

Developing a Writing Habit

Making writing a habit has a number of **benefits**:

- you will likely be more productive, more motivated, and less stressed
- you will also probably enjoy the writing process a lot more.
- Your writing will certainly improve.

I've been a committed procrastinator most of my life, but to my astonishment and pleasure I've developed a writing habit of my own. You can too, if you haven't already!

Something I have learned: **writing = thinking**. Writing helps you clarify and develop your ideas, and find creative insights – for me, it is a much more effective approach than “thinking” or “talking” out your ideas, although those approaches have their place. You must **give yourself time** to write, and you must **write**, or your ideas will never reach their full potential.

Restarting Your Writing: Some strategies and considerations

- Set a daily goal – something realistic, that you can achieve. Write it down.
 - Many people rely on what Bolker calls the “inspiration method,” which means sitting glued to the chair until an idea comes; most people do not do well with this method.
 - In fact, research indicates that most people should not write for more than 2 hours per day.
 - A helpful approach is to set a certain number of pages per day as your writing goal – for example, 3-6 pages every day for a week.
 - Establish ways to remind yourself about your writing goal: post-it notes on the coffee maker / bathroom mirror, friends, electronic reminders, etc.
- Create a writing habit:
 - Write at the same time and place every day, and precede it by the same habits (i.e., wake up, go for a walk, make a coffee, then sit down to write for 2 hours)
 - Getting your writing done first thing in the morning can be very effective. (But this may not work for everyone!)
 - Start with 10 minutes of free writing to warm up; it's much easier to start by committing to these 10 minutes than to 2 hours. You will keep writing after the 10 minutes are up.
 - During your writing hours, write. Don't “check something” on the internet, or stop to make some tea, or watch a YouTube video for three minutes. Just write.
 - If you are really stuck writing about one aspect of your work, write about a different aspect. Keep writing.
 - When you're writing, avoid editing, proofreading, fact-checking, etc. The purpose is to produce words on paper / a computer screen. Edit later. Just write, even if it's not great-quality writing.

- Keep a piece of paper next to you, to write down anything that you want to give your attention to – then give it your attention when your writing time is up.
- Consider rewarding yourself; certainly acknowledge your small achievements in developing a writing habit! Pay attention to what works for you, and how you benefit when you write regularly; it will help motivate you.
- When you're not writing:
 - Carry a notebook around to keep track of good ideas
 - Set up a daily routine that supports your writing habit
 - Take care of yourself (nutrition, sleep, exercise and hydration are very important!)

Most importantly, find and do what works best for you. Not only are you on a journey of discovery about your thesis topic, but you are also on a journey to find out what conditions you need to be the best writer you can be.

Resources

Bolker, J. (1998). *Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day: A Guide to Starting Revising, and Finishing Your Doctoral Thesis*. New York: Henry Hold and Company.

Elbow, P. *Writing without Teachers*. (2003). Oxford University Press.

Pressfield, S. (2003). *The War of Art: Break Through the Blocks and Win Your Inner Creative Battles*. New York: Warner Books.

Silvia, P. (2007). *How to Write a Lot*. Washington: American Psychological Association.

Swales, J. and Feak, C. (2004). *Academic Writing for Graduate Students: Essential Tasks and Skills*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Sword, H. (2012). *Stylish Academic Writing*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.