dissertation. There is no shame in writing for one's disciplinary newsletter or for a scholarly blog.

Section 2 of the book focuses on the writing process, which is helpful to graduate students who do not have strong writing training in their program. What got some students into graduate school may have had little to do with their writing skill and knowledge of the writing process. These chapters will help graduate student writers think about writing, revision, proofreading, and feedback. Each part of the writing process is worthy of attention, and even tenure-track faculty members can struggle with one or more parts of the process. Some of us write horrible first drafts. Others rarely if ever proofread. The more we understand each step as important, the more likely we are to devote the necessary time to it, and the easier the process of writing becomes. Chapter 16, 'Fear of Feedback,' is an excellent reminder that even though feedback can sting, and some feedback from reviewers and faculty members can be mean, there is always something to learn and always a way to improve one's writing. It is also important that graduate student writers realize that we all get feedback and struggle with how to interact with that feedback. Even the most experienced academic writer is likely to internalize a comment here and there. Feedback helps writers hone their craft. In its best possible form, feedback represents another scholar's suggestions for improving one's writing and argument. It is not a condemnation of one's work, one's chosen field, or one's potential for success in academic publishing. Stories abound of articles being rejected by lower-tier journals only to be accepted with minimal revisions

by higher-ranking journals. Papers that were not well liked in a graduate seminar often easily find publication. Even bad feedback that is personal can help one decide that submitting to a certain journal is too much of a risk or that one's colleague or professor may not be the best source of feedback. By appreciating feedback as an opportunity to improve, graduate student writers best position themselves for writing success.

Chapter 22, 'Valuing and Enjoying the Process, Not Just the Outcome,' is important for both those who enjoy writing and those who find it stressful. For graduate students who enjoy writing, it is important to think about writing not just as a way to produce articles but also as a way to test ideas, explore new styles and material, and capture and tend to one's thoughts. Being published is certainly a great reward, but the process of getting to the publication should also be rewarding. For those who hate writing, and this describes more graduate students than many of us may realize, working to enjoy the process makes everything easier. Completing an article, thesis, or dissertation is daunting and may never happen if every word one types is drudgery. How one values and enjoys the process will vary according to the individual, but a good starting point is to appreciate that writing is an art form, and like art, it requires patience, practice, and care. Rarely is one a good writer immediately. Framing writing as a fun, stress-relieving opportunity to experiment and to explore oneself and one's discipline can help make writing less burdensome and more joyful.

If one teaches graduate students, has a graduate student in one's family, or is sending an undergraduate off to graduate school, this book will be a valuable resource for any competitive graduate school environment, especially because there are many stories of horrible graduate school writing experiences out there that may discourage young scholars, even if the accounts were intended to be helpful advice.¹ While Chua's book contains some citations and lists other excellent books on writing, scholars and graduate students will want to look elsewhere for more rigorous treatments of graduate writing, such as the *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* and journals in the fields of English and composition studies. The book is lively and evenly paced, and will be an asset to graduate students in the humanities and social sciences, as most of its information accords with how writing and publishing work in those areas of study. Chua's story of developing a love of writing is relatable for those of us who already love writing and hopefully will be inspiring to those who want to develop this love for themselves.

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NOTE

1. Janet Davis, *My Own Worst Enemy: How to Stop Holding Yourself Back* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2012); Rachel Toor, 'Ph.D.s Are Still Writing Poorly,' *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 8 November 2017, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/PhDs-Are-Still-Writing/241700>.

Dawn Duke, Pam Denicolo, and Erin Henslee. *Publishing for Impact. Success in Research.*

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Reviewed by STEVEN E. GUMP

When working with applicants for competitive fellowships and grants, I often find myself playing devil's advocate. 'So what?', 'Who cares?', and 'How will *this* project make the world a better place?' I'll ask, encouraging applicants to consider how to build enthusiasm about their projects among reviewers and interviewers. In a sense, I'm seeking an articulation of potential impact, a fundamental evaluation criterion used by some funding agencies, such as the National Science Foundation. 'Broader impacts,' according to the NSF, involve 'the potential [of a project] to benefit society and contribute to the achievement of specific, desired societal outcomes.'¹

'So what?', 'Who cares?', and 'How will my reading *this* article or chapter or book make the world a better place?' are also questions that editors and reviewers—and, ultimately, readers—ask of the scholarly materials with which they engage. (Materials that fail to address these questions, in my experience, interest only specialists who know the answers to those questions already.) Scholarly authors who want their work to make an impact outside a narrow subspecialty should thus write with an aim toward addressing these questions of broader impacts. Readers of *Publishing for Impact*, an entry in the Success in Research series issued by SAGE Publications, are afforded a thorough introduction to writing articles, chapters,