



Writing Productively:
The Road to Academic Success


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Topics

- Overcoming roadblocks
 - Writer's block
 - Unblocking
 - Warm up the mind
- Motivational tools
 - Scheduling
 - Set goals
 - Set priorities
 - Monitor progress
 - Rewards & punishment
 - Social support
- Attitude Adjustment
 - Monitor self-talk
 - Failure isn't fatal



"People who hate writing and are reluctant to write feel as if they are 'undressing' in front of other people. By writing, they are baring a private part of themselves, and this is extraordinarily difficult and painful for some people. When they put words in a document, they are standing naked in front of other people."



<http://science-professor.blogspot.com/2008/08/barely-writing.html>

Overcoming Roadblocks

Writer's block

"I don't feel like writing [this morning, today, this week, this semester.....the rest of my life!]"

"I can't find time to write."

"Even if I do a good job [writing], the reviewers will criticize it for some trivial reason."

"I hate outlines."

"I have no ideas for this writing project."

"I need to do some more analyses first."

"My writing will never be as good as my peers."

"I write best when I'm **under the gun.**"


<http://womeninwetlands.blogspot.com/search/label/writing%20problems>

Overcoming Roadblocks

Writer's block

In groups of 2-3...

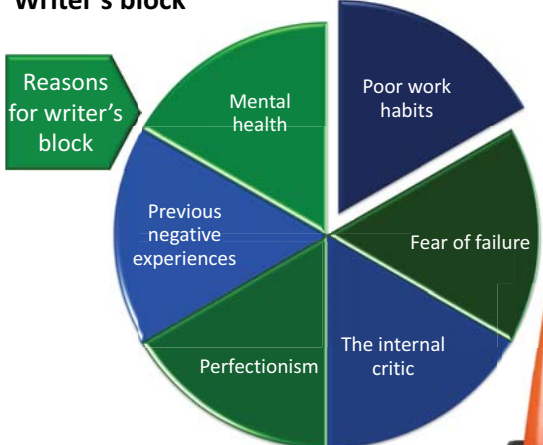
1. Introduce yourselves – faculty, school, job title, etc.
2. What writing project/s are you working on right now?
3. Describe a recent time you sat down to write. What were you trying to write? What happened? What seemed to get in the way of being productive? What seemed to help?




Overcoming Roadblocks

Writer's block

Reasons for writer's block

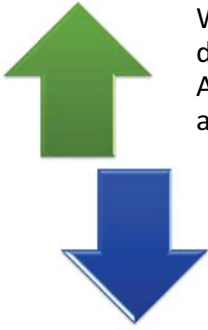


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Overcoming Roadblocks

Unlocking



What writing pitfalls do you suffer from? Are there others that aren't on the list?

What are your productive writing 'assets'?



http://www.rsc.qut.edu.au/pdfs/Training/res/Writing_Productively_RB.pdf

Overcoming Roadblocks

Unlocking

• Know yourself!

- ▲ What part of the day is your most creative?
- ▲ Which stage of the process seems difficult?
- ▲ What is your best environment to work?



Overcoming Roadblocks

Unlocking

1. Right thoughts concerning writing

Accept that writing can be difficult

2. Regularity

Learn to write by writing

3. Automatization

Make writing an automatic process

4. Social support

Constructive feedback



<https://wiki oulu.fi/display/tor/1.2.2+The+scientific+writing+process>

Overcoming Roadblocks

Unlocking

Talent Is Overrated



<http://womeninwetlands.blogspot.com/2009/04/is-talent-over-rated.html>

Overcoming Roadblocks

Warm up the mind

• Free writing

"The idea is simply to write for ten minutes...Don't stop for anything. Go quickly without rushing. Never stop to look back, to cross something out...to wonder what word or thought to use, or to think about what you are doing. If you can't think of a word or a spelling, just use a squiggle or else write, 'I can't think of it.' Just put down something." – Peter Elbow (1973)

- Read the text later
- Select an interesting thought



<https://wiki oulu.fi/display/tor/1.2.2+The+scientific+writing+process>

Style and approach can be chosen freely

Overcoming Roadblocks

Warm up the mind

Write unselfconsciously

1. Be careless, reckless
2. Develop true self-confidence
3. Be microscopically truthful
4. Keep a diary
5. Write what is next



<http://womeninwetlands.blogspot.com/2009/11/if-you-want-to-write.html>

Overcoming Roadblocks

Warm up the mind

<https://iee.na5.acrobat.com/p41003999/?launcher=false&fcsContent=true&pbMode=normal>

• Clustering

- Circle the main idea in the middle
- Write down all your ideas, not in order
- Circle each idea
- Connect the circles beginning from central idea
- Do not force anything
- Everything is allowed



When you get the impulse to write, use it!



Overcoming Roadblocks

Warm up the mind

<https://iee.na5.acrobat.com/p41003999/?launcher=false&fcsContent=true&pbMode=normal>

• Mindmapping

- Write the problem in the center
- Clockwise, write down the parts of the problem as short nouns
- Branch out using different colors



Overcoming Roadblocks

Warm up the mind

1. Abstract
2. Introduction
 - 1. Background
 - Previous work done by others
 - Several guides
 - Instructions for Authors
 - Previous work done by you
 - Wrote a draft that nobody liked
 - Bought *Writing for Dummies*
3. Methods
 1. What you did
 2. How you did it
 3. What you used
4. Results
 1. Typical raw data
 2. Data you obtained
5. Discussion
 1. What the results mean
 2. Comparison to work of others
 3. Significance of your findings
6. Conclusion
 1. Take home message
 2. We are so great
7. Acknowledgements
8. References

USE BULLET POINTS TO LIST THE MAIN POINTS OF A PARAGRAPH

<https://iee.na5.acrobat.com/p41003999/?launcher=false&fcsContent=true&pbMode=normal>

Overcoming Roadblocks

Common misconceptions



<https://wiki oulu.fi/display/tor/1.2.2+The+scientific+writing+process>

Motivational Tools

- Schedule writing
- Set goals
- Set priorities
- Track progress
- Rewards & punishment
- Social support



Motivational Tools

Schedule writing

- Establish a time to write each day
 - E.g., 8-10 am every Mon, Wed, Fri
 - Stick to it **no matter what**
 - Write even if you don't feel like it
 - Writing time can include *prewriting* activities
 - Practice makes perfect

The secret is the regularity, not the number of hours

"Through the practice of writing, they [professors] build a positive mood, even an inspiration for writing" -Boice (1990)

Motivational Tools

Schedule writing

Put off writing until a large block of time appears

Target holidays, weekends, etc.

Avoid binge writing

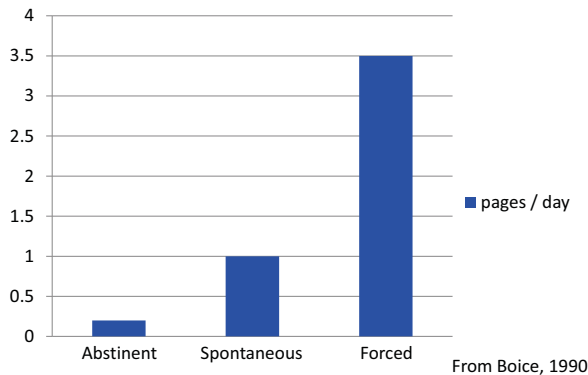
Exhausting and rarely is successful

Binge writers spend time feeling guilty and anxious about not writing

<http://womeninwetlands.blogspot.com/>

Motivational Tools

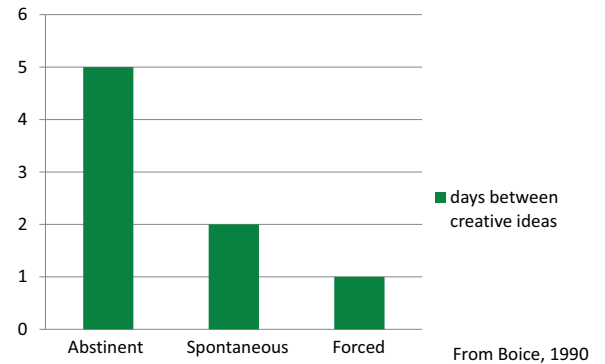
Schedule writing



Conclusion:

Motivational Tools

Schedule writing



Conclusion:

Motivational Tools

Set goals

SMART goals

- | | | |
|----------|-------------------|---|
| S | Specific | Exactly what do you want to achieve? |
| M | Measurable | How will you know when you've achieved it? |
| A | Attainable | Is it possible for you to achieve the goal? |
| R | Relevant | Why have you chosen this goal? |
| T | Time-bound | When does it need to be completed by? |

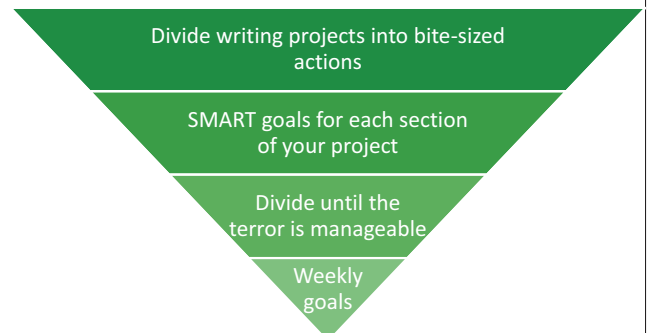
e.g., 'write and submit an article on xxx from chapter 4 of my dissertation for the *Journal of X* by the end of June'

Put your top-level goals up near your work area

http://www.rsc.qut.edu.au/pdfs/Training/res/Writing_Productively_RB.pdf

Motivational Tools

Set goals



- Come up with a top-level SMART goal for your writing project
- What are your goals for this week?

http://www.rsc.qut.edu.au/pdfs/Training/res/Writing_Productively_RB.pdf

Motivational Tools

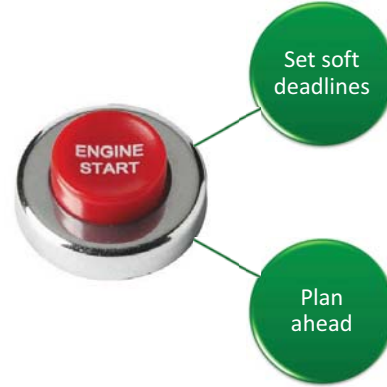
Set priorities

- Write down your priorities, e.g.:
 1. Checking page proofs and copyedited manuscripts
 2. Finishing projects with deadlines
 3. Revising manuscripts to resubmit to a journal
 4. Reviewing manuscripts and grant proposals
 5. Developing a new manuscript
 6. Doing miscellaneous writing

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Motivational Tools

Set priorities

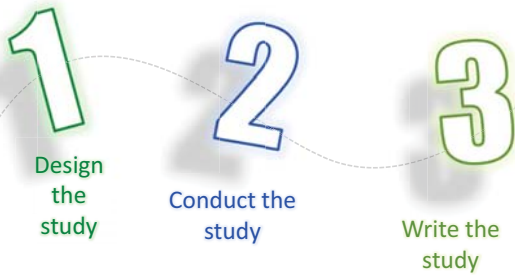


- Process can drag on without them
- Put in long hours at the beginning
- Give yourself extra time
- Allow for formatting and submission
- Know yourself and your work
- Start writing immediately
- Methods and Introduction

http://www.ieee.org/documents/51764_PostScripts%20from%20Survival%20Skills%20for%20Scientific%20Writing%20final.pdf

Motivational Tools

Set priorities



Motivational Tools

Set priorities

- Structure, flow, and persuasion
- Style



- Collecting ideas
- Formulate questions and explore the field

- Narrow down the subject
- Write a synopsis
- Specific analysis of literature

- Structure
- Do not focus on style

http://www.gold.embs.org/resourceCenter/WritingSkills/Reumann_WritingSkills_EMBC09.pdf

Motivational Tools

Track progress

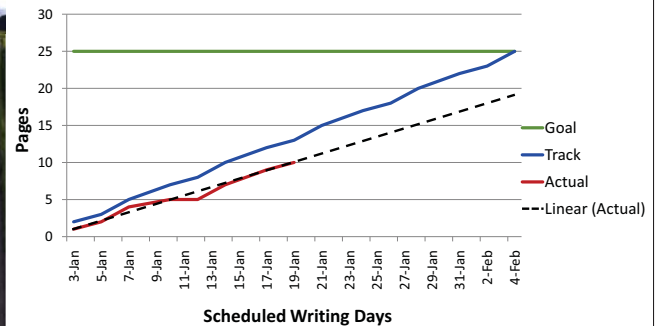
Set Better Goals

day	date	project	words written	time taken	comments
Mon	4-April	JBC paper revisions	437	2:00	Goal met
Wed	6-April	JBC paper revisions	350	1:30	Goal met
Fri	8-April	R03 Specific Aims	150	0:30	Goal met
Mon	11-April	R03 Significance	210	0:30	Goal met
Wed	13-April	R03 Significance	470	1:00	Goal met
Fri	15-April	R03 Innovation	510	2:30	Goal met
Mon	18-April		0	0	Unmet
Wed	20-April	R03 Approach section	768	5:00	Goal met, binge!
Fri	22-April	Blood paper	430	1:30	Goal met
Mon	25-April	Blood paper	301	2:00	Goal met
Wed	27-April	Matt's paper	234	1:00	Goal met
Fri	29-April	Matt's paper	0	0:30	Goal met, editing

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Motivational Tools

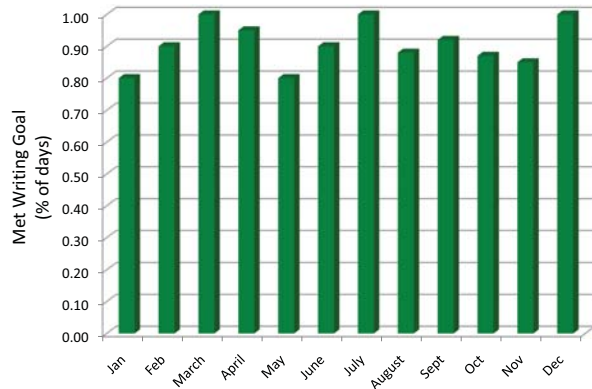
Track progress



http://www.totaltraining.com/Store/Viewer.aspx

Motivational Tools

Track progress



Silvia, P. How to Write A Lot: A practical guide to productive academic writing

Motivational Tools

Rewards & punishment

- ▲ Martini Method
- ▲ When to use extrinsic motivators and punishers:
 - To get you started
 - If intrinsic motivation is low (e.g., it's boring, easy subject matter)
 - When the work doesn't involve creative ideas



http://www.rsc.qut.edu.au/pdfs/Training/res/Writing_Productively_RB.pdf

Motivational Tools

Social Support

- Ask for feedback
 1. Uncritical feedback from a friend
 2. Critical feedback from a colleague
 3. Expert feedback from a mentor



<https://wiki.oulu.fi/display/tor/1.2.2+The+scientific+writing+process>

Motivational Tools

Social support

When your advisor or a peer reviewer writes on your paper comments such as, "unclear" or "ambiguous" or "obtuse", do you think that s/he:

- a) is just picking on you
- b) doesn't understand your unique "style"
- c) is making a subjective judgment
- d) might be right



<http://womeninwetlands.blogspot.com/search/label/science%20writing>

Motivational Tools

Social support

Instructions to commenters:

1. Address concrete points in the text
2. Suggest alternatives
3. What is your general opinion
4. How does the text fulfill its function
5. Is the tone appropriate
6. Is it clearly structured
7. Is the logic of the text easy to follow
8. Are the expressions accurate and understandable

<https://wiki.oulu.fi/display/tor/1.2.2+The+scientific+writing+process>

Motivational Support

Social support



<http://theadventurouswriter.com/blogwriting/tips-for-starting-a-writers-group/>

Attitude Adjustment

- Monitor self-talk
- Failure isn't fatal



Attitude Adjustment

Monitor self-talk



The tyranny of the *shoulds*

- 'I should'
- 'I have to'
- 'I must'



The freedom of choice

- 'I choose'
- 'I will'
- 'I want to'

http://www.rsc.qut.edu.au/pdfs/Training/res/Writing_Productively_RB.pdf

Attitude Adjustment

Failure isn't fatal

You *will* get rejected

Special tip #1: make a plan for rejection, but don't anticipate rejection.

You *will* get negative feedback

Special tip #2: talk with others about their experiences with negative feedback and rejection

Journal acceptance rates are typically 5-30%

Special tip #3: start a 'brag book' (for your eyes only) to remind yourself of your successes when life gets tough



Presenter Media

http://www.rsc.qut.edu.au/pdfs/Training/res/Writing_Productively_RB.pdf

Take-Home Message

- ▲ Identify writing problems
- ▲ Solutions for unblocking
- ▲ Warm up the mind
- ▲ Schedule writing
- ▲ Set goals
- ▲ Set priorities
- ▲ Track your progress
- ▲ Get social support
- ▲ Adjust your attitude

ALMOST THERE →

