The effect of low-intensity writing interventions on early-career researchers is unknown

- Writers with high self-efficacy outperform writers with low self-efficacy along multiple dimensions related to productivity.
- Writing boot camps and other structured, time-intensive interventions increase self-efficacy.
- The heavy time commitment required by these interventions poses a significant barrier to early-career researchers.

Can a low-intensity intervention increase writing self-efficacy?

We investigated whether a less-time-intensive writing intervention could still produce the increased writing self-efficacy linked to intensive, longer-term interventions.

- Modeled on Shut Up & Write® (SUAW)
  - Consistent meeting times
  - Experienced facilitator
  - Goal sharing and report-outs
- Virtual via Zoom
- 1 or 2 hours/week for 5 weeks
- Pre/post participation survey adapted from the validated Writer Self-Perception Scale

A short-term, low-intensity writing intervention significantly increased writing self-efficacy in early-career researchers.

Study Population

Participants were early-career researchers and medical students from underrepresented backgrounds and/or Minority-Serving Institutions.

- 10 were self-selected early-career current and former LEADS scholars
- 13 were medical students in the LEADS/Gleitsman program

87% of LEADS scholars and 79% of Gleitsman scholars are from underrepresented backgrounds. 79% and 77% respectively are women.

Results

Seven (30%) SUAW participants completed both the pre- and post-survey. Participants (n=7) reported significantly higher self-efficacy on the item “I have a generally positive attitude toward writing” pre-to-post (p=0.047).

The mean of the question “How satisfied were you with this SUAW activity?” which appeared only on the post-survey (n=10) was 1.10 (1=extremely satisfied, 5=extremely dissatisfied).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and t-test results for pre-and post-test self-efficacy items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Pre (n=7)</th>
<th>Post (n=7)</th>
<th>t-score</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I understand the standard features of writing in my field.</td>
<td>4 3.29 0.95</td>
<td>4 4 0.58 0.094</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am confident in my skill as a writer.</td>
<td>4 3.57 0.79</td>
<td>4 3.86 0.9 0.356</td>
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<tr>
<td>I enjoy the process of writing.</td>
<td>3 3.14 1.07</td>
<td>3 3.57 1.13 0.289</td>
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<tr>
<td>I consider writing to be one of my strengths.</td>
<td>3 3.14 1.07</td>
<td>3 3.43 1.27 0.172</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a generally positive attitude toward writing</td>
<td>3 3.14 0.9</td>
<td>4 3.86 1.07 0.047*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I sit down to write, I feel anxious.</td>
<td>3 3.14 0.9</td>
<td>3.5 3.5 1.05 0.809</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel unable to manage distractions and focus on my writing.</td>
<td>2 3 1.29</td>
<td>3 3.14 2.86 0.788</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I procrastinate on my writing.</td>
<td>4 3.71 0.95</td>
<td>4 4 1 0.172</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions

We found that a short-term, less-intensive writing activity increased writing self-efficacy in early-career researchers and medical students from underrepresented backgrounds. Participant satisfaction, moreover, was high.

The fact that we saw improved self-efficacy despite a short duration and low time commitment suggests that our SUAW activity has promise. Departments should consider instituting SUAW as a low-investment way to foster greater writing productivity among early-career researchers.

Key References