

# Open Knowledge for a Sustainable Future: Research, Ethics, and Wikipedia

Week 8 (Academic + Wiki) — Advice & Conclusions

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# Roadmap

- 1 Summary
- 2 Advice from Famous Writers and Scientists
- 3 Your feedback to us

# What You Learned About

- Academic vs. encyclopedic writing (audience, voice, structure)
- How to write well — what is your message and how to convince
- Evaluating sources and writing bibliographies
- Ethical Writing: FAIR / CARE, openness, ethics
- Feedback and Peer Review
- Practice both: (Academic) paper and (Wiki) article
- Learn transferrable skills: argument, evaluation, revision, collaboration focusing on environmental issues

# Two Tracks, One Goal

## **(Academic)** Short paper (4-8 pp + refs)

- Argument-driven, thesis-focused
- Synthesis and analysis
- Scholarly voice & citation norms
- Writing part of a larger process

## **(Wiki)** Wikipedia article

- NPOV, verifiability, no original research
- Clear structure; accessibility
- Community standards, consensus

- We **compare genres** to strengthen writing and judgment.

- **Academic paper (Francis):** 4-8 pages + references; peer review; revision memo
  - ▶ Review two articles
- **Wikipedia article (Pavel):** sandbox draft; sourcing; feedback; mainspace
  - ▶ Comment on two articles
- **Participation:** discussion, reflections

# Roadmap

- 1 Summary
- 2 Advice from Famous Writers and Scientists
  - Writers
  - Scientists
- 3 Your feedback to us

# Plan for this week

- 15 voices:
  - ▶ Writers: Stephen King, Ursula K. Le Guin, Octavia Butler, Haruki Murakami, Jorge Luis Borges, Chinua Achebe, Karel Čapek, Shonda Rhimes and Ta-Nehisi Coates.
  - ▶ Scientists and researchers: Richard Hamming, Jane Goodall, Marie Curie, Timnit Gebru, Edsger W. Dijkstra, John Amos Comenius.
- For each:
  - ▶ who they are → why listen to them
  - ▶ one or two pieces of advice, with sources.
- Goal: learn a few good habits

- Who is he?
  - ▶ Prolific American novelist, especially horror, fantasy, and suspense.
  - ▶ Author of *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* (King, 2000).
  - ▶ Known for disciplined daily writing and for demystifying the craft.
- What is his advice?
  - ▶ **Read a lot, write a lot.**

“If you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all others: read a lot and write a lot.” (King, 2000)<sup>1</sup>

    - Block non-negotiable time every day to *read* and to *produce text*.
    - Protect that block the way King protects his writing hours.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/312517>



- Who is she?
  - ▶ American writer of speculative fiction: *Earthsea*, *The Left Hand of Darkness*.
  - ▶ Major voice on imagination, language, and power.
  - ▶ Wrote the craft book *Steering the Craft* (Le Guin, 2015).
- What is her advice?
  - ▶ **Practice the craft deliberately.**  
In *Steering the Craft*, Le Guin treats writing as a set of skills (rhythm, syntax, point of view) that can be practised in focused exercises, not just “inspired” (Le Guin, 2015).<sup>2</sup>
  - ▶
    - Pick one small skill to practice each day (clarity of argument, transitions, examples).
    - Write short “exercises” just to improve that skill, separate from the main project.

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<sup>2</sup>See sample exercises and discussion at  
<https://www.powells.com/book/steering-the-craft-9780544611610>.

# A Few Words to a Young Writer

*Socrates said, “The misuse of language induces evil in the soul.” He wasn’t talking about grammar. To misuse language is to use it the way politicians and advertisers do, for profit, without taking responsibility for what the words mean. Language used as a means to get power or make money goes wrong: it lies. Language used as an end in itself, to sing a poem or tell a story, goes right, goes towards the truth.*

*A writer is a person who cares what words mean, what they say, how they say it. Writers know words are their way towards truth and freedom, and so they use them with care, with thought, with fear, with delight. By using words well they strengthen their souls. Story-tellers and poets spend their lives learning that skill and art of using words well. And their words make the souls of their readers stronger, brighter, deeper.*

## A Few Words to a Young Writer

- Who is she?
  - ▶ African-American science fiction writer: *Kindred*, *Parable of the Sower*.
  - ▶ First science-fiction author to receive a MacArthur “genius” grant.
  - ▶ Essay “Furor Scribendi” offers very direct writing advice (Butler, 2005).
- What is her advice?
  - ▶ **Habit beats inspiration.**  
“First forget inspiration. Habit is more dependable. Habit will sustain you whether you’re inspired or not.”<sup>3</sup>
    - Decide on a modest, daily minimum (e.g., 30 minutes of focused work).
    - Hit the minimum every day, even when you do not feel like it.

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<sup>3</sup><https://www.gradesaver.com/bloodchild-and-other-stories/study-guide/summary-furor-scribendi>

- Who is he?
  - ▶ Japanese novelist: *Norwegian Wood*, *Kafka on the Shore*, *A Wild Sheep Chase*.
  - ▶ Long-distance runner; memoir *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running* links running and writing (Murakami, 2008).
- What is his advice?
  - ▶ *If you don't know what to write about, the first thing you should do is read a lot of what you \*think\* you want to write.* (Murakami, 2022)
  - ▶ **Treat work like endurance training.**  
Murakami describes keeping a strict routine when drafting: early start, several hours of work, daily repetition, like marathon training (Murakami, 2008).<sup>4</sup>
  - ▶ For this week:
    - Choose a simple daily rhythm (when you start, when you stop) and keep it.
    - Think “distance covered”, not “perfection today”.

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<sup>4</sup><https://www.penguin.co.uk/discover/articles/murakami-writing-process-novelist-as-a-vocation>

# Jorge Luis Borges

- Who is he?

- ▶ Argentine writer; short stories such as “The Library of Babel” and “The Garden of Forking Paths”.
- ▶ Explored libraries, labyrinths, and infinite texts.

*“I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library.”*

From his 1958 poem, “Poem of the Gifts” (or “Poema de los Dones”), written after becoming the blind director of Argentina’s National Library, reflecting on his love for books and his encroaching blindness.

- What is his advice?

*All things have been given to us for a purpose, and an artist must feel this more intensely. All that happens to us, including our humiliations, our misfortunes, our embarrassments, all is given to us as raw material, as clay, so that we may shape our art.*

*Borges and Alifano, 1984*

- Who is he?
  - ▶ Nigerian novelist and essayist; *Things Fall Apart*.
  - ▶ Central figure in postcolonial African literature.
  - ▶ Essay “The Truth of Fiction” on how stories convey truth (Achebe, 1990).

- What is his advice?

- ▶ **Stories shape perspective**

*Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.*

*I don't lay down the law for anybody else. But I think writers are not only writers, they are also citizens. They are generally adults. My position is that serious and good art has always existed to help, to serve, humanity.*

*The Art of Fiction No. 139 (Achebe, 1994)*

- Czech writer, playwright, journalist, and essayist; a central figure of 20th-century Czech literature.
- Known for fiction such as *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)* and *Válka s mloky (War with the Newts)*.
- His essay collection *Marsyas čili Na okraj literatury (Marsyas, or On the Margin of Literature)* explores language, journalism, style, and the responsibilities of writers.
- Čapek emphasises clarity, responsibility, and continual labour in mastering one's language.

- **Writing is distinguished by mastery of language.**

*Mezi všemi lidmi se vyznačuje nebo má vyznačovat spisovatel ne tím, že píše, nýbrž tím, že umí česky; avšak umět znamená pracovat, stále zkoušet, stále hledat a soustředit se; nikdy nebudeš hotov s mateřskou řečí.*

*Marsyas čili Na okraj literatury* (Čapek, 1931, pp 176–177)

*A writer is—or should be—distinguished not by the fact that he writes, but by the fact that he knows his language; and to know it means to work, to keep trying, to keep searching, to concentrate; you will never be finished with your mother tongue.*

- ▶ For Čapek, the foundation of writing is not inspiration but disciplined craft.
- ▶ Clarity emerges from continuous engagement with language.



- **Clear language is clear thought — and a civic responsibility.**

*Učiníte-li řeč zpěvnou a líbeznou, nebo dáte-li jí zvuk zvonu či děloviny, nebo učiníte-li ji jasnou a moudrou, pružnou, věcnou, lehkou, logickou nebo vzletnou, vnukli jste tyto ctnosti samotné duši národa; ale je-li vaše mluva těžká, zmatená, beztvará, obnošená a falešná, budete zlořečeni ...*

(Čapek, 1931, p 177)

*If you make language melodious and graceful, or give it the sound of a bell or a cannon, or make it clear and wise, flexible, factual, light, logical or soaring, you have infused these virtues into the very soul of the nation; but if your speech is heavy, confused, shapeless, worn-out or false, be accursed ...*

- ▶ Čapek frames clarity not only as a stylistic virtue but as a moral duty.
- ▶ Confused language harms public discourse; clear language strengthens it.

# Shonda Rhimes — writing under pressure

- American television writer, producer, and showrunner
- Creator of *Grey's Anatomy*, *Scandal*, *How to Get Away with Murder*
- Founder of Shondaland; one of the most influential writers in modern TV
- Known for sustaining long-running narratives under extreme deadlines
- Why listen: expertise in discipline, productivity, and creative resilience

- Write even when you don't feel like it

*“Waiting for inspiration is for amateurs. The rest of us just show up and get to work.”*

  - ▶ Writing is a professional practice, not a mood
  - ▶ Momentum matters more than brilliance on any given day
  - ▶ Showing up regularly trains clarity and craft
- Say yes to discomfort

*“The very act of doing the thing that scares you will change your life.”*

  - ▶ Growth comes from stretching beyond familiar patterns
  - ▶ Creative fear often signals importance, not danger
  - ▶ Relevance requires risk

(Rhimes, 2015)

# Ta-Nehisi Coates — thinking through writing

- Who is he?
  - ▶ American writer, essayist, and journalist
  - ▶ Author of *Between the World and Me*
  - ▶ Known for intellectually rigorous, reflective nonfiction
- What is his advice?

*I don't have ideas. I have questions. Writing is the process by which I discover what I think.* (Coates, 2013)

  - ▶ Writing clarifies thought rather than merely expressing it
  - ▶ Confusion is not a failure; it is the starting point
  - ▶ Drafts are instruments of discovery

*You owe the reader your best effort at precision.* (Coates, 2015)

  - ▶ Vague language hides weak thinking
  - ▶ Precision is a moral as well as intellectual task
  - ▶ Revision is where honesty happens

# Richard Hamming

- Who is he?
  - ▶ Mathematician and engineer; worked at Bell Labs
  - ▶ Known for Hamming codes and contributions to information theory
  - ▶ Famous for the talk *You and Your Research* (Hamming, 1986)
- What is his advice?
  - ▶ **Work on important problems.**  
*If you do not work on an important problem, it's unlikely you'll do important work.*  
(Hamming, 1986)
  - ▶ For this week:
    - Ask every morning: *What are the most important problems I can tackle today?*
    - Reserve your best energy (not just leftover time) for them.

# Jane Goodall

- Who is she?
  - ▶ Primatologist and conservationist; pioneered long-term field research on chimpanzees in Gombe Stream National Park.
  - ▶ Known for patient, immersive observation that transformed primatology and animal behaviour studies.
  - ▶ Founder of the Jane Goodall Institute and the Roots & Shoots programme.
- What is her advice?
  - ▶ *Only if we understand can we care. Only if we care will we help. Only if we help can they be saved.*  
(Goodall, 1999)
  - ▶ Goodall's work emphasises long-term, careful observation before theory-building, especially in complex systems  
(Goodall, 1971, 1986)
  - ▶ *What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make.*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup><https://janegoodall.ca/what-we-do/>.

# Marie Curie

- Who is she?
  - ▶ Physicist and chemist; pioneer of radioactivity.
  - ▶ First woman to win a Nobel Prize, and the only person to win in two scientific fields.
- What is her advice?
  - ▶ Replace fear with understanding.  
*Nothing in life is to be feared; it is only to be understood.*<sup>6</sup>
  - ▶ Scientific courage comes from knowledge.  
Curie repeatedly emphasised that understanding phenomena reduces fear and superstition(E. Curie, 1937; M. Curie, 1910)

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<sup>6</sup>From Curie's lectures and letters, popularised in E. Curie (1937).

- Who is she?
  - ▶ Computer scientist and AI ethics researcher.
  - ▶ Co-author of “On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots” (Bender et al., 2021).
  - ▶ Founder of the Distributed AI Research Institute (DAIR).
- What is her advice?
  - ▶ Ask who pays the price.

*We recommend that researchers weigh the environmental and financial costs of model training, consider dataset curation carefully, and reflect on downstream harms.*

(Bender et al., 2021)
  - ▶ Ethics is part of research quality, not an add-on.

Social impact and power asymmetries must be treated as core research concerns



- Who is he?
  - ▶ Dutch computer scientist; pioneer of algorithms and structured programming.
  - ▶ Author of influential essays and EWD memoranda.
- What is his advice?
  - ▶ Clarity and correctness first.  
*Program testing can be used to show the presence of bugs, but never to show their absence.*  
*On the Cruelty of Really Teaching Computing Science* (Dijkstra, 1989)
  - ▶ Think before you write.  
For Dijkstra, programming (and writing) is disciplined reasoning before execution.

# John Amos Comenius

- Who is he?
  - ▶ 17th-century Moravian (Czech) philosopher and educational reformer.
  - ▶ Author of *Didactica Magna* (*The Great Didactic*).
- What is his advice?
  - ▶ Design learning so students do the work.  
*Teachers teach less, and learners learn more.*  
*Didactica Magna* (Comenius, 1657, ch 19)
  - ▶ Education should be universal and systematic.  
Comenius' principle: *omnes, omnia, omnino* [Teach everyone everything thoroughly]  
„Všechny všemu všestranně.“ (Comenius, 1892)
    - universal access to education (not just elites)
    - broad foundational knowledge, not narrow specialization
    - systematic, humane teaching methods that actually work

# Putting it together

- ① Work consistently:
  - ▶ King, Butler, Murakami, Rhimes: habit beats mood; pages accumulate.
- ② Choose problems that matter:
  - ▶ Hamming: importance; Gebru: responsibility; Goodall and Curie: patience and courage
- ③ Treat clarity as craft:
  - ▶ Le Guin, Dijkstra, Coates, Čapek: clarity comes through practise and revision
- ④ Remember people and consequences:
  - ▶ Achebe, Borges, Čapek, Comenius: language shapes stories, publics, and learners

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# What did you learn, what can we learn?

- What was the most surprising thing in this class?
- What do you think is most likely wrong?
- What do you think is the coolest result?
- What do you think you're most likely to remember?
- How do you think this course will influence your subsequent writing/research/life?
- Is there anything we can do to improve this course?

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