



# Reflections on Writing Supplement

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The Editors of the *Northern Ireland Legal Quarterly* were excited to announce the launch of a new opinion-style series of pieces 'Reflections on Writing', in February 2025.

We invited authors to think about their own writing practices. To ask, for example, why do I write? How do I write? Where do I write? How do I carve out the time and space to write? How do I improve my writing? How has my approach to writing changed? Who has influenced my writing practices? What is the value of writing in the contemporary scholarly context?

These are among the questions many scholars ponder wherever they are on their scholarly journey, but seldom articulate to an audience, let alone publish, or even have an opportunity to publish. This new series seeks to develop dialogue around these and other related questions.

The Editors of the NILQ believe that such a dialogue is all the more pressing given the very many constraints put on colleagues in academia at different points in their careers. So, we invited scholars to write

up their thoughts on these – and other – questions. Authors were given the freedom to select their leading question or prompt for reflection, and to express their thoughts however they wish within the broad remit of the series.

The inaugural contribution to the series, entitled 'How the academy negatively affects writing practice', by Professor Mariana Valverde of the University of Toronto, was published on 12 February 2025. In the piece, Mariana reflects on how her experience on community newspapers early on in her career taught her much about the craft of writing and how to meet deadlines, which she was later able to draw on when she began her doctoral studies.

In the second contribution, Professor Shaun D Pattinson, Durham University, offers five guiding thoughts for those at the beginning of their academic law publishing journey, gained from his own experience of rejection and acceptance.

In the third article in the series, Professor Barbara Prainsack, University of Vienna, explains

how her method of writing a predetermined number of words each day changed her mindset and made writing something to celebrate.

In the fourth article in the series, Professor Graeme Laurie, University of Edinburgh, examines the idea of ‘stuckness’ – by asking the question, why don’t we write? – and recommends would-be authors to develop and hone their own personal Research Voice as they build up a portfolio of academic work.

The fifth contribution to the series is from Professor Duncan Sheehan, University of Leeds, who describes the academic’s job as ‘a writing job’. His starting points are intellectual curiosity and the desire for understanding. But he also stresses the communitarian aspects of the process, the need for patience and good time-management and, last but not least, the ability to say ‘No’.

In the sixth article in our ‘Reflections’ series, Professor Tamara Hervey, The City Law School, examines the process of co-writing – producing a joint piece of work in which a single ‘voice’ ‘speaks’ to the reader and the authorship is completely intertwined. She explains how working with one or more colleagues can strengthen the finished version, whether it be a chapter, article or even a book, by bringing together different ‘positionalities’, ‘life experiences’ and ‘ways of seeing the world’.

The seventh article in the series is by Professor Roger Cotterrell, Queen Mary University of London, who describes the deeply personal nature of writing and the sense of satisfaction of communicating successfully with the reader. However, he also stresses the need for ‘never-ceasing self-reflection’ on one’s own writing practice and draws on George Orwell’s influential 1946 essay, ‘Why I write’, for further inspiration.

In the eighth article in our series, Professor Niamh Nic Shuibhne, University of Edinburgh, examines how the UK community of academics working in the field of European law have been affected by the shock of Brexit and reflects on how it has had an impact on her own writing – not just at a professional level but also from an emotional and personal perspective.

In the ninth article in our ‘Reflections’ series, Dr Sylvia de Mars of Newcastle University describes how a stint at the House of Commons Library writing policy briefings for MPs and the result of the Brexit referendum were the catalysts that enabled her to shake off some of the constraints of traditional academic publishing and discover a freer and more enjoyable way of writing about EU law.

The tenth contribution to our series is our first co-authored piece, by David Cowan, Cardiff University, and Simon Halliday,

University of Strathclyde. It comes in the form of an email conversation in which they begin by reflecting on why a collaborative project over 20 years ago resulted in a sole-authored paper rather than a joint publication but move on to a discussion of the difference between working and writing together and what they both learned from the experience.

In the eleventh 'Reflections' piece, in a wide-ranging article, Nicola Lacey, London School of Economics, meditates on 45 years of writing by highlighting four very different projects, describing the hurdles of peer review, loneliness, co-writing and self-doubt and highlighting the complex environment that modern academics must navigate to get their work published.

In the twelfth article in the series, Emily Jackson, London School of Economics, shares the four things that motivate her to write: anger; to answer a puzzling question; shock; and commitment to a big project. She describes the early part of her writing process as a 'scattergun' approach before order starts to emerge, and charts the advantages of co-authorship, knowing when to abandon a project, dealing with feedback and sharing 'work in progress'.

Conor Gearty's contribution, the thirteenth in our series, takes us on a journey through his authoring life, from early childhood, through doctoral angst, and several serendipitous

encounters. Drawn from this experience he provides 'Eight tips for surviving (and enjoying!) academic writing' – a wealth of first-hand advice sprinkled with anecdotal examples on the way.

Michael Dougan, University of Liverpool, has never experienced writer's block and derives real enjoyment from the process of academic writing. In the fourteenth contribution to this series, he describes his highly structured approach to the task, starting with an intuition that there is 'something to say' and moving on via shorthand notes and bullet points to create order out of legal chaos.

In the fifteenth article in this series, Alison Liebling, University of Cambridge, explores the emotional side of her most recent writing journey and describes not only the joy of the process, but also how so-called 'negative' feelings can become sources of creativity as well.

All contributions to this series so far have been published on an advance open access basis as soon as they become available. So please check here to see the latest additions.

We have already published the [first article](#) in the 2026 series of Reflections on Writing.

Look out for further contributions in the near future!