

Writing to Learn, Writing for Publication, and Teacher Training: A Commented Interview with Dana L. Driscoll

Alena Kašpárková and Dana L. Driscoll

Abstract: In line with the efforts to boost the discourse on teaching academic writing and writing for publication, the report brings information on the cooperation with Dr. Dana L. Driscoll from Indiana University of Pennsylvania and VŠB-Technical University of Ostrava (VŠB-TUO). Dr. Driscoll has cooperated with VŠB-TUO for the past 4 years on teaching writing for publication, teacher training, and evaluation of the PhD Academy (Doctoral School). The report also offers highlights from an interview with Dr. Driscoll of September 9, 2022, made during her stay at VŠB-TUO.

Key words: writing to learn; writing for publication; writing centre; written assignments; teacher training

Alena Kašpárková from VŠB-Technical University of Ostrava (VŠB-TUO) and Dana L. Driscoll from Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) have worked together for the past 4 years on a number of projects, and this year it was finally possible for Dana to come in person to the Czech Republic. VŠB-TUO hosted Dana between September 5 and 9, 2022. During her stay she gave a series of workshops to PhD candidates and faculty on teaching writing and writing for publication, and a keynote at the InfoDay for the PhD Academy (Doctoral School).



Dr. Dana Lynn Driscoll is a Professor of English and the Director of the Jones White Writing Center at Indiana University of Pennsylvania in the United States. She teaches writing for publication, research methods, teaching writing, and learning development in the Doctoral Program in Composition and Applied Linguistics at IUP and also offers extensive undergraduate and graduate-level writing support to students across the disciplines at the IUP Writing Center. She has offered numerous keynotes and workshops globally and has published over 35 articles on learning theory, teaching writing, writing development, writing centers, writing for publication, and writing expertise. She currently co-edits the open-source textbook series *Writing Spaces* (reaching millions of students each year) and, while at Purdue Uni-

versity, she ran the world-famous Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL), one of the largest and oldest writing-related web resources in the world.

VŠB-TUO invited Dana based on her expertise and the fact she has been studying and supporting writing in the context of learning transfer. For the past 3 years, VŠB-TUO has offered a two-semester course Writing for Publication to PhD candidates. To train teachers for this course, Alena Kašpárková from VŠB-TUO, Kamila Etchegoyen Rosolová from the Czech Language Institute with the Czech Academy of Sciences, and Dana L. Driscoll from IUP have designed and run a course called **Writing for Publication: Teacher Training**. However, at VŠB-TUO we believe that besides supporting writing for publication during graduate studies, it is crucial to support academic writing during undergraduate studies. Therefore, during her stay, we asked Dana to primarily focus on strategies to support the teaching of academic writing.

The week began with a three-day **Writing to Learn** workshop where Dana L. Driscoll taught undergraduate faculty (i.e. academic staff who teach undergraduate students) in technical disciplines why teaching writing matters, key aspects of understanding writing and learning to write, best practices for assignment design and assessment, and how to effectively support writers' processes through feedback and revision. The scaffolded workshops were highly interactive, and the faculty had the chance to discuss the material, reflect on their own teaching, and create course materials that they could directly use in their classrooms. The following one-day workshop **Writing for Publication** offered key strategies for successful writing for publication. As faculty and doctoral candidates routinely struggle with finding time to write and making progress on writing for publication, the workshop offered research-supported strategies for writing for publication, including exploring barriers to writing productivity and how to overcome these barriers. The attendees explored successful models for writing success including scheduling writing time, goal setting, writing groups, fostering positive dispositions, writing and revision strategies, and addressing setbacks and failure. Through this workshop, the attendees developed a writing plan for a project they were currently working on. Finally, the keynote **"Writing Your Way into Your Discipline: How Learning to Write Creates Expertise"** at PhD Academy InfoDay (<https://www.vsb.cz/veda/en/news-detail/?reportId=44137&linkBack=%2Fveda%2Fen%2Findex.html>) articulated the importance of writing to scientific disciplines and demonstrated why writing expertise was closely linked to becoming an expert in one's discipline and supported professional identity formation.

Alena Kašpárková (in the interview referred to as AK) interviewed Dana L. Driscoll (in the interview referred to as DD) about her expertise, her research, the need to support the teaching of communication and writing in higher education, and her

short experience in the Czech Republic. This text offers the highlights related to the workshops from a much longer interview, a short version of which in Czech was published at Vědavýzkum.cz.

Writing to Learn

AK: "Let's start with a general question. Why is it important to teach and support writing even at a technical university?"

DD: "I would argue it's more important to support and teach writing there, perhaps even more than in some other places. I think there's a lot of reasons for this. I think the first is social, in the sense that one of the problems that we have seen in increasing amounts in the last 10 or 15 years is that scientists and those working in technical fields have an inability to communicate with the general public. We have a great distrust of science. I think that this is happening throughout the western world, which makes it more difficult for us to address real social problems, like global pandemics or climate change, major issues that we are experiencing. So, the people who are moving into technical fields in the future, our current students, really **need to learn how to communicate** with their fellow citizens, with the world around them. Because the failure to do so means that it doesn't matter how much good knowledge we have within a field, that knowledge is not necessarily being used to solve social problems, because we have so many. I think that's really important. The second reason is that in an increasingly global workplace learning how to communicate effectively is about how you are becoming a functional professional. That's part of how we accomplish our goals as professionals. We also know from global data. If you can point to one thing that employers say that graduating students need more of, it's **communication skills**, it's reading, it's writing, it's public speaking and these skills aren't always emphasized. And yet, this is what we know people lack when they get into the job market. I think for these reasons it's really important for students to learn how to write effectively and really invest the time and doing it well."

AK: "The teaching of writing is far ahead in the US when compared to other countries. What are the most important lessons to learn, either in academic writing or writing for publication?"

DD: "I'm going to take these questions separately. I think that the reason that teaching writing is far ahead in the US is that we've had a lot of PhD programs and a lot of research being done. We have a set of best practices that are research-supported, which is really a lot of what I was presenting here. In terms of academic writing, especially for thinking about **academic writing** at the undergraduate level and for multilingual writers, so people who are writing in multiple languages, people who are writing in English whose first language is not English,

I think it's really important that they recognize that writing is more than just punctuation and grammar. We have a tendency to pay attention to those things and those things are really important. They impact how others view you. They impact what we would call your credibility as a writer, but we consider those to be sort of what you work on at the end of your project. So, when we start to think about writing project, the things that are really important are what is your **purpose** for writing, what are you trying to get/accomplish, who is the **audience** for your writing, or the **expectations** that the audience has for you. Do they expect you to use technical language? Are they the general public? Maybe, they don't have a technical background. What are the length requirements? What is the genre? What are the features or the expectations of that genre? Should you use really long sentences, or really short sentences? What is the organizational structure? What is the context in which you're writing? Are you writing this in the class, are you writing this as a professional trying to win a bid, as an engineering firm, are you writing a letter to your local representative? You really need to think about the situation. This is called the **rhetorical situation**, the situation in which you write and from there you figure out what you want to write. Eventually, you work on the polishing of the language."

AK: "You were giving a series of workshops on Writing to Learn. Can you explain the issues behind this notion?"

DD: "**Writing to Learn** is a concept that has been very well documented, and well researched in the field of writing studies. Writing to Learn basically means that when you sit down to write and I'm talking about writing an article or a grant or an undergraduate research paper (something that requires engagement), you think you know what you're doing and then you sit down to write and then you realize how much you have to learn. We have 60–70 years of research demonstrating this. This is one of the most enduring concepts in our field. We recognize that when you sit down to write, you actually learn through the process of doing it. It **deepens your understanding**; it shows you the things you don't yet know. It's much harder to write something out to communicate it than it is just to think about it. So, it is essentially through the act of writing, it's part of how we build human knowledge. It's an incredibly powerful tool for doing that. In our workshop series, where we were working with various faculty to learn how to teach writing, that was one of the three focuses that we talked about. The other two were writing to **build a professional expertise**, understand disciplinary methods, where many writing processes, like writing a research article or a lab report, also teach you the ways of thinking in a discipline. And, the third piece we talked about in that workshop was that writing helps our students **develop a sense of professional identity**, ethics and can really help them address what we call "wicked problems" or really difficult problems to solve."

Writing for Publication

AK: *“This was academic writing. Is there any difference with Writing for Publication?”*

DD: “As for **Writing for Publication**, I think that everything I just said applies for writing for publication but there are some key challenges that particularly new faculty that are new to writing for publication and graduate students face that are not necessarily present in general academic writing, particularly figuring out how to build a relationship between yourself and the specific study that you’re doing and the body of previous knowledge. Not only how to do that, but why to do that is really important. I think that that’s something that people don’t get. They sort of have a very narrow view of “I need to write this article”, here is the study that I’ve done, but really journal reviewers and practitioners in the field, they want to see how this work fits with this broader body of knowledge that we are all co-creating. I would say that is a perpetual real difficult thing to do that requires a lot of skill and attention. It also requires a lot of revision. I think the other major thing that is really different about writing for publication is again going to this idea that we’re building human knowledge. What are the major contributions of the study? So, what are the implications? How do they build our professional practice? How do they build our knowledge?”

And, the final thing I’ll say about academic writing and writing for publication and writing in general is the **value of revision**. A lot of us, and you know we’re all guilty of this when you’re younger in school, you just want to write this, get this done. So, you write your assignment as fast as you can, turn it in, and that’s that. The thing is a lot of the deep learning, thinking, and the professionalizing happens when you take the time to revise. Rather than just writing something at the last minute and turning it in, it is about creating a process of writing for yourself that includes time for revision, which is anything from getting feedback on it to stepping away for a few days and coming back later to just sort of really reading it carefully and rethinking. Revising your work on a larger level is another part and that to a real extent is the difference between somebody who is maybe a very successful writer and one that isn’t.”

AK: *“Writing is not only about writing but there are many skills hidden under this umbrella.”*

DD: “Yeah, this is actually something we talked a lot about in the workshops this week and the **Writing for Publication workshop**. Half of the workshop was dedicated to how to write for publication and all of the elements of it, and half of the workshop was dedicated to how to be a good writer, which included things like developing a strong sense of project management, time management, goal setting. So, there’s a whole set of skills when you learn how to write and you

learn how to manage your time, you're learning how to be a professional, setting goals for yourself, meeting those goals, managing your time, understanding how to communicate with others. These are basic one-on-one skills of a professional workplace and those are all related. When you learn to write, you are learning a whole set of skills, in addition to writing."

AK: "And, also there is a dimension of journals and communicating with the reviewers, editors and the field."

DD: "This goes back to revision. The work is not complete until it's published. This idea that we send out an article for publication and we are going to receive oftentimes a great deal of feedback is difficult and challenging. This really asks us to question our basic assumptions that we went into the study with, and the need to engage in a very serious and structured revision process so that we can address this feedback, so that we can improve that writing and the thinking behind that writing is really important. And, again that's the difference between somebody who's successful or not."

AK: "How were the participants responding to the ideas?"

DD: "We had two different groups of participants. The faculty that took part in the three-day workshop at the beginning of the week, I think they responded really positively. Many of them created assignments. The whole goal was that they could create an assignment for one of their classes, and not just the assignment. They would understand how to integrate this assignment, how to teach it, the different homework assignments or activities that would help students prepare to write it, and then students would write that assignment. We also talked about how to provide feedback and assessment in the three days. It was about the entirety of start to finish with the assignment. I expect that they'll be many new writing assignments on campus, which will greatly benefit students.

In the Writing for Publication workshop we had a mixed group of graduate students and faculty. I also think that was very well received. In part because I think everyone expected to have the second-half of the workshop which was about how they write for publication, what are the strategies, but we also did a lot with how do I become a professional writer? How do I cultivate a writing practice so that I can continue to be productive and prolific? How can I work on not just one publication, but a series of publications? And how can I build this into who I am as a scholar or as a graduate student? I think that kind of time management and project management are particularly useful. There's a lot of good research on it, but a lot of that just doesn't end up being discussed. We talked about writing for publication and people think of it as how do I write an article, not how do I set the conditions up for myself so that I am the best at writing this article."

AK: *"I can say the ideas really resonated with the participants. I could hear that they were feeling motivated to think more about goal setting and time management."*

Workshop participants not only from VŠB-TUO and the Czech Language Institute with the Czech Academy of Sciences found the workshops highly useful. For more details, see workshop participants' feedback at <https://www.vsb.cz/veda/cs/detail-novinky/?reportId=44298&linkBack=%2Fveda%2Fcs%2Findex.html>.

Writing for Publication: Teacher training

AK: *"In cooperation with our university and the Czech Language Institute, we have designed a Writing for Publication: Teacher Training. In what way is this course unique?"*

DD: *"Getting back to how doctoral education works, and not just here in Czech, I mean globally, most people who get a PhD are heavily immersed in the content of their discipline. But a person with a PhD that's moving into being a faculty member may never have had a course on how to teach anything, much less teach writing, which is a really specialized thing. I know this because I talk to them every day. They find themselves at a loss as to: How do I supervise dissertations? How do I help my students navigate this very complex landscape of publication? Even if they themselves are very successful at publication, a lot of what they have done is internalized. They've essentially done it like most of us through trial and error. You just make enough mistakes, you get enough rejections that you figure out what not to do and then you learn how to do it. But it doesn't mean that you're prepared to teach students how to do that. And, there's actually a lot of good research and good information on pedagogy about how to effectively teach students. So, for example, something like feedback practices. You can provide feedback that really helps a student along or you can provide feedback that shuts them down. It's not even what you say, it's how you say it. There's a lot of information in that course that a graduate faculty member would not have access to because I almost guarantee that they did not have this as part of their training. We see this course as a way to supplement and extend the work that they're already doing and provide them with a large set of new tools for them to be more effective, for them to be more efficient with their time, and for them to help their students better. I think it's a really wonderful offering. I think it's really unique and I'm really, really happy to have been able to work on that and continue to offer it."*

For more information about the Writing for Publication: Teacher Training see the course description at <http://cap.avcr.cz/en/academic-writing-course/teacher-training-en/>.

In conclusion, VŠB-TUO and Dr. Driscoll have agreed to take their cooperation further each year. All the workshop attendees are looking forward to Dana

L. Driscoll's next stay in 2023 and her forthcoming articles and book on writing for publication.

Authors

Dr. Dana Lynn Driscoll is a Professor of English and the Director of the Jones White Writing Center at Indiana University of Pennsylvania in the United States. She teaches writing for publication, research methods, teaching writing, and learning development in the Doctoral Program in Composition and Applied Linguistics at IUP and also offers extensive undergraduate and graduate-level writing support to students across the disciplines at the IUP Writing Center. She has offered numerous keynotes and workshops globally and has published over 35 articles on learning theory, teaching writing, writing development, writing centers, writing for publication, and writing expertise. She currently is co-editor of the open-source textbook series *Writing Spaces* (reaching millions of students each year) and, while at Purdue University, she also ran the world-famous Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL), one of the largest and oldest writing-related web resources in the world.

Alena Kašpárková, Ph.D., e-mail: alena.kasarkova@vsb.cz, works at VSB-Technical University of Ostrava, Czech Republic. Educated in language teaching, coaching, environmental science, and academic writing development (Coventry University, UK), she supports undergraduate and graduate students as well as her fellow academics in academic writing, writing for publication, and writing beyond university. She teaches academic writing to undergraduate students, and participates in a multidisciplinary research project developing the Czech Academic Phrasebank. In 2021 she co-organized the 11th Conference of the European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing (EATAW). Since 2019 Alena has served on EATAW board and since January 2022 as the editor of *Journal of Academic Writing*. As for writing for publication, Alena has contributed to the development and taught Writing for Publication courses and Writing for Publication: Teacher Training course. Concerning writing beyond university, she aims to prepare graduates better for writing in general, and her research focuses on early alumni's success and the strategies they apply when writing at the workplace. She was involved in the 2019–2021 research seminar on Writing Beyond the University: Fostering Writers' Lifelong Learning and Agency with Elon University, USA.