Hope St. John (HS):

Hello, and welcome back. I'm Hope, and this is *Write for You*, the podcast from the University of Washington's Odegaard Writing and Research Center about graduate writing, how it happens, and what comes next. Together in open dialogue, we talk with graduate and postgraduate writers about how writing and revision is practiced: peaks, valleys, and everything else along the way. Listen in as we talk tips, strategies, and clarifying moments, and maybe you'll even find something that sounds right for you.

On this episode, we'll be talking with Megan and Mikhail, two graduate students whose thesis and dissertation projects have led them to working extensively with data. This perspective on writing in conversation with data and communicating in a range of different styles and formats is one that I'm excited to share. Before I turn it over to Megan and Mikhail, a little note: this episode was recorded via Zoom, so you may hear a little bit of background noise here and there, but hopefully nothing too distracting. Now, with that out of the way, here are Megan and Mikhail.

Megan Laine (ML):

Hi, my name is Megan Laine. My pronouns are she/her, and I am a master student in Clinical Informatics and Patient-Centered Technologies. I was an optometrist before going to this graduate program and switched from patient care to wanting to change how healthcare IT is developed and designed and used.

Mikhail Echavarri (ME):

Hi, I'm Mikhail Echavarri. My pronouns are he/him, and I'm an archeology graduate student in the Anthropology Department of the UW. My research focuses on responses to colonialism in the Philippines and the things people did to deal with other people showing up and doing stuff to them.

[Cat meows]

She just wants to join the conversation.

ML:

Yes, very much so.

Mikhail, how would you describe your writing habits? Do you have any specific routines that you use to ground your writing practice?

ME:

It's an interesting question. My writing habits are sporadic. I try to write consistently and sometimes it doesn't work. What I try to do is – and a lot of people say this is procrastination – but I like to clean off my desk space and try to settle in. I start, usually if it's a blank piece of paper, it's really hard to do, but if I've already written something, I start with rereading that and trying to figure out where I was. That's pretty much my habit, is to kind of putz about until I start to get into it. I've tried a bunch of things, like Pomodoro, do the 25 minutes of working time and then the five minutes off, and that doesn't work for me because it takes me 25 minutes to even get going. But sometimes the 45-minute time block where I'm like, "I must do something in this 45 minutes," can work and then it gets me going. So yeah. How about you?

ML:

I totally understand what you mean about taking even 25 minutes just to fuss about and get ready because I feel like I am the same way. I need to have my desk clean. If there's clutter anywhere, it's really distracting. I need to have all of the related articles or applications like citation managers, like Zotero, open. I need to have all the tabs with all the articles that I'm referring to open so if I need to look at them... So I totally get it. I try to have a cup of water or tea or coffee nearby.

I'm a night owl, so I prefer to work at night. It seems more quiet and there's less distractions. So that's when I try to write, although I feel like society doesn't reward night owls, so that's kind of tough. Yeah, I've also tried Pomodoro, and sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't for me, so I try to do a lot all at one go. That's usually how I do it.

And then, going back to rereading what you just wrote is helpful, but I also find that really painful, looking at my previous draft and also looking at any comments or suggestions from my advisor or other people. I find it kind of uncomfortable. So I think part of that fussing and getting the desk ready and the table ready is preparing myself for the discomfort.

ME:

That's really funny because I do the same thing and Hope is one of my people that reads for me and gives me comments. And you might not like to hear this, but when I read comments, I have the comments there and sometimes I'm like, "I don't like this comment," and the adversity gets me writing because I'm like, "They don't understand what I'm writing about." And most of the time, it happens with my advisor. He'll put a comment on there and I'm like, "He doesn't get me at all. I'm just going to..."

ML:

Yeah.

ME:

"I don't see why he's commenting this."

ML:

Yeah. I have this affirmation card. I should have had it here so I could read it. But it's an affirmation card. It's very silly. It says something like, "Criticism: when I receive criticism, I'll be very calm, and I will dismiss any negative tones or implications from the criticism and I will just receive it" or something like that. And so I try to keep that card in front of me when I look at revisions.

ME:

I should make a card like that. But it doesn't mean that I don't appreciate all your feedback, Hope. It's very useful.

HS:

I completely understand the sentiment, Mikhail. No worries.

ML:

So another question I have, Mikhail, is what is one of your bad habits in writing, or what is one of your crutches that you rely on?

ME:

So I'm interpreting this question as the way I write. So one thing that I've tried very hard to not do is the sets of three thing that you often see.

ML:

Can you explain what that is?

ME:

Yeah. I'm trying to think of an example. It's like, "Oh, the responses to colonialism could be violent, passive, or co-optive," and then you have the three that you have there. And usually my first pass, it's always three things separated by commas. And I mean, it's not a bad thing, but someone pointed it out once that especially academics do it a lot. So I try to think about why am I using this set of three? Do I need to? Maybe it comes out of this. The way I was taught to write in high school where it was your intro paragraph and then the three body. And so your intro always had to reference the three body paragraphs you're going to have, I guess. Maybe that's the beginnings of it. I don't know.

ML:

Mm-hmm.

ME:

I feel like a lot of your writing practice comes out of internalizing these small rules that you get in grade school.

ML:

Yeah. Yeah. These reinforcements from your teachers that you would've gotten when you're learning how to write essays and things like that.

ME:

Yeah. And they're training wheels. You don't need to use them anymore, but we often do.

ML:

That's really interesting. I've never thought about how my grade school or high school writing learnings would be influencing the way I write now. Hmm.

After hearing your response to that question, I felt a little self-conscious because I was going to say that's something I tend to do. Also is I tend to try and fit too much stuff in one sentence, and I love using the topic A, topic B, topic C. I love doing that too, so now I feel a little self-conscious.

ME:

Well, don't. We all try to put too much into everything because it's all this info.

ML:

Yeah. So I would say my other bad writing crutch, I'm really hard on myself, so it's really hard to even get a first draft down sometimes because I'll beat myself up in my head to say, "Oh, that sounds terrible. Oh, that sounds awful." So the first, the second, and the third versions, they sound all terrible to me. I think that's something that's a bad habit, is being so hard on myself because it doesn't really help with getting words down on paper.

ME:

Yeah. I experience that also.

HS:

So, what do you do to get around that, that sort of being really hard on yourself?

ML:

Therapy. I have an awesome therapist and I have an awesome husband and it takes a lot of work to try and quiet the inner critic. And sometimes when I'm really stuck, I will ask my husband to hear me out and just let me talk it out. And then sometimes, in the process of speaking to him conversationally, it's so much easier to

think about what to say then to try and put it in the Microsoft Word document. Yeah, sometimes that's really frustrating, but other times, taking a break and asking for help is what is necessary. How about you, Mikhail? What do you do when you get stuck?

ME:

The therapy is a good one. Yeah.

When it's hard to silence the critic, I just tell myself that this is going to be the worst thing I've ever written, and I just need to put something there. And that was some good advice that I got from at least two sources, is just write something super terrible, and then at least you have something to work with. So I've written a lot of terrible things that people have read and that helps. Over time, you write something super bad and then someone reads it and they're like, "Well, 50% of this is fine." And then you're like, "Well, I guess I'm not so terrible." So that helps.

ML:

It is reassuring when you get some nice feedback from other people.

ME:

It is.

ML:

So you had just mentioned some writing advice you had received: just get something down. It could be the worst thing that you've ever written, but as long as you have that, then you can work on it. Was there any other advice that you've gotten from colleagues or fellow students or instructors?

ME:

I'm drawing a blank. How about you?

ML:

I think... I don't know. My spouse is such a good cheerleader. He said, "Graduate students are so specialized. They are a handful of people that know everything about that one particular topic or that one particular subtopic in their field." And so we can have a little bit more confidence about what we're doing and what we're saying, because there's only so few people that really have taken the time to

learn about and read about and specialize in these topics, that we can give ourselves a little bit more credit and have more confidence in what we're writing.

ME:

That's true. I've heard that before. That is something to keep in mind.

HS:

So one of the things that I think can be interesting sometimes is that you get different kinds of advice from graduate students versus advisors. And so I'm wondering if there are things that maybe you have learned from other graduate students or advice you've received from other graduate students that you've felt like was useful for you in some respect.

ML:

My spouse is a former graduate student, so maybe that counts as a fellow graduate student. I'm going to have to think about that, though, for my program.

ME:

I think it's hard to think of advice because I don't often think of it that way from fellow grad students. It's more like absorbing each other's things. When I first started grad school, I had been out of school for a while...

ML:

Oh.

ME:

Four years. And I wasn't doing anything particularly mind expanding. So when I got back into grad school, it was difficult to write. And I think maybe it was Hollis, Hollis Miller. I was writing a lot of third person stuff. And she was like, "Just start writing first person again. Use 'I.'" And that helped a lot because it helps to also get rid of the passive voice. And we're part of this movement of scientists and social scientists who are pushing back against the detached person of science things. So using "I" and getting rid of the passive voice is

part of that because it helps to inject your responsibility into the work. Yeah. That was some good advice.

Also, it took a while to temper my writing style, and that just comes from writing something and someone pushing back against it and you pushing back against them pushing back against it. So I've come into whatever my writing style is now from a lot of experimentation with this really reflexive, crazy writing style.

When we had to do our master's exams, which, for us, it was writing three 2,000 word papers in three days and then another three days of the same thing, that was difficult for me. And so I was kind of getting annoyed with writing so much in such a short amount of time. It didn't feel like it was useful.

So I just started writing however I felt like writing and citing works that were outside of the archeological canon. And I passed, but I was like, "Is there any feedback from this?" And then my advisor's like, "Not really, except it was kind of crazy." Because it was. I was just going nuts writing that much about topics I didn't really particularly care about. And at some point during that writing process, I decided that if the department didn't want my style and what I cared about, then I didn't want to be part of it anyway. So it worked out for me, but that was probably the craziest I've ever written and I've tempered that back, but it's still there. There's still a little bit of me in there. So yeah.

ML:

I think that's a really tough part of getting revisions from other people, is that if you take all the suggestions, it's not going to sound like your voice anymore. And when you look back at your work, it's going to feel like, "Did I even write this?" Yeah. So I definitely think you're really brave for just charging forward with your style.

ME:

Thank you.

ML:

So you mentioned earlier that you had a gap in between your previous schooling and going back to graduate school. And I did too, in the sense that I was practicing optometry for five years after school. And I kind of wanted to ask you about this idea of getting back into academic writing.

And for me, I studied biology in undergrad and I didn't necessarily write academic papers. I wasn't involved in biology research very much, and the type of writing I did as an optometrist was very short and to the point. It would be maybe summary notes for patients, instructions on what to do to treat something, it would be notes to a doctor that I'm referring the patient to, a summary of the main findings and straight to the point what I would like them to do, and maybe documents at my workplace, like training documents for the technical staff and the assistants.And so all this writing was really short, less than a page usually.

And so getting back into academic writing for me was really challenging and kind of intimidating. As soon as I got into my program and started classes, the School of Nursing told us that they have some writing resources available to us, like a writing tutor, and she's a fellow graduate student. And I made an appointment with her as soon as possible because I knew that there would be writing assignments and I just wanted to have something on the calendar so that I could share a draft with her and get feedback and get some help. So that's something that I did this time around. I knew that I was just going to ask for help sooner than later in my graduate program. And so you touched upon it earlier, but I was curious if you had any other thoughts of going back into academia or getting back to school and getting back to writing.

ME:

Yeah. That's incredibly smart and brave to just be ready to ask for help. That was not my experience. My initial breaking the rust off of writing was tough, so I didn't really ask for help, and skipping ahead, that's what I would've told myself just to ask people for help like you did. Go find a tutor. Because... Yeah.

In my first quarter, I was thrown into TAing a pretty difficult class, and it was a lab class and I had access to the lab. So there was one or two nights where I had to write papers and I was just struggling, and I was doing it at the lab, and before I knew it, it was 7:00 AM the next day and I was still in there.

ML:

Oh my goodness.

ME:

Not as many places as you would think are open late enough to get a coffee or something. So there's that.

ML:

Maybe that's a piece of writing advice you could give to another graduate student in your program: if you're going to stay on campus super late until 7:00 AM, not many places are open for coffee, so bring some instant coffee powder with you.

ME:

Or maybe don't stay on campus until 7:00 AM.

ML:

That one's realistic too.

So I wanted to ask, who do you write for? And you kind of touched upon this earlier because you had talked about how, in your social sciences field, the style of writing is changing where there's a little bit more ownership and responsibility for what you're saying. So yeah, who do you write for and how does that influence your approach to writing?

ME:

That's a good question, because I think I'm in-between right now. Right now, I'm writing for academics. I do a lot of grant writing, proposal writing. I'm working on three papers right now, and I'm struggling with those partly because they're for journals and for people who are super technical, so I feel like I have less control over how I write for those types of things. I would like to write for the community I work with, for the most part.

ML:

So you mentioned the folks that you're writing for with the grants and the journals, very technical people, and then your community. Can you describe the differences between those?

ME:

Yeah, so I do most of my research in this region of Philippines called Bicol and it's five provinces in Southern Luzon, and we're working with other academics in the Philippines. So Partido State University, shout out to them. But also the Church. We work with the

Archdiocese. And we work with other community members, and the majority of those people are not archeologists and they don't necessarily care about the nuances of ceramic sherd or the nuances of what I do specifically, which is look at the chemical composition of ceramic sherd and group it with other ones and see where they're coming from and how they are interacting. They want to know ultimately what comes out of it, which for me specifically, it's how did these exchange networks change, or did they change, and what were people doing?

And they care about those things because they care about their community now. They care about where did our Church come from and how old is it and why is it the way it is and why is our community the way it is and why do we believe the things we believe? Our research is just a small puzzle of that. So I'd like to write more big picture things, things that are easier to digest, and I'm not at that point yet.

And then my other community is fellow grad students. Over the last two years, I got into doing what I'm doing, which is what I just described. And it's super complicated and not a lot of archeological, especially archeology, students are mathematically inclined. And I'm not. And so it's come about that one of my goals at the moment is to make this type of analysis easier to do and faster and less expensive, because right now, it's super expensive for a lot of reasons. And it's hard to find resources that explain to you what you're doing and how you're doing it. So I'd like to do more of that. And part of that is that I'm writing my own code so that it's easier to share that stuff like that. So yeah. That's who I would like to write for and that's who I'm not currently writing for, and there's that tension. Right back at you.

ML:

I love that. Who are you writing for now and who do you want to write for? Okay, so who am I writing for now?

Well, in the past couple years I've been writing for my instructors, because we have some didactic-type courses, and they're usually clinicians with an informatics background. And then some of the recent work that I've been jumping in on has been related to usability research of medical devices that you can use at home, things to help monitor your sleep. I helped moderate some focus groups and helped that group of people write a paper. There was a big EHR transition at UW Medicine in the past year, and I was

working with some folks to write about the challenges of transitioning from one EHR to another with respect to the alerts in the healthcare software, so the warnings and reminders that doctors get.

And then I also did a really cool internship last summer with a designer as my mentor, and I wrote a manuscript to send to a design-related work. That was really interesting because it's very different from my typical clinical informatics community. The design vocabulary is very different than informatics, more artistic people. Informatics people are numbers-oriented and metrics-oriented. So that was really interesting.

Yeah. So I guess lately, I've been writing for people who are clinicians by background and informaticists secondarily, so that could be doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and then also people that work alongside them on the health IT systems, like EHR analysts. So EHR stands for “electronic health record,” so analysts are people who help customize the way that it's built for UW, for example, people who are in charge of the technical services at UW Medicine. So it's challenging because it's a wide group of people from various technical backgrounds, different vocabularies, and they all have different values and priorities, kind of like your situation where you have your technical group of archeologists and then the people that it impacts – the community – have very different interests in what you're writing about.

And yeah, that leads me to the community that I wish to write for, which is clinicians, because I was so frustrated when I was working in optometry in how the EHR was used, or not used, or used to its full potential or not, and how that also influenced the way that we could care for our patients because there could be a lot of silly workflows, a lot of silly requirements to put something in the EHR but that not actually be directly related to how we care for people. And so that's something that I would like to write more about, now that I've gone through my program and now that I've done some work to learn about programming and databases and I understand how to access all this information that exists. I want to write about how can we maximize it in a way that helps the people that are providing care to patients. That's what I want to do.

ME:

I like that a lot. I like the idea of the more human-centered approach to data and databases and info.

HS:

I think that one of the things that we maybe don't talk about a lot is sort of balancing writing that is effective and readable with more technical and maybe sometimes more quantitative data metrics information. But that sounds like something that you both have to deal with in some capacity, so I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about how you manage that, what your experiences have been like with that.

ML:

My scholarly project for my master's program was related to comments that doctors leave in the electronic health record when they see a reminder or a warning. So let's say a patient sees UW Medicine for something, and there's something that triggers a warning to the clinician. And it asks the clinician or suggests to them, "You should do this activity next because of whatever medical reason or best practice at our clinic." And the clinician has the option to accept the recommendation or reject it. And sometimes, the clinician can leave a comment as to why they reject it. And part of the reason for doing that is if something were to happen, you would need to have some reasoning for your thought process of why you decided not to follow the recommendation.

But what I found after looking in the databases that no one besides me has really looked at over many, many years, and what I had found was that a lot of these comments actually have really useful suggestions or feedback on how to improve those warnings. And a problem with these warnings is that they cause a lot of brain fatigue and sometimes they're not very effective. So in writing about these alerts and what I found in people's comments, I realized that in my initial drafts, I had a tendency to just write the numbers, but not really say anything, like “People will understand what I'm trying to say.” And my advisor would leave comments like, "What do you want me to take away from this? What do you want me to get from these numbers?"

And I think this challenge of writing effectively with all this quantitative information is trying to have the confidence to say what you want to say and being backed up with the numbers. I think not having enough confidence to be really brave about what I'm saying with the numbers is tough because there isn't very much work to compare against. Yeah.

I find that... Oh gosh, I know we're talking about writing, but I so prefer PowerPoint slides and presentations to get my point across. So that's my thought on the challenges with writing effectively with quantitative information. How about you, Mikhail?

ME:

I'm in a similar boat, I guess. I think people who write with more quantitative stuff need to focus a lot more on visualizations. I think you can get a lot of information across with a good visualization and then you can focus more on what you want to say about it rather than having to explain your data and what you're showing. And I think, one, that's hard because it's hard to develop a good visualization, so a lot of people for various reasons either don't do it or they aren't doing it as effectively as they could because it is difficult. So that's my first thought.

For me personally, it's difficult to read a lot of the more technical stuff because it can get boring. And I haven't found the balance yet of how do I write something that conveys what I need to convey about numbers and whatever while also being at least mildly easy to read? So come back to me in a few years when I've written a few more articles, because I can write a good narrative in general, but I have a hard time with the technical stuff and making it not seem convoluted and boring. So yeah, that's where I'm at.

ML:

I understand. And I feel the same way. So, I have a follow-up question to that. We were saying that it's really hard to write about numbers and quantitative information and not make them seem so boring. Are there any examples of writers in your field or even outside your field that you admire for being able to do that?

I guess that's tough because in an academic setting, a lot of the papers can be really technical and boring, but are there examples? Have you found examples? Is it just the nature of the journal writing that it has to be a little bit boring?

ME:

Maybe. I can't think of anything off the top of my head. But shout out to StatQuest on YouTube. He's a professor of some kind of statistics, but he does these videos that have jingles and he does music with

them and explains some more complicated mathematics. So that's not boring and it gets the information across. But yeah, it's not a journal, so I don't know. There's some good articles I've read that I'm like, "This was interesting and was fun to read. Ish." Right? But I've heard a lot from people who are more senior now and they hate writing for journals and articles because it almost necessarily limits them. They'd rather write their books where they can be more prose-y, so it might just be the nature of it.

ML:

I think that's a theme that we're finding today, that even though we're writing more academically in school, we definitely know that there are other modes of communication that can be more exciting and effective. Yeah.

One of my favorite writers in my space is Atul Gawande. He's a medical doctor and surgeon who writes pieces about the state of healthcare in the United States. He writes about the challenges that clinicians face with electronic health records or providing care in a cost-effective way. And his articles have been published in *The New Yorker*, and he obviously reaches a really wide audience, not just clinicians.

And I really like his writing because it's not dramatic. It's not sensationalist. It just calmly states things as they are, but it also has a way of feeling very urgent. People need to act on it. And it's so fascinating that that kind of writing can get so much emotion from other clinicians and other people working in healthcare, but these technical papers and journal articles, you don't see them making the rounds on Twitter or things like that unless you're directly in the academic community. So yeah, I would say that's one of the examples of writing that I feel like is really good at raising concern or getting people interested in fixing things.

ME:

That's an interesting thought, of on top of your abstract, if you could write one or two tweets that summarize your paper in an interesting way.

ML:

I love it. Have you seen that NPR article about the student in communications who made a poster where his poster is just one sentence in size 100 font and a QR code to his paper?

ME:

No, I haven't seen that. That sounds really cool.

ML:

The whole idea is that the way that we do posters is really boring and convoluted. And so if you get your main point on your poster and then a QR code and you can talk about it.

ME:

I like that a lot.

What's one piece of literature reading that changed your perspective on writing?

ML:

I think Atul Gawande's writing. I kind of mentioned that earlier. I think when I was practicing as a clinician, I would often hear from my colleagues and we would chat this water cooler chat of, "Ugh, the EHR. EHR bad." And it comes from a place maybe of not really understanding how the EHR is built or why it was built or the regulations and laws and how that influenced how quickly they were scrambled together. Anyways, so the one piece of writing that I feel really spoke to me would be “Why Doctors Hate Their Computers” from *The New Yorker* in 2018. And I think it's different than the water cooler chat, which is just complaints, and it puts it in a much more eloquent way that is more understandable and more calm and reasoned and tells other people why it matters to them too.

And I think that's what is so great about it, is that it makes it clear why other people should care about it. And I think, for our writing, that's something that I aspire to. What does why we do matter? And being able to communicate that to different people from different backgrounds and with different values is really important to me, and so I think that particular article when it came out was really impactful because it was spoken about by other people than just clinicians. It was all of a sudden something that wasn't just the water cooler chat. It was something that people who have the purchasing power to decide which electronic health record to buy, they paid a little bit more attention to it. So that's an example of an impactful piece of writing. How about for you?

ME:

It's not archeology, but Laurie Penny's body of work, specifically their book... My favorite one is called *Bitch Doctrine*. And they're just so incendiary and thought-provoking and just unabashedly opinionated about exactly what they want to be opinionated about. And I referenced earlier that my writing was tempered by the academy. And part of that was I want to be as incendiary as that in archeology. Obviously, in the last seven years, I've realized that I need to start somewhere else, but it changed my perspective because a lot of archeology is written for archeologists and can be boring for people who are not particularly interested in the nuances, right? And we have a problem in our field where people with interesting ideas about archeology can write blogs and put out videos and stuff that are super interesting to listen to, but they're complete nonsense and they're often racism-laced and are just speculative about random stuff that doesn't make any sense if you know what you're talking about, but they're super interesting to listen to and read. And they're often backed by things like the History Channel, because they're fun to watch, right?

And archeology, I think we need more incendiary archeologists, more pop culture books written by us who get the point across, but they're fun to read. And sometimes, I'll walk into a bookstore, and I'll look at the archeology section and we have these pop culture, science books about archeology, they're mostly dry and they're kind of somewhat outdated, obviously because they're synthesizing a lot of information. And then we get those and then we get the crazy people. And for the most part, archeologists who are doing the work are just writing articles, and part of that is the incentive structure of the academy, but at some point, I'd like to write a book that is incendiary and causes people to read it but that is backed by actual evidence and makes interesting points. But that is down line. But Laurie Penny's work has informed my trajectory, I hope.

ML:

I want to read your book when it's ready. I love the idea of something that is incendiary because it gets people excited. And I'm kind of hearing that you feel that maybe the people who are most vocal, you'd like to say something else.

ME:

Yeah. Well, it's easy to be vocal when you just come up with your own stuff without any backing because you can just make up whatever you want. It's harder when you're trying to say things and then say, "Here's why I'm saying these things: because I have all of this body of literature and my own work that is backing it up." Yeah. And there's a way to write with receipts, but it might piss people off. We'll see. I want to piss people off.

ML:

I do too. I understand what you're saying, though, that while we're in our graduate programs and we're kind of learning the style, we're learning the accepted common practices of communicating. It helps us to understand where that's coming from so that we could... I don't know if the word "subvert" is appropriate. But at least if you know the rules, then you can play the game, right?

ME:

Mm-hmm.

ML:

If you know the rules of what the academic community accepts as proof, then it gives you more credibility.

ME:

Yeah. I think that's true. Yeah, you need the credibility before you can start pissing off people. Yeah.

HS:

Yeah.

Before I let you go, I did want to revisit this question about a piece of advice for your past self. What would that be for you both?

ML:

I think the advice I would give to myself when working on my scholarly project and any type of writing is if you're holding onto your draft because you think you can make it better before you request feedback, just send it, because of course it's going to get feedback. And don't beat yourself up trying to make that first or second draft even better. Just do it, just send it out. It's better to get that feedback sooner than later. How about you, Mikhail?

ME:

Like I said before, ask for help. And maybe... So someone told me that when you go into grad school, take classes and try to write papers that are focused on your topic, and that way you are building up yourself towards what you're trying to do. And maybe that works. I tried to do that and it still took me the same amount of time as everyone else to get to where I am. And some of the most fun I've had is in classes that are not on topic and they were just interesting. So it's okay to write a paper or take a class that is not focused exactly on what you think you're going to do because what I thought I was going to do is not what I'm doing now. And maybe if I had taken classes that were different, I would've opened me up to my trajectory sooner. I don't know. I would be somewhere different. But it's okay not to do that. It's okay to think about stuff that isn't specifically what you came to grad school for.

ML:

Love that. I really like that advice.

HS:

And there you have it. Thanks for listening to this episode of Write for You, and a big thanks again to our guests. On behalf of the Odegaard Writing and Research Center, I hope that this has been informative, affirming, and maybe even inspiring.

If you want to learn more about the OWRC, its programs or services available to University of Washington Faculty, Students, and Staff, you can find us online at depts.washington.edu/owrc. In the meantime, for myself and everyone at the OWRC, happy writing.

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