



Hope St. John (HS):

Hello! And welcome back to Write for You, the Odegaard Writing and Research Center's podcast on graduate writing. I'm Hope, your disembodied writing buddy and host. Sit in with me as I virtually connect with current and former graduate writers from across the University of Washington to learn more about their writing processes, experiences, and how writing gets done. Who knows, maybe you'll even find something that sounds right for you.

On this episode, we hear from Jeevan, a recent graduate from the Master of Arts for Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages program. A returning graduate student and multi-publication author, Jeevan talks about inspiration, writing with goals in mind, and transitioning to the next phase of his graduate writing life. I'll let him introduce himself and tell you more.

Jeevan Karki (JK):

Hello. I'm Jeevan Karki. I use he/him pronoun. Actually, I have just graduated from the English Department last March. I specialize on teaching English, English as second language speakers, so I'm planning to transition into doctoral program at Curriculum Instruction and Teacher Education program. And my scholarly interest include language literacy and cultural development and negotiation of English as second language learner students, and also immigrant schooling. I also am interested in equitable literacy and learning multimodal literacy teacher education quite a lot. And also I worked as a first year composition instructor. Beside that, my personal interests include, I love traveling a lot and photography. Traveling and photography go well together so yeah.

HS: That's great. I had no idea that you were transitioning into a doctoral program. Many congratulations on that.

JK: Thank you so much.

HS: Yeah. So to get us started today, I would love to hear a bit about your background as a writer. Would you be able to tell us a little bit about that?

JK: Yeah, sure. My writing background is interesting, I'd say that way. I have written for quite diverse audience, in fact. I have published something like four to five research paper and journals, and I have published something more than a dozen of blogs, especially reflective blogs. And beside that, I have also written some op-eds that is, again, centering around education because I'm an educator and I work in the education sector. And beside that, I also do some creative writing sometime when I have time. So I mean, coming to grad school, I have totally stopped doing that now. I don't have time for that, but I have some experience doing that. But mostly I'm around in this academic writing research and blog and all these kind of things. Yeah.

HS: Yeah, that's really interesting. Do you find that your different experiences writing for different audiences informs how you approach your academic writing or vice versa?

JK: That's a great question. In fact, so something that I'm always mindful about is who am I writing for and what's the venue? Where am I publishing this or maybe releasing it, and what kind of medium, what kind of molds do I have access to when I'm composing a piece of writing? That's something that I'm always mindful. For example, if I'm writing a blog to teachers, I mean I'm writing a blog, especially reflecting on myself, hoping that that is going to be useful for fellow teachers who are going through the similar kind of situation that I'm going through.

So I'm always mindful of my audience because they also do have these experiences. So I'm talking to them, I'm writing to them. So I'm always mindful about that. And now coming back to grad school, so if I'm writing some paper to my professors, I am also again mindful about, "Okay, I'm writing this to the professor who is more knowledgeable than myself in this area," and they do have their own expectation as an assignment. So I look at that and also think about the audience. So writing for multiple or diverse audience has really made me mindful about, "Okay, before I sit and start to write, okay, my first thing is why am I writing this? Who am I writing for? And then how do I approach writing?" So that's kind of thing always going on in my mind when I'm seating to write.

HS: Yeah, these considerations about audience can be really important. And I think particularly in grad school, we are asked to think more directly about who are you in conversation with? Who is your audience?

JK: Right. Right.

HS: Yeah. So you do all of these different kinds of writing. You're doing the formal academic, you're doing things that are public facing. Do you think of yourself as a writer?

JK: Yeah, that's an interesting question. In fact, let me say this, not in a yes or no, but let me tell how my readers perceive me maybe. So I do have experiences writing in publishing research paper and blogs and op-eds and all these kind of things. So they have been received well so far. My work has been cited and they call me writer, but I think I'm still learning to write. So I'd say it that way because more and more if I go back to blog or a piece of writing that I wrote last year, now when I look at that, I think, "Oh my God, how horrible that is. If I could write that now, I would write that in a different way," because every day I'm reading and writing, and this skill is getting better every time I read, every time I write, every time I encounter a new reviewer or comments. So there's a lot to learn. So I would say I'm still learning to write, despite the fact that I have written some and published.

HS: Yeah. Approaching it from the perspective of the reader is really interesting. I wonder, so you mentioned as you're talking about the building of the writing skill, you talk about both writing, but also reading. And so one of the questions that I often have for writers is about what they like to read for one, but then secondarily, what are the things that you admire in the work of others? Or what are the things that when you read them, you're like, "That was great"?

JK: Exactly. Exactly. That mostly happens when I'm writing my own piece. Sometime when I'm writing something and I'm really stuck and I cannot move ahead, that's the moment that I like to read the most when I'm writing. And I look at my bookshelf and look at those great books and think about those great people, "Oh my God, how the heck they have been able to write this kind of book and publish that".

I mean, when you are going through the pain of writing, I think that's the moment that you admire the writers, the authors. That's what

happens to me. And then that's the moment I feel like reading a lot. Sometimes I'm reading and I'm kind of pausing to write and approaching a book to read, and I just think of, "Okay, I'll just go through this pretty quickly, five minute or 10 minute," and I find myself spending hours reading that, putting my writing aside. That's the time I read really deeply and then things makes a lot of sense, and that time I am not only looking at their content, but also the mechanics of writing, the rhetorical choices. I'm simultaneously thinking about their message and also their rhetorical choices, rhetorical decision as a writer. So yeah.

HS: That's super interesting to hear that you read most when you're feeling stuck in your own process.

JK: Right. Yeah. That's kind of funny sometime. But yeah, that's what I find myself doing.

HS: Yeah, no, I think it's very relatable because I sometimes find myself, I get a particular kind of writer's block where I just keep using the same words over and over again, and I'm like, "There's so many words to choose from. There's got to be a different word," but I'm just so stuck in my own language that I can't find those better words that I'm looking for. And what I end up doing is I'm like, "Okay, I got to read something," or, "I have to listen to someone talking. I have to hear a different voice. I have to be with someone else's words."

JK: Exactly. Exactly. People get burnout when you're writing, and you really need to recharge yourself one of the ways reading or listening to other people. I totally agree on that. Yeah.

HS: Well, this brings me into a question about process and about what does your process look like. So tell me about the last time you wrote. What were you doing? How did you approach it? Is that typical for the way that you write, or was that sort of a departure from your normal process? Just take us through that.

JK: Right. Yeah. The last time I wrote something substantial, that was back in March because I graduated in March, and since then I've been writing cover letters, but talking about my academic writing, that was really meaningful to me. That was part of my course itself. I was doing research method in second language acquisition, and we were supposed to do research and then produce a paper by the end of the quarter. That itself is quite challenging. You have 10 weeks, so you have to design your research, and then you have to collect the

data. Also, you have to produce a research paper. So that's something that I went through and that is so meaningful to me. So I carried out a research that was about the experiences of bilingual immigrant adults coming to US high school. So I was looking at how they were navigating language and literacy and cultural experiences in a new setting, a new school system. So I followed some adults and then finally I had interesting data, and then coming back to my writing, I wrote 8,000 words in five days, 1000 words in five days.

The fact is most of other people, they were working in group and there were two or three people, but it happened like I had to do my research independently and then quarter and schoolwork and other courses, and each of them had their own assignment and all. So this one was writing 8,000 words in five days. It was kind of horrible initially. Right? So something beyond the imagination. But I did that, and how I did that is because it was research, I already had some kind of frame, outline because during my proposal phase, I reviewed the literature and I had written some section for my literature review. So I just pulled that and build off that. And other than that, during the data collection also, whatever crucial moments where there I had taken notes on that or reflected on that, those were also useful for me. And methodology section, I also had some resources and some draft on that.

So there was that. But the most important thing is the finding discussion and setting the introduction section and all so that was most important and challenging part. So how I approach that is basically I enjoy writing on my own desk, in fact at home. But for this one, there's no way. I really needed to go to library. So when I have limited time and when I have to write a lot, I often go to library. I get kind of an interesting vibe there to sit and write. So the thing is basically I wrote like 1000 to 1500 words a day, sometime even more maybe. But it was possible. It was possible. I mean, when I reflect back, of course there are better ways to do that. But the thing is, it is possible when you are into something, when you're bound to write, when you are focused in something in your writing, it is possible. The thing is, it was horrible, but also the message for myself and others is like, it is possible to write 1000 or 1500 words a day.

HS: Yeah. I think at some point we all come up against that sort of, "I have to write a lot in a short period of a time," and it is taxing, I think. But do you tend to be more of a writer that writes in spurts, or do you tend to be someone who prefers a daily writing practice?

JK: I love to develop that habit, but I'm not able to keep up with that daily writing. I have a lot of things to write, so I plan to write, but something comes up and really not being able to do that. So I'm kind of person, I need a kind of deadline for everything. So a deadline for everything. Then there is my goal when I have to do something and submit somewhere else, I do that. I get into that, and I just do that anywhere. That's how I move ahead.

HS: Yeah, these are goal-oriented.

JK: Yeah, sort of. Yeah.

HS: So when you started that master's program from which you have recently graduated, was that your first experience in grad school or had you had prior grad school experience?

JK: I did have. This is my second graduate degree. I graduated back in 2012, in fact. So I came back to school after a decade. So in between I was working full-time.

HS: So what was that like for you coming back, having been working full-time to then come back into grad school? What was that experience like?

JK: Yeah, that's a really interesting question. And also looking back, I think for me it was because of my academic interest and my own independent research initiative that brought me back to academy, in fact. So even though I was working, I worked in nonprofit, still in education sector, I had to travel frequently. After working sometime, I realized that that was the perfect moment for me to write, record what's going on in the actual field. And then I also took that as an opportunity for my own data collection. So those data were really inspiring for me. And I think although I was detached from graduate school, I was still in going through that process. So that coming back to grad school again, that was not so horrible for me. I was able to manage that, but for many people like that can be a huge problem, the taking a break, and again, coming back to the grad school. I mean, coming to grad school again has its own kind of requirement.

And also we talked about the time and the nature of task and all these kind of things, that is obviously different. When I was off campus, I was doing that in my own time, a lot of flexibility, whether I write or not, I didn't have some kind of deadline for that. And interestingly, I was more productive. I don't know. I didn't have any

kind of deadline or any pressure, but when I look at my own CV and my publication record in graduate school, I hardly published two things in two years. But back then I was more productive, I think. So it's kind of interesting. Yeah.

HS: Yeah, that is quite interesting when we're able to take time and devote ourselves to specific interests.

JK: Exactly. Exactly. Yeah. Yeah.

HS: What's the ideal outcome for your writing? Do you have a desired outcome when you sit down to approach a project? And if so, what is that thing that you're working towards?

JK: Right. I think that's a great question. In fact, so as a graduate student who is also planning to transition into PhD, I was always mindful of whatever I'm writing. For example, one of the writing task back in my 2021 fall, I had to write my own experiences of learning a second language, and I wrote that, and I liked that myself, my professor liked that, and I had an opportunity to revise that and develop that as a scholarly piece. And I told my professor, I like to publish things, so I want to publish this piece. So when you're reading this and giving feedback, I would expect you to give feedback for this kind of venue. And also, my professor had been really nice on that part, and I received some really useful feedback, and as a result, I was able to publish that, the assignment. I definitely had to rewrite that in a different way to suit the need of the program, but I was able to publish that in a prestigious magazine from UK.

So that's something that I'm always thinking of. So what I mean from this is, as a graduate student, I think it's really important for us to be thinking about the writing project, not as part of the course only, but I tend to think beyond the course. So where can I use this project beyond the course? How can this writing project contribute to my own scholarly interest? How can I expand this project beyond? Something like in my research project, so I took up the research which aligns with my research interest that I'm pursuing in my doctoral degree. That was one of the reasons that I didn't find a team to work with because I wanted to build off that project as part of my doctoral degree.

So that's something to be thinking about. I think if we approach writing that way, and if we have that bigger goal beyond college, I think writing tasks can be interesting, and then you can achieve a lot.

I think you can achieve a lot more, I think, and you already have something after you complete the course, and you can work on that. So that has been my experience.

HS: It seems like, and you can correct me if this is a false impression, but it seems like you are very confident and self sure kind of writer, and so I wonder how did you cultivate that confidence? I mean, I feel like writing can sometimes be a vulnerable experience, and because of that, I'm always really interested in how people build up their sense of confidence and self-assuredness when it comes to writing.

JK: Yeah, I mean, I am vulnerable too in writing. I love my confidence for sure, but one of the things is I think I work hard. I'm hard on myself. In fact, so often time I find myself working late maybe, and I told some of the success stories, but there are also other stories of pain and all. So sometime spending two hours and not producing anything else. So that's something happens to all, but I think that's the writing process. That's the writing process. So you don't necessarily need to have same kind of speed every day. You don't necessarily need to have same kind of outcome every day, but as long as you're in process, whether you write or not that you are thinking, you're rethinking and you're writing and you're erasing, and you're rewriting, you're frustrated. So you don't have anything at the end of the day.

I mean, that all happened. So I think we have to take that as a writing process. Other than that, one of the important thing is, for me, writing is what sales me. For me, it seems like everything depends on writing, whether you are applying for grad school or job or any project or any kind of grant or whatever that is, your writing goes first, isn't it? You have to follow your writing. Your writing goes first. So I just consider writing that way, and there's no way to get rid of writing. Writing comes anyway, so I'm in academy, I have taken up that route. So when you are in that academy route, there's no way to take exit or anything else, you are in the freeway. Keep going. So maybe one of the thing is that once you are in freeway, there are other vehicles, there are your colleagues, there are your classmates, and then your professors and all. So that kind of a demand itself, that also helped me move ahead. But for sure, there are some frustrating moments too.

HS: So how do you deal with those moments of frustration?

JK: Well, yeah, if things are not working, I mean, I take a break. I love movies. These days, I don't have time to watch long movies, but I tend to watch short movies, short films, five minute, 10 minute, and I think about that. You don't need 90 minutes or two hours to make a film. You can still make a five minute or 10 minute movie that tells a lot more than two hours movie. That's something sometime applicable in my writing. Also, I was a filmmaker too, kind of as part of my hobby, especially the post-production in filmmaking and then editing in writing. Somehow I see the similarities. You have a lot of footage there. You are going to produce a 10 minute movie, but you have footage of 1000 minute, maybe a lot there. So it's hard to cut and fit there for 10 minute out of a huge archive of footage.

So I mean to say that when I have this kind of block, I find myself pressurizing a lot, and that's something that I realize the next morning or next time. But if things are not working, the best way is just leave it, take a break, do something fun, take a walk. For myself, two things work best, take a walk or watch something fun. So that's what I do. As long as you have time. In graduate school, you don't have time for that too.

So the best thing is watching five minute, 10 minute short videos that help best for me, and then kind of do some exercise, just jump or sometime kind of play the music and dance wildly in the room like nobody's seeing you because I'm not a good dancer, but I just jump and dance and that kind of physical exercise. I think I also find like we are sitting 15 hours, 18 hours a day and writing and writing, and sometimes we don't have time for eating fresh food. We don't have time for breathing in fresh air. We don't have time for exercise and all. I think that also might have affected my own ability. So now moving forward, I'm thinking of those kind of habits also, not being hard on myself, setting realistic goals and taking frequent breaks and all. So yeah, thinking back and looking forward.

HS: I think that's a great approach. Thinking back, looking forward. And in that same vein, I want to ask, is there any other advice that you think would be useful for other graduate writers to be thinking about as they move along in their writing journeys?

JK: So I think it's important to be kind on yourself when you're writing. So we have to be hard on our goal, but kind of on yourself, I think. So that's something that I'm not in the position to give advice to anybody else, but that's something that has been my reflection all this time. Be kind to yourself, but hard on your goal because

graduate school and especially doctoral program is a lot about we have to write, publish. There is a lot of writing, a lot of writing, and also set the realistic goal. So that's something that I'm going to do. At the moment, I have three projects going on. So am I being realistic? It can be sometime tempting. Okay, there's a lot to write and there's a lot of interesting project, but I think it's really important to pause and thank yourself and ask yourself, "Okay, prioritize, and then set the realistic goals. Don't take up a lot, and then whatever you take up, finish that better." So that's something that I'm advising myself. That's something that I'm going to think about myself in my doctoral journey ahead.

HS: Good advice to self and to others.

Thanks again for listening to this episode of Write for You, and a big thank you to our lovely guest. 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 students, faculty, and staff, you can find us online at depts.washington.edu/owrcweb. In the meantime, for myself and all of us at the OWRC, happy writing.

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