



## Writing services for academics on the rise

By Janna Degener

Published on EuroScientist: [www.euroscientist.com](http://www.euroscientist.com)

### What drives scientists to delegate time-consuming writing tasks?

Universities and private centres in different European countries have introduced writing services for academics, in the past few decades. The trend is now catching on as the work of scientists becomes incredibly complex. More and more scientists are now happy to delegate the time-consuming task of communicating their results to professional writers and editors. Academic writing centers and learning development centres that include academic writing service have developed throughout Europe. The European academic writing centres have joined in the [European Writing Centres Association](#) that was founded in 1998 and the [European Association For The Teaching Of Academic Writing](#).

This is a sure sign that the nature of scientists' work is more collaborative than ever. This also shows a lesser known facet of what has now become the extreme specialisation of the scientific process. This article explores what motivates scientists to avail of such services. Yet, gaining support to write an academic paper, is different from outsourcing this task completely, as writing remains an inherent part of doing science.

### Tailored writing courses

Writing skills are an essential part of what scientist need in their career. "Some of these institutions are very engaged in university didactics in order to let the scientists integrate write-intensive teaching in their courses so that the students know how to organise the process of writing, how to argue logically und so on," explains Melanie Brinkschulte, head of the German association of academic writing centres, Gesellschaft für Schreibdidaktik und

Read this post online: <http://www.euroscientist.com/writing-services-for-academics-on-the-rise>

Schreibforschung, in Göttingen, Germany. "And there are also writing workshops and writing consultations for doctoral students who prepare dissertations, work on cumulative graduations or have to produce several publications."

Such services have long existed in the USA. There, academic writing services were introduced in the 1970s. Gradually, universities in Europe have adapted the model to their own needs over the past few decades. Brinkschulte notes: "in Germany the study system is different so universities could not adapt the American system literally. Students write much longer essays, for example, so that the writing process is more complex for German students. That means that you have to develop a concept how to support these students."

Indeed, the model of stand-alone writing classes was not seen as a viable option in Europe, but writing centers, or academic support services, which supported student writers, was a model which some European universities began to adopt in Germany, Denmark, and elsewhere, according to Tracy Santa co-founder of EATAW.

Now, the UK has been among the first in providing academic writing services, often closed by cuts in education in the noughties. In Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Sweden, France and in Southern and Eastern Europe there are also initiatives that teach academic English. The trend is now widespread. "While there are many initiatives by which English majors learn English for academic purposes, and some English writing courses for scientists, in Southern and Eastern Europe, there are very few first language writing initiatives. I am aware of one in Romania and one in Georgia", says John Harbord, head of the Center for Academic Writing at the Central European University in Budapest, Hungary.

### Greater awareness and drivers

There is now a raising awareness of the need to support scientists to help them write their academic papers. "Even in the 19th century established scientists asserted that their young colleagues were not able to write," says Helmut Gruber, president of the Austrian [Gesellschaft für wissenschaftliches Schreiben](#). He adds: "during the past 20 to 30 years student numbers have exploded in Austria so that there is less support available to students and the problem is more obvious."

Brinkschulte thinks that people are also more aware of that such skills can be taught: "People in different European countries are starting to realise, these days, that writing is not a talent alone but something you can learn like the science itself and that it is normal to quarrel with the writing process. This is a good development."

The emergence of academic writing centres also stems from the internationalisation of higher education. Students who are not native-English-speakers often have more problems to meet intensive writing requirements in their studies. "This development has started earlier in the English-speaking countries, hence awareness was greater there earlier as well," says Gruber.

Another reason is that the pressure among academics has increased. "Scientists are living and working under the increasing pressure to publish," points out Tatyana Yakhontova, associate professor at the Department of Foreign Languages for Sciences at [Ivan Franko National University](#) of L'viv, Ukraine. She adds: "research writing services help some of them to prepare their work for publication quickly and, thus, to cope with the pressure,"

Besides, there is further explanations for the emergence of academic writing centres in Europe. In particular, there is a weakness, in terms of writing skills, among the new generation scientists coming through the ranks, according to Yakhontova.

### Support versus outsourcing

Academic writing centers can thus support academics in improving their own writing skills. However, they cannot do scientists' job for them. Experts agree that science and writing are directly connected so that it is not possible to fully outsource this activity to others.

This is valid especially, but not exclusively, in the humanities. "In natural sciences and technical disciplines language is [arguably] less important because [researchers] communicate mainly with figures, tables and diagrams," says

Read this post online: <http://www.euroscientist.com/writing-services-for-academics-on-the-rise>

Gruber, "But in the human science the verbal expression is very important." This means that in research teams, there might be one person who focuses on writing but a real separation of science and writing is not possible. Harbord agrees: "I know that in the medical sciences, scientists work more on research and employ people to write it up for them," he says, adding that scientists working in social science and humanities are less likely to delegate the writing to someone else.

Finally, the two activities of doing science and writing about it may not be that easy to dissociate. Barbara Arfè, psychologist at the Department of [Developmental Psychology and Socialisation](#), at University of Padova, in Italy, who is also associate editor of [Culture and Education](#) magazine, concludes: "There is a strict and fundamental link between doing science and writing about it."

Photo credit: [CC BY 2.0 by marcello](#)