SOME THOUGHTS ON WRITING FOR STUDENTS WHO WORK WITH ME: A DRAFT CONTINUALLY IN PROGRESS

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2008

Among Charlie Rose's more interesting guests was biographer David McCullough, author of *Truman*, *John Adams*, *Mornings on Horseback* (about Theodore Roosevelt) and numerous others.[1] He tells us that "to write well is to think clearly and that's why it's so hard, but it's also why it's so enjoyable." He adds that "as soon as you start writing, then you become aware of what you don't know—what you need to know." McCullough strikes a responsive chord from my own experience when he observes how "when you write you suddenly have ideas or insights or questions are raised that you wouldn't have if you weren't writing. That's why it's important for students to be required to write a lot."

McCullough defines writing as rewriting, something he does all the time, again and again and again: "I'm not a writer; I'm a rewriter," he says. I often go back and rewrite the whole first part of the book because I know so much more by the time I get to the end of the book." McCullough notes that his spouse is his best critic. She reads and rereads his drafts. Whether one turns to a spouse, friend or colleague, every writer needs a reader.

It's also good to read what one has written word for word. Best way to do that is to read it out loud, which forces you down into the trees. Boring as that might be, it's the best way I know to catch errors and locate the rough spots. I was delighted—a sense of confirmation—when I heard McCullough say pretty much the same thing. Beyond my finding errors and rough spots, McCullough added another qualitative reason to my list: "I write for the ear as well as the eye. I think that's very important. . . . Read what you've

written out loud because you'll hear things that you don't like that you very often don't see."

I guess my mother was right when she told me to write as I speak!

Preparing to Write

It's usually worth knowing what one is planning to write before getting underway. Some people may like the adventure of writing without much sense of destination (much less direction), but most of us don't. Writing an essay (or poem for that matter), a paper or article, a thesis or dissertation, a book or multi-volume treatise without knowing where it's going is like getting into a car without destination or road map. Meandering about leads everywhere or nowhere, notwithstanding hours of driving up and down blind alleys and along other tangents.

It's good to write a single-, no more than two-sentence thesis statement that captures what the work is all about; for example, "that democracies tend not to go to war with each other is the closest one gets to a law applicable to the social sciences" or, perhaps, its converse—that "democratic peace theory distorts the relation between the type of political regime and the propensity to war and peace." Or is the paper about how the power structure—the distribution of capabilities—in international politics facilitates or constrains policy makers? By contrast, perhaps the thesis is that such exogenous factors as structures external to individuals are not what explain foreign policy choices, but rather the interpretive, subjective and inter-subjective understandings these policy makers internalize.

Whatever my thesis may be, it's good to write it down on a 3"x5" card I can post it on the wall by my desk, place it on the table next to my computer, or put it in my pocket so it will be with me wherever I go. In the course of research and, most importantly, thinking about the subject, I

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[1] See the interview with David McCullough on PBS program "Charlie Rose" broadcast March 21, 2008. References and quotations used in this essay are taken from that interview by Charlie Rose.

may decide to change the thesis. That's okay, but then it's a good idea to scratch out the old and write the new version in its place. Indeed, when my research takes me far and wide, I'm tempted to explore all avenues that interest me, however tangential they may be. Referring regularly to my 3"x5" card keeps me from going down too many of these alleys or, if I do decide to go down one, then to curtail my brief tour quickly.

One problem with research is that it can become seemingly endless. I remember one fellow writing a dissertation who had a massive number of note cards extraordinarily well organized in neatly arranged file boxes—never could bring himself to write! Or another friend (let's call him Joe) who was "roasted" at a party, uncharitably I think. In the skit another "friend" who was playing Joe carried a seemingly heavy, 3'x3'x4' huge box across the stage. "What's in that box, Joe?" "It's my dissertation." "I know you've been working long and hard on it, Joe, but how much have you written so far?" Joe then turns over the box and one sheet of paper flies out and lands on the floor. [Audience laughs at the real Joe, now red-faced.]

Why does this happen? Is Joe lacking self-confidence in his work? Does he see his dissertation as if it were a *magnum opus* upon which his *persona* forever will be judged by others? Although meeting or surpassing scholarly standards is always the goal, perfection can hardly be the bar. Yet many caught in this form of writer's block fail to complete (or sometime even start) works of any size from essay or article to book or treatise.

For his part, McCullough says he completes some 40-50% of his research before he starts writing. Then he never stops writing, continuing his research as he writes. Research should help, not block the writer. In my own more recent experience—not possible before access to the internet became so easy—I write plugged in, whether to check a date, read a journal article, or find other information useful to the article or chapter in a book I'm drafting.

Finally, once a destination is set (the thesis), research is underway, and thinking continues an outline has begun to form—a roadmap for getting to the destination. Just as need for more research can become a writer's block, so can the task of making a fully developed outline as if it were prerequisite to writing the first lines of a paper, article, chapter, thesis, dissertation or book. Outlines are roadmaps, not end product. They are means to ends and thus always subject to amendment. There are more ways than one to Rome. In any event, hopefully the directions chosen will lead there. If not, we change course, modifying the outline as needed or even replacing it.

Changes in both destination and roadmap are allowed. Theses may change in the course of research, not to mention drastic alterations of both outline and text. Writing is always an ongoing enterprise, sometimes having a life of its own. This short essay is one such work in continuous progress as I learn from writing—mine and those of my colleagues and students. Indeed, even after one has "finished" a text does not mean it necessarily is the last word. Revisions (and even reversals of earlier arguments) in later editions or new articles and books are always possible. The i's are not always dotted and the t's are not always crossed in anything I write. Once "finished," writings are always open for review and revision.

Getting Started

Getting the piece started is more than half the battle. When asked, I always say the way to write (and break any writer's block) is to force oneself to "start" writing whether on a lap- or desk-top computer or, in the old-fashioned way, on a typewriter (haven't seen one in years), a pad or even a scrap of paper, calendar, blank pages, spaces or margins in a book I own, a paper napkin, or whatever is available—didn't Lincoln write the "Gettysburg Address" on the back of an envelope? The important thing is to get words on paper (or these days, in electronic form).

Problem is I'm not always at (or even near) my computer when an idea I should write down comes into my mind. That's why I always try to have paper and pen or pencil with me wherever I go at any time of day. Lest he lose an idea, twentieth-century novelist Thomas Wolfe even used to get up at night to scribble some inspiration he had had in a dream or on awakening—perhaps adding to the content of *Look Homeward Angel* or, having revealed all of Asheville, North Carolina's (his hometown's) dark and dirty secrets, he realized *You Can't Go Home Again.*

Writing in a much different time and place and on very different subjects, Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) carried writing materials with him whenever he took his walks in the English or, when in exile, in the French countryside. His biographer, John Aubrey, tells us that Hobbes "walked much and contemplated, and he had in the head of his cane a pen and ink-horn, carried always a note-book in his pocket, and as soon as a thought darted, he presently entered it into his book, or otherwise he might perhaps have lost it."[2] Too bad he didn't have access to the "advanced" technology of a ball-point or felt-tip pen!

Like many (if not most) professors he was comfortable enough with his eccentricities and didn't seem to mind people noticing his strange behavior—writing as he walked. He had this same fear of losing a thought. What was Hobbes to do with his notes gathered helter skelter as thoughts struck him wherever he might be? Aubrey provides the answer: "He had drawn the design of the book into chapters etc so he knew whereabout it would come in. Thus that book [*Leviathan* (1650)] was made." Put another way, Hobbes was organized. He knew how to put seemingly random thoughts to good use. Like what he wrote or not, his book is still "in print" and likely will be for centuries to come!

When asked how he writes something as long as a book, David McCoullough relates an experience early in his career with Harry Sinclair Drago who wrote over 100 books, typically in the pulp-western genre focused on the American West. He relates how at a press conference President Eisenhower had identified Drago as his favorite author, his second favorite, Bliss Lomax (actually the same person—a *nom de plume* used by Drago for some of his books). In a fluke opportunity McCullough had early in his career to speak to Drago, he asked him "how do you do that"—write more than 100 books? How could he could be so productive? The answer was deceptively simple: "Four pages a day!" That's how McCoullough says he does it—four pages a day. He adds: "Best advice an aspiring writer

could be given." The same logic no doubt applies to writing a dissertation or thesis, a paper or article, and for that matter an essay like this one. Four pages a day. . . .

Coping with Anxieties

Old fears of losing manuscripts never seem to go away. The most extreme case I've ever heard was the person who kept a copy of his dissertation in the freezer so it might survive even a house fire. Somewhat less extreme, but still obsessive, I'm always hitting "save," particularly if I've just written what I consider to be a good sentence or finished a thought. Woops! I'd better hit the "save" button. Done.

Burning a disk takes more time and energy than I usually want to expend and I'm not always as timely as I should be to copy what I've written to an auxiliary drive—and this after losing my hard drive in January! I was lucky at the time to have copied most of my documents into my auxiliary drive days earlier. A short-term remedy for this problem is quite simply at the end of the day to e-mail myself the essay or chapter and thus save it in cyberspace. Printing it out (when I have a printer and it's working) is another remedy, of course, but saving my work electronically does save trees as well as keeping stacks of paper from forming on my desk.

Wisdom from the Ancients on Intellectual Honesty

Follower of the historical tradition one finds in the Greek writers Herodotus (the "father" of history" in the western tradition) and Thucydides before him, Polybius (203-120 B.C.E.) instructs his readers on plagiarism—obviously not just a 21st century problem. Polybius observes "that there are two kinds of falsehood, the one being the result of ignorance and the other intentional."[3] He differentiates between "pardon [given to] those who depart from the truth through ignorance" and those we "unreservedly condemn . . . who lie deliberately." Writers lie when "claiming as one's own what is really the work of others." More than lying, of course, plagiarism is also both stealing someone else's intellectual

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[2] See John Aubrey, "A Brief Life of Thomas Hobbes, 1588-1679" in Aubrey and Richard William Barber (ed.), *Brief Lives* (Rochester, NY and Suffolk, England: The Boydell Press [now Boydell and Brewer], 1982).

[3] See Mark V. Kauppi and Paul R. Viotti, *The Global Philosophers: World Politics in Western Thought* (New York: Lexington Books, 1992), p. 83. Cf. Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, trans. Ian Scott-Kilvert (London: Penguin Books, 1979), IX:2, XII: 12, and III:9.

property and cheating by unfairly or unjustly not giving credit where it is due, not to mention when competition for grades or other rewards give the plagiarist an unfair advantage.

Using someone's words directly or as paraphrase warrants a note acknowledging the source placed in such a way as to make clear to the reader what the author has written and what has been taken from other sources. If a number of quotations are used in a paragraph or over several paragraphs or pages, one can avoid littering the text with notes by constructing blanket notes that say something to the effect that references and quotations in this paragraph, page or section are drawn from the same source, listing pages as appropriate. Common or public knowledge can be used freely without attribution, of course, but if someone's summary or ideas are particularly helpful we ought to say so.

Going from a source directly to a paper is worth a comment. When I've checked a source my practice is to put it aside (or if on the web, minimize that window) and then write from scratch. Not having a photographic memory is a distinct advantage. Still, even after I've composed using my own words, I go back to the original to make sure I have not inadvertently repeated what are in essence someone else's words. If quotes or reference are in order, I use them and cite the source. Here's an example, starting with a passage I read on the U.S. Senate website dealing with precedents related to foreign policy and the ratification of treaties:

> On August 22, 1789, President George Washington and Secretary of War Henry Knox presented the Senate with a series of questions relating to treaties with various Indian tribes. The Senate voted to refer these to a committee rather than debate the issue in the presence of the august president, who seemed to overawe many of the senators. Washington decided that, in the future, he would send to the Senate communications regarding treaties only in writing, setting the precedent that all of his successors have followed.[4]

Here is the paragraph I drafted using this source in combination with other information:

> As the first presidency of the new constitutional republic, precedents set in Washington's administration were the bases of important norms that would become institutionalized with the passage of time.[5] For example, Secretary of War Henry Knox accompanied President Washington to the Senate in August 1789 for an advisory on treaties made with native-American tribes. Instead of conducting a debate in his presence, the matter was referred to committee. That was the last time Washington or any of the presidents who succeeded him appeared in person on treaty matters. Washington and all of his successors have met the constitutional requirement to seek the "advice and consent" of the Senate on the ratification of treaties by formal, written exchanges.[6]

Beyond these uses of notes that give credit (or blame) wherever it may be due is the explanatory note that identifies other sources the reader may consult for corroborating or opposing views or presents a more detailed argument that otherwise might have cluttered the main text. Notes are a good place for tangents that, if included in the main text, tend to get the argument off track. One of my professors told us in a graduate class how much he loved footnotes. What he was really saying, of course, is that notes are a reflection of the scholarship we have put into what we have written that, if well constructed, also can be helpful to the reader.

One can use footnotes, endnotes, parenthetical documentation, or some combination of these in some standard, uniform

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[4] See www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/Treaties.htm, accessed May 31, 2008.

[5] For a discussion of treaty-related precedents from the Senate's perspective, go to www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/Treaties.htm. The account is also an interpretive understanding favorable to the Senate's role—that the President neither participates in nor observes Senatorial proceedings on treaties and the House of Representatives customarily votes to fund Treaty obligations even though it has no part in the treaty ratification process.
[6] *Ibid.* Cf. *U.S. Constitution*, Article II

way. Eclecticism has its place in scholarly work, but not when it comes to notes. Notes—whether footnotes or endnotes—are efficient. One can avoid redundancies, for example, by using *ibid.* to refer to the citation in the immediately preceding note or making abbreviated reference to a source fully cited earlier. My own preference between using notes or parenthetical documentation is for the note because of its unobtrusive quality. It informs me that there is a note without cluttering the text with parentheses containing family names, dates and pages. Not only are notes more pleasing to me esthetically, but also papers written without "parenthesis clutter" are also easier to read quickly.

As between footnotes and endnotes, footnotes win easily. There was a time before word processing when using endnotes was decidedly the way to go—at least from the writer's point of view; changing or adding notes did not necessitate retyping the entire paper, just the list of notes at the back of the paper. It would have been nice for this reason to have been allowed to use endnotes when typing my M.A. thesis some decades ago. But all of that is passé now. Notes are automatically renumbered and reordered by the word-processing program. Footnotes do have the decisive advantage, then, of allowing the reader easily to choose which notes to read closely, skim, or not read at all. Flipping from text to endnotes in the back pages is a pain, particularly when the old reasons for doing so no longer apply!

On Standardization

In *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* T.E. Lawrence ("Lawrence of Arabia"), leader of a British-sponsored Arab movement against the Turks in World War I, provides important conceptual understandings of insurgencies. A maverick in the Royal Army, Lawrence was particularly well equipped to think outside the box—one more than willing to depart from the conventional wisdom, customs and practices.

His going it alone carried over to a dispute with his publisher whose editors insisted that he use one spelling for the same city in the Arabian peninsula. Was it to be *Jeddah*, *Jiddah*, *Yeddah*, or *Yiddah*? Lawrence insisted on using all four spellings interchangeably. After all, how was he to be the authority empowered to settle a

dispute over the correct transliteration from Arabic to English?

Be that as it may, most scholars vote for standardization at least within a single piece of work unless there is a plausible reason for varying usage. Thus, the American-English spelling of *defense* usually prevails over the British-English spelling of *defence* in an article or volume written or edited by Americans. On the other hand, if the writer is from the U.K. there's no compelling reason to change her or his spelling, particularly if it is an article on British *defence* policy (woops, my word processor is telling me I've misspelled *defence*!).

When it comes to notes or parenthetical documentation and bibliographies, standardization within a particular manuscript makes sense. Setting aside my personal preference for footnotes based on esthetic or functional reasons, the method of documentation one employs should be internally consistent and conform to generally accepted norms. Thus, authors are listed with given names first followed by family names in notes, usually only family names in parenthetical documentation, and family names first followed by given names in bibliographies, which customarily are alphabetized with the reader's utility in mind—the longer ones often broken into categories (e.g., books, articles, papers, documents, etc.) and some bibliographies annotated as well with descriptive commentary.

Coauthoring—First Draft by One Author Edited by Coauthor

Although single-authored work retains its privileged status in académe, team efforts are common in both government and business research. An approach to joint writing—the one my co-author and I have used more than 20 years of collaboration on several books—is quite simply to divide the labor between us along entries in the Table of Contents (whole chapters or parts of chapters). One of us does the first draft and in effect gets it off the ground! The other reads, edits, rewrites and adds or deletes words and sentences, paragraphs, and even pages as need be. Then it goes back to the original author who goes over it yet again—sometimes putting some deleted material back in or adding things that have come to mind since writing the first draft. Telephone conversations help resolve any differences.

Here is a first draft by one of us:[7]
In an age of increasing globalization, there is nothing more practical than good theory. Theory allows us to deal with complexity by focusing our attention on key global structures, processes, and trends, whether economic integration or the rising power of India and China. Theory provides us with concepts and perspectives that hold the promise of new insights on international relations and world politics, with explanation the ultimate objective. Divergent images and competing theories should not be viewed, therefore, as a matter of despair, but rather as an opportunity to view the world through multiple prisms or spectacles….

Here, then, is the coauthor's redraft, even adding another paragraph:

In an age of increasing globalization, there is nothing more practical than good theory. Theory allows us to deal with complexity by focusing our attention on human engagement throughout the world, key global structures, diverse state-and non-state actors, human activities and processes, and a long list of items on the world's agenda to include warfare and the spread of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism and intercommunal strife, various forms of human exploitation, the quest for expansion and observance of human rights, economic integration and global commerce, competition for scarce resources, environmental degradation, and the rising power of countries like India and China.
Theory provides us with concepts and perspectives that hold the promise of new insights on international relations and world politics, with better explanation or prediction the ultimate objective. We strive to make the world

and our part in it more intelligible. Coping with divergent images, interpretive understandings, and a large number of competing theories should not be viewed as a matter for despair, but rather as an opportunity to view the world and our place in it through multiple prisms or spectacles. We improve our understandings not only of the world out there, but also ourselves in relation to others around us….

Authors in joint projects customarily do not keep track of who has written what in this iterative, draft-and-redraft process. In the interest of continued teamwork it's good to regard these as truly collective projects. Ego need not get in the way of inter-subjective exchanges that improve manuscript quality in a geometric way—when working well, the product is always much greater than the sum of its author inputs!

"On August 22, 1789, President George Washington and Secretary of War Henry Knox presented the Senate with a series of questions relating to treaties with various Indian tribes. The Senate voted to refer these to a committee rather than debate the issue in the presence of the august president, who seemed to overawe many of the senators. Washington decided that, in the future, he would send to the Senate communications regarding treaties only in writing, setting the precedent that all of his successors have followed."
Source: www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/Treaties.htm, accessed 31 May 2008.

As the first presidency of the new constitutional republic, precedents set in Washington's administration were the bases of important norms that would become institutionalized with the passage of time.[8]

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[7] These drafts are the opening lines of a draft Preface to Paul R. Viotti and Mark V. Kauppi, *International Relations Theory*, 4th ed. (New York: Longman, 2009 forthcoming).

[8] For a discussion of treaty-related precedents from the Senate's perspective, go to www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/Treaties.htm. The account is also an interpretive understanding favorable to the Senate's role—that the President neither participates in nor observes Senatorial proceedings on treaties and the House of Representatives customarily votes to fund

For example, the Secretary of War Henry Knox accompanied President Washington to the Senate in August 1789 for an advisory treaties made with native-American tribes. Instead of conducting a debate in his presence, the matter was referred to committee. That was the last time Washington or any of the presidents who succeeded him appeared in person on treaty matters. Washington and all of his successors have met the constitutional requirement to seek the "advice and consent" of the Senate on the ratification of treaties by formal, written exchanges.

Afterword

This short essay is really a working document that I hope to draw from in teaching students about writing, perhaps giving part or all of it to some. I view it very much as a work in progress. What I present here is at least a distillation of the kinds of things I've told students when discussing how to write essays, term papers, theses, and dissertations. No doubt this paper will grow longer as I incorporate feedback and learn more myself about the process of writing. I've tried to strike a conversational tone here, reserving more formal, "field" language to statements of hypotheses or sample text.

Treaty obligations even though it has no part in the treaty ratification process.