

Lists for Many Occasions in Qualitative Research Writing

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This article proposes many ways qualitative scholars can use the list as a writing form when composing their academic texts. Given that so many people already write lists in daily life, the list as a form contains a democratic quality unmatched by many other forms of experimental research writing, which are more often garnered from other disciplinary contexts or elevated writing practices. Embracing the simplicity of form and complexity of interpretation that the list offers, the author describes different styles of lists—such as the to-do and the catalog—particularly emphasizing how they may serve qualitative researchers in their writing process or textual expression. In addition, the author analyzes existing lists written by children, poets, and researchers in the context of qualitative inquiry. Each section is accompanied by prompts and pedagogical advice for researchers wishing to practicing composing lists.

Keywords: Qualitative writing; academic writing; poetry; narrative

Introduction

This article considers the use of *the list* as an experimental writing form for qualitative research writing. It is written for those who are interested in diverging from academic writing conventions in order to incorporate more democratic forms, akin to Badley's (2016) call for *blue collar writing*. It is also for those who enjoy playing with what the humanistic fields of literary studies and rhetoric and composition can offer academic writing. I assume the list may be of interests to some of the readers of this special issue on expanding genre conventions in qualitative writing. I write this with the general belief that writing is not distinct from, but bound to, the interpretive processes of research, and that what researchers

write is part of both the how they make sense of their own studies, and ontological unfolding of what will be circulated.

Lists are mutable, sturdy forms of writing, finding their way into many genres and adapting quite easily. For those who compose with them, the demographics range from published poets to informal jotters to school children. Like all writing forms, they are not universal and will not appeal to all, but unlike most other writing forms, they do not require disciplinary expertise from the writer. Despite such qualities, lists have rarely been explored as an academic writing convention.

Lists are, however, often integrated into academic writing as organizational paratext—like bibliography, table of contents, and index—rather than used as core forms within the long-form of the text. Perhaps the list has been neglected as a core form of academic expression, and used largely as a fragmented paratext, because lists lack most of the fundamentals we associate with long-form academic writing. For example, narrative forms of writing often contain full sentences sequences of sentences, and are associated with a linear logic. Lists do not rely on these facets as much, often containing fragments of sentences and their own ordering systems and categories, which are dictated by the author. There are no strict rules on the stylistics of lists, and they are lawless in terms of length and the use of punctuation. The lack of rules can thus be disagreeable with many notions of academic writing. But if we borrow Fung’s (2021) accommodating suggestion that academic writing is any “writing done for academic purposes” (p. 3) that is “carefully elaborated, well supported, logically sequenced, rigorously reasoned, and tightly woven together” (p. 4), then lists fit the criteria so long as they serve these goals.

While Fung’s (2021) thoughts on academic writing offers space for difference among writers’ tastes and style, qualitative academic instruction and advice can be more particular, often encouraging the idea that good writing is that which tells stories that reflect reality, using strong narrative form. For example, Holley and Colyar (2009) described that in addition to ethics and trustworthiness (p. 680), the researcher’s “responsibility extends to deliberate choices related to writing that position the text as an informed reflection of the participants’ reality. A greater understanding of the storytelling properties of research allows the author to concentrate on the ways in which texts reflect social reality” (p. 680). Similarly, Goodall

(2008) explained in his qualitative writing guidebook, “the ability to tell a good tale is largely a matter of form: introductions, bodies, and conclusions in essays; dramatic structure in narratives that move the characters and the account from initial conflict to its eventual resolution” (p. 46). The academic writer is thus urged to do with their research writing what fiction writers can do with their novels.

While students of qualitative research will receive a variety of methodological and theoretical choices in their methods education, most will receive the same writing advice. A great deal of the emphasis on reflecting reality through the stylistic logics of storytelling also incorporates the concept of thick description, a narrative tool that provides meaning to every little wink witnessed in the research process (Geertz, 1973). Ponterotto (2006) argued that thick description is actually “one of the most important concepts in the lexicon of qualitative research” (p. 538), which illustrates the way in which qualitative methodological education could use more experimentation. Qualitative research methods are diverse in their theoretical and methodological options, but on the other hand, qualitative research *writing* has a tiny and relentless canon, a fact that illuminates why expanding genre conventions in academic writing is both needed and appropriate in the context of a qualitative methods journal. In other words, qualitative research methods and methodology has been expanded enough that there is no singular canon of what we might be taught as we embark on learning qualitative research; conversely, qualitative writing has not been expanded as much, and thus we can point to a precise canon of qualitative writing conventions. While there is nothing wrong with a strong canon, it signals that there is room for more theorizations of and diversified practices for qualitative academic writing.

Far from the stipulations of narrative form, we find lists, which do not have to include introductions, bodies, conclusions, characters, conflicts, or resolutions. As a structure, they are made up of “ideas once captured” (Pullinger, 2017, p. 100). They do not even have a unified goal—some are poetic, operating as “a container” that “confronts the uncontainable” (p. 93), while others function like a *Wunderkammer*—a “cabinet of curiosities’ ... eclectic collections of objects removed from their original contexts and displayed for others to marvel at” (Pullinger, 2017, p. 100). Some are pragmatic in that they simply catalog sets of known things (p. 89) like parts, pieces, ingredients, or tasks. Others are a combination of both,

appearing pragmatic in their insistence on telling the reader what to do, but also operating a kind of future-oriented manifestation of what will take place at a future date. They are flexible in their expression and length. In this way, lists might be a friendly form for qualitative researchers who are seeking new writing practices or find the numerous criteria of narratives to be so intimidating that they can barely begin to write at all.

Importantly, I agree with scholars in qualitative academic writing who claim that the writing of the research is not a thing that comes after, but is instead a part of the research method at large. Writing helps thinking, creating “a way to access that personal fund of information—and misinformation” (Walcott, 2009, p. 21). Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) argued that writing is a method of inquiry and data analysis (St. Pierre, 2007, p. 5205). In other words, in qualitative research, writing is not merely the act of “writing up” what was observed or found, but rather a creative act of construction and deconstruction (Badley, 2009). If we operate with the assumptions of “hermeneutic practice” (Eryaman, 2008, p. 2), then whether we are writing our own memos or jottings, or preparing a publishable manuscript, the very practice of writing is also a practice of interpreting. Such a notion has often led me to wonder, how do different forms of writing assist different kinds of writers in their constructions? Are some academic forms of writing operating as limitations, posing obstacles to the different ways researchers might make and create sense of their studies? I address the topic of this special issue—writing off the beaten track—with the idea that academic writers may need different *forms* of writing to help enact inquiry, some of which we may already use in other contexts, such as the list.

With that in mind, I present four kinds of lists for qualitative academic writers to consider: (1) the double-sided list; (2) lists for the difficult to express; (3) the catalog list; and (4) the to-do list. While there are certainly more than four types of lists, I felt that this categorization spoke to many of the concerns qualitative academic writers have, and proved as a helpful method of organizing the enormous variety of lists I found during my interdisciplinary research. To help make sense of some of the rhetorical qualities of lists, I share and interpret some well-written lists in each section, describing how these lists do great work toward speaking truths, sharing stories, describing experience, eliciting emotions, or persuading readers, despite their minimal form. I am particularly drawn to lists that come

from places outside of academia, such as elementary school writing assignments, Hebrew poetry, and the arts. I illustrate that this form is indeed an alternative to how we normally compose academic writing, leading us toward a different creative medium. In keeping up with the notions of writing paralysis and writing as inquiry, I also provide some writing prompts that might inspire writers or could be implemented in qualitative classrooms at different stages of the academic writing process, from research design to written study.

1. The Double-Sided List

I began considering lists as a viable writing form when I found a lively text written by my five-year-old daughter, Juniper. She had created this writing on her own and left it on her dresser, where I found it while cleaning up. Earlier that same day, I had helped her brainstorm ideas for a children's poster contest centered on environmentalism that the city government was coordinating. During her quiet time, she created a double-sided list on pastel paper, which provides for both the title of this section, and the concept of this style of list.

My daughter's double-sided list initially caught my eye because of the influence I have gathered from the writing theorist, Ken Macrorie (1984), for many years. I have read and reread his work since I first encountered him as a graduate student in English, taking a rhetoric and composition class. Macrorie spent most of his career as a teacher of adult writers, but celebrated the way children wrote, and even used samples of child writing as examples within his writing theory books. Macrorie said that bad writing was writing that was lifeless. "Most good writing," he directed, "is clear, vigorous, honest, alive, sensuous, appropriate, unsentimental, rhythmic, without pretension, fresh, metaphorical, evocative in sound, economical, authoritative, surprising, memorable, and light" (1984, p. 29). Macrorie disdained clichés, a trait shared by qualitative writing scholars, too (Davis, Browne, et. al. 2004, p. 372). He wanted texts that did something new: "No tedious recounting of old stuff. New, strong comparisons." (p. 3). I found these elusive characteristics the Juniper's double-sided list that day.

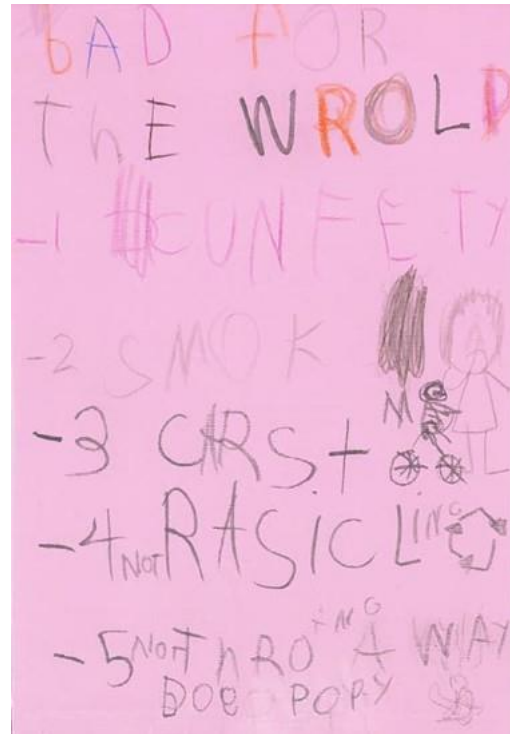
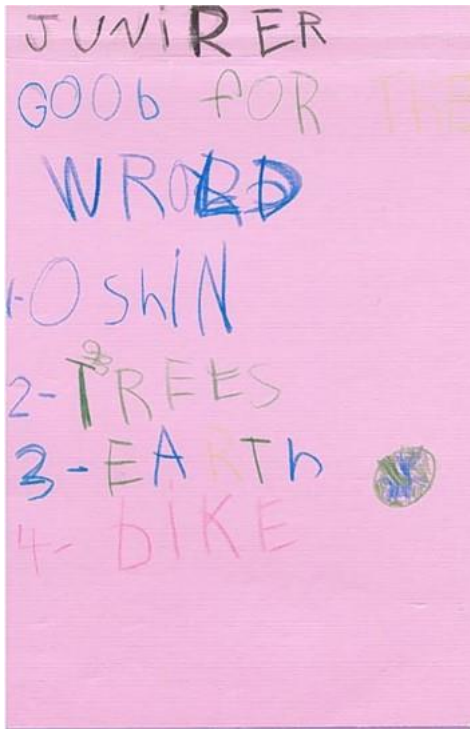


Figure 1 & 2

In Juniper's list inspired by our discussions of environmentalism, she organized one side as what is *Goob for Wrold* (Figure 1) and the other to be what was *bad for Wrold* (Figure 2). Bad things are cunfety; smok; carst; not rasicling; not throing away dog popy. Good things are oshin; trees; Earth; bike. It is immediately noticeable that this list does not contain things that many people would commonly consider *bad for the Wrold* in terms of environmentalism. In fact, the list's title itself complicates things, suggesting that Juniper was thinking more philosophically than she and I had been that afternoon when we brainstormed environmental concerns together. On her own, she had pivoted to thinking about *the wrold* as a concept, beyond the bounds of the Earth. Indeed, the fact is proved when we see that the Earth itself is one of items listed as something good for the Wrold. Quite quickly, Juniper's writing contains surprise, as it provoked me to think differently about very important issues related to how we conduct our lives in this shared world. Without error, she had gone beyond everyday environmentalism and created a guide for living well in the world, in the universe, at large.

Most importantly, this list does what I want to do, what I want to teach my university students to do, and what I want to receive as a reader when I do scholarly research: it conjures big thought, but does so in a minimalist form. The list is stark, relying on a few keywords and a few present participles, but it achieves one of the most difficult balances in writing—it guides the reader to ideas while still leaving room for the reader’s own sense-making. When a piece of media tells us exactly how to think, it is considered didactic, a pejorative term for the quality of being patronized. When a piece of media does not tell us anything about how to think, it contains no argument and is thus acritical. The best route is to gently direct the reader, while leaving just enough work for the reader to do. When done well, this balance is made while also supplying the reader with some of the writer’s charm and style, which gives the reader pleasure as they undertake the interpretive work. Juniper’s double-sided list does this, providing ideas about how to lead the good life without the traps of the common clichés, which is an incredible achievement for even practiced writers.

When we are composing academic writing, we should hope to set our readers up for their own inquiry based on our text, embracing that the academic research community is taking part in a parlor conversation (Burke, 1941, p. 110), not the delivery of a monologue. For example, one moment for inquiry while reading Juniper’s double-sided list is the issue of figuring out how individual items on the list have a relationship to the other items on the list. How does confetti and recycling and smoke all fit in the same container? Why is confetti bad for the world? It is the form of a list, specifically, that makes us think about categories and how items fit within them. Thus, the mystery of placing smoke among confetti is prompted by the categorical nature of the form itself, putting the reader to work within the dialogic relationship among writer/text/reader. After pondering the mystery, I concluded that confetti left on the ground could easily choke a curious creature who tries to eat it off the grass, though I never checked with the writer to verify.

It is not surprising that a parent might come across a list in a child’s bedroom given that some say lists themselves are a natural human tendency that require no formal teaching. Usher (2014) explained that “since we first began walking earth, human beings have been creating lists of one kind or another, calmly content in the knowledge that all things are constantly being assigned, prioritized, ranked, and streamlined to within an inch of their

lives” (p.xiii). So too, many older forms of writing contain lists, like epics written in Akkadian, a language developed by Sumerians in cuneiform script (Watson, 1984, p. 351). Hebrew poetry is also list-prone, particularly “lists with final total” such as ““Demons, destiny-devils, spectres, ghosts, fiends, they are the creatures of Enlil”” (p. 352), and “lists of body parts,” or lists that link components by way of listing them together, “from top to toe” (p. 355).

If lists come easily to us humans, they are an inviting form for many kinds of researchers. Agreeing with writer Umberto Eco, Pullinger (2017) noted that “our liking for lists and their affinity with infinity is an awareness of our own limits, and ultimately our own mortality... The infinity of the list conjures the possibility of escaping thoughts about death, although inevitably returns us to our own finitude” (p. 93). Just as adults know this, children are learning it too. A few days after finding Juniper’s double-sided list, I asked her if there was anything more to add. She glued the original list onto a new page, and titled it Nithre: 1 dans; 2 walk; 3 play; 4 hike. Lists are living documents, expanding infinitely, and we might infer that in this case Juniper offered some actions that were *goob for the wrold*.

Composing this kind of List

All writers can create double-sided lists that tell something important, like Juniper’s. Here are some things to consider if you wish to write one:

- A. Though many graduate-educated individuals shun the concept of binaries, the double-sided aspect of this list is a special feature worthy of exploration. Even the most sophisticated of French philosophers, Barthes, penned a double-list of *likes* (pears, Pollock) and *dislikes* (the harpsicord, fidelity), titled *J’aime, Je n’aime pas* (1977/2014, p. 75). These lists could be incorporated into the data analysis portion of writing as either a way to organize data findings that seem to present tensions within a research project, or as part of the process of analyzing the findings. Consider organizing data or findings into a simplistic good for

the world/bad for the world j'aime/je n'aime format to see what comes of these two interacting and opposing categories, potentially forging an emotional connection between the data and the researcher

Use the double-sided list to create analytical work for yourself as a researcher and for your readers, just as Juniper did. It may provoke you to think about the relationships between the things within the single list, and then among the two competing lists, drawing on Derrida's ideas of duplicity often found in discussions of *differance*. Wood and Bernasconi (1988) wrote, "If difference is relational at all, and certainly Derrida indicates that it is, the peculiar character of this relationality must itself become an issue for us... *Differance* is always more than binding together and separating which is the world of comparisons" (p. 31). When presented as comparisons, we can see that there are other forms of relationality among the things listed together and separately, challenging our perceptions.

- B. The double-sided list is rhetorically fun, particularly because it can be used to surprise or strike your reader. In Juniper's *bad for World* list we have some expected items: not recycling and smoke. But it is the presence of confetti *among* the smoke that provides a rhetorical jolt. Leave a surprise for your reader by challenging them to figure out the mysteries embedded in your category list. Put something unexpected, but fitting, and see if you can achieve discarding clichés for more memorable rhetorical play. This will create the liveliness in the text that so many of us are after, causing someone to laugh, ponder, or study our work until they can make sense of the surprising elements.

2. Lists for the Difficult to Express

Many qualitative researchers work with the difficult task of expressing complex feelings, experiences, and concepts that are difficult to convey in writing. At least for some, the qualitative umbrella is an accommodating field for writing about things that are sometimes hard to fit to language, such as affect, phenomena, or that which seems unspeakable at times, such as grief. These things are experienced, but textualizing them can be difficult. I think of the Jennifer Carlson and Kathleen Stewart's (2014) notion of mood works, or things that are "not easily read, but they are legible and, as such, they can be sensed out and followed" (p. 114). We might add to that, they are *not easily written*, either

The issue of struggling to write academic papers out of qualitative research is common enough to have generated a great deal of scholarship in which qualitative writing scholars urge qualitative researchers to begin their writing as soon as a research idea is beginning to form in their minds. Walcott (2009) suggests that there will never be a moment of clarity during which writing can perfectly begin, and thus one should begin writing immediately (p. 19). If not, scholars may find that waiting until more research is complete merely adds more complex layers to their study, resulting in writing paralysis. This advice is probably very good, but I know that in some circumstances—such as a time when I was attempting to write something that had to do with childhood neglect—the more words and formality that was required, the more I struggled to say anything at all about the topic.

This relates to a popular notion in qualitative inquiry, expressed by Richardson and St. Pierre (2005)—among others—that suggests that writing is a form of inquiry itself. St. Pierre (2007) explained that "writing forces us to textualize the rigorous confusion of our thinking, and that work is analysis" (p. 5305). While we normally operate under the assumption that we are writing for a future academic audience, Tierney and Hallet (2010) pointed out that "the primary reader for a text is the author. The text is a dialogue the author is having with him or herself to work out a particular problem or issue" (p. 682). Writing is then both a key part of the interpretive process that serves the researcher/writer, and the form most academic arguments take in their final presentation, when they are published and delivered to an audience. Not only is writing part of inquiry, but as St. Pierre (2007) noted,

“form constrains content, and different genres of writing encourage different thinking and produce different knowledge. No particular genre of writing is superior to another” (p. 5304). In other words, writing both stipulates our inquiry and some content stipulates certain forms.

Because academic writing conventions can be limiting for some, various qualitative methodologists, like St. Pierre (2018) and Hein (2019), have argued for theoretical alternatives to the common forms of academic writing. Hein (2019) surmised that “linearity, meaning, plot... internal coherence (textual unity), binary logic” (p. 84) dominate qualitative writing. In many ways, these characteristics—while seemingly inspired by creative writing—are also stricter standards than any creative writing practice, given how many narratives might have plot but do not follow linear time, for example. Similarly, such standards disregard the fact that not all content can be expressed equally across the same form. St. Pierre (2007) explained that “a poem can convey as much meaning (and a different meaning) as an academic essay. In fact, to learn as much as they can about their topic, researchers might write up data from a single project using a variety of forms—personal narrative, expository essay, autobiography, fiction, and poetry—in order to engage those data in more and more complex ways” (p. 5304). Standards of form should be developed with the content and context in mind, so that these elements can work together in constructing a successful piece of writing.

There are examples of poets who have used the list form—known simply as *list poetry*—to express difficult to describe topics in ways that might appeal to some qualitative academic writers. For instance, the German dramatist and poet, Brecht, who used the list poem form to write about the concept of *pleasure*. Consider this excerpt from his 1976 poem, “Pleasures”:

The newspaper

The dog

Dialectics

Taking showers, swimming

Old music

Comfortable shoes

Taking things in

New music (p. 448)

Qualitative writing, though often centered on human life, tends to lack human qualities: “too many of us, fail to write like human beings. Indeed, we may actually have been taught to write like disembodied professionals” (Badley, 2019, p. 180). Perhaps Brecht’s (1976) poem serves as an example of what it looks like to write as a human being. The concept of pleasure is a difficult one to express in writing because it exists within the realm of human experience more than something we can easily observe, predict, or recreate. Writing in the form of the list may help create the conditions for this kind of expression, given that lists fulfill humankind’s “distant poetic impulse” to name objects, empowering “us by momentarily allowing us to order our surrounding world, verbally or symbolically putting everything into a sequence and an arrangement we desire, if only for an instant” (Belknap, 2014, p. xii). Functioning as a core mode of human expression, a list sequences ideas together to convey difficult concepts like pleasure.

Brecht’s (1976) stark list contains no full sentences, no lengthy descriptions, and no qualifying information other than the title, yet it is a rich portrait of how one person likes to spend his time and what makes him feel pleasure. Unpredictable and devoid of cliches, he explains a practical man who wants comfortable shoes and likes all kinds of water. He likes the comfort of old music he knows, but is adventurous enough to discover new music. He is a dog person and a Marxist. He is a good combination of Earthy and also high-brow at the same time. All of this is expressed, and this is not even the full text of the poem! This is what is produced when instead of trying to overly explain the complexity of pleasure as a concept, the author makes a simple list of things that elicit pleasure and hopes the context is carried along with it.

Describing the universal qualities of list poems, Pullinger (2017) instructed that it “offers a friendly, undemanding model for encouraging children themselves to write poetry.

But usefulness as an introductory exercise seems hardly adequate to explain its popularity amongst the work of established, accomplished poets” (p. 87). Pullinger surmised that it may be that lists like these are the choice of many poets because when used skillfully, they allow for a simplicity of form, so that complexity can exist in other aspects (p. 87).

In a similar fashion to Brecht (1976), the American artist Nicole Lavelle creates visual art using lists. She presents these handwritten lists on pieces of solid-colored paper, void of any illustrations, numbering, or anything else. In each of these, she uses repetitious phrases, such as her work “Inspired By My Mom” (n.d.). Here is an excerpt from her list, which was originally 26 lines:

Inspired by the shapes of houses

Inspired by weak winter snow

Inspired by old folk songs

Inspired by the reek of aged books

Inspired by handmade quilts

Inspired by the story of the moon

This list accomplishes nuanced specificity without the use of narrative form and is full of memorable images and phrases. Thinking in terms of academic writing, this list could operate as a portrait of a participant in a qualitative study, or as a portrait of the researcher who is keen to share personal details related to their positionality. Lavelle’s style of list describes human qualities of an individual without the need for narration or even basic demographic data. Of note, there is no clear ranking among the 26 items on the list, no need elaborate writing skill, and there are no boundaries to what could go on the list. The unifying feature of the list is a refrain that begins each line: *Inspired by*. Narrative writing can certainly accommodate a topic like inspiration, but thinking back to St. Pierre’s (2007) claim that some forms better express some meanings, it is also true that some writers are attracted to different forms for various expressions. I have seen this quite directly in the classroom when assigning students to write about their inspirations using lists, paragraphs, or other forms that might

come to mind—in every case, some students directly choose the list, some come to it after struggling with a paragraph, and some never consider using it. The most important thing here is the *choice of form* for expression.

Lists like these have no length boundaries and could easily operate as living documents, perhaps even as a practice over a period of days, weeks, months, or years when expression in other forms is not coming easily. While grieving loss, Flint (2020) wrote about facing a “new silence” (p. 58) and using listing as a method of hope. Her lists of Things that are Good accumulated over time and within the published excerpts there is even repetition of Things that are Good on different days—tea and being barefoot, for example. Pullinger (2017) noted that lists like this are always bound to be incomplete. They are “open-ended, which means that they are acting as a sample” (p. 89). The point at which the list has enough is when it is big enough to express the complexity of the hard-to-describe thing, working as a representative sample. These do not tell someone how to do something, what to buy at the store, or any such thing. In these, “no action is implied,” (p. 89) but rather they connect items in new different ways, pulling them together to because in combination, they successfully express something that they could not express when they are simply strewn about with no container.

Composing this kind of List

Creating a list offers an alternative to narrating something that is difficult to express; the difficult to express is what many qualitative researchers investigate. This kind of list is merely *suggestive* of something or someone, not direct or finished. In the case of Flint’s (2020) Things that are Good, the list is an expression of period of life in which, ironically, vividly tells a story of that time without the need for all the details.

- A. To write a list like Brecht’s Pleasures (1976), you must begin with a major concept that will unify all the associations on the list. The beauty of this exercise is in seeing how the items on the list come to suggest the concept that is hard to express. I list a few ideas below, but you will have others on your mind as well.
 - a. Pleasure
 - b. Joy

- c. Anxiety
- d. Contentment
- e. Nostalgia

B. Lavelle's (n.d.) list was similar to Brecht's (1976), but used a repetitious refrain to organize and thematize her writing. Consider using a list like this to describe human qualities about yourself or another person; these could operate like subjectivity statements or participant description, for example. . Try one of the refrains below, or come up with your own. If you teach, this is a good classroom activity for student writing.

- a. Inspired by
- b. On my shelf is
- c. I remember
- d. I should tell you
- e. Fond of
- f. Never again will I

3. The Catalog List

Unlike lists that are effective using only a representative sample of terms, catalog lists work well when they have hearty accumulations. . Rather than conjuring difference and comparison—like in the double-sided list—or expressing that which is hard to say like the ones just discussed, catalog lists depend on thoroughness at their foundation. These lists are useful to qualitative researchers given that they can sometimes help achieve the academic writing goals of evaluation, analysis, setting a scene, and/or immersing the reader (Goodall, 2008, 30-46).

In the classic ethnography, Agee (writer) and Evans' (photographer) (1939) *Three tenant families: Let us now praise famous men*, is a book-length study of poverty among Southern tenant farmers during the Great Depression. It uses multiple forms, including narrative, photograph, and lists. This text is rhetorically savvy in that it is both persuasive

and emotionally moving, in part because the author and photographer knew when to utilize various forms toward their goals. While Evan's incorporated the iconic black and white photographs of people who appeared both worn out and unsmiling, Agee incorporated lists within the text, accumulating everything owned by the impoverished families he studied. The lists within the text became a method for describing to readers what poverty looks like from the macroscopic to microscopic, venturing from the outside of the home all the way into the contents of every drawer. Here is an excerpt from the section titled: "SHELTER: An Outline," in which Agee moves from inside to outside:

A home in its fields

I. The Front bedroom

General

Placement of furniture

The furniture

The altar

The tabernacle ..." (Agee and Evans, 1939, p. 125).

As Agee (1939) progresses into each room of the house, he lists the furniture, accompanied by what is placed on every surface and hidden within every drawer. In addition to the minimal style of a basic hierarchical list, Agee also used listing in sentence form in his descriptions of the nooks and crannies. He writes:

In the table drawer, in this order: A delicate insect odor of pine, closed sweated cloth, a mildew. One swooning-long festal baby's dress of the most frail muslin, embroidered with three bands of small white cotton-thread flowers... One plain baby's dress of white cotton; a torn rag; home-sewn, less studiously; folded. (p. 165)

This portion of the text is lengthy, creating a tedious reading experience. Such an experience mirrors the presumed tedium undertaken by the researcher, who cataloged the contents of the home. These lists achieve the academic writing goals of setting a scene and immersing a

reader that Goodall (2008) noted were important (p. 36-40). But further, it gets at Goodall's idea that good academic writing is also one of evaluation and analysis (p. 36-40). Agee's listing builds the case that he has truly unveiled the lives of these tenant farmers, evaluating everything--in terms of their quality, degradation, amount, and placement—they have in such a way that contemporarily, it reads as uncomfortably intimate. His lists seem to know too much, including hidden details in a form of ethnographic fieldwork that leaves little to the imagination. All the while, a reader cannot help but see a piling on of evidence, the proof of poverty, by listing the minimal belongings and their decaying conditions.

These lists are thus a highly persuasive form within the larger text. Belknap (2004), a scholar of lists, noted that it was Agee's (1939) text that made him pay attention to lists in the first place, planting the seed for his subsequent scholarly book on lists. He writes, "I was drawn particularly to the spare itemizations of possessions Agee recorded for the families he studies...The idea that everything an entire family owned, socks and all, could be counted out and still sum to so little, virtually nothing, left a deep impression on me (p. x). If the poverty is a point to be made in the text, the lists speak for themselves in making this point. Indeed, if everything a family owns can be listed in a few book pages, poverty is not only described, but literally demonstrated, not only through the content of the text, but *within the very form*.

It is common for writers outside of the academy, like fiction writers, to use catalog lists in their writing to supplement the narrative or help the writer orient themselves to big accumulations of things, such as characters. As Brian Richardson (2016) explained, "starting with the catalogue of ships in the *Illiad*, lists and narrative are found together, almost always with a list of a series of lists nesting within a narrative proper" (p. 328). Richardson proposed that though many other scholars of writing style have said lists disrupt a narrative (p. 327), he sees that lists work in tandem with the narrative and "at times, merge closely together" (p. 327). They serve some purpose that the narrative cannot fulfill on its own, at least not in the same way—like revealing the dates and times of events, or all the known qualities of a character (p. 327). Within fiction, catalog lists are commonplace and exist in some of the most revered texts, including Milton's writing, proving that when they are written to serve the overall purpose of the text, their "disengagement from syntactical structures" (Alber, 2016, p. 345) does not come across as inappropriate or unlearned.

Unlike Agee and Evans (1939) melancholic lists describing poverty, Henry David Thoreau also integrated lists into *Walden* (1854/2004) in order to do the opposite: revel in minimalism and preach its practicality (choosing a life of austerity as a single man is quite different than trying to feed a family through farm labor). Thoreau listed every item purchased and its costs for his home on the pond (p. 47). He also annotated his list here and there, making a note next to his two casks of lime he used to make plaster, saying, “That was high” at \$2.40 (p. 47). His lists of materials also serve the purpose of persuasion, proving to readers that his experiment was not terribly expensive. Given that readers are prone to doubting the trustworthiness of authors, Thoreau’s listing also proves a kind of depth of knowledge, suggesting he really did this thing because he can express every piece and part of it.

Catalog lists fulfill several purposes, such as demonstrating issues related to volume, like austerity or wealth and proving the authenticity of an experience by proving thoroughness and depth. Unlike many quantitative methods, many qualitative methods have no standard accepted norm for how much data one needs in order to demonstrate a point. Data saturation is widely interpreted depending on many factors, though some have used a concept called “saturative instantiation,” which uses the logic of the “the piling on of examples, as a way of demonstrating the ubiquity” (Lee, 2000, p. 8). This piling on of examples helps convince readers of the importance, universality, or otherwise, of whatever thing is being listed. In this way, “enough” evidence accrues simply through saturating readers with instances. Large catalogs also work as immersive, providing so many details that they eventually set a scene, like Agee’s (1939). In other words, catalogs are complex rhetorical forms that function in several ways, benefiting both proof, examples, and writing style.

Composing this kind of list

Catalog lists are tedious to write and may not always be relevant. Many have already written some version of a catalog in the form of things like annotated bibliographies, in which every reading related to a topic is discovered and summarized. Writing a catalog list is no harder than writing an annotated bibliography, but in this case, what kind of list is written greatly depends on what kind of research is being performed. For those interested in trying out catalog list writing, I suggest using a spreadsheet to begin with so that more details can be added in different columns, and the author may play with sorting functions before integrating the list into a larger writing project. These are best started at the beginning of a research project. I suggest one example of a catalog list prompt to help explain how one might begin such a task:

- A. Use simple headings within a spreadsheet so that the catalog to be written has boundaries. Open extra columns for more details, including an annotation area to leave personal comments, like Thoreau lamenting the cost of lime. Here is an example of forming a catalog list during the research process:
 - a. In field research, catalog lists work well for building strong observational notes for the researcher themselves, as well as useful notes for setting the scene for readers once a study is written up. The lists could contain all materials available in the classroom; the names of each student being observed and every activity or lesson they take part in throughout the day; and all the things on the walls of the classroom. If tasked with creating a catalog like this, one is likely to attend closely to the material and aesthetic qualities of the room, which would translate well into many observational studies. That said, there is no reason why a catalog list should not contain other things, like smells, feelings, or overheard snippets of conversation.

4. To-Do Lists

Finally, another common list that may be helpful to qualitative researchers in their academic writing is the to-do list. These procedural lists often make the most sense within methods papers, research proposals, or research notes. To-do lists may seem unattractive to qualitative researchers given that many in the field have been rightfully weary and critical of qualitative methods becoming too procedural, resembling some of the out-of-the-box methodology of quantitative research. Lincoln (2001), a foundational methodologist and advocate of qualitative research, described how qualitative research has had to defend itself against quantitative research norms, recreating the concepts of ethics and validity (pp. 30-35) away from highly formulated methods and reproducible circumstances—human behavior simply does not follow such a framework. St. Pierre (2021) also pointed out that if our research is indeed inspired by theories from sources like poststructuralism and posthumanism, then we can never simply “know what to do” (p. 6) in a formulaic way. She cites Foucault, saying, “it isn’t because I think that there is nothing to be done; on the contrary, it is because I think there are a thousand things to do” (cited in St. Pierre, 2021, p. 6).

In other words, if we are to take on a to-do list in our qualitative methods papers, our research proposals, or even just our private notetaking in preparation for research, the concept of the to-do list must be liberated from a purely procedural set of instructions. There are many sources who present alternatives to this, such as the New York School of poets who, during the 1960s and 1970s, frequently used the to-do list format. Rather than write a procedure to follow, their to-do lists were attempts “to master time by imagining, confronting, and determining the tone, value, placement, and emphasis (or lack there of) of one’s end. In poems like ‘Things to Do in New York,’ ‘Things to Do on Speed,’ ‘10 Things I Do Everyday’” poets experiment with “envisioning the future” (Soong, 2020, p. 69). The to-do list can thus be used to create a temporal relationship between our moment of writing and our imagined future. Perhaps, by writing it down, we are manifesting the future like one might write a spell. In putting it on paper, we call forth what we hope to have already done in the future, an act that Soong calls (2020) “prospective memory” (p. 92).

The to-do list poem draws on the old form of writing that fills 18th-century diaries and similar texts, in which authors listed the tasks completed and to-be-completed as part of their daily journaling routine. The more contemporary versions, like The New York School of poets' work, simply incorporated "the economic method of making lists in works like Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*" (Soong, 2020 p. 92) into their own lives, thereby merging procedure and poetics. For example, a portion of Ted Berrigan's (2011) to-do list poem, "10 Things I Do Every Day," reads:

wake up

smoke pot

see the cat

love my wife

think of Frank (p. 77)

In this list, there is not a clear distinction between what *is already* done and what *will be* done. The title indicates that these are things that happen every day, like a regimen. On the other hand, to-do lists are particularly fascinating in how they function to implicate the future self into actions. To-do lists play with time and can be read as "prospective memory... unlike retroactive memory, which involves the traversal and measurement of past time, prospective memory involves remembering 'to carry out intended actions at an appropriate point in the future'" (Soong, 2020, p. 92). In such cases, the writer "presumes a future but also entails an implicit imperative or promise to oneself" (p. 92). This list functions to fight off forgetting, while also creating a promise to oneself. It calls into the future, "pointing to things located outside one's present or past realm of perception" (p. 92).

To-do lists can also be directed at audiences or given to others. Chrissie Hynde, a musician most famous for her time in the band The Pretenders, wrote a list for others like her, called "Advice to Chick Rockers." Her list includes things like: "7. Don't try to compete with the guys; it won't impress anybody. Remember, one of the reasons they like you is because you don't offer yet more competition to the already existing male egos" (Hynde, 1994/2014). A list like Hynde's is intended to be pedagogic and is typically written by an

expert for an audience of novices. Thinking of Hynde’s list in light of Soong’s concept of prospective memory, Hynde offers her readers not a single future, but “futuraity as a set of options” (Soong, 2020, p. 95). This is even emphasized by her last bit of advice, in which she directs: “10. Don’t take advice from people like me. Do your own things always,” reminding us that procedure is always just a suggestion. Such a list, then, explicates “alternatives and sights of potentiality more than ... facts” (p. 95).

Because of this quality of potentiality and prospective memory, the to-do list fulfills some of the goal many scholars have in qualitative research design, which is frequently the first bit of writing on a project. By writing our research design down, we set our intentions; but given that qualitative research may involve people, experiences, affect, sounds, relationships, networks, or other unpredictable elements, we are not able to articulate everything in advance. Our research is mutable by default, and thus many qualitative researchers struggle with imaging and writing down their design. They must create a workable plan for something that has not yet been done, which requires putting stipulations on things that often remain uncertain to the researcher.

Alternatively, the idea of designing future actions, as imagined within to-do list poetry form, reminds us of our potential future more than it does to sediment rigid frameworks. To-do list poems can be seen as a composition of things that are “potentially discovered (and potentially lost) through living itself” (Soong, 2020, p. 96). In the qualitative research and writing context, this sentiment may aid a researcher who is challenged by the need to describe a study before it has actually been lived—sometimes this is required for IRB, book proposals, recruiting collaborators, or otherwise. The happenings of the future can be a burden to write, but in another light, this kind of list is an interesting exercise about projecting things onto the horizon, describing what the future self will do at another time. There is a weird comfort in the to-do list, given that in performing the writing, we are evoking a prospective memory of what might potentially fill our time, or simply a space of “displaced futures that never came into fruition” (Soong, 2020, p. 98). What we intend to do and what really ends up happening can only become known in the living of life.

To-do lists and their makers are aspirational, and such lists can be used in our qualitative academic writing as such. The famous science fiction author Robert Heinlein

(1952) created a list he called “free-swinging predictions” because he thought “cautious predictions are *sure* to be wrong,” whereas free-swinging ones had some chance of turning out right. Though not a strict to-do list, a list of predictions is not so different. Heinlein’s list claimed many incorrect things and a few correct ones, like: “8. Freud will be classed as a pre-scientific, intuitive pioneer, and psychoanalysis will be replaced as a growing, changing ‘operational psychology’ based on measurement and prediction”; “11. Your personal telephone will be small enough to carry in your handbag. Your house telephone will record messages” (13-22). Even Charles Dickens (1851/2014), at a time in his life when he did not yet own enough books to fill his shelves, invented book titles, and commissioned that fake books be bound, including *Jonah’s Account of the Whale* and *Heavysides Conversations with Nobody*. He made up the titles for over 40 books, simply to fill in the shelves for the moment, until a future time when real books could be procured (p. 214). To-do lists, then, can be “free-swinging” and not just simple enumerations of what to do in a precise order, but rather the conjuring of future aspirations and acquisitions.

Composing this kind of List

Incorporating to-do lists into qualitative research design writing can help with manifesting actions and things we wish to see done, or such lists might be used as advise for others within a methodology paper. Readers, looking for new ideas for their potential futures, may appreciate a to-do list that helps them set their own intentions. In order to speak to both the possibility of writing for the self or for another, I offer two prompts below.

- A. Consider writing a to-do list for yourself about a research project you are hoping to accomplish. You may wish to structure in chronological order of tasks to be accomplished, or you may wish to simply list things that will need to happen in any kind of order, particularly if your research has a less linear trajectory. Here are some things to include on an aspirational research to-do list:

- a. What kinds of readings will need to be done for this project? Set your intentions by listing the keywords, disciplinary areas, theoretical explorations, and other guideposts for your future reading. This will help set the intentions of this research and define some boundaries in your search—you will likely add to these as you go on.
 - b. Would you need other humans to do this research? Some may be participants, and some may be collaborators. Include on this list who you must contact and how you might contact them.
 - c. If you do not need humans, perhaps you need archival sources, photographs, artwork, existing data sources. List where these might come from and what tasks you could do to complete them.
 - d. If you need money to do this, include that need on the list.
 - e. If you need to travel to do this, include the places on the list.
- B. Another kind of to-do list functions more pedagogically and can be helpful as guidance for others who are seeking help setting their intentions. Their minimal qualities allow for more interpretative room than more lengthy textbooks and articles, making them a nice tool for those who want to speak meaningfully to an audience of people from many disciplines with diverse research interests. For example, you might create a to-do list like Berrigan's (2011) "10 Things I do Every Day." Beyond waking up and smoking pot, some more academic topics might center on:
- a. How to publish a manuscript
 - b. How to form a research question
 - c. How to do a type of research methodology
 - d. How to find sources
 - e. Ways for finding funding
 - f. Ways to connect with other researchers
 - g. Ways to evaluate one's own writing

Conclusion

Just as qualitative research embraces the imbroglio of methodological differences and manifold content areas of study, this special issue attests to the way the field pursues experimentations with form and genre in academic writing. I propose the list as a democratic form that can easily be integrated into qualitative studies and methodology writing in ways that may enhance the rhetorical functions of the writing or aid the writer in composing a text in the first place. Clough (2000) argued that the worst thing that could happen in qualitative writing is a “return to methodological policing, putting an end to theorizing the future” (p. 290). In that spirit, it is invigorating to think about how the genre of academic writing can be enhanced with lists like the ones found in children’s writing or as published poetry.

Often, qualitative scholars have experimented with academic writing to help rescue the struggling writer who is paralyzed by the confines of academic writing or simply eager to experiment across forms. Holliday (2007) said that “getting from data to written study can be a traumatic time for the researcher” (p. 92)—if that is the case, writing is far more troubling than it needs to be. Many, like Bridges-Rhoads (2015), encouraged others to “take up the page as a site of experimentation with/against/through paralysis” (p. 704). Experimentation with writing becomes the method by which one may overcome the obstacles to writing. Such experimentation often takes place by resisting the typical academic writing structures and trying something different.

Many of the experimental writing tactics qualitative researchers propose lean into the concepts of chaos, messiness, and failure. In these, writers find relief from the requirement of a clean, refined, and finish text. Embracing such concepts resist academic writing structures, but it also occurs to me that writing forms that break away from traditional academic writing do not necessarily have to also be chaotic and messy, nor do they have to fail. Perhaps it is not the orderliness of academic writing that is the problem, but rather it is the dullness of topic, tone of authority, boredom of literature review, unhuman distance between reader and writer, formulaic organization of social science prose, and so forth.

Not only can we find inspiration for genre-breaking writing tactics by searching across the arts and other academic disciplines, , but also within our everyday life, in forms of

writing we have known and practiced for a long time. Like the list-writer Walt Whitman, who “exploited its capacity to accumulate elements and yoke together phenomena” (Belknap, 2004, p. 2), the list can be a generative form that “spark[s] endless connections and inclusions in a multiplicity of forms” (p. 2). These qualities will resonate with some qualitative researchers who want to write up an accessible and meaningful text that plays with many forms of rhetorical expression. Consider writing a list when you want to imply expanse and perpetuity; call upon the human tendencies to collect; create a living document that needs tending to, like a little pet; integrate multiple writing forms within one genre-breaking piece; expose the hermeneutical elements of reading a catalog; invite children and new writers to say something; surprise the one who finds it; and alleviate all the fuss over language.

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