

Detailed outline of the tasks undertaken during AcWriMo at Maynooth University Library

Week 1

Task 1 Writing to Prompt

Write 100 words, in sentences not bullets, about why you are participating in this writing programme. Be as specific as possible.

Five minutes was allocated to this task. Most participants in AcWriMo had some idea of what they wanted to achieve. Some didn't adhere to the word count, which is a discipline in itself. People read out their response and discussion followed.

Task 2 Audience & Purpose

Participants were given five minutes to do the following task:

Finish the following two sentences, using no more than 10 additional words

The purpose of my blog post/article is to...

The audience for my blog post/article is ...

Again, people shared their responses and there was lively discussion.

Task 3 Title

Participants were asked to consider what in their title would make a reader want to read further and were given four minutes to complete the following task.

Develop a working title for your piece of writing with a maximum of 12 words.

A discussion of titles followed, and this brought the one-hour session to a close. People were assigned tasks four and five to complete within five days and e-mail to me. As the month progressed people began to share with the full group. By the second iteration of the programme we had a folder in Teams and people shared their work there. Feedback from myself and other participants went directly to the writer by e-mail, not into the Teams folder.

Task 4 Keywords

What words would you use to retrieve your article in a literature search?

Assign three keywords to your piece of writing.

Task 5 Abstract

Write an abstract of no more than 150 words for your article.

The following guidelines were given and a sample abstract provided.

An abstract details the essence of an article. The discipline of writing an abstract, even if it is not required, as is the case in a blog post, is useful. It will help you focus on what you are going to write. This will change between the start and finish of writing. If you find you are moving away from the abstract completely, you need to consider if you are losing focus. You will rewrite your abstract, but you shouldn't be rewriting it every time you sit down to write.

People had five days to complete these two tasks. As facilitator, I read and gave feedback outside the session and people volunteered to read their work in the session and received verbal feedback from colleagues.

I then asked the group to consider the following question for our next meeting.

What evidence/data/information do you have that you can draw on in your piece of writing?

Week 2

Following a brief discussion of the above question, we moved on to outlining/structuring. By this point one of the seven had left the group.

The following guidelines were given.

Having an outline or structure, makes the task of sitting down to writing less daunting. It's easier to sit down to write a 150-word section, than to think about sitting down to write 1,000 words. Working from an outline will help you decide what you put in and what you leave out. What you leave out is as important as what you put in.

While this preparatory work takes time, it will be of benefit in the long run as noted by Aby Day:

The reason many aspiring authors fail is that they throw themselves immediately into the activity of writing without realizing it is the forethought, analysis and preparation that determine the quality of the finished product. Day. P.9ⁱ

Some sample outlines were suggested.

Who, What, When, Where, How, Why

What Happened? What was my role in it? What was the outcome?

Introduction, Context/Background, Description, Evaluation/Reflection, Conclusion

Introduction, Context/Background, Case Study (what happened) Outcome/Results/ List of Resources

Top Ten Tips – Introduction followed by each tip followed by brief conclusion

People completed three tasks (numbers 6, 7 and 8) during our meeting. This was followed by brief discussion.

Task 6

Draw up an outline for your piece of writing.

Have at least five sections.

Under each section heading, write a sentence beginning with

This section will cover...

The sentence should be no longer than 16 words in total.

This was followed by a brief discussion, then people completed tasks 7 and 8.

Task 7

Work out approximate word count for each section of your piece

We then went on to the actual writing of a section of the piece.

Task 8

Draft a section of your post/article

The basic guidelines below were given.

All writing is rewriting. Give yourself permission to write badly. Good writing is bad writing ferociously revised. Trying to polish too early may hamper the ideas phase during the early drafts when you are chopping and changing and just trying to get ideas down on paper or a computer.

People were asked to complete the next task (Task 9) within five days and to circulate to the group. This was to write approximately 500 words of their article, without stopping to edit. Feedback went to the individual, rather than the group as a whole.

Task 9

Write approximately 500 words of your article. Don't stop to edit, focus on getting 500 words written.

Week 3

By week 3, a second person had left the group, which now numbered five.

Task 10

Continue writing your piece for 20 minutes.

The session opened with time to write (Task 10). This was to illustrate that it is possible to advance a piece of writing in a short time period. Afterwards the concept of snack and sandwich writing, suggested by Professor Rowena Murray was discussed. A snack is when you have about fifteen to thirty minutes, beyond that is the sandwich.ⁱⁱ

People, in twos, were asked to exchange drafts. They had ten minutes to read and ten minutes to answer the following questions and share their responses with their writing partner, through Task 11 which focused on giving and receiving feedback.

Task 11

Giving and receiving feedback

What do you like about this piece?

Are there any sections where you are confused/need greater clarity?

What would you like to see more of, taking into account word count restrictions?

Participants were assigned Task 12 to complete within five days. This was to complete a first draft of their piece and share with the group within five days.

Task 12

Continue writing and try to complete the first draft of your piece and circulate/place in the Teams folder within five days.

Week 4

At this point, participants had 1,000 words or more of their post written. They individually carried out the following editing exercise (Task 13), then shared their responses.

Task 13

Editing

The group was given time to do two short editing exercises, based on the drafts people had written. Following that, the editing process was discussed.

Editing exercise 1

There are 54 words in this sentence – make it two sentences and reduce the number of words overall.

While the entrants to the school poetry competition were transition year and beyond, it was decided that rather than participating in the poetry evening, we would create a podcast where student poets were interviewed and shared their thoughts on Ken Saro-Wiwa, the competition, and what topics are most important for them and their work.

Editing exercise 2

There are 76 words in the piece below. Restructure it as two sentences and reduce the number of words overall.

It's easy at the end of the day or week to just sit down and not want to talk to anyone but by sending that quick text or making that quick call, you are not just connecting with your family and friends but you are reminding them that you are there if they need you and if you need them and there is nothing better than a good giggle with the people who know you best.

The following general guidelines on editing were given.

Read aloud to get a sense of the sound of your narrative/story. Good writing is the result of good editing.

Make every word count. Are there superfluous words in any of your sentences?

How does each sentence move the story along?

Above are the tasks carried out in AcWriMo. The final task was to give feedback. The detailed feedback is available at

ⁱ Abby Day, *How to Get Research Published in Journals* (2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2016)

ⁱⁱ Rowena Murray, *Writing for Academic Journals* (4th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020)