

Engaging with the process of writing can connect researcher and reader and foster real innovation and impact

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*A new project aims to open academic writing practice to reflections and experiments with the actual process of writing, with a view to creating new, open research products that have an impact on peers, public and policymakers. **Ninna Meier** and **Charlotte Wegener** outline their vision for the Open Writing project, its importance, and why Open Science must be about more than merely free access to academic research.*



How do we develop writing practices and research texts that make an impact and allow for innovation in and beyond academia? We have been preoccupied with this question for some time now. Within the European Union it has become a priority to make scientific knowledge production and communication more democratic; what is now called 'Open Science'. We have now begun a three-year research project in conjunction with the Open Science initiative, which centers on developing what we call 'Open Writing'.



We attempt to open up the scientific writing process in two ways. First, to open academic writing practice to reflections and experiments with the actual process of writing. This means taking a good, hard look at *how* we write, for whom we write, and why we write. Work on the writing process includes understanding and practicing diverse styles of writing, creative writing and co-creation of texts. An important element in this is to explore [writing with resonance](#); writing that succeeds in developing a relationship between writer, text and reader. Second, our Open Writing initiative seeks to create open research products (e.g. essays, blogs, and audio-visual formats) that have an impact inside and outside the academic community, on the public and on policymakers.

Open Writing is thus a writing practice that includes both process and product. As Laurel Richardson stated in her widely cited paper, 'Writing as a method of inquiry', (included in the [Handbook of Qualitative Research](#)), writing is an essential tool for knowledge creation. We need to pay attention to writing practices because writing is the primary channel for disseminating research and attempting to influence communities of peers, practitioners and policymakers. Accordingly, Open Writing is the key to achieving the larger vision of Open Science.



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Within the Open Science discussion, the most frequently discussed issue has been that of Open Access. However, the vision of Open Science involves much more than free access to scientific publications. Open Science also seeks to open up the research process itself so as to encourage radical participation and knowledge sharing. As process, our Open Writing ambition thus encourages various types of collaboration. As product, Open Writing is communicative, accessible and sensitive to its potential impact (which can be economic, social, ethical or political). Yet Open Writing does not end here; *how* we as researchers -through our writing – stimulate and react to innovation and impact is crucial to enhancing the Open Science agenda. If there is no real connection between the researcher (writer) and the recipient (reader), we risk our writing circulating only within a closed system of peers. Open Writing seeks to open up this closed circuit.

According to [Cribb and Sari](#), many universities invest between 100 and 1000 times more money in their research and development than they do in communicating their research and ensuring that results meet societal needs for precise and useful knowledge (consider how decades of research on global warming has failed to make an impact on millions of skeptical citizens and even some politicians). To make the vision of Open Science a reality, Cribb and Sari argue, universities should invest just as much money, time and creativity in knowledge sharing and the communication of scientific discoveries as they do on research activity itself.

Our Open Writing project has theoretical and practical objectives. Our theoretical goal is to lay the groundwork for what we see as a wholly new research field. As a field of research, Open Writing is closely connected to the study of innovation and impact. The connection reflects the fact that writing is the primary means for researchers to accomplish our end of the innovation/impact relationship (whether or not we succeed depends in no small part on how the reader understands and uses our work). Thus, Open Writing combines the innovation and impact agendas with an aim of creating more democratic research practices.



"...writing is the primary means for researchers to accomplish our end of the innovation/impact relationship."

Ninna Meier and Charlotte Wegener
(Aalborg University)



The goal is to create a nuanced, empirical, grounded, conceptual apparatus that can more fully inform writing practices so that researchers can further develop and communicate academic writing to a broad range of stakeholders.

There is a long tradition of creative writing in American universities. Creative writing, however, is concerned primarily with fiction and journalistic/essayistic writing and does not address creative and innovative ways of writing scientific texts. Still, why is Open Writing not just creative writing? The answer lies in the purpose: Open Writing is writing with a strict focus on fostering innovation and impact. Hence, it is writing which aims beyond the creative process as such. Both impact and innovation are processes that occur *after* we have pressed the submit button (and might render us more likely to have our writing accepted for publication). Innovation is the step after creativity, as it pays particular attention to the value creation following creativity, while impact is what happens as a result of our research. Impact is “[the good that researchers can do in the world](#)”. By combining academic writing with the research fields of innovation and impact, we hope to produce accessible, co-created and communicative research processes and products, thus contributing to value-creating changes inside universities and in society.

Open Writing can be informed and developed using a variety of theoretical and philosophical perspectives. We are inspired by a pragmatic approach to knowledge as a social practice. In this understanding, knowledge is something we primarily *do* in continual exchange with other people and the world. [Lave and Wenger](#) developed the idea that learning is based on access to activities and technologies in a social practice. If the values and structures of production within the practice are opaque or vague, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to participate, contribute and learn. This idea can explain why [the public may conclude that scientific knowledge is irrelevant, incomprehensible or even questionable](#). We believe that the divide between public understanding and scientific knowledge creation can be reduced by increasing accessibility. What access to research writing and research texts (in its widest definition) may look like, how to make sense of it and with whom will be the subject of our experiments and discussions as we pursue our project over the next three years. We hope you will join us in this effort.

Please write to us, blog and follow us on Twitter [@Open_Writing](#).

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Impact Blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [comments policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.

About the authors

Ninna Meier and **Charlotte Wegener** are Associate Professors at Aalborg University, in the Department of Sociology and Social Work and the Department of Communication respectively. They have been co-authors and writing friends since their doctoral studies. Since then, they have written about and explored writing in several ways. They seek to expand academic writing as both process and product, for instance by involving other modes of expression such as fiction, music, blog posts, dreams, and standup to mention but a few. Specifically, they aim to make academic knowledge production more democratic, open, and fun.

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