

Writing for *Mujeres Talk*



"Typewriter of Capricorn" by Emdot. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

by the Editorial Group

As an online venue dedicated to the publication of Latina, Chicana, and Native American Studies research, commentary, and creative work that is widely accessible to both specialist and non-specialist audiences, we've often been asked by potential authors to provide guidelines on how to write for this site. In answer to this request, we'd like to share our experience in writing and editing for this site, and provide a guide for authors.

The Academic Journal Article

Throughout one's career, academics receive extensive training in how to write a scholarly article for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. That training begins with the assignment of the seminar paper in a graduate course and workshops on publishing in graduate school. As a new professor, one receives further training in the form of workshops, mentorship from senior faculty, actual peer review feedback on submissions, participation in peer reviewing the work of others, and the ongoing reading of academic journals and volumes. Through this process, one learns how to craft a publishable academic journal article appropriate to a specific field. As should be apparent, this doesn't happen overnight. There is a learning curve. For this reason, we at *Mujeres Talk* are not surprised when we occasionally hear back from a potential author who we've invited to submit that, "I don't know how to write in that format," or "I don't have time to learn how to do that." The working conditions in higher education have, indeed, changed significantly, and it's no surprise that many academics barely have time to do what is expected and required of them for their regular appointments, let alone a kind of writing that may have more limited impact on tenure and promotion than traditional forms of scholarly publication (books, journal articles).

The Online Academic Essay: Actual Experience

Yet, academics and non-academics alike do write for *Mujeres Talk*, and for a variety of reasons, including:

- To make Latina and Native American Studies contributions to media and public policy discussions
- Interest in online dialogue on topics of importance to academic and non-academic audiences
- Contribute to public discussion of humanities, and research in ethnic studies
- Promotion of a recent publication or film
- Opportunity to analyze current events
- Widely share “how-to” information and guidance
- Interest in collaborating with others in co-authored pieces
- Provide mentorship and support to Latinas and Native American women in academia
- Report on events, conferences, lectures
- Engage students in interactive assignments.

These wide-ranging reasons for interest in our site has meant that *Mujeres Talk* has published several different types of short essay – “Dichos” or advice for academics; commentary on current events; personal reflections on research, community work, or current events; research in brief; biographic profiles; analyses of film or literature; and book reviews. We’ve also published three different kinds of multimedia artifacts: slide shows, graphic book; and short video. Three of our authors have used *Mujeres Talk* for class assignments. In one case, faculty author Ella Diaz wrote about the visit of artist Ana Teresa Fernandez to her school and assigned students to comment on their engagement with this artist and her art. In another instance, faculty author Brenda Sendejo collaborated with students in her Latina/o and Latin American Spiritualities course to co-write a piece on identity, social justice, and spirituality. In a third example, faculty author Theresa Delgadillo wrote an essay on Latinas/os in a popular television program that she also assigned her class to write, and then invited the class to engage in online dialogue on their shared assignment.

Essays that first appeared on *Mujeres Talk* have been republished on sites such as *Share INC/Domestic Violence*, *Texas Ed Equity*, and *Puerto Rico Today*. Our modified form of peer review has been cited by the *US Intellectual History* website. And we have collaborated in simultaneous posts with the websites *HASTAC*, *La Bloga*, and *Somebody’s Children*. We do not keep count of the thousands of spams and random hits the site receives, but we do track the number of page views/reads for each new post, and these have steadily climbed and now range between 400 and 1000 per post. Our subscriber list has grown to 194. Anyone can comment on our site, and we’ve received multiple comments from across the country on posts. We notify our growing list of followers on Facebook and Twitter of new posts, as well as related news. Since 2011, we have published 121 essays or multimedia presentations on this site.



"Writing? Yeah." by Caleb Roenigk. CC BY 2.0

Benefits of Writing for *Mujeres Talk* or Another Online Venue

Both academic and community authors who have contributed to our site have recognized multiple benefits from this experience, including:

- Learning how to write for online media
- Publicizing one's expertise
- Enhancing one's online research profile or that of one's program, department, or school so that others interested in areas you research can easily find you
- Getting early feedback on work-in-progress.

Authors retain the copyright to the work they publish on *Mujeres Talk* and, with citation, may reproduce their short form research or online essay in longer journal articles or scholarly manuscripts on their research, or in other kinds of print or online publications.

Tips for Writing for *Mujeres Talk*

For authors interested in multimedia submissions, we encourage you to research readily available software for making short videos, graphic books, and slide shows to share. For those of you interested in learning how to write the kind of short essay we usually publish, we offer the following tips and questions as a guide:

- Our upper word limit is 1500, and that means you can only say one or two things well. Your topic can be big, but your insight must be focused.
- Imagine your audience. Who are you writing to? Is it a group of close colleagues? A public lecture open to anyone at your university? A conference-like gathering of people in your field? Be sure your essay addresses that audience. And then remember that your friend brought along some folks who would also like to understand your work, so make sure a non-specialist can follow it.

- Write yourself into the essay, making apparent your investment, interest, and/or personal experience with the topic. This is especially important if you are writing a personal reflection or personally inflected commentary. It might be important if you are writing a review, but this advice is less likely to apply to essays that present research in brief.
- Be generous to other Latina/o and Native American scholars and students.
- Pose a question in your essay. This is a good way to invite readers in to dialogue.
- Provide citations, references, shout-outs, and links where appropriate.
- Save some good stuff for the peer review journal article that will carry greater weight in tenure and promotion.

If you're interested in writing commentary about a current event or reporting on a lecture, conference, or concert, you might begin a draft of your essay by jotting down some short answers to these questions:

- What event are you interested in writing about?
- Why is this event important to *Mujeres Talk* audiences?
- Do you want readers to do something about this current event or do you want them to know something about this event? If you answer "do something" explain what and provide links. If you answer "know something" explain what, and include citations.
- If there is currently public discussion about this event, what are the views currently circulating? How is yours different?
- How did you become interested in this event? What personal experience do you have with this event?

If you're interested in writing research in brief, consider which piece of your ongoing, original research you want to publish in this format. Like academic journals, we seek unpublished, original work. Unlike academic journals, we only publish in short format. Keeping that distinction in mind, consider writing about a concept in your research, or how that concept has been critically regarded, or one example of the kind of analysis you are engaging, or a small piece of your findings. The short form research essay will not be as extensive or as complete as the academic journal article, but it does need to be as rigorous and engaging as any more extended work.

Since this is a distillation of our experience, we thank all the women who have ever served on the Editorial Group of *Mujeres Talk* and all the authors who have published on this site. A special thank you to Diana Rivera of Michigan State University who recently completed a one year term on our Editorial Group for her wise advice and guidance in creating mechanisms to ensure the continued success of the site.

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