

*Scientific Writing Course*  
*October 31- November 4, 2022*

# **After the retreat... Keep your writing flowing**

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# Outline

- Establish a daily writing habit. Prioritize your writing
- Recognize resistance, let go of perfectionism
- Mindful writing
- Writing as thinking
- Learn how long writing takes

Establish a daily writing habit

*When inspiration doesn't come to me,*

*I go half-way to meet it*

Sigmund Freud

*Work brings inspiration,*

*if inspiration is not discernable in the beginning*

Igor Stravinsky

# Establish a daily writing habit – why?

- Brief daily writing, every day (M-F) - even 30 minutes/day
- Keeps ideas fresh
- Keeps projects moving forward when busy, during unplanned events
- Builds discipline and commitment
- Requires breaking large tasks into small manageable daily chunks – makes them less ominous

# Establish a daily writing habit – How?

- Identify the time of day best for you
- Make your writing space comfortable (for you)
- Block time on your calendar & decline meetings
  - Brief daily sessions, plus longer blocks as feasible ( $\geq 1$  longer session/week)
- Define your task/goal at the start of each session
  - At the end of each – take note where you left off – set goal for next day
- Partner up with others for accountability or co-writing
- Allow some ebb and flow to daily writing. There may be times when you take a 2 week break. Just start up again after whatever came up

# Pomodoro

- Sessions of 25-45 minutes – what's best may vary by project
- For each session, identify a simple clear goal before starting
  - In the next 30 minutes, I'm going to draft the first paragraph of the introduction.
  - In the next 30 minutes, I'm going to free write ideas that I might incorporate in my discussion.
- Do take a break at the end of the segment if >1 session
  - Focus deteriorates over time.
  - Refresh energy with a short break.
  - Stretch. Look into the distance to reduce eye strain
  - When you stop –jot down where to start after break (or next day)

# Micro goals for 30 minutes of writing

- Example "Draft introduction" may take several 30 minute blocks:
  - Outline
  - Draft paragraph 1
  - Draft paragraph 2
  - Draft paragraph 3
  - Clean up the overall flow / edit
- Other 30 minute tasks...
  - Review nearly complete paper, identify revisions that need to be made
  - Clean up reference list

# Recognize resistance to writing

- For many, our mindset is the biggest barrier to writing, not the technicalities.
- Feeling overwhelmed – too much to do, not sure where to start.
- Uncertainty/fear of how the work will be reviewed, strong inner critic, tendency to perfectionism
- Unclear goals or uncertain commitment to the project
  - Is this project important?
  - Do I really want to be doing this?

# Recognize resistance, acknowledge, move on

- Resistance might not be at the front of your awareness. Notice behaviors:
  - Distractions as you sit down to write
  - Excessively editing or revisiting themes or analyses, not handing over to co-authors
- Reflect on what's going on. Be a curious observer
  - Feeling overwhelmed? – too much to do, not sure where to start.
  - Uncertainty how the work will be reviewed, strong inner critic, perfectionism
  - Unclear goals or uncertain commitment to the project
    - Is this project important?
    - Do I really want to be doing this?
- Don't battle it, but calmly identify logical flaws

# Some strategies to address resistance

- Feeling overwhelmed?
  - Break down a large project into small goals
  - Think of a goal you can achieve in 30 minutes, and reward yourself when done
- Perfectionism
  - share drafts early and often – with “safe” reviewers first (safe=honest, constructive, encouraging)
- Inner critic
  - Acknowledge and set aside during early drafts. DO bring this voice to the table during editing
- Uncertainty/unclear goals
  - spend some time reflecting on your goals, priorities – at least quarterly
  - Try “mindful” writing, writing as thinking
- Find yourself procrastinating?
  - Commit to only 10 minutes of writing
  - Reward yourself with that activity

*Almost all good writing begins with terrible first efforts.  
You need to start somewhere.*

Anne Lamott

Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life

# Mindful writing

## Why?

- Brings clarity to your goals and to your immediate task
- Minimize resistance due to feeling overwhelmed, concerns about critical feedback
- Work patiently and consistently

## How/what is it?

- As you sit down to write, pause, reflect on your goals
- Start only when you have a clear intention. Stop after 30 minutes. Reflect.

# Writing as thinking – enables creativity

- Start writing *ideas* (not your manuscript) before a project is fully formed, or to *think* about a difficult section of a manuscript
- Begin a session with a minute or two of mindful reflection
- Try talking out loud about your ideas, jot notes, draw diagrams
- Try free writing
  - Don't edit. Don't stop.
  - Try pen & paper vs computer to force yourself to not edit
- Outline ideas as they come together

# Weekly / periodically reflect

- Why am I writing? What message do I want to deliver? What motivates me to do this? How can I share my joy with readers?
  - vs. writing under pressure for deadlines, to meet commitments
- Acknowledge your wins – # writing sessions/minutes, # words
- Monitor inefficiencies with weekly goals and weekly reflection
  - Did I succumb to resistance and get lost in email/etc during planned writing times?
  - Did I excessively revise one sentence, or spend a lot of time on a side issue of low importance?
  - Don't dwell on the negatives - acknowledge, consider solutions, and move on

# Co-writing / mini writing retreats

- Writing with others can:
  - be inspiring
  - build community
  - keep you accountable
- Commit to not catching-up/chat during writing sessions
  - Do a round of 1-sentence check in to state your goals for the session (or put goals in the chat)
  - Take breaks as with pomodoro
- Plan a **separate time** to discuss weekly goals/challenges

# Learn how long writing projects take

- This comes with daily writing (time & output more closely tracked)
- Most of these strategies apply to data analysis too
- More on time-tracking in part 3 today
- Learn to plan accordingly and feel less discouraged by missing unrealistic self-imposed deadlines

# How long does it take? Try time-tracking

- Document your activities 24H/day in 1/2 hour increments for a full 7 days
- See spreadsheets here
  - <https://lauravanderkam.com/manage-your-time/> (+ see instructions)
  - or use an app
- Use the level of detail that capture what is important to you, but is also feasible – recording is hard, don't make yourself work too hard
- Although she recommends categorizing at the end of the week – I find it easier to think about meaningful categories at the start

# Time tracking

- As you track, notice which activities come with resistance.
- At the end of the week, reflect – how well did you adhere to your writing schedule? To other priorities?

## Example categories

1. Data analysis
2. Writing manuscripts
3. Writing grants
4. Meetings, admin (email, research admin, IRB, etc)
5. University service
6. Chores (groceries, dog walks, etc)
7. Personal/self care (exercise, socializing, eating, etc)

Others to consider – commute time, clinical duties, parenting, class, homework