



## Book Review

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Timothy G. Pollock. *How to Use Storytelling in Your Academic Writing*. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2021. 185 pp. \$39.95, paper.

In *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, Jerome Bruner (1986) distinguished two modes of thought. The logico-scientific mode employs categories and concepts as a means of describing and explaining the world. It deals in general causes and tests of verifiable truth. The narrative mode, by comparison, deals in human intention and action, locating experiences in time and place. It provides good stories, gripping drama, and believable accounts. Although both modes can be convincing, they convince of different things.

As academics, we face the challenge of needing to bridge these two modes of thought—logico-scientific and narrative (e.g., Hoffman, 2001). In many respects, our training focuses on theorizing, designing, and executing research studies. But storytelling is essential if we are to bring our insights and ideas to the world, suggesting a critical gap.

This is the challenge Timothy G. Pollock tackles in *How to Use Storytelling in Your Academic Writing*. At its core, the book aims “to help you improve your writing and increase the chances your insights are read and understood” (p. 2). To do so, it takes a “nuts-and-bolts” approach (p. 6). Specifically, the book is full of practical advice, codifying otherwise tacit and hard-won knowledge gained during Pollock’s career as an author, advisor, and editor.

Pollock unfolds his insights about the storytelling process across 14 chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the book’s mantra: “Think like a storyteller.” Chapter 2 introduces the book’s key organizing device, Freytag’s pyramid, which distinguished five elements common to dramatic plots: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, dénouement (p. 8). Each of these elements has a role to play, whether you are writing a quantitative, qualitative, or theoretical article.

Chapter 3 details key storytelling tools: the human face, motion and pacing, showing and telling, and conversational writing. Here readers also will find helpful heuristics on how to allocate page space across the five elements for each type of article (see Table 3.1). Chapter 4 dives into the building blocks of any story: words, sentences, and paragraphs. Especially memorable here are the five pathologies of academic writing and Pollock’s “idiosyncratic list” of dos and don’ts (pp. 45–48). The admonition against “dingleberries” is a tip I learned as a doctoral student in Pollock’s organization theory seminar, one I use regularly when up against journal page limits.

With these foundations laid, Chapters 5 through 8 apply Freytag’s pyramid to a typical quantitative research article. Chapter 5 deals with establishing and problematizing the conversation and ways to position contributions so that readers see them as interesting. Chapter 6 turns to the main and supporting characters in a story: theory, hypotheses, constructs, and context. Chapter 7

discusses the challenges of writing convincing, compelling methods and results sections. Chapter 8 focuses on the discussion section, laying out typical shortcomings (i.e., rehashing results, meandering, overreaching) and their remedies. Chapter 9 adjusts the preceding guidelines for qualitative articles, theory articles, and book chapters.

Chapters 10 through 13 take up other important aspects of academic writing. Chapter 10 examines the core activities of writing by way of an analogy to painting (i.e., preparing the ground; blocking the scene; adding detail, refining, and focusing; finishing and framing). The chapter ends with reflections on how to enhance your productivity as a writer. Chapter 11 talks about the co-authoring process, including tips and tricks on managing relationships through the ups and downs of the research and publishing journey. Chapter 12 examines the journal review process, including initial submissions, dealing with rejection, and handling the revise and resubmit process. Chapter 13 considers other kinds of academic writing, including grant proposals, research statements, and cover letters.

Pollock concludes the book in Chapter 14 by reflecting on scholarly writing as a deliberate practice. As a practice, writing is not a destination but an ongoing journey of continual improvement and refinement, ultimately one that many of us find deeply satisfying.

Although scholars at any career stage will likely benefit from the book's storytelling insights, it should be required reading for emerging scholars seeking to impact the world through their scholarship. For instance, it would make a great textbook for a graduate writing course or proseminar. Selected chapters could be assigned as companions to assignments in other courses (e.g., Chapters 5 and 6 in a content seminar; Chapters 7 and 8 in a methods seminar). But no matter where you are in your writing journey, *How to Use Storytelling in Your Academic Writing* is bound to offer fresh inspiration for making your academic writing more compelling.

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