A "do" and "don't" list for carving articles from big research projects

- DO think carefully about your audience for this particular treatment of your research. Are you speaking to specialists? disciplinary generalists? a wider scholarly group? activists, advocates, or policy-makers? After having something to say, deciding to whom you want to say it is the most important aspect of article preparation.
- DO select one big question, idea, problem, or set of findings and stick to it. Dissertations as a whole may be difficult to present in article form, but a single chapter – from which you are able to draw a particular argument and supporting evidence – can often be condensed into a suitable manuscript.
- DO fit your selection and presentation of ideas and findings to a particular journal or other publication venue. Think about what made your favorite published pieces successful, and learn from them.
- DO be selective in the materials you include in the literature review. The idea is not to show that you have read exhaustively in a subject (EXCEPTION: if you are writing for a law review journal, cite everything ever written on the topic). Rather, strategically invoke the central concepts, mainstream and cutting-edge methods, key debate or unresolved issue in the published research and theory on the topic. Use your review to set your research in intellectual context, to explain methodological choices, and to "set up" your presentation and interpretation of your findings.
- DO use a certain amount of "boilerplate" text for sections on methods and sources. You don't have to keep finding creative ways to describe response rates and the results of measurement analyses.
- DON'T introduce new ideas, concepts, or arguments in the conclusion of the manuscript. If you think of something new and important while you're writing, either go back to the beginning and figure out how to set up and support your presentation of it, or pull it out to use in another manuscript.
- DO solicit comments from trusted readers in your peer and mentoring network. But
- DON'T send an unsolicited manuscript to the top person in the field. Instead, write as though you were expecting that person to be the reviewer for the journal to which you want to send the manuscript (this is likely to happen).
- DON'T assume that anybody (let alone everybody!) knows as much about your specific topic and research as you do. Remind yourself of the burning questions that motivated your research, and write a straightforward account of both the question and the results of your search for an answer. At the same time,
- DON'T imagine that people will be fascinated by a step-by-step story of how you identified the research problem, developed the question, and overcame the myriad obstacles to completing the research. Introductions and methods sections are not places to explain to readers how hard you've worked or how brilliant you are. If you want to draw attention to such autobiographical details, *show* don't *tell*!
- DON'T assume the data speak for themselves. Interpret your findings and their implications in ways that will speak to your chosen audience. Link them to broader arguments through the literature review, discussion, and conclusion as well as in the presentation of the findings.
- DO follow all guidelines for manuscript preparation, including word limits, style requirements, and reference format. These are frequently published in the back or front of the journal itself.
- DO write for non-academic audiences (Op Ed pieces, letters to the Editor, feature or shorter articles for your local newspaper, etc.). Your institution will love the publicity, and sometimes responding to journalists' inquiries can help you see aspects of your research that were hidden to you originally. But don't let such activities take up too much of your time, pre-tenure. Unless your institution heavily emphasizes service, and considers such writing "community service," it is unlikely to contribute to your tenure case.

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