



## Writing as a form of resistance and professional autonomy

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### ***Presentation abstract***

This mini keynote made an argument for looking at writing as a form of resistance in a world of AI-enhanced efficiency, and as an expression of professional autonomy, where writing offered us a space to think through ideas and experience joy and wonder in the process. We posited that writing could be a nourishing act that affirmed what made us uniquely human, offering the potential to increase our sense of professional satisfaction, happiness, and wellbeing. Through writing – a difficult and fraught act as it is – we have a chance not to surrender our individual selves but to continuously (re)create ourselves and (re)connect with our community, together forming an ecosystem of interdependent human intelligences for whom the goal was not necessarily proficiency in writing but staying invested in the process.

We invited the community to consider the following questions:

1. How could writing and knowledge production create community, compassion and connection in higher education?
2. How do we develop a writing culture with our students and colleagues? What might it look like?
3. How can we connect with writing as an embodied process of thinking and feeling, and help others to see the freedom it offers as well?

**Keywords:** writing as resistance; professional autonomy; human connection; embodied writing; academic community.

## ***Community response***

The session struck a chord with participants and their responses reveal the importance of two sides of writing: its profound personal significance and its contested place in AI-challenged higher education (HE). Following the mini keynote, the presenters opened their session with the question: 'why are you here?', eliciting three separate conversations that touched on key ideas such as resistance, rebellion against a constrictive system, sense of self being potentially lost in AI, writing as constructing yourself professionally or personally, and a provocation that writing makes us autonomous beings.

The following reflections from the participants illustrate the need to see writing as an expression of one's voice and not to give up on its transformative potential:

To me, writing is like finding your inner voice. If students are able to understand that by writing (or typing) they are connecting with their inner voices to shape their thoughts, it can be a transformative learning experience to shape our views of the world around us and what we experience (Nurun).

A space to discuss and celebrate the process of writing, as well as the product – wonderful!

I very much enjoyed this mini keynote session on writing as an act of resistance in the age of AI and as a means of establishing professional autonomy. Even as our world gets more digital, the heart of writing remains a deeply human and meaningful act.

Writing was also clearly seen as a form of empowerment, even if it comes with some struggle or discomfort:

Writing is not just a tool to demonstrate knowledge, but it is also a time for reflection on our learning, struggles and growth. It creates a bridge between our individual experiences and the broader academic community. By establishing collaborative spaces where ideas and perspectives can be shared, we should always strive to offer a safe platform for students and colleagues to connect, grow and challenge narratives.

I often wonder how we can encourage students to see writing as a purposeful process for discovering their inner voice and interpreting new knowledge. Finding that shift can move students from being passive receivers of information to active participants in knowledge, empowering them to take ownership of their learning and thus strive towards more professional autonomy (Jackie).

Provocative in their prompts, the presenters encouraged deeper reflection:

I was initially nervous about the discussion concerning 'writing as resistance', as I feel this positions us in a place of defensiveness and aggression, rather than the freedom and collaboration I look for as a writer. However, it was fascinating to hear others speak about 'resistance' as a way of getting out of the box, of escaping limitations... so perhaps not that different from my ideas of freedom after all! I also loved the quote, 'by writing we assert ourselves as humans'. More of this, please (Rachel).

Having many writing specialists in the room brought professional enthusiasm to the room while highlighting some persistent challenges:

As a writing skills specialist, I am somewhat biased towards the idea of writing as resistance and also joyful agency, so joining the conversations that Alicja and Carina facilitated on the topic was a beautiful opportunity – thank you! I would love to have had more time, or a whole session on this topic with a forum for practice sharing as there was such a clear feeling that writing was seen as a positive process over product fixation, or AI shortcuts to product – but that students can easily get lost or miss out on the joy and passion that writing can (and should) be. I am now hunting down your book to buy, thank you! (Fliss)

This tension between process and product was further explored by a participant who reflected on their own writing practices in relation to AI:

This session led me to reflect on my own writing processes as they relate to my expectations for student writing. I found myself making a distinction between writing as content-creation and writing as reflective process. In my own work, I feel more comfortable using AI to help generate content when my own thought processes seem less relevant to the final product (such as for student exercises and case studies), and less likely to use AI as a tool when I am generating my own research and reflective work. I am wondering how I might make these distinctions explicit for students. When I ask them to write, I am interested in their development of personal reflection and critical thinking – and this is the reason that AI is less helpful in their work – I am not looking for content/product, but looking to use writing to assess process and development.

And this distinction raised practical questions about student engagement:

I liked the idea of 'writing as resistance' and how we can use the process to get out of the box and encourage creative thinking. I can see the relevance to us professionals who might see more value in writing than our students do. It would be interesting to hear how we could encourage students to get into that mindset too, especially when most of the writing they do, given the rise of AI-generated content too, is for the purposes of the strict confinements of assessments? How do we instil

inspiration in them and a willingness to engage in a creative process and be proud of their output? Thank you for your mini keynote and the inspiration (Lenia).

The relational aspect of writing that emerged in these discussions was beautifully illustrated by another participant's observations about working alongside students:

As someone who would love to write more and is also terrified of writing, I loved this session – the thoughtfulness, joy, remembering writing is relational. It often strikes me how just sitting alongside a student provides them with the sense of a reader alongside them. Even without my saying anything about their work, they often see their writing differently – they start to see their writing as a reader might and then reflect on what they really want to communicate to their readership. They discover that they have a voice – it is not just about content, it is them shaping/ expressing/ commenting on that content because they are a writer.

The philosophical implications of writing in the digital age were most fully developed in a response that drew on contemporary social theory:

I was drawn to the session by Alicja's pointed (or so I thought/hoped) use of the word 'human' in her mini-plenary pitch. Unsurprisingly, the spectre of automated text generation haunted the conversation, but the prompt questions helped me in my thinking on the value of the writing in the age of the great AI Con (Bender and Hanna, 2025). I've recently been reading/grappling with the work of Hartmut Rosa and want to argue that human engagement with writing offers a real opportunity for staking a claim to agency in the face of social acceleration (Rosa, 2013), and finding resonance, what Rosa (2019) defines as a vibrant, reciprocal and transformative relationship with the world. For all the grappling and struggling we may experience when we write, the marks we make on the page (whether physical or digital) are something that we have control over; crafting anything gives us a gift of devoting time to a process until we choose to let go of it; how rarely can we say this of any other aspect of modern life? Indelible marks can of course be troubling, but when we capture something through writing, we're giving it immortality. What could be more powerful than that?

Other participants captured the breadth of the discussions through a series of questions, points, and distinctions:

What is writing to us? What a great discussion.

- Writing to learn
- Writing for therapy
- Writing for wellbeing
- Writing for communication
- Writing to remember
- Writing for liberation
- Writing as an embodied practice

Also, some great discussions on 'writing' versus typing or other forms of production like narration. Is 'writing' a privileged form? Can I use a Dictaphone or a transcription tool? Is that still writing?

- Writing versus content creation
- Writing to process deep thinking - versus using AI to produce a piece of content.
- How do we think of writing as content production versus writing as knowledge production.
- Editing as a process of scrutiny.

Human intelligence. Human writing. Humanness. Writing as a human endeavour. Writing is an opportunity to control something (in an uncontrollable world). Enjoyment, autonomy.

Are you using AI to write... or using AI to help you writing – coach you to get it better etc?

Collectively, these responses present writing as far more than an academic skill. Consistently returning to themes of agency, authenticity, human connection and deep thinking, the participants positioned writing as an essential practice for maintaining our humanity in an age of acceleration and extreme optimisation. The recurring tension between writing as process versus product, and the challenge of helping students discover writing's intrinsic value in the age of transactional education, emerged as central concerns. What began as a discussion about resistance evolved into a celebration of writing as a joyful and transformative activity in an increasingly uncontrollable and output-obsessed world.

### **Next steps and additional questions**

Beyond sharing their personal reflections, the participants asked a range of important questions:

- I would love to know your take on the challenge of making the writing meaningful and relevant to the writer. Specifically, how do we get students to feel like writers, something they are invested in, rather than a clever binary code that results in a grade? Perhaps from more purely transactional to intrinsically meaningful?

- Is the dissertation still fit for purpose? Access the process. Access the thinking. The dissertation is freezing the thinking in a markable process. What about a portfolio instead? Capture the thinking – it could be graphical. Then the end product – maybe let some use of AI.
- How we critique the products of AI. How do we help students to develop a critical lens on the products of AI? When to 'do it yourself' or hand it over to AI. How do we make students care? If they don't care – then they will use AI. We need them to understand the role of writing. Retain our humanity. Express ourselves as people. 'Sell' the benefits of writing.

### ***Authors' reflection***

Each of the three discussions took our prompts as their point of departure, arriving – sometimes too soon, given the passion with which our discussion groups engaged – at very different destinations. Yet the idea of care came through as a linking concern in every conversation. Care for our students in how they experience their learning. Care about writing itself, and its central role in knowledge production and the reflexive externalising and sharing and developing of ideas. Care, perhaps too, for ourselves as writers, in how writing can tell us something about who we are, as people, and more specifically, as professionals.

The rapid and pervasive emergence of generative AI has told us that we do not need to write anymore, that we can save ourselves time and trouble by having the machine produce our texts for us instead. Yet our three discussion groups vigorously contested this position, valuing writing for its relationality and intentionality. This isn't to say that AI does not have a place; we must acknowledge the new reality provoked by this technology, the better to manage rather than be managed by it. But the power of connection through writing is not something that these participants, at least, are willing to outsource.

So, how to share this power with students? The challenge, as it has been pointed out above, lies in making writing meaningful for students. And part of that involves supporting them to think deeply about something they care about, and sitting with the discomfort of not having a quick and clearcut answer. We can all produce content, but producing knowledge takes care and thought. We have to want to think about a subject, whether for

its own sake or for where that new knowledge might take us – and that is true of any writer. In such a situation, the dissertation – indeed, any essay – remains a vital part of academic life, as there is no other substitute for deep and intentional thinking (Buckley and Syska, 2025; Syska, 2025). Indeed, if anything, it should be celebrated!

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