

The 'perpetual stew' of research writing

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We often hear about dishes passed down through generations, not just as recipes but as actual dishes built upon older batches, like a sourdough starter. For example, a restaurant in Thailand claims that its beef noodle soup has been simmering for almost half a century. Each evening, they clean the pot, remove most of the broth while leaving a base to simmer overnight, and top it up the next day with fresh stock and ingredients. Similar practices exist in many cultures, where stews, broths, and fermented bases are replenished and extended over time.

This idea of a 'perpetual stew' is, I find, a powerful metaphor for explaining how research writing differs from other types of writing and why feedback is so integral to the process. Unlike most assignments that students complete before starting research, which typically end with submission and grading, research writing has no neat, obvious endpoint. Instead, it moves through a continual cycle of feedback, revision, and further feedback until you decide your work is serviceable. In this sense, you are never truly starting from scratch, as Mullaney and Rea (2022) paradoxically observe. Each iteration is influenced by your previous work, and you remain open to further refinement. This is not simply a matter of recycling old material. Rather, your work matures, enriched by new ideas, lessons, and experiences added along the way. Finishing one project does not mark the end of your research writing. Each completed piece naturally feeds into your next project, even if it is on a different topic, often in unexpected and generative ways.

In an era of growing concerns about plagiarism, self-plagiarism, and the undisclosed use of AI-generated text, this metaphor offers students a useful lens through which to view their development as writers and researchers. It helps them recognise that being able to demonstrate how their work has evolved over time is one of the most effective ways to assert and protect their authorial voice, and to defend it if ever called into question.

Reference

Mullaney, T. S., & Rea, C. (2022). *Where research begins*. University of Chicago Press.