



MY SCIENTIFIC WRITING COMPETENCY: A SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

Dear Writer:

This questionnaire invites you to reflect on your competency as a scientific writer. In this context, writers need to negotiate and ultimately master many different dimensions, conventions, and expectations.

The aim of this questionnaire is twofold: first, to make you aware of the demands placed on you in various contexts; second, to help you check, at the time you complete the questionnaire, how confident you feel in dealing with each demand. In this sense, there are no right or wrong answers. Rather, we want to encourage reflection and thereby support your development as a writer.

The questionnaire is extensive. Please do not let this put you off. It covers all of the demands described in SYSTEMATIK WISSENSCHAFTLICHES SCHREIBEN (SYSTEMIZATION SCIENTIFIC WRITING, Knorr 2023). You may focus on individual areas and only partially complete the questionnaire. The topics covered are as follows:

Dealing with the Writing Process	3
Reading	3
Dealing with Reading Results	4
Developing Ideas and Questions.....	5
Drafting your text.....	6
Genre	7
Citations and Reference.....	9
Creating your Argument	10
Use of Language	11
Media	13
AI and Writing	14
Organizing the Process	15
Final Reflection	16

Because this is a questionnaire focusing on scientific writing competency and individual components may change, you can fill out the questionnaire at different points in your writing career. You may then collect and compare the results and use them as a further addition to your writing portfolio.

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References:

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My Scientific Writing Competency

This is the questionnaire of:

Name:	
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Completed on:

Date:	
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Dealing with the Writing Process

A text does not magically appear out of nowhere. It takes time to write a text. You do not just write—you also read and interact with others. The more extensive and complex a text may be, the more demanding the text production process becomes. Therefore, we will guide you through the various sub-activities and aspects of academic and scientific writing with this questionnaire.

Reading

Scientific writing does not take place in isolation, without context; it is always based on the findings of others. But reading does much more in the writing process than simply provide references. We would therefore like to draw your attention to various functions of reading in this context.

This table addresses different reading processes.

	1 = Does not apply at all.	2	3	4	5	6	7 = Fully applies	No Answer
I feel confident when reviewing the literature.								
I know different strategies and techniques to read scientific texts (e.g. bird's eye view, skimming, SQ3R, reverse outlining).								
I use various techniques and strategies to read scientific texts.								
I select specific reading strategies to master the task at hand.								
I adapt my approach to the medium (printed or digital text).								
In addition to the content, I also notice how other writers communicate their ideas (choice of words, rhetorical devices, etc.).								
I enjoy reading scientific texts.								
I am happy with the way I read these texts.								
I am happy with my time management when reading.								

Space for further reflection



Dealing with Reading Results

One of the challenges of scientific reading is the sheer amount of information. As a rule, you will read many sources. Keeping track of these materials and the results of your reading so that you can use them later are additional challenges.

	1 = Does not apply at all.	2	3	4	5	6	7 = Fully applies	No Answer
I can keep track of the literature I have read or would like to read.								
I take specific notes and consider carefully what I write down.								
I can find texts and passages that I want to refer to when writing (such as quotations, paraphrases, or references).								
I am satisfied with the way I deal with the results of my reading.								

Space for further reflection

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**Developing Ideas and Questions**

The question of what and why you should actually write is at the beginning of every writing project and initiates a search that is part of scientific writing. For many writers, searching for your exact subject matter may be a lengthy process. You may not decide on your topic until shortly before the deadline. There is no one right way to arrive at a research question (and later a text). Any way is correct - as long as it feels natural to you. Use any technique that works for you.

You can also take the [Berlin Writing Type Test](#).

	1 = Does not apply at all	2	3	4	5	6	7 = Fully applies	No answer
I know strategies that support idea generation (freewriting, change of perspective, etc.)								
I know strategies for narrowing down a topic and developing a question (looped freewriting, clustering, mind mapping, conceptual conversation, etc.)								
I can find and commit to a research question at an early stage.								
Once I have decided on a question, I stick to it.								
I need a plan for my text very early on in the process.								
I need a polished concept or a detailed outline before writing.								
The best ideas come to me while I am still developing the topic.								
I like to keep my options for organizing my text open for as long as possible.								
It's easy for me to let go of an idea or a thought.								
I am satisfied with the way I develop questions.								

Room for further reflection

**Drafting your text**

Drafting the text is an essential part of text production. Many people associate these actions with the term “writing.” The fact, other actions are also part of the text production process, which will become clear in this next table.

The following statements about drafting texts should make your more aware of your writing so that you can develop your own approach.

	1 = Does not apply at all	2	3	4	5	6	7 = Fully applies	No answer
I know strategies for overcoming the “fear of the blank page.”								
I know strategies that allow me to keep writing when I am missing pieces of information or cannot find the right word (e.g. comments to myself, color coding, marginal comments...)								
I use knowledge bridging strategies to avoid interrupting the flow of writing.								
I know strategies for starting a writing session productively.								
I use writing techniques to get over “hang-ups” or when I feel stuck.								
I am pleased whenever I write a sentence that states exactly what I had in mind.								
At the end of a writing session, I take a few notes that continue writing right away at the beginning of the next session.								
I know which time of day I can work well.								
I know in which surroundings I can work well.								
I can structure my working day in such a way that I can actually work during productive phases.								
Working in the sense of drafting a text is fun!								

Room for further reflection

Many writers talk about these processes in a negative way. For example: “I find it difficult...,” “I can’t...,” “it takes me far too long...” and so on. How do you think/talk about your text production process? What do you find easy?



The following table refers to sections of a scientific text.

	1 = Does not apply at all	2	3	4	5	6	7 = Fully applies	No Answer
I know the function of the following texts or sections and how they relate to the rest of a scientific text. Please note: not every section is required in every text!								
Abstract								
Introduction								
Theory Section								
Methods section								
Main section								
Results								
Discussion								
Summary								
Conclusion								

Space for further reflection

Which text forms do you find easy to write, which are difficult? Which text forms are important in your context, and which are not? Do you see a connection between text forms that you write yourself and those that you read in an academic or scientific context?

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Citations and Reference

Scientific work and writing requires honest handling of the intellectual property of others. For example, you must identify and include references to all sources used to prepare your text. There are no clear rules as to what such identification should look like. Rather, different forms and conventions have developed in various disciplines. This includes reference and citation systems such as Harvard, MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.

	1 = Does not apply at all	2	3	4	5	6	7 = Fully applies	No Answer
I know the differences between the citation systems “footnote system (or German system),” “author-year system (or Harvard system),” and numbering system.								
I know how to cite with footnotes.								
I know how to cite with the author-year system.								
I know how to cite using the numbering system.								
I know how to quote verbatim.								
I can paraphrase, that is, restate using my own words the ideas of others.								
I can decide when a quotation or paraphrase is appropriate.								
I am aware of the different types of plagiarism.								
I know how to prevent unintentional plagiarism.								
I can insert quotations and paraphrases correctly into my text.								
I can create correct bibliographies.								
I feel comfortable using citations and paraphrasing.								

Space for further reflection

Note down any other thoughts that come to mind when you think of citations.



Creating your Argument

Every good scientific text has a line of argument that focuses on a topic and is characterized by a clear positioning by the author(s). This position and the way in which you support your argument with other authors' works add up to your "voice."

	1 = Does not apply at all	2	3	4	5	6	7 = Fully applies	No Answer
I can create a line of argumentation.								
I have an idea of what readers expect from my text.								
I can decide what information readers need and what they do not need.								
I adapt my text to readers' expectations (which I anticipate).								
I can use ideas from the literature (quotations, paraphrases, or references) to advance my argument.								
I can summarize complex debates.								
I can deal critically with arguments I find in scientific articles.								
I can make my voice "audible" in my text by setting my position apart from others.								
I can make my own position clear in my text.								

Space for further reflection

For more advanced writers: How would you describe your voice? How can readers recognize that a text is written by you? Which voices do you find appealing? What kind of voice would you like to have? What do you like about your voice?



Use of Language

Every text is written in at least one language. Even if several languages are used, one language must play the dominant role (at least at German universities). This is specified in examination regulations. Two languages are listed in this questionnaire, as these are commonly used at German-speaking universities.

Examination language: German

	1 = Does not apply at all	2	3	4	5	6	7 = Fully Applies	No Answer
I can generally express myself well in German (word choice).								
I feel confident using the required technical or subject-specific language in German.								
I feel confident using German grammar.								
I feel confident using German spelling.								
I feel confident using German punctuation.								
It is easy for me to write in a scientific style in German.								
I feel comfortable writing scientific texts in German.								

Space for further reflection

How comfortable do you feel with using German?

How do you feel about other languages that you (have to) use when producing texts? Which language(s) would you like to use more often? What for? Why?

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Examination language: English

	1 = Does not apply at all	2	3	4	5	6	7 = Fully applies	No Answer
I can generally express myself well in English (word choice).								
I feel confident using the required technical or subject-specific language in English.								
I feel confident using English grammar.								
I am familiar with the linguistic and stylistic expectations of readers of English-language texts. This includes, among other things, paragraphing.								
I know different varieties of English, such as American or British English.								
I feel confident using my preferred variety of English, for example in terms of spelling.								
I feel confident using English punctuation.								
It is easy for me to write in a scientific style in English.								
I feel comfortable writing scientific texts in English.								

Space for further reflection

How comfortable do you feel with using English?

How do you feel about other languages that you (have to) use when producing texts? Which language(s) would you like to use more often? For what? Why?

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Media

Scientific text production takes place in a digital environment: Various programs are used to create texts and to read and manage literature. When working with empirical data, special software for data collection, processing, and evaluation is often used as well. All of this requires media skills. In this self-assessment form, the questions are limited to the use of text processing and literature management. Use the space for further thoughts to reflect on other aspects of media use.

	1 = Does not apply at all	2	3	4	5	6	7 = Fully Applies	No Answer
I can type fluently on a keyboard.								
I can create directories (tables of contents, tables, or figures) automatically from my word processing program.								
I use the automation possibilities of my text processor.								
I enter bibliographical details of scientific articles in a reference management program (such as Zotero or Citavi).								
I can create bibliographies automatically.								
I can customize the citation style in my text according to my wishes.								
I feel confident in the use of tools, media (books, PDFs, notes, etc.) that I use for scientific work and writing.								
I am satisfied with my information management.								
I am satisfied with my media skills in the area of text processing and literature management.								

Space for further reflection

What feelings do you associate with your media use? What influence do these feelings have on your media use?

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AI and Writing

Since November 2022, AI-based tools such as ChatGPT have begun to change the way we write. This opens up new opportunities, but also brings risks for the development of your own writing competency. The following question are meant to encourage reflection on your writing in light of recent technological changes.

	1 = Does not apply at all	2	3	4	5	6	7 = Fully applies	No Answer
I use AI tools to generate ideas.								
I use AI tools to revise my texts.								
I use AI tools for translation.								
I can get AI tools to do what I want them to do.								
I am satisfied with the output generated by AI tools.								
I can check AI-generated output for correctness.								
AI tools are great additions to my toolkit as a writer.								
AI tools make writing easier.								
I tend to integrate AI-generated output directly in my text.								

Space for further reflection

What feelings do you have when it comes to the topic of AI? What influence do these feelings have on your attitude towards AI?



Organizing the Process

The text creation process can be lengthy, and writers face various challenges. How would you describe your process?

	1 = Does not apply at all	2	3	4	5	6	7 = Fully Applies	No Answer
I like the intellectual and emotional challenges that come with scientific writing.								
I like the intensive examination of myself and my habits while working on a writing project.								
I can work on several writing projects at the same time.								
I can integrate writing into my daily life.								
I use specific techniques or writing strategies to create a scientific text.								
I am satisfied with my time management.								
I am satisfied with my process organization, i.e., the way I arrive at a complete text.								

Space for further reflection

Visualize your ideal and your actual writing process. What do you notice? Describe the similarities and differences without judging them.



Final Reflection

The questionnaire has guided you through a wide range of topics. Please take some time for a final reflection and note down some key points.

What are your strengths as a writer?

Which topic would you like to know more about in order to develop further?

Where do you see your biggest challenges?

What kind of support would you like to receive? By whom?

When you look back: What do you wish you had known about scientific writing when you started your degree?

Further thoughts