Editorial

Supporting First-Time Authors: a Culture of Encouragement

Sofija Venckute
HawkVen Limited

Abstract
First-time academic writers often face challenges such as fear, perfectionism, and lack of confidence, which can hinder the expression of their authentic voice. This article explores how authenticity in vocational and practice-based writing is not only valuable but essential for producing credible, impactful research. While tools and academic conventions are designed to prevent bias and improve clarity, they can sometimes suppress individuality. To address this, the article offers practical guidance on using grammar, structure, and accountability tools that support, not stifle, original expression. It also discusses the role of mindset, resilience, and peer support in helping beginner writers grow their skills without compromising their voice. Finally, it outlines how the Journal of Vocational Research and Practice (JVRP) actively fosters a culture of encouragement, supporting writers through developmental feedback, mentorship, and inclusive practices. The goal is to empower new authors to publish confidently, authentically, and with academic integrity.

Keywords
Encouragement, writing process, vocational research, peer review, first-time authorship.

Introduction

First-time writers deal with a variety of challenges like fear, mental load, stress (Dunn, 2021), however, the benefits of published research span from increased visibility of a subject, growing credibility and even enhanced career options (Woszczynski and Whitman, 2016). This article discusses the importance of supporting first-time writers and tools that will not just encourage them, but will create an environment where the authentic voices of such individuals is supported.

Valuing authentic voices

The subject of authenticity in academic writing has been debated by many scholars, who have challenged both the benefits and downfalls of such phenomena, especially

in the light of AI (Allen, 2002; Yeo, 2023). However, it is important to establish that authenticity in academics is one of the most important tools that enables new perspectives, thought-provoking points of view and conclusion-challenging critical mindsets to challenge ideas and come to new research interpretations (Suchan, 2004; Badley, 2008). Therefore, beginner writers have a unique position where their authenticity, whether it is reflected in writing styles or ideas, makes their work stand out (Yeo, 2023; Lillis, 1997; MacKenzie, McShane and Wilcox, 2007; Badley, 2008).

Authentic voices often come not from the writing task itself but from the experiences that are reflected in one's work (Behizadeh, 2014). For instance, writing about subjects that are a point of curiosity to the author has proven to enhance their learning, critical thinking and reflect the writer with a higher sense of integrity (Ed.gov, 2021). The latter often arises from instances where the author identifies their viewpoints on the subject and uses critical thinking and research to challenge those ideas (International Journal of Education, 2023). Such writing not only produces unique results but also makes the author more credible (Lapum, et al., 2019).

Furthermore, in the context of vocational research, writing in one's own style, based on observations or personal experiences and contrasting them against academic findings, allows one to make conclusions that better reflect reality, present a tone of voice that is commonly used in practice, and bridge the gap between academics and practice (Villarroel et al., 2024; Biswas, 2024).

Finally, it is important to note that in many academic environments, authenticity can be discouraged due to already set writing styles and perception of what professional text should sound like (Sotiriadou, et al., 2020; Humanities LibreTexts, 2019). This viewpoint is not completely unjustified, as issues like bias can be common with beginner writers (Dreyer, 2023); therefore, in academic settings, first-time writers are provided with tools to help avoid such mistakes (Ebarvia, 2023). But these tools, as previously indicated, can also crush authenticity (Rathbun and Turner, 2012). This suggests that beginner writers have a great way to make their work more authentic, but a lack of experience exposes them to risks of bias, plagiarism and inconclusive writing, and the tools that help prevent that can also remove that authenticity. The following paragraphs will outline how different academic writing tools can support authenticity whilst encouraging critical thinking for beginner writers.

Practical tools for concrete support

Being a first-time writer has its challenges, like the aim for perfectionism, mental load and organisational challenges (Shah, Shah and Pietrobon, 2009; Merrell, et al., 2011). However, it is important to establish that being a beginner writer does not mean a beginner thinker, therefore, the adoption of useful tools that will help to overcome such challenges can be used to not just produce better outcomes, but also cater writer's development process (Karyuatry, 2018; Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2024). In academics, the aim for 'perfect' output has proven to be both a hindrance and a contributor to the academic development process (Madigan, 2019). What is important to establish is that learning a new skill, such as writing, can be achieved whilst keeping authenticity and avoiding obsessive perfectionism. Tables 1 and 2 outline what online tools and methods support better writing practices, whilst table 3 encourages authenticity and aid overall writing process.

Online tools

Table 1. Online tools for grammar and integrity.

Helps with	Tool	Reference
References check	Zotero	(Zotero, 2019)
Plagiarism	Grammarly Plagiarism Checker, Quetext	(Grammarly, 2019; Quetext, 2000)
Grammar	Grammarly, Hemingway Editor	(Grammarly, 2019; Hemingway Editor, n.d.)
Unethical AI use	Author declaration + transparency guidelines (e.g. Author's Guild advice)	(The Authors Guild, 2024)

Writing methods

Table 2. Structure methods.

Method	Helps with	References
Freewriting	Brainstorming, idea generation, reducing anxiety	(Li, 2007)
PEEL / PEE	Point, Evidence, Explanation, Link – paragraph structure	(Gibbons, 2019)
IMRaD	Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion – for research papers	(Sollaci and Pereira, 2004)
Gibbs' Reflective Cycle	Structuring practice-based reflections (e.g. for vocational accounts)	(Adeani, Febriani and Syafryadin, 2020)

Table 3. Voice and creativity support.

Approach	Supports	References
Reflective journaling	Developing personal voice and clarity of thought	(Hubbs and Brand, 2005)
Sentence stems/scaffolds	Building confidence in constructing arguments	(Lee, 2004)
Writing for real audiences	Enhancing authenticity and relevance (e.g., professional context)	(Johns, 1993)
Personal experience + literature	Encouraging originality while maintaining academic credibility	(Larsen and László, 1990)

Accountability and mindset

Finding your authentic voice, identifying the topics that are of interest to explore and utilising tools for effective and concrete research results is the beginning of a practice, which can feel isolating and daunting to sustain, especially for beginner writers (Davidoff, et al., 2001; Kaufman, 1998). However, it is important to note that feeling overwhelmed is part of the exercise, which can affect beginners more severely than experienced writers (Magee, 2012). However, with practice and mindset exercises,

this part of the process can not only be minimised, but also be a route to stronger mental toughness and discipline (Zimmerman and Kitsantas, 2007).

To overcome these psychological challenges, it is important to develop accountability, which can be achieved by cultivating relationships with peers and mentors who will check in on the writing progress (Grainger, 2007; Kaufman, 1998). Such reviews will also be a good introduction to the feedback process, which will allow for the development of resilience, composure and open-mindedness for the moments when feedback is provided by strangers (Isaac, M., 2020). Based on research, peer review is one of the more effective ways to improve writing skills (Geithner and Pollastro, 2016). It is useful, however, to use structure (example in table 4) in the review process to ensure the feedback is constructive (Hardavella, et al., 2017). Furthermore, the key to successful writing is not perfectionism, but the ability to develop and refine the text upon feedback without feeling judged. To achieve this, there are many useful tips and practices that allow to develop an open mind when receiving criticism, which include empathising, reflection on why a particular comment may have had a more significant impact, reminding oneself what is the reason for feedback and why it is important (Kang, 2024) (continued in table 4). With time, the more feedback is received, the easier it becomes to take it in and improve the writing accordingly (Jug, Jiang and Bean, 2019).

Table 4. Feedback and accountability.

Method	Helps with	Example
Peer review checklists	Clarity, structure, early bias/plagiarism spotting	(Parker, et al., 2018)
Draft, feedback, revise cycle	Learning through iteration, skill development	(Fernando, 2020)
Writing groups	Motivation, deadline accountability, collaborative feedback	(Wilmot and McKenna, 2018)
Mentorship/pair writing	Confidence, guidance from experienced peers or editors	(Monnier and Dalal, 2024)
Progress tracking tools	Staying on schedule (e.g., Trello, Google Calendar for milestones)	(Sturm, et al., 2012)
Exercises when preparing for feedback	Helps to keep an open mind when receiving feedback	(Kang, 2024)

Finally, as a beginner writer, to remain authentic, whilst developing writing skills can be challenging, but easier to achieve by surrounding yourself with supporting individuals and peers who encourage such a culture. Journals like JVRP foster authenticity, constructive feedback and open-mindedness when it comes to reviewers, making sure that first-time writers keep their unique points of view and writing styles whilst receiving support for enhanced writing practices.

How JVRP supports new authors

Valuing authentic voice requires an objective and open-minded view (Behizadeh, 2014), which is why JVRP nurtures the culture of development. This means that members of the editorial board are focused on encouraging a variety of writing styles,

and their feedback is focused on development of that authentic voice and making it louder, rather than boxing it into specific writing frames. Furthermore, the peer review process is strongly focused on encouragement, mentorship, long-term ambitions of the writer and not rejection of one's work. This is one of the core values of the journal which not only offers peer review and supportive writing workshops but also invites new writers to become active participants in building a community that encourages authenticity and writers' development.

Conclusion and recommendations

To conclude, first-time writers should utilise the tools that are available to ensure their research is credible, but utilise peers and their authentic voice to deliver strong messages about the subjects that matter to them the most. Finally, lean on JVRP to develop writing skills, build a community that supports new writers and encourages authentic voice.

Reference List

Adeani, I.S., Febriani, R.B. and Syafryadin, S., 2020. Using GIBBS'reflective cycle in making reflections of literary analysis. *Indonesian EFL Journal*, *6*(2), pp.139-148.

Allen, G., 2002. The "good-enough" teacher and the authentic student. *A pedagogy of becoming*, pp.141-176.

Badley, G., 2008. Developing (authentic?) academic writers. *Quality Assurance in Education*, *16*(4), pp.363-374.

Behizadeh, N., 2014. Xavier's take on authentic writing: Structuring choices for expression and impact. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *58*(4), pp.289-298.

Biswas, A., 2024. *The Journey to Authenticity in Academia - The PhD Place*. [online] The PhD Place. Available at: https://thephdplace.com/the-journey-to-authenticity-in-academia/ [Accessed 29 May 2025].

Davidoff, F., DeAngelis, C.D., Drazen, J.M., Hoey, J., Højgaard, L., Horton, R., Kotzin, S., Nicholls, M.G., Nylenna, M., John, A. and Overbeke, P.M., 2001. Sponsorship, authorship, and accountability. *The Lancet*, *358*(9285), pp.854-856.

Dreyer, V., 2023. *The Digital Influence on Beginning Writers: A Basic Qualitative Study* (Doctoral dissertation, American College of Education).

Dunn, M., 2021. The challenges of struggling writers: Strategies that can help. *Education Sciences*, *11*(12), p.795.

Ebarvia, T., 2023. *Get free: Antibias literacy instruction for stronger readers, writers, and thinkers*. Corwin Press.

Ed.gov., 2021. *Writing with Authenticity and Choice Are More Important Than Ever | IES*. [online] Available at: https://ies.ed.gov/learn/blog/writing-authenticity-and-choice-are-more-important-ever [Accessed 29 May 2025].

Fernando, I.H.S., 2020. Improving writing skills in english as a second language (ESL) through feedback, revising and multiple draft writing: an action research. *CINEC Academic Journal*, *4*.

Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, D., 2024. Academic writing and ChatGPT: Students transitioning into college in the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Discover Education*, *3*(1), p.6.

Geithner, C.A. and Pollastro, A.N., 2016. Doing peer review and receiving feedback: impact on scientific literacy and writing skills. *Advances in Physiology Education*, *40*(1), pp.38-46.

Gibbons, S., 2019. "Death by PEEL?" The teaching of writing in the secondary English classroom in England. *English in Education*, *53*(1), pp.36-45.

Grainger, D.W., 2007. Peer review as professional responsibility: A quality control system only as good as the participants. *Biomaterials*, *28*(34), pp.5199-5203.

Grammarly, 2019. *Plagiarism Checker by Grammarly*. [online] Grammarly.com. Available at: https://www.grammarly.com/plagiarism-checker.

Hardavella, G., Aamli-Gaagnat, A., Saad, N., Rousalova, I. and Sreter, K.B., 2017. How to give and receive feedback effectively. *Breathe*, *13*(4), pp.327-333.

Hubbs, D.L. and Brand, C.F., 2005. The paper mirror: Understanding reflective journaling. *Journal of Experiential Education*, *28*(1), pp.60-71.

International Journal of Education, Modern Management, Applied Science & Social Science (IJEMMASSS) 33 ISSN : 2581-9925, Impact Factor: 6.882, Volume 05, No. 04(I), October - December, 2023, pp. 33-38

Isaac, M., 2020. Peer Review and the writer: Teaching students agency. *Journal of teaching writing*, *35*(1), pp.1-20.

Johns, A.M., 1993. Written argumentation for real audiences: Suggestions for teacher research and classroom practice. *TESOL quarterly*, *27*(1), pp.75-90.

Jug, R., Jiang, X.S. and Bean, S.M., 2019. Giving and receiving effective feedback: A review article and how-to guide. *Archives of pathology & laboratory medicine*, *143*(2), pp.244-250.

https://hemingwayapp.com/Kang, M., 2024. Council Post: The Art Of Giving And Receiving Feedback. Forbes. [online] 12 Aug. Available at: https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbescoachescouncil/2020/05/05/the-art-of-giving-and-receiving-feedback/ [Accessed 29 May 2025].

Karyuatry, L., 2018. Grammarly as a tool to improve students' writing quality: Free online-proofreader across the boundaries. *JSSH (Jurnal Sains Sosial dan Humaniora)*, *2*(1), pp.83-89.

Kaufman, J.L., 1998. Authors vs contributors: accuracy, accountability, and responsibility. *JAMA*, *279*(5), pp.356-357.

Lapum, J., St-Amant, O., Hughes, M., Tan, A., Bogdan, A., Dimaranan, F., Frantzke, R. and Savicevic, N., 2019. Originality in writing. *pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca*. [online] Available at: https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/scholarlywriting/chapter/originality-in-writing/ [Accessed 29 May 2025].

Larsen, S.F. and László, J., 1990. Cultural–historical knowledge and personal experience in appreciation of literature. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *20*(5), pp.425-440.

Lee, K.S., 2004. *Effects of individual versus online collaborative case study learning strategies on critical thinking of undergraduate students*. The University of Texas at Austin.

Li, L.Y., 2007. Exploring the use of focused freewriting in developing academic writing. *Journal of University teaching and learning practice*, *4*(1), pp.40-53.

Lillis, T., 1997. New voices in academia? The regulative nature of academic writing conventions. *Language and Education*, *11*(3), pp.182-199.

Long, A. and Long, B., 2013. *Hemingway Editor*. [online] hemingwayapp.com. Available at: https://hemingwayapp.com/ [Accessed 29 May 2025].

MacKenzie, H., McShane, K. and Wilcox, S., 2007. Challenging performative fabrication: Seeking authenticity in academic development practice. *International Journal for Academic Development*, *12*(1), pp.45-54.

Madigan, D.J., 2019. A meta-analysis of perfectionism and academic achievement. *Educational Psychology Review*, *31*, pp.967-989.

Magee, P., 2012. Introduction. Part 1: beyond accountability?. *Text*, *16*(Special 14), pp.1-19.

Merrell, R.S., Hannah, D.J., Van Arsdale, A.C., Buman, M.P. and Rice, K.G., 2011. Emergent themes in the writing of perfectionists: A qualitative study. *Psychotherapy Research*, *21*(5), pp.510-524.

Monnier, R. and Dalal, H., 2024. Peer Mentoring in Academic Librarianship: Service and Connections can Lead to Improved Scholarly Output. *Endnotes: The Journal of the New Members Round Table*, *12*(1), pp.37-46.

Parker, T.H., Griffith, S.C., Bronstein, J.L., Fidler, F., Foster, S., Fraser, H., Forstmeier, W., Gurevitch, J., Koricheva, J., Seppelt, R. and Tingley, M.W., 2018. Empowering peer reviewers with a checklist to improve transparency. *Nature ecology & evolution*, *2*(6), pp.929-935.

Quetext.com, 2000. *Plagiarism Checker | Quetext*. [online] Quetext.com. Available at: https://www.quetext.com/ [Accessed 29 May 2025].

Rathbun, G. and Turner, N., 2012. Authenticity in academic development: The myth of neutrality. *International Journal for Academic Development*, *17*(3), pp.231-242.

Shah, J., Shah, A. and Pietrobon, R., 2009. Scientific writing of novice researchers: what difficulties and encouragements do they encounter?. *Academic Medicine*, *84*(4), pp.511-516.

Sollaci, L.B. and Pereira, M.G., 2004. The introduction, methods, results, and discussion (IMRAD) structure: a fifty-year survey. *Journal of the medical library association*, *92*(3), p.364.

Sotiriadou, P., Logan, D., Daly, A. and Guest, R., 2020. The role of authentic assessment to preserve academic integrity and promote skill development and employability. *Studies in Higher Education*, *45*(11), pp.2132-2148.

Suchan, J., 2004. Writing, authenticity, and knowledge creation: why I write and you should too. *The Journal of Business Communication (1973)*, *41*(3), pp.302-315.

The Authors Guild, 2024. *AI Best Practices for Authors*. [online] Available at: https://authorsguild.org/resource/ai-best-practices-for-authors/ [Accessed 29 May 2025].

Villarroel, V., Melipillán, R., Santana, J. and Aguirre, D., 2024. How authentic are assessments in vocational education? An analysis from Chilean teachers, students, and examinations. *Frontiers in education*, 9. doi:https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1308688.

Wilmot, K. and McKenna, S., 2018. Writing groups as transformative spaces. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *37*(4), pp.868-882.

Woszczynski, A.B. and Whitman, M.E., 2016. Perspectives on open access opportunities for IS research publication: potential benefits for researchers, educators, and students. *Journal of Information Systems Education*, *27*(4), pp.259-276.

Yeo, M.A., 2023. Academic integrity in the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI) authoring apps. *Tesol Journal*, *14*(3), p.e716.

Zimmerman, B.J. and Kitsantas, A., 2007. A writer's discipline: The development of self-regulatory skill. *Studies in writing*, *19*, p.51.

Zotero, 2019. *Zotero | Your Personal Research Assistant*. [online] Zotero.org. Available at: https://www.zotero.org/ [Accessed 29 May 2025].