



Learning Exchange: Writing Workshop for Caribbean Coral Reef Managers
Dec. 9-12, 2012
Akumal, Mexico



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Background

Past Caribbean TOT participants identified a need for technical support to better translate the science/conservation work being done in the Caribbean region to the public. This learning exchange allowed us to address that request by conducting a science writing workshop for Caribbean coral reef managers. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has conducted these workshops internally for several years. Peter Kareiva, Matt Miller, Bob Lalasz and coral reef expert Rob Van Woesik of the Florida Institute of Technology led this workshop.

Objectives

The aim of the workshop was to provide the participants with access to science and writing experts and a peer group of reviewers during three intensive on-site days, so that each participant left with a draft paper ready for publication in the journal/website/forum of their choosing.

Expected Results

Of the fourteen participants, six hope to publish in a peer-reviewed journal, one plans to submit an article for publication in The Nature Conservancy Magazine, one is creating a learning exhibit for grade school students, three wrote articles for local newspapers or local dissemination, two wrote content for internal TNC projects, and one hopes to publish in a weekly news magazine.

The Reef Resilience Program will follow up with each individual quarterly to see if they have achieved their publication goals.

For details on participants and organization including their writing topic and publication goals, please see Appendix A.

Workshop participants

There were fourteen participants who attended the workshop (See Appendix A). Two were worldwide office employees, and four were participants from regional Caribbean-based TNC offices. Eight were coral reef managers from TNC partner organizations, local NGO's, or local government throughout the Caribbean. Several of the participants spoke English as a second language. Half of the participants were women. Four participants had also taken part in the 2010 Caribbean Training of Trainer's workshop.

Methodology

See Appendix B for the agenda.

Prior to the workshop, all participants submitted an abstract and were assigned to peer groups by subject or target publication type. Then members of each peer group exchanged papers with each other and the four leaders of the workshop. Before arrival everyone reviewed their peer group's papers and returned them with comments or suggested edits.

The first day participants gathered for a group dinner and for introductions and an overview of the goals for the next three days. Afterwards, peer groups met briefly to discuss the progress thus far on their papers and discuss their target audiences.

On the second day, workshop participants met in the workshop venue. Bob Lalasz gave an overview of a time management technique (the Pomodoro Technique, see Appendix E) and suggested that participants try it for the duration of the workshop. Then, students were given the morning to work on incorporating the peer and expert review comments into their drafts. The afternoon began with a brief discussion (by Bob Lalasz) of how to write an abstract and then participants continued to work on their drafts. Before dinner, they submitted their current draft to Dropbox, and after dinner spent time reviewing the current drafts of their peer group.

On the third day, workshop participants spent the morning and afternoon incorporating edits and comments from their peer group and from the experts, and meeting individually with the experts as needed. Before dinner, they submitted their current drafts to Dropbox. After a closing dinner, participants again reviewed their peer group's drafts.

The final day consisted of brief one-on-one closing interviews with each participant and the workshop leaders. Each participant discussed the progress made and their plan of action for continuing to edit their document and submitting it for publication, as well as gave feedback about the workshop.

Conclusions/Lessons Learned

Ten out of 14 participants took part in an evaluation survey. (Please see Appendix C.) 100% agreed that:

- this workshop was useful to their work,
- they learned skills that they will use in the future,
- they would recommend this workshop to colleagues,
- they received useful feedback on their drafts from the workshop leaders.

They appreciated the quick turn-around on comments for each draft, and the time dedicated to focusing on their document. Many commented on how helpful the editing process was, particularly access to the expert reviewers (Peter Kareiva, Bob Lalasz, Matt Miller, and Rob Van Woesik).

In future writing workshops similar to this one, participants suggested starting the work even earlier before the beginning of the workshop in order to arrive with a more polished document and “maximally utilize the review process”. Several participants expressed the desire for a longer workshop and suggested that the time be extended for future workshops. Many participants requested more formal sessions:

- writing an abstract,
- defining your target audience,
- publishing options,
- tips and tricks,
- sentence structure,

- how to write for your target audience, etc.

The location at the Hotel Akumal Caribe was quite successful (it was quiet and not crowded) and feedback about the venue, rooms, and food was generally very enthusiastic. Future workshops similar to this one should seek out a workshop venue that has food, hotel, and the meeting venue within walking distance. Wifi in the hotel room is a necessity, and an ideal location is relatively easy to access (within an hour or two of the airport) but removed from urban distractions.

The workshop venue was a little too warm and had intermittent wireless internet which was at times both a positive and negative attribute. One participant suggested a longer break time consisting of a short field trip.

Reef Resilience Program staff also felt that the workshop was very successful. Our recommendations include:

- Extend the length of the workshop by at least ½ day to allow time to increase the cohesiveness of the group of managers. This time could be used for a field trip to a local MPA or reef location and would further help us meet our program goals by promoting collaboration and closer working relationships between regional managers.
- Final closing interviews should take place before the closing meal (a lunch?) in order to provide a more concrete closure to the workshop.
- One staff member should be solely responsible for logistics (rather than also participate in the workshop).
- 12-15 is an ideal number of managers to include.
- Recruiting and inviting managers should start earlier. Five months in advance, Reef Resilience Program colleagues should be contacted to ask for suggestions of managers, and they should be asked to participate 4 months in advance.
- It is helpful to have all of the managers at a mid-to-high writing level, but also target those who don't have many opportunities to improve their writing skills.
- Remember to take a group photo.
- Reef Resilience Program staff should arrive a day in advance to be certain venue and food logistics are taken care of.
- Have a local manager (if possible) "introduce" the location to the group so that they have a better understanding of the site. (Paul Sanchez-Navarro of CEA gave a brief introduction to the location, which was well-received and helped orient everyone.)

Next Steps

The Reef Resilience Program will follow up with each participant to track when their paper is submitted/accepted for publication, and will continue to offer support and encouragement. A copy of any published articles will be kept in Reef Resilience Program files and shared within the Network (reefresiliencenetwork.ning.com).

The Reef Resilience Program will look for opportunities to offer this workshop in future years in other regions.

Conclusions

The Reef Resilience Writing Workshop successfully helped 14 coral reef managers and practitioners produce a draft of a paper that is ready or nearly ready for publication, and a plan of action for the next steps. All surveyed participants gave excellent and positive feedback about the results, and all would recommend this workshop for their colleagues. It will be important for the Reef Resilience Team to follow up with participants to see if each is able to succeed at submitting their draft for publication to assess the outcome of this workshop.

Testimonials

“Getting feedback from the editors and peers was most helpful in my developing my writing skills!”

“The quick turn around on comments and edits facilitated the flow of writing as well as productivity.”

“It was close to perfect, even down to not having access to wireless the second day.”

See Appendix D for a Workshop Review by Jahson Alemu I.

Appendices

Appendix A: Participant List, Organization, Topic, and target publications

Appendix B: Agenda

Appendix C: Survey Results

Appendix D: Workshop Review by Jahson Alemu I.

Appendix E: Pomodoro Technique

Participant	Org	Working Title/Topic	Objective	Intended Journal(s)
Jahson Alemu	Institute of Marine Affairs, Trinidad and Tobago	Mass coral bleaching event in 2010 in Tobago, Southern Caribbean	Publication of article in scholarly journal	Marine Biology or Estuarine, Coastal and Shelf Science
Martin Barriteau	The Sustainable Grenadines Inc (SusGren)	Conflicts between Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and traditional fisher folk in the Grenadines	Info sheet for MPA managers and government officials	
Angelique "Angie" Brathwaite	Coastal Zone Management Unit - Ministry of Environment & Drainage, Barbados	Lessons Learned from Mass Coral Bleaching in the Eastern Caribbean	Publication of article in scholarly journal	
Elianny Dominguez	TNC	Oceans, the human guardians	Portable exhibits for five coastal communities of the Dominican Republic (May 2013)	
Raimundo Espinoza	TNC	Moving further towards effective Protected Areas Management in Puerto Rico: Innovating local, regional and international conservation initiatives.	Article for publication in the TNC magazine	Nature Conservancy Magazine, Resurgence & Ecologist or similar Magazines (Either op-ed, or similar format)
Olando Harvey	Tobago Keys Marine Park	Population Health of Green and Hawksbill Sea turtle at the Tobago Cays Marine Park	Publication of article in scholarly journal	
Loureene Jones	National Environment and Planning Agency, Jamaica	An Evaluation of Reef Ecosystem Health; A Report Card for Jamaican coral reefs	Publication of article in scholarly journal	Bulletin of Marine Science
Kemit-Amon Lewis	TNC	Coral restoration as a tool to enhance reef resilience in the US Virgin Islands	Publication of article in scholarly journal	PLoSOne or Caribbean Journal of Marine Science
Petra MacGowan	TNC	Management Strategies, Threat Reduction Land-Based Pollution (online toolkit)	Online publication as part of the Reef Resilience website content and course materials	

Steven Nimrod	St. George's University, Grenada, West Indies	Herbivore algal interactions on coral reefs in Grenada.	Publication of article in scholarly journal	peer review journal like Marine Ecological Progress Series or Coral Reef
Julie Robinson	TNC	Show me the Money [FISH]!	Op-Ed for national newspaper in Belize, local NGO newsletters for distribution to stakeholder communities	Co-writing with local fisher community
Paul Sánchez-Navarro Russell	Centro Ecologico Akumal	Creating a Marine Management Program for Akumal	Akumal Community, general public, international donors	
Olmo Torres-Talamante	RAZONATURA Founder & CEO + Director of WATER CYCLE Program	Anchialine Ecosystems linking The Great Selva Maya and the MAR or	Newsweek or similar magazine	
Stephanie Wear	TNC	TNC Coral Reef Strategy/Organizational Analysis	Internal TNC document	

Appendix B: Agenda

Akumal Writing Workshop for Marine Managers December 9-12, 2012

Pre Workshop:

Monday, 3 December	First drafts due from participants (*send to peer group and editors)
Friday, 7 December	Peer group comments due

*Each participant will be assigned a peer group of no more than 4-5 people, before the workshop. These peer groups will share first drafts of their writing with each other as well as with the workshop editors, and provided short comments on the drafts of others in their groups.

Workshop Agenda:

Sun, 9 December	(Travel to Cancun, take shuttle to Hotel Akumal Caribe, check in to room)
6:00pm	Group dinner at hotel
7:30pm	Participants meet in their peer groups to clarify any peer and editor comments.
Mon, 10 December	(All day meeting)
8:30am	Meet at Centro Ecológico Akumal, group meeting and time for writing.
12:30pm	Lunch at CEA
5:00pm	Revised drafts due to peer groups and editors
6:00pm	Dinner at hotel
7:30pm	After dinner, peer groups and editors review drafts and provide comments before next day's work commences.
Tues, 11 December	(All day meeting)
8:30am	Meet at CEA, group meeting and time for writing.
12:30pm	Lunch at Centro
5:00pm	Revised drafts due to peer groups and editors
6:00pm	Dinner at hotel
7:30pm	After dinner, peer groups and editors review drafts and provide comments.
Wed, 12 December	(Exit interviews)
7:30-12:00	Each participant will complete an exit interview with workshop editors. In this meeting you will outline next steps and due dates for next drafts/submissions.
12:00 or prior	Leave for airport (see shuttle schedule)

Appendix C: Survey Results

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
This workshop was useful to my work.	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	10.0% (1)	90.0% (9)
This workshop was a good use of my time.	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	22.2% (2)	77.8% (7)
I learned skills during the workshop that I will use in the future.	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	30.0% (3)	70.0% (7)
The editors gave me useful feedback.	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	11.1% (1)	88.9% (8)
Working in a peer group helped to improve my writing.	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	22.2% (2)	33.3% (3)	44.4% (4)
I would recommend this workshop to my colleagues.	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	22.2% (2)	77.8% (7)

What was the most helpful part of this workshop?

The comments from the expert panel and the pomodoro technique and the power point presentation on how to write Abstract/paper

Getting feedback from the editors and peers was most helpful in my developing my writing skills!

The quick turn around on comments and edits. It facilitates flow of writing as well as productivity.

The most important part of the workshop was the designated time to actually get writing done.

The feedback from the reviewers (central science) comments and audience received from editors on my paper.

Review process, time management. Particularly the one on one sessions with the leaders.

Getting guidance from the editors. Comments from my peers were useful but on a more detailed scale, the overall comments from the editors were more useful at this stage.

great editing from lead editors, and the abstract lecture

The time dedicated to nothing but writing. And the feedback from the TNC team

What improvements about the workshop itself (not the location, food, or hotel) would you recommend for the future?

Start the work 2 weeks before the workshop. Because I did the most progress

working on the first round of comments

I would offer one or two more "short" presentations (no more than 15 minutes) on writing skills. I found these useful and was also a very good break from writing.

Have more general presentations from the coaches present.

I was expecting the workshop to have more sessions on different aspects about writing. The designated time for writing was great, but a few more pointers or suggestions to the entire group (what works well, things to avoid, options for publishing, etc.) would have been beneficial.

I would have love a formal session for all sections of the paper like was done for the abstract. We could have the formal session on each area followed by individual writing on that particular section, until the entire paper is done.

A bit on actual writing would have been helpful to include: defining the audience; how to write for the audience; sentence structure etc.

More pre workshop manuscript organization by participants, so that at the workshop itself participants can maximally utilize the review process.

It was close to perfect, even down to not having access to wireless the second day. Perhaps making it longer so that we can actually complete during the workshop time.

15 minute segments on different parts of a paper

Maybe a summarized "tips for writing" document we can use later

What improvements about the location, hotel, or food would you recommend for the future?

every thing was great

I think the location was perfect! The food was fabulous (best workshop food I've ever had!!!). I was really pleased with all of it.

The hotel was great, however the tight space and hot environment, in a crowded room wasn't the most comfortable setting. Also, A large scale Pomodoro, ie, take advantage of the setting incorporating a short field trip to break from the intense writing.

The venue was fine for the workshop except for the warmth in the main room at times. In the future, it may help to have the designated writing times with longer periods to relax the mind. This would possibly mean extending the workshop to a full week. But may reduce "brain drain" in the future.

There should be a bit more space to allow for free movement and air conditioning in the central meeting location

Everything was fine for the amount of work required by participants.

More power outlets. good choice to not have televisions in the room.

Food-wise, since i'm the world's worst vegetarian (don't like veggies and don't eat any meat apart from fish) it would be nice to have a fish alternative w each meal...but i was ok with the food..probably made me healthier.

all good - very happy

I will not comment on this as we offered the space. I would like to receive the feedback though, in order to improve our services.

Appendix D:

Three days in Akumal - TNC Writing Workshop 2012

Jahson Alemu I

Overused among budget-strapped universities and research institutes, the term "Publish or Perish" is the mantra of many for success in academia. However, often times local coral reef managers and institutions within the Caribbean are not as bound by the obligation to publish for wider audiences, and opportunities for sharing success stories, lessons learned and research are lost. Recognizing this, and with the support of The Nature Conservancy Reef Resilience Programme, for 3 days in December 2013 reef managers, researchers, students and educators, were essentially "nailed" to chairs and "glued" to computers, and aggressively encouraged to write; so that they could share their important work with new audiences, either as a peer reviewed journal publication, blog posts or op-ed pieces.

I attended the workshop as a coral reef scientist from the Institute of Marine Affairs, Trinidad and Tobago with the intention of generating a publishable manuscript describing the impact of 2010 mass bleaching event on Tobago and the identification vulnerable sites to climate change impacts. By extension, the techniques learned will be used to publish the other reef research (success stories and lessons learned) currently underway in Tobago, such as the valuation of coral reef ecosystem services, reef vulnerability to climate change impacts and reef connectivity.

For three days, in Akumal, Mexico a team of scientists lead by The Nature Conservancy's Chief Scientist, Peter Kareiva provided rigorous reviews of our would-be manuscripts, as well as one-on-one consultations on the best way forward. Often times scripts were riddled in red and yellow with corrections and comments by each reviewer, but by the end of the process a polished manuscript was in the making. Participants were also separated into groups depending on the nature of their manuscripts, where they reviewed each iteration of the others' evolving material. This was probably the most valuable message for the workshop, by having a group of reviewers among whom your work could be critically assessed before publishing. Other messages came from Peter, who stressed that we should make our writing relevant...management might be a good place to start, and the Bobs, stressing time management (I think I'm beyond the help of a Pomodoro)...sorry Bob. This was definitely a great experience for all that attended and more similar workshops should be conducted to build capacity among other coral reef managers. Three weeks later, I was able to submit to a peer reviewed journal, and I'm currently awaiting feedback.

As small note on Mexico from a first time visitor, I appreciate a good taco like everyone else, but why put tacos in soup? And diving in Cozumel was awesome.

Appendix E: Pomodoro Technique

TOOLS

To start using the Technique you only need some simple tools:

- ✂ A KITCHEN TIMER (Pomodoro looks fine)
- ✂ A PENCIL
- ✂ A TO DO SHEET
- ✂ AN ACTIVITY INVENTORY SHEET
- ✂ A RECORDS SHEET

You can download and print sheets' templates from Pomodoro Techniques web site.

BASICS

Put all the activities you have to accomplish on the ACTIVITY INVENTORY SHEET. At the beginning of each day select the tasks you need to complete and copy them on the To Do SHEET.

Start working:

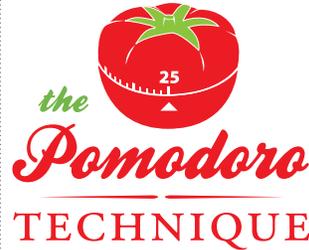
- ✂ Choose the topmost task from the list
- ✂ Set the Pomodoro to 25 minutes
- ✂ Work until the Pomodoro rings
- ✂ Mark the task with an x on the To Do SHEET
- ✂ Take a short break (3–5 minutes)

Keep on working, Pomodoro after Pomodoro, until the task at hand is finished, then cross it out on the To Do SHEET.

Every 4 Pomodoros take a longer break, (15–30 minutes).

RULES & TIPS

- ✂ A Pomodoro is indivisible
- ✂ If a task takes more than 5–7 Pomodoros, break it down
- ✂ If it takes less than one pomodoro, add it up, and combine it with another task
- ✂ Once a Pomodoro begins, it has to ring
- ✂ The next pomodoro will go better
- ✂ The Pomodoro Technique shouldn't be used for activities you do in your free time. Enjoy free time!



Cheat Sheet



WHAT IS IT?

The Pomodoro Technique is a time management method that can be used for any kind of task. For many people, time is an enemy. The anxiety triggered by “the ticking clock”, especially when a deadline is involved, leads to ineffective work and study habits which in turn lead to procrastination.

The aim of the Pomodoro Technique is to use time as a valuable ally in accomplishing what we want to do in the way we want to do it, and to enable us to continually improve the way we work or study.

THE GOALS

The Pomodoro Technique will provide a simple tool/process for improving productivity (your own and that of your team members) which is able to do the following:

- ✂ Alleviate anxiety linked to becoming
- ✂ Enhance focus and concentration by cutting down on interruptions
- ✂ Increase awareness of your decisions
- ✂ Boost motivation and keep it constant
- ✂ Bolster the determination to achieve your goals
- ✂ Refine the estimation process, both in qualitative and quantitative terms
- ✂ Improve your work or study process
- ✂ Strengthen your determination to keep on applying yourself in the face of complex situations

INTERRUPTIONS

Once you've started using the Pomodoro Technique, interruptions can become a real problem.

Internal interruptions are distractions that come from you: stand up and get something to eat or drink or to look up something on the Internet this minute.

Make these interruptions clearly visible. Every time you feel a potential interruption coming on, put an apostrophe (') on the sheet where you record your Pomodoros.

Then do one of the following:

- ✂ Write down the new activity on the To Do SHEET under Unplanned & Urgent if you think it's imminent and can't be put off.
- ✂ Write it down in the ACTIVITY INVENTORY SHEET, marking it with a “U” (unplanned); add a deadline if need be.
- ✂ Intensify your determination to finish the current Pomodoro. Once you've marked down the apostrophe, continue working on the given task till the Pomodoro rings.

People who work in social environments have to deal with *external interruptions*: a colleague asks you how to compile a report; an email program constantly beeps every time a new message comes in.

A 25-minute or 2-hour delay (four Pomodoros) is almost always possible for activities that are commonly considered urgent.

Make these interruptions clearly visible. Every time someone or something tries to interrupt a Pomodoro, put a dash (-) on the sheet where you record your Pomodoros, apply the Inform, Negotiate, and Call Strategy.

Then apply one of the rules exposed above for internal interruptions.



Downloadable book and much more on www.pomodorotechnique.com