

How Writing Faculty Write: Strategies for Process, Product, and Productivity, by Christine E. Tulley. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2018. 190 pp.

Reviewed by Emily Carson, Villanova University

In *How Writing Faculty Write: Strategies for Process, Product, and Productivity*, Christine E. Tulley details the successful writing habits of some of the most prolific academic writers. Adopting the interview format of *The Paris Review's* "Writers at Work" series, which explored how fiction writers "find ideas, struggle with writer's block, approach revision, and navigate publication venues" (ix), Tulley turns our attention to a group uniquely qualified to recount the behind-the-scenes work of faculty writers: fifteen of the most renowned rhetoric and composition studies scholars, that is, teachers of writing and top producers of writing scholarship.

Tulley's collection responds to recent attention to the distinct demands of faculty writing by those in areas like faculty development, research administration, and composition studies. Robert Boice has noted that faculty need "creative ways of moving past blocking-related feelings that they are overscheduled and too busy to complete enough writing/publication for tenure" (vii). Peter Elbow and Mary Deane Sorcinelli addressed this need through the "Writing for Professors" program they created at the University of Massachusetts–Amherst. Promoting the benefits of bringing faculty together to write in "The Faculty Writing Space: A Room of Our Own," they model the side-by-side writing their program encouraged by writing side-by-side columns to reflect individually on their experiences with faculty. For his part, Elbow suggests that lack of productivity comes from professors seeing themselves primarily as researchers and thinkers instead of writers; he recommends that faculty devote more time putting pen to paper to develop a writerly "trust" of language (19).

Tulley's book foregrounds promising insights to be gleaned from composition faculty, for whom "engaging in writing is essential to be[ing] an effective writing teacher" (4), for whom "the process of writing itself is intellectually satisfying and engaging" (5), and who, therefore, more than most, perhaps, understand "the writing that is the academic currency of most tenure-track and tenured positions" (4). The attitudes teased out through Tulley's interviews differ, thus, from "general faculty development efforts which tend to focus on productivity and don't always work" (6), usually landing on a set of trite writing guidelines: schedule regular writing time, set measurable goals, and establish a system for feedback and accountability. Indeed, many faculty reach the end of a busy academic year or open summer having been committed to such advice, but not having met their goals. This challenge became clear to me

in my role assisting faculty with their writing. A junior faculty member had crafted his first-ever book proposal during a two-day writing retreat and then met with me. We worked to reorganize his draft, clarify genre conventions, differentiate book from dissertation, and pinpoint his market. As I prepared to leave his office, he considered his revision task, leaned in, and confessed, “I hear you and I get it. But *how?*”

With her introduction and conclusion, Tulley charts out patterns among the interviewees that effectively address this faculty member’s formidable *how*: “how different attempts at carving up writing times into specific segments of the day . . . help writing faculty make forward progress” (28), how to return to writing after an interruption so that “no time is wasted figuring out how to start again” (25), and “how publishing writing faculty are moving from a draft to a publishable final product” (27).

Academics will recognize the challenges these writers depict: the practical writing tasks that actually fill their days, from emails and administrative reports to letters of recommendation, dissertation reviews, and editing tasks, such as are described by Malea Powell, Kathleen Yancey and Duane Roen; the fifteen years it took Jacqueline Royster to complete her “soul” project; the “slogging” that Cynthia Selfe describes; and the “slowness” of Jessica Enoch’s writing. Such is the reality of the group’s pursuit of well-crafted and accessible writing, as Thomas Rickert, Joseph Harris, Melanie Yergeau, Dànielle DeVoss, Royster, and Yancey discuss. These writers also accept the difficulty of drafting. Tulley’s conversations with Yancey, Chris Anson, and Howard Tinberg about composing their addresses to the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) reflect not only the “rock star” group Tulley has enlisted for interviews (the majority of other interviewees have also chaired the CCCC), but also the recursive nature involved in striving for such well-crafted writing, even for these accomplished scholars. Harris and Anson give detailed descriptions of their revision techniques.

As senior faculty mostly at research institutions, these writers tackle multiple projects at once. The grids that Anson creates to track varied projects to completion correspond to Royster’s color-coded folder system, Jonathan Alexander’s “to do” document, and Rickert’s “academic triage,” where some projects “die out” in the face of more promising work. In fact, Enoch, Yergeau, Powell, Anson, Alexander, Selfe, and Cheryl Glenn describe being tugged toward other types of projects, such as novels, for example. To explain their productivity, Roen emphasizes good work habits and discipline, while Harris valorizes time for ideas to gestate, and Royster relies on “quick focus.” To get started, Kristine Blair writes grants, Anson does “semi-drafting,” and DeVoss sits right down at the exact moment an idea is proposed at a conference to chart out the project.

Many (Glenn, Alexander, Harris, Blair, Powell, and Rickert) speak thoughtfully about the privilege and responsibility of their status within the field. Harris and Tinberg describe the evolution of their attitudes about student work; they consider the ethics of incorporating student voices into research and teaching. Rickert, Yancey, DeVoss, Blair, and Selfe share how they set up, work through, and benefit from co-authorship. Nearly all of the interviewees mention the impact of technology on their writing and the multimodal options they now consider for publication. In Tulley's interviews with Glenn and Enoch—Enoch was formerly Glenn's graduate student—a dialogue emerges about the importance of mentoring; readers hear reflections from each side of this partnership about what denotes good mentoring and the positive outcomes that result from earnestly attending to the mentor-mentee relationship. Along with Anson and Roen, they describe how professors can model writing habits for students. Powell advocates for classes that go beyond individual mentoring to formally teach professional genres, such as the letter of recommendation, to graduate students.

The interview collection as a whole reveals how faculty weave writing into their roles as mentors, researchers, administrators, teachers, and disciplinary leaders. "Writing projects seldom happen in isolation from other spaces of academic life" (23), observes Tulley. As a group, Tulley determines, these successful writers employ common techniques: writing within brief moments of time available, planning the structure, scope, and audience of their text before they begin, using writing to discover and reformulate their argument as they proceed, and securing peer feedback early in the process. Readers will note additional patterns throughout the transcripts as they might not be able to resist reflecting on their own processes and goals. Such is the simple brilliance of Tulley's writers-at-work methodology: the compilation of individual testimonials shows rather than tells, collectively offering extensive personal reflection and self-disclosure so as to present a uniquely specific array of unexpected glimpses into the reality of what it means to do the writing Elbow advocates. This in-depth view effectively counters reductive advice about time management and discipline that lead faculty to underestimate the adjustments, delays, loads of laundry, minute revisions, collaborations, frustrations, hours of work on a project, hours of work off a project, and networking opportunities that lead, over time, to an extensive corpus of publications.

This backstage approach contributes to the burgeoning field of faculty productivity studies. Until now, Tulley points out, there has been a "lack of self-study" (3) among composition scholars—ironic in a field that emphasizes student reflection, but perhaps more indicative of shortsightedness within academia as a whole and the problematic lack of support for faculty writing across universities that Boice identified decades ago. The collective testimony of

Tulley's book addresses the need for innovative and practical ways individuals, departments, and supporting units can tackle the emotional challenges, time constraints, and performance pressures of writing in the academy. By probing this untapped topic, Tulley's book challenges faculty development efforts to translate the successful practices of these well-established scholars so as to operationalize their insights more broadly across the scholarly community. It likewise impels further conversation within composition studies about how looking at our own writing can help us to pursue what we mean by well-crafted writing and to better share ways of achieving it.

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Works Cited

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- Elbow, Peter, and Mary Deane Sorcinelli. "The Faculty Writing Place: A Room of Our Own." *Change: The Magazine for Higher Learning*, vol. 38, no. 6, 2006, pp. 17-22.