

# Postgraduate English

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***Review of Rowena Murray, Writing for Academic Journals (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005). x + 240pp. ISBN. 0335213928. £18.99pbk.***

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This book is aimed primarily at academics who are struggling to find time to write for journals and are eager to improve their academic writing skills. It combines practical guidance with moral support, addressing the whys and wherefores of academic writing, how to improve your chances of publication and the most effective strategies for writing efficiently and effectively. It is multi-disciplinary in outlook across arts and sciences, but I think English postgraduates would find it helpful as a general guide to the process of journal writing, especially the sections on how to target journals; utilising reviewers' feedback (both negative and positive); and what constitutes good academic writing (in which the author helpfully close-analyses samples of good journal articles from different disciplines). Other sections may not be so useful, or so relevant, for a postgraduate audience. Murray spends a lot of time discussing common obstacles to successful writing and issues of self-doubt connected with it. All very reassuring when you're faced with your first rejection letter, but I suspect that for most postgraduates the questions about journal writing will be more practical: how do I go about submitting articles for academic journals and what does that process involve? Murray sets out the wider territory of journal-land and the process of submission at length but this isn't the book to go to for information about particular journals in your subject area.

The book is well-structured and user-friendly, allowing you to dip in and out as necessary. It is also impressively well-researched (inevitably, perhaps, for a book on academic writing). Murray's advice on how to plan and organise your writing time may not work for everybody, however. Whatever she says about the proven

effectiveness of regular 30 minute writing slots, I remain a confirmed proponent of 'binge-writing'. Likewise, formulating a specific plan of how many words are to be written when, on what subject and in which section may seem a mite too anal for creative English bods and possibly counter-productive given that most of us are working within natural time-constraints anyway (anyone remember the fatally idealistic Rimmer in Red Dwarf who spends six weeks planning his revision time-table and one night cramming for the exam?). Using a template of prompts and self-analysis sessions to structure your creativity may be helpful up to a point, but I wouldn't treat these recommendations too prescriptively. Having said that, this is a book I'm keeping on my shelf as I know it will be useful as a first port of call for general journal queries, and just occasionally for assurance that it is all worth it in the end.