# WRITING AND PUBLICATION IN GRADUATE SCHOOL

Hugh Nibley

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Q. Why is such overwhelming stress laid on publication at the so-called "Prestige schools"? Isn't teaching as important as writing?

A. They are equally important because they are one and indivisible. Recently the U. of C. made a year-long study of the "Research Function of the University" and came to the not surprising conclusion that the best teachers always do some research and the best researchers always do some teaching:

> A man who brings only talent and enthusiasm for teaching with him from graduate school (says the study) may well be seen as a second-rate member of the local academic community. . .within a decade of his promotion to tenure, he will prove to be a very routine teacher indeed. . . for the individual faculty member, the balance between teaching and research must be preserved. . .It is in post-graduate education that a research-oriented faculty is essential. . .Our own system. . .requires a man to start showing a sizable volume of productive results within at least two years of arrival if he is to be ensured an orderly progress up our promotion ladder.

Q. Are you assuming that research and publication are synonymous?

A. That is what is meant in the report by "productive results"--not a mere collection of notes but actual publication. A dancer dances, a painter paints, a composer composes, a builder builds, and a scholar publishes. All the costly gimmicks, the laborious jargon, the world's-fair architecture, the intellectual posturing, the enormous staff, top-heavy administration, and swarming student-body of a big modern university are but window-dressing unless we can show that we are able to produce something.

Q. But might a church university not be an exception?

A. On the contrary, publication is especially important in a church university; for where the severe standards imposed by professional journals are not applied, scholars inevitably succumb to the occupational hazards of the religious teacher, easily lapsing into superficial pseudo-scholarship, irresponsible speculation, ill-informed controversy and authoritarian pomposity.

Q. Is publication necessary to preserve integrity?

A. There is no better way. As long as a professor can go to bed at night and rise up in the morning in the sublime assurance that he will never be called upon to produce solid support for his exalted station; as long as he can fulfill the measure of his existence by pontificating before a room full of adolescents, warming chairs in committee rooms and dozing at meetings without ever having to pass muster before a competent board of editors, a man is bound to abuse his security by the relaxing of scholarly standards. The trouble with not publishing is that it is just too easy--nothing is easier, in fact than not to publish. Anyone can be a teacher, a very bad teacher, if you will, but still anyone can teach. On the other hand consistent publication requires a high level of excellence--journals simply cannot afford to publish trash. Publication and not teaching is the one way to keep a scholar on his toes.

Q. Is it not enough to study hard and be well-informed?

A. No. Scholarship is an open-ended discussion in which things are never settled. The important thing, therefore, is not to be right on a particular point but to be able to enter into the discussion. It is for this purpose that scholarly journals exist. Until one gets onto the playing-field, one is not in the game--he is merely a spectator, and may cheer for this or that player or shout advice from his classroom bleachers, but never knows what it really is like in the arena.

Q. How much time should be spent in courses before trying to publish?

A. An absolute minimum. The first paper a student writes should be aimed at publication.

The student who has read enough and thought enough and knows enough to have something to say is ready to write; and if he is ready to write, he is ready to publish.

Q. Even if he is very young?

A. Age has nothing to do with it. There is no point to spending long years learning how to give form and expression to thoughts you are never going to have, or learning how to write up discoveries you will never make. Don't bother to spend time, money, and energy learning how to hunt buffaloes unless you are sure that there will be buffaloes to hunt. You should be sure of that by the time you are ten years old. If you don't find any game in one area, move to another and move quickly; avoid becoming shackled to another man's career. In hundreds of graduate schools, the eager youth are being ostensibly prepared for venturing forth into new and wonderful worlds of intellectual exploration; yet I have known many professors in these schools who would gladly give a thousand dollars to anyone who could suggest to them some really good topic in their field to write about. Don't waste your time in played-out fields--there are plenty of others. How can the graduate faculty prepare others to hunt the buffaloes they have never seen?

Q. When can a student consider a study worthy of publication? How can he be sure of mature judgement?

A. He can get all the mature judgement he wants, free of charge, from the editors. When they consider a study acceptable, then he can. You see how important it is not to be left to our own opinions regarding our own work. Vanity often tells a man a work of his is a masterpiece, when it may not even be mediocre by general standards. There are 3 minimum prerequisites that every paper worthy of publication must have, however.

Q. What are the three prerequisites?

A. Every study should be 1) authentic, 2) original, and 3) significant. Without all three of these characteristics no study should be published; with all three any study is certain to find publication without difficulty.

Q. Can't a paper qualify by virtue of being very high in one or two of the characteristics even if it is defective in others?

A. No. I could prepare a very full and accurate account of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, for example, but since the story has already been told a dozen times no editor would be interested in it--it is not original. I could on the other hand supply a highly original account of how in my opinion the Scrolls were discovered--original, even sensational stuff--but unless it was also authentic and not merely speculative, it would not justify publication. Or I could make a full and accurate listing of all the appearances of the letter "y" in the writings of Washington Irving, an original project never before undertaken--but also totally without significance.

Q. But doesn't your insistence on all three qualifications mean that very few people can become scholars?

A. It means that no one can become a scholar merely by taking courses and serving time. It is high time we realized this before spending more millions in hopeless causes. Countless students have come to grief because they have believed, and even been encouraged to believe that scholarship is a rank to which one can rise by process of promotion. It is nothing of the sort. Good grades, a neat appearance, and a pleasing personality are good enough in themselves but they have nothing to do with a student's capacity to produce. That is something else. One can become a dean, a professor, a department-head, a president, or a regent by appointment (often achieved by obtaining the favor of just one key person of influence), but since the beginning of time nobody ever became an artist, a scientist, or a scholar by appointment. If your work has the three qualifications of authenticity, originality, and significance, you are in business; if it does not, you are not, no matter how many people you may impress.

Q. Then why bother to study?

A. Because even the greatest talent must be improved by technical know-how, and even limited talent can be made productive by the proper training.

Q. What kind of training? How does one go about getting authentic, original, and significant ideas?

A. First, you must load up on the information already available. Since there is lots of it your appetite must be enormous and your interest reach the point of high excitement. That, for scholarship, is talent. There is a vast amount of stuff to be got through

before you begin to approach the frontiers of your field where the information begins to peter out and where you can find yourself at last looking out over unexplored territory. Before you can stand on the borderline you must first traverse the wide terrain through which generations of researchers have hewn their way before you. Much of this land is through long neglect now covered with a dense second-growth, often thicker than the first. The Classical Scholar, for example, must read all his ancient authors as if nobody had ever read them before, and added to that he must familiarize himself with the wonderful and bedizzening work of the Renaissance scholars who often possessed astonishing knowledge and insight into the ancients. This takes years and years, but it is great fun, and in the process, if the student has any perceptivity at all, new and original ideas are bound to pop up everywhere as he steadily and systematically reads his way forward: on all sides slips, gaps, anomalies and contradictions will appear; he will soon learn that in the light of new discoveries all the old sources have to be re-read again, this time with a new meaning; everywhere are things waiting to be interpreted or re-interpreted, explored or re-explored. Just as thousands of hints, cues, and signals are pouring in to our receptive senses from the surrounding physical world, the scope and nature of whose message is determined only by our ability to receive and respond to the cues, so the documents of the past have an infinite number of messages for us if we can only read them.

Q. Doesn't all that reading mean that the student has to pass through a long, unproductive period?

A. Yes. It is the business of the school to take care of that. The word "school" (schole, ludus) means a place where one will not be pressed by immediate practical affairs but can find time to play with types and models and engage in what Aristotle called theoria--sizing things up. That is the meaning of a liberal education as against a trade-school or strictly bread-and-butter education, though the liberal education always pays off best in the long run. By graduate school the long period of preparation should begin to pay off in actual production. Since we do very little real preparation in our high schools and colleges, our graduates are for the most part unable to produce except in artificial classroom situations.

Q. You mean that every graduate student should publish?

A. What else? What else is he being trained for? Read what it says on an M.A. or Ph.D. diploma. This is what it says on mine: "The regents of the U. of So-and-so have conferred upon So-and-so who has proved his ability by original research in Such-and-such a subject the degree of Such-and-such." The operational words here are "ability" and "original." There is no mention whatever of administrative experience, hard work, ability to get along with people, teaching skill, dedicated loyalty, a pleasing appearance, etc., by which we place such store in our educational politics. Here they have nothing to do with the case. The degree is awarded entirely as an earnest of things to come, the recognition of promise in terms of "ability" of years of "original research" that lie ahead. What the graduate school is doing, if this all-important certificate means anything at all, is getting the student ready for a lifetime of original research.

Q. You have said that a paper must be first of all authentic. What do you mean by that?

A. Two things--but they are really the same: it must be accurate and it must be complete. Without the highest standards of accuracy, even the most ingenious and learned study may be not only useless--since the work will have to be done all over again--but actually pernicious, since it will lead the unwary astray.

Q. But isn't perfect accuracy impossible?

A. Yes, slips can be detected in the most careful work, but they are not characteristic of such work--they are recognizably slips. It is when inaccuracy is due to lack of familiarity with one's subject, usually when one has bitten off more than he can chew, sliding over into related areas with which he has only limited acquaintance, that inaccuracy becomes disastrous. Accuracy is actually a much rarer quality than we think. It requires patient and meticulous covering of all the ground. That is the sort of drudgery with which the "grand old man" or the "authority in his field" is liable to have diminishing patience with the years, and with which the young student eager for success and recognition may have no patience at all. The temptation to cheat is very great--who is going to

go to all the trouble of looking up one's footnotes? Not even the reviewers. Inaccurate documentation may go undiscovered for years. Being accurate requires doing a thoroughly thorough job. That is why we say that accuracy and completeness are the same thing in research.

Q. If there is no such thing as perfect accuracy, how complete is complete?

A. Completer than you think: where any information at all is lacking, no conclusions can ever be trusted; how often has just one bit of evidence changed the whole picture? No stone can be left unturned; since there is no way of knowing what an unexamined source might contain, to leave any source unexamined is to ignore material that may, and often does, refute one's entire thesis.

Q. Do you mean that an ordinary student must examine every piece of evidence on a subject?

A. Yes. Not to use all available evidence is to defeat the whole purpose of research, which is to add to the fund of existing knowledge. How can you add to it if you don't know what is already there and what is missing? No future progress is possible where past progress is ignored. What is the advantage of centuries of writing and research that others have put into my subject if I intend to consider only ten percent of it? By what right do I presume to ask others to give my work the respectful attention which I deny to theirs? We cannot honestly add a word to historical writing until we know what needs to be added.

Q. Do you mean that an ordinary student must examine every source in every library in the world before he considers his work done?

A. Exactly. I grant you it isn't easy (there is no such thing as an ordinary student, by the way); in the past, it has been all but impossible and for that reason real scholars were few and far between. But today the whole structure of university research activity is based on the assumption that complete research IS possible. Hence the enormous costly libraries, where a few good encyclopedias and reference works would suffice the undergraduate; hence the vast machinery of classification, reproduction, indexing, cross referencing, exchange and communication; hence the big grants and fellowships, the incessant traveling of scholars, the ceaseless consultations, conventions and huge outpourings of professional journals, digests, newsletters, and reviews in every field. All is dedicated to the single proposition that every scholar can and must be properly informed of every significant development in his field as quickly as possible, the purpose of it all being to assure completeness in individual research.

Q. How can anyone handle such large masses of material?

A. Attempts to have computers share in the work have not been satisfactory. Accordingly the solution remains today the same as it has always been. It is for the sake of completeness in research that scholars necessarily become narrow specialists. If one cannot cover the ground completely in a given area, there is nothing for it but to narrow down the area until one can do a complete job. That is why intense specialization has long been the hallmark of advanced research.

Q. Does not such narrowness defeat the purpose of historical and other humanistic studies in general, which is to broaden knowledge?

A. Paradoxically, the defects of intense specialization are self-correcting if one is consistent and conscientious. One inevitably reaches a point where specialized research cannot go forward without a broadening of information. The more one specializes in a particular Biblical problem, for example, the more languages and related matters one must need to know; one can specialize to the point of studying a single star, but really to understand that star requires an immense broadening of physical, chemical, and scientifical knowledge.

Q. Is it always necessary for a student to deal with original sources?

A. Sometimes he cannot have access to first-hand materials, but he is only a scholar to the degree in which he deals in such. For example, if I must depend on a translation, accepting uncritically the opinion of someone else, for a translation is only an opinion, I automatically forfeit my own right to an opinion on the matter.

Q. But isn't one's own interpretation of a text apt to be less correct than that of an expert and specialist in the language?

A. Yes, but one is still not free to accept another's translation, for it often happens in ancient texts that a novice will notice things that have escaped the attention of transla-

tions of students; one cannot accept any translation as definitive because there is no such thing as a correct translation.

Q. What do you mean by that?

A. A correct translation would be a perfect translation. The electronics experts have discovered what has been known to linguists for a long time--that there is no such thing as a perfect translation. If there were, a translation machine could be devised without difficulty; but the world's foremost authority on translation machines points out why perfect translation is impossible, namely because "the human translator. . .is often obliged to make use of extra-linguistic knowledge which sometimes has to be of considerable breadth and depth." It is precisely this extra-linguistic knowledge which is the field of literary and historical scholarship, where mere language study is only the first if most important step. A document studied carefully in the original always conveys more information than any translation, and it is usually information of a vital and significant sort.

Q. Why do you insist on originality, and what do you mean by it?

A. By originality we mean doing something that nobody else has ever done. Merely to duplicate what others have done is a criminal waste of valuable time and energy, both the writer's and the reader's. The first duty of the scholar before undertaking to add to the sum total of knowledge is to make very sure that his contribution will do just that. If somebody has already done the work in an area, he should be grateful instead of resentful to find it done.

Q. But isn't it distressing to find that a field has already been plowed?

A. Only if one insists on staying in that field. But there are always fields beyond, even though they become increasingly far away and difficult to reach. The end is always in sight for those without originality; for such, the field has always been worked out. The original person is one who can do something new after everything has been done. There are such people. If you are not one of them, do not aspire to the heights. Also beware of the scholarly opinion, which is only an Ersatz for originality.

Q. What do you mean by that?

A. An opinion no matter how learned is not an original contribution. An opinion merely assigns a given object to a given category; for example, object--onions, category--good, bad. With both the object and the category given, even a cretin is capable of reacting with an opinion. For anyone to write, "I have examined all the evidence, and my considered opinion is. . ." is worse than worthless. What makes one an authority is the ability to provide evidence, not dispense with it, and the better the authority is, the more clearly, fully and fairly he can present the evidence.

Q. Cannot a contribution be valuable, e.g., for a particular group of people, without being original?

A. To repeat what others have said and report what they have done for the benefit of people who might not have access to specialized writings may be a commendable public service, but it is NOT scholarship, even if you throw in your own opinion as you go. The compilation of a newsletter or the writing of popular articles may be a useful and indispensable activity, but it is strictly office-work and no more. To qualify as scholarship, a writing must present information hitherto unknown. Such a feat is entirely beyond the scope of some departments at the BYU, even though they award academic degrees. An opinion is not information, and an interpretation is NOT a discovery. Schliemann discovered important tombs, but he did NOT discover the tomb of Atreus--that was merely his interpretation of what he had discovered. The scholar does not stand or fall by the judgement of the general public, who are not in a position to criticize his work, but of his peers in his field. For a university to try to build up prestige by advertizing in popular journals or cultivating an "image" through the arts of public relations is not only futile but dishonest.

Q. What do you mean by significant?

A. Significance is a relative value, measured by the interest of a writing to a reader. There are three types of interest that make a study significant: human interest, scientific interest, and vested interest.

Q. What is the human interest you refer to?

A. It is the fun one gets from writing and reading the stuff. Writing that amuses and

edifies needs no apology. Scholarly writing should always be a pleasure to read. If it is, it needs no more justification than a good mystery story or play. Over and above the normal appeal of good literature to the imagination, scholarly writing has the added appeal of telling the truth. There have always been people who pursued scholarly study for the pure joy of it; there always will be people who simply cannot leave the stuff alone. Humanity as such has an incurable taste for humanity, which combined with an equally incurable curiosity to know what really happened will always keep historical scholarship in business.

Q. And what is scientific interest?

A. As any scientist will tell you, the desire to know how things really are. All the human race has to show for its existence is the records of its past: the really important clues to the nature of the beast must come from them. The documents are just as real—objective, tangible and "scientific" as fossils and star spectra, and they cry for an explanation and understanding just as insistently. The documents which scholarship presumes to examine are the world's great depository of human experience, the actual field-notes and lab-notes from which alone man's behavior can be studied in any d[illegible]. The biological and archaeological records are very feeble and unsure by comparison.

Q. What about the vested interest?

A. Aside from the sheer delight of knowing one's fellows and the pure and insatiable appetite for knowledge, it is sometimes decidedly to one's advantage to know what happened in distant times and places--it may even be of vital importance. There is an enormous vested interest in scholarship--political, economic, religious; it is the image of the past that controls the present.

Q. Isn't an ulterior motive in scholarship to be deplored?

A. Not if the field remains open for free discussion. Jacoby, one of the great histo[illegible]graphers of our century, said that no significant historical work was ever written "sine ira et studio"--there must be passion behind it, and nothing stirs passion like a personal stake in things. Ranke wrote without passion and without ever taking sides, for which reason, says Jacoby, nobody ever reads Ranke.

Q. But isn't partisanship the death of true scholarship?

A. It is unavoidable, not only in scholarship but in the physical sciences; everyone necessarily views the world from his own point of view--one simply can't help it. The corrective for that is not to deny it but to learn other points of view. Vested interest is the one thing that assures a scholar that his writing will be both read and criticized. Where much is at stake even footnotes may be carefully scrutinized. This is a healthy thing. When I know that every sentence I write is going to be challenged, I must proceed with care and play the game with scrupulous honesty; otherwise, if I am caught in a trick, I will only damage my own case.

Q. Shouldn't we avoid religious polemic?

A. Yes. I defy anyone not to take some position regarding Mormonism if he is going to write about it; this does not mean that one must engage in polemic, but it does mean that one must regard the inclinations and prejudices of all scholars as one of the facts of life. We are under obligation not to become the helpless victims of scholarly attack on the Church or lose by default whatever advantages are presented in new discoveries. If a new find seems to support or refute a position or claim of the Church, it is sheer imbecility not to point out the connection and discuss its significance. As an open-ended discussion, historical scholarship cannot withhold comment until all issues are settled and agreed on, since things are never settled. The student does not gather information with the mechanical impartiality of a vacuum-cleaner, but sees every bit of information as fitting into some pattern or other. Frankly taking a position or a frame of reference, the student unblushingly tries to prove or disprove things, dont avoid taking a position, but don't resent it if all the world takes an opposite position. Remember, in order to be original, your contribution should contain something which has never been accepted before, because it has never been known before.

Q. Should ten, twenty, or thirty references be required for a term paper?

A. I have heard that question before at the BYU and hardly believed my ears. On the old-

Library Committee we used to discuss by the hour how many titles would be necessary for the library of a college with five thousand, ten thousand or fifteen thousand students. It would make as much sense to ask how many volumes of an encyclopedia are needed by a small school, a middle-sized school, or a large school, or how many ingredients should go into a one-pound, a two-pound, or a three-pound pudding or cake. The answer is always the same: no matter how MUCH of a thing you want to make, you must always put into it all the ingredients its nature requires. For a given paper one must have all the references necessary for a honest presentation—whether that means two or two hundred is entirely beside the point.

Q. What is the main weakness of our students?

A. Undoubtedly the desire for recognition rather than interest in what they are doing. They are decidedly degree-seeking rather than knowledge-seeking. Eager to be successful, they want to rush into production without any foundation. The Gospel is only for the honest in heart, we are told; to others it shows an infinitely exalted but also remotely distant goal for which they have not the diligence to work or the patience to wait, but whose allure they cannot resist. So they anticipate the goal, sometimes in forms and ceremonies (we take our academic ritual in deadly earnest), sometimes by cultivating an invincibly cocky self-confidence, and sometimes in mental and emotional crackups. We want to be rewarded and recognized for our study, and that is not a proper motive for learning.

Q. What do you mean, not a proper motive?

A. Brigham Young said it: "Again, what do you love truth for? Is it because you can discover a beauty in it, because it is congenial to you, or because you think it will make you a ruler, or a Lord? If you conceive that you will attain to power upon such a motive, you are much mistaken. It is a trick of the unseen power that is abroad among the inhabitants of the earth that leads them astray. . ." And it is nowhere more at home than in our universities. Our institutions exploit this improper motive to the fullest. The history of universities shows that they have consistently been the enemies of that search for knowledge to which they pay lip service.

Q. How is that?

A. They give priority to their own image, cultivating the fiction that merely to be connected with an important institution is in itself an achievement. It is nothing of the sort. All productive work is individual work. A great institution is largely a show, we are much too prone to expend our time and energies cultivating appearances instead of doing an honest job and letting the 'image' take care of itself: it is time we were taking the message of Matthew 23 to heart. It is easy to hold meetings and ceremonies, form committees, give courses, and talk everlastingly; it is not only easy and pleasant to discourse on the education of the race; it is actually a temptation which few can resist. The urge to improve other people's minds is, as Brigham Young observed, not a rare virtue but the commonest of vices. It should be avoided rather than rewarded. Talking about education is like beer-drinking (and the two often go together): it is pleasantly intoxicating, enormously time-consuming, idiotically exalting, and subtly enervating; while imparting a befuddled sense of power and glory, it effectively paralyzes activity of mind and body.

Q. Isn't it both exhausting and discouraging to try to buck the fierce competition in the scholarly journals?

A. There is no competition! The press is large and hungry—ever-expanded, in fact, and the constant complaint of editors is that they almost never get anything that is informed, original, and significant. The editors are pathetically eager to welcome any good material from any source.

Q. How does a student gain access or introduction to the editors of journals?

A. The only go-between you will ever need is the nearest post-office.