

WRITERS' RETREAT 2015



Evaluation Report

The Writers' Retreat (25th – 27th May 2015) was funded by the MIC research committee Seed Funding Scheme (Development of Research Skills) and organised by Dr. Elaine Murtagh.

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Writers' Retreat 2015

EVALUATION REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The report summaries feedback received from MIC staff who took part in the Writers' Retreat at Coolbawn Quay, Co. Tipperary (25th – 27th May 2015). Responses are presented for 11 people who completed the online survey.

Rationale and content

The writers' retreat provided participants with an opportunity to focus on writing in an uninterrupted, self-structured manner without the normal distractions and creates an ideal way to accelerate progress on a particular journal article, PhD chapter or research report (Moore, 2003). It is anticipated that directly as a result of the retreat participants will submit a journal article for publication or complete a PhD chapter.

Key component of the writers' retreat included:

1. Pre-retreat preparation, including distribution of handouts and guidelines (see appendix 1)
2. Private writing time
3. Facilitated sessions
 - Planning & Goal Setting: Dr. Catherine Martin, Regional Writing Centre, University of Limerick
 - Writing with your student; Writing with your supervisor: Dr. Melissa Parker, Dept Physical Education & Sport Science, University of Limerick and Cathy Berei, Dept of Movements Sciences, University of Idaho
 - Next steps and Action planning: Dr Íde O'Sullivan, Regional Writing Centre, University of Limerick
4. Peer feedback: The provision of peer feedback supports the redrafting process during the retreat (Ebest, 2005). Partners were encouraged to meet at least daily to provide feedback on each other's writing.

The schedule for the retreat can be found in appendix 2.

Participants

Name	Position / Department
Tanya de Paor	Lecturer in Visual Arts Education, Dept Arts Education & Physical Education
Anne Dolan	Lecturer in Primary Geography, Dept Learning, Society & Religious Education
Michael Finneran	Senior Lecturer in Drama Education
Claire Griffin	Lecturer in Psychology of Education, Dept Learning, Society & Religious Education
Mairead Hourigan	Lecturer in Mathematics Education, Dept Language, Literacy & Mathematics Education
Aisling Leavy	Lecturer in Mathematics Education, Dept Language, Literacy & Mathematics Education
Fiona McDonagh	Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow in Drama Education, Dept Arts Education & Physical Education
Gwen Moore	Lecturer in Music Education, Dept Arts Education & Physical Education
Anne Marie Morrin	Lecturer in Visual Arts Education, Dept Arts Education & Physical Education
Dorothy Morrissey	Lecturer in Drama Education, Dept Arts Education & Physical Education
Elaine Murtagh	Lecturer in Physical Education, Dept Arts Education & Physical Education
Aislinn O'Donnell	Lecturer in Philosophy Education, Dept Learning, Society & Religious Education
Margaret O'Keefe	Lecturer in Drama Education, Dept Arts Education & Physical Education
Sandra Ryan	Lecturer in Education Disadvantage & Sociology, Dept Learning, Society & Religious Education
Orla Slattery	Inclusion Coordinator, Dept Learning, Society & Religious Education



FINDINGS

Overall experience

When asked to rate their overall experience of the writers' retreat on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent, 100% of participants reported it as Excellent.

Participants were asked to note the BEST aspect of the writers' retreat. The majority of respondents commented on the value of having dedicated time and space to write. The collegial nature of the course which served to promote sharing of experiences was noted by five participants. For others, the importance of the facilitated sessions and the peer-feedback was highlighted. A sample of responses is shown below.

What was the best aspect of the Writers' Retreat?

It was one of the best academic experiences that I have had to date in MIC

The best part was having the time and space to write. I cannot overstate the importance of this

Having dedicated time and space to write in a supportive and productive environment

The collegial environment was very conducive to writing and reflecting

Input on first and third days were very helpful for me in particular

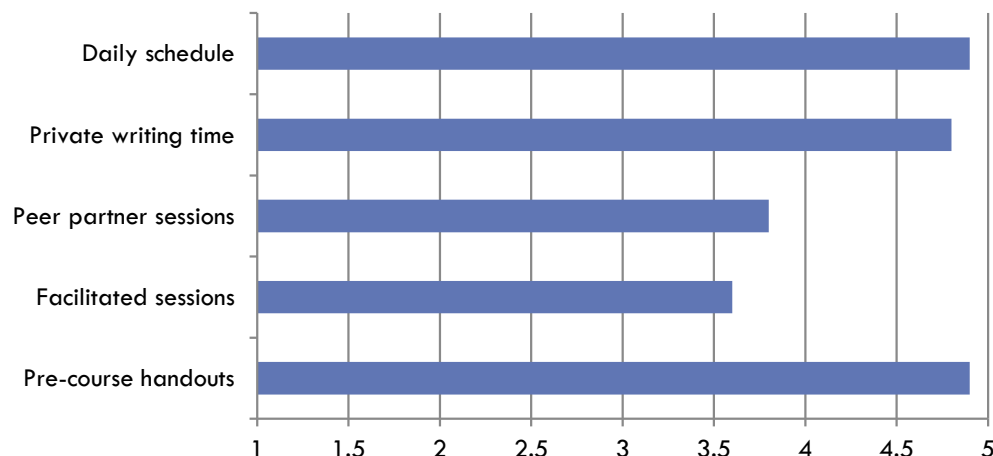
Collaborating with colleagues especially peer partner, it was useful to have a colleague from a different background respond to the work

Participants were also asked to note the WORST aspect of the writers' retreat. The majority of participants reported no negative comments. Two respondents felt that the peer-partner sessions were not particularly useful for them.

Course Provision

Participants were asked to rate their opinion of several key aspects of course provision. Respondents were very positive in their evaluation of the pre-course handouts, daily schedule and private writing time. There were mixed responses with regard to the peer-partner sessions and facilitated sessions (see figure 1). These are discussed further in the 'recommendations' section of the report.

Figure 1: Rating of aspects of course provision

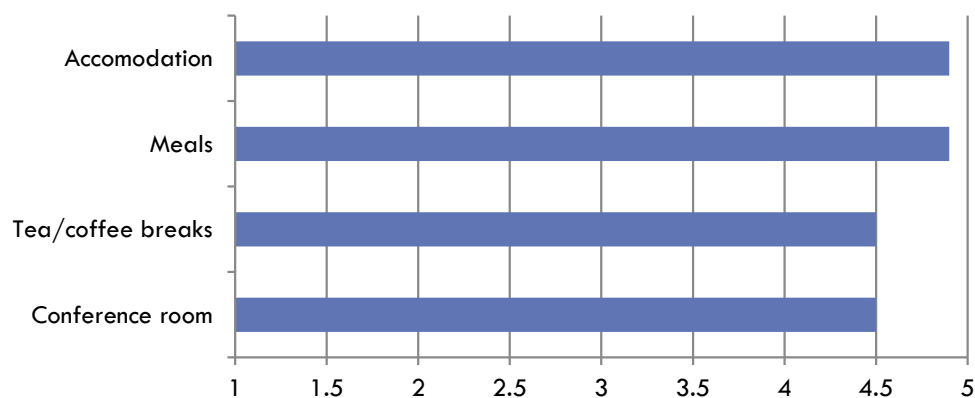


Note: 1 = poor, 5 = excellent

Course Venue

The course venue is of crucial importance in setting the right atmosphere for a productive writers' retreat. Figure 2 shows participants' perceptions of the standard of accommodation, meals, tea/coffee breaks and the conference room.

Figure 2: Rating of the venue



Note: 1 = poor, 5 = excellent

Recommendations

Participants were asked to suggest themes and content of facilitated sessions at future retreats. A recurring suggestion was to hold a session on the variety of writing outlets available, for example, journal articles, book reviews and book chapters, and how to target specific journal. Additional suggestions are shown below. Two participants noted that they would have preferred not to attend the facilitated sessions in order to continue their own writing instead.

Suggestions for facilitated sessions:

- *Identifying and applying for research grants*
- *Dealing with poor/difficult peer reviews*
- *Individual feedback from writing consultant*
- *Discipline specific sessions*

Participants were also asked for suggestions for the development and improvement of the Writers' Retreat. Five participants suggested that a Writers' Retreat should be held each semester. Two respondents suggested an "opt-in" process for the peer-feedback sessions. Additional responses are shown below.

Suggestions/further comments:

- *I think that there should be more funding available if more faculty would like to avail of it in the future*
- *Perhaps include attendees in the pairing for peer-feedback process*
- *More individual desks in the school house*

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, participants were overwhelmingly positive about their experience of the writers' retreat. Many noted that the have dedicated time to write was essential to progress their individual writing projects. Recommendations made by participates should be taken into consideration when organising future courses of a similar nature.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Pre-retreat handouts

Handout A: Before the retreat

BEFORE THE RETREAT

Before the retreat:

- Prepare to transport your laptop or arrange to borrow one
- Start outlining the work you are planning to do
- Make key decisions about your work well in advance of the retreat: for example target journal/publisher/format/genre
- Commit to keeping a record of the 'ecology' of your paper (versions, correspondence, feedback, reviews, ideas, changes in direction and so on). This will become a helpful professional development tool for yourself and your colleagues.
- Make your transport arrangements well in advance. Decide if you are going to drive.
- Commit to the ENTIRE course. It is far away. It is residential. You need to ensure that you are not so stressed on arrival that it takes 24 hours before you are in the right frame of mind to start writing.

Some reading

- A paper on the writers' retreat concept (Moore, 2003)

From Murray, R. & Moore, S. 2006. The handbook of academic writing: a fresh approach, Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Handout B: Targeting a journal

TARGETING A JOURNAL (ADAPTED FROM MURRAY, 2004)

Experts in effective academic writing strategies say: 'Do not write and then plan to find an appropriate "place" for your writing – rather, analyse target journals carefully and then write with the benefit of this analysis'.

- Get several copies and scan recent editions of your chosen journal.
- Read full instructions for authors, check website and print off all relevant author information.
- Work out how you can mould your work to suits the journal's agenda.
- Write to the editor with an initial inquiry.

Emailing the editor

'I am writing a paper on XXX which argues that YYY...Do you think this would be of interest to readers of the journal at this time?'

If you get a response, reply thanking the editor and letting him/her know when the paper is likely to be completed.

This relatively easy exercise does several things:

- It externalises your commitment to writing.
- It means that you won't be 'writing into the dark', but that you'll have a specific goal in advance of the writers' retreat.
- It has the pragmatic effect of differentiating your paper from those that are submitted without an 'initial go-ahead' from the editor.

Some reading:

- A chapter from Rowena Murray's book: *Writing for Academic Journals*, Chapter 2: 'Targeting a journal'. (This will be emailed to you separately).

From Murray, R. & Moore, S. 2006. *The handbook of academic writing: a fresh approach*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Appendix 2: Course schedule

Monday 25th May

10am	Participants arrive
10.30–11.30am	Planning & Goal Setting <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr. Catherine Martin, Regional Writing Centre, University of Limerick
11.30am – 1pm	Private writing
1pm	Lunch (and check into rooms)
2pm	Private writing
6 - 7pm	Peer partners meet
8pm	Dinner

Tuesday 26th May

8am	Breakfast
9am	Private writing
12 – 1pm	Writing with your student; Writing with your supervisor <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr. Melissa Parker, Dept Physical Education & Sport Science, University of Limerick• Cathy Berei, Dept of Movements Sciences, University of Idaho
1pm	Lunch
2pm	Private writing
6pm – 7pm	Peer meetings
8pm	Dinner

Wednesday 27th May

8am	Breakfast
9am	Private writing
12pm	Next steps and Action planning <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr Íde O'Sullivan, Regional Writing Centre, University of Limerick
1pm	Lunch
2pm	Participants depart