THE PRODUCTIVE GRADUATE STUDENT WRITER

HOW TO MANAGE YOUR TIME, PROCESS, AND ENERGY

TO WRITE YOUR RESEARCH PROPOSAL, THESIS, AND DISSERTATION

AND GET PUBLISHED

JAN ALLEN

Foreword by CHRIS M. GOLDE

"You eat a whale one bite at a time. As this practical book will convince you, you write a doctoral dissertation—or any other daunting assignment of scholarly writing—in much the same way. Jan Allen's encouraging voice and useful tips have helped graduate students at Columbia and Cornell finish the whale and earn their degrees. This book now makes her optimism and wisdom accessible to graduate students everywhere."—**COLE M. CRITTENDEN** | *Deputy Dean of the Graduate School, Princeton University*

"I wish I had had this book when I wrote my dissertation! It helps overcome the sense of isolation and offers important and practical suggestions for how to get unstuck and keep writing. It's full of great advice, grounded in insights from many top writers and tested by the author herself."—**JEFFREY ENGLER** | *Vice President, Special Projects, Council of Graduate Schools*

"This book is a pithy distillation of Jan Allen's wisdom. She serves it up in bite-sized chunks. Use it as an energy burst to start your daily writing time and set your new habits into place."—**CHRIS M. GOLDE** | *Assistant Director of Career Communities for PhDs & Postdocs, Stanford University*

"This book is a gem. A gifted scholar and graduate school dean provides precisely the kind of practical, tested advice that all students need to write theses, dissertations, grant proposals, job applications, and scholarly articles efficiently. I wholeheartedly recommend it."—**STEVEN MINTZ** | *University of Texas at Austin*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jan Allen is associate dean for academic and student affairs in the Graduate School at Cornell University, having previously served as assistant dean of the Graduate School at the University of Tennessee, associate dean at the Graduate School at Northwestern University, and associate dean for PhD programs at Columbia University. She presents workshops on mentoring, teaching, and graduate student survival skills; hosts the Productive Writer Listserv; and curates a popular related website (graduate-mentor.com).

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For Bobby

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FOREWORD

Doctoral students write. Historians write. Literary scholars write. That seems obvious. Psychologists write. Education scholars write. Sociologists write. That's not all. Chemists write. Geologists write. Neuroscientists write. Engineers write. *All* doctoral students write. A dissertation—a monograph or collection of articles—is required. That means writing.

Unfortunately, few graduate students start their programs with well-established habits of writing. Instead, they figure it out on their own, often relying on strategies that sufficed during their undergraduate years: Binge writing. Procrastinating. Staying mired in perfectionist gridlock.

Those strategies, however, don't work for doctoral writing. What to do? Shed the old habits and develop new ones. Easier said than done, of course. Fortunately, there is help. This book will set you on the right course.

There is a paradox of writing, especially grad school writing. It seems like a solo endeavor, but it works better as a team sport. The best analogy for me is the sport of fencing. I was a collegiate fencer. Don't get excited, I was not a particularly talented fencer. I did not win awards, although I did end my collegiate career as captain of Brown University's combined men's and women's fencing team. (I like to imagine that I was one of the first or perhaps the only woman to captain a men's varsity team.)

Fencing is a useful analogy here because it is both a team sport and an individual sport. Each athlete competes on his or her own. Win or lose, it is you versus your opponent. Writing, similarly, is an individual endeavor—you versus the information, you versus the page, and you and the reader in a back-and-forth interplay.

But my college competitive experience was most importantly and most memorably about the team aspects. We were not selective. If you wanted to join this club/varsity team, you were welcome. No experience was necessary. Many of us, I recall, were spectacularly unathletic. Show up enough, though, and you would get the chance to compete.

We practiced as a team. We met daily at the gym. We stretched, warmed up, built muscle strength, and lunged from one end of the practice room to the other. We became close friends, despite our different majors, hometowns, and career goals. Romances bloomed and faded. We commiserated together after disappointing losses. During the competitions, we cheered each other loudly from the sidelines. These shared experiences bonded us together as a team.

These memories come to mind as I think about writing as a team sport. Grad student writing, in particular, suffers in isolation and flourishes in a group setting. Join a writing group. Create a community of writers. An individual sport turns into a team sport.

Writing as a team sport is in the DNA of this book. One of this book's parents is the BreakWriting electronic mailing list that Jan Allen started in 2006. During the hiatus between the end of the fall term and the start of school in January, she sent out a daily encouraging note of writing advice. It was a pep talk in your inbox. All of those grad students with resolutions to write during the break were thrown a lifeline and roped into a community. "You are not

alone." "You can do this." "There are predictable challenges and tested strategies for overcoming them." She was the coach for a dispersed team of writers.

Dissertation-writing boot camps are the other parent of this book. Pioneered at the Graduate Center at the University of Pennsylvania in the early 2000s, Allen launched boot camps at Columbia University and Cornell University and became a national cheerleader for them. (I am proud to have helped bring them to Stanford University.) Boot camps are an institutionalized example of individual writing within community.

Four features that are associated with good and productive writing flourish when doctoral writing turns into a team sport. First, writing regularly on a schedule is far preferable to binge writing. Allen introduces this essential practice in chapters 1 and 2. Regular writers produce more words (there is evidence for this). I also suspect that regular writers feel less anxiety. Dedicating regular time to write turns writing into a job, rather than something undertaken when the spirit moves you. Just as sports teams work out together, a writing group or writing partner helps to regularize the practice of writing. Writing with others holds us accountable. You can't stop and sweep the kitchen floor, or bake brownies, or shop online. Someone will notice!

Second, goal setting is remarkably helpful when writing, as Allen says in chapter 5. In many writing groups, each person starts the day by articulating a specific writing goal. "I will write 250 words." "I will write one part of my literature review." "I will edit the methods section I started last Monday."

Third, your teammates pick each other up during rough patches. The camaraderie bred of shared experience is crucial for surviving graduate school. Everyone in your writing

group understands the anxiety of turning in a chapter or an article draft to an adviser; the disappointment of an unfavorable review; and the hopeless feeling of confronting thousands of words and hundreds of pages and wondering "Is there anything good in there?" Your teammates will remind you that you can do it. They carry you through the dark days—as you do for them.

Fourth, writing partners can also serve as sparring partners (to continue my fencing analogy). "I am struggling with this transition. Can you read these few paragraphs and give me feedback?" "I want to create an outline. May I talk through the logic of the argument with you?" "I want to ask my adviser for feedback. Will you read my draft e-mail to her?" Dialogue improves your work and sharpens your thinking.

Jan Allen has seen it all. For decades she has brought her empathetic wisdom to help graduate student writers find their voices and their writing rhythms. This book is a pithy distillation of her wisdom, served up in bite-sized chunks. Use it as an energy burst to start your daily writing time and set your new habits in place.

Chris M. Golde
Stanford University

PREFACE

This book is for graduate students and others who want to become more productive writers. It's especially written for those who want to

- increase their motivation, focus, and persistence to move a project to completion;
- overcome procrastination and perfectionistic tendencies;
- reduce (or write in spite of) their anxiety and fear of writing; and
- manage their time, work, energy (and adviser) for greater productivity.

This book had its genesis in conversations with my graduate students over many years. Those conversations grew into workshops, first at the University of Tennessee, where I was a faculty member for 20 years, then developed into day-long Saturday workshops at Northwestern University, where I was associate dean in the graduate school. But most of these strategies for greater writing productivity were elaborated on during thesis- and dissertation-writing boot camps I conducted. I began at Columbia University, while I was associate dean for PhD programs (2005–2012), and now run them at Cornell University, where I am associate dean for academic and student affairs in the graduate school (since 2012). This advice is based on what has worked for me, my faculty colleagues, my own graduate students, and now hundreds of graduate students across these institutions.

Some of the tips here were initially shared in an online dialogue each December and January (2006–2012) called BreakWriting. These online posts offered advice for students with writing goals over each semester break. I've continued sharing strategies and tips for writing productivity with posts throughout the academic year using the Productive Writer electronic mailing list (for the link to sign up for monthly tips, see gradschool.cornell.edu/policies/writing-support/), hosted by the Cornell University Graduate School. I receive questions and suggestions for new postings from more than 15,000 subscribers at more than 400 graduate schools in 30 countries. Thank you, and please keep your questions and comments coming.

I hope this book helps you identify and develop the skills that play an essential role in your writing and completion of any important goal or project, especially skills leading to your academic success and degree completion such as persistence when facing distractions, resilience when facing challenges, and resolve when facing discouragement (and patience when awaiting an adviser's feedback).

Successful writing is not an innate talent for most of us. Writing is based on skills, which we can identify, learn, practice, and refine. We do this by writing and by reading, especially well-written prose, including nonacademic books and articles. This book focuses on the process of writing. What kind of writer are you? What is working for you now? What do you struggle with? What are your challenges and obstacles? Which of these are internal? Which are external? Which are under your control? What will it take for you to increase your focus and persistence and motivation to become a more productive writer? In examining your own writing process, you will identify your strengths as well as areas where you can add more strategies to your writing

repertoire, enabling you to become a more productive and prolific writer. Once you do, you will enjoy writing more than perhaps you do now. You may even look forward to your writing sessions as they become part of your daily routine with more and better writing as an outcome. It's possible. Amazing, huh?

Consider the writing productivity strategies described in this book. You can read one tip each day or one a week. But don't read them during the time you schedule your writing. Writing is not reading or doing another experiment or searching the stacks for another book or online for another article. It's not sharpening pencils (my favorite), organizing pens, color-coding your notes, shopping for cool file folders (another one of my favorites), or organizing your kitchen cabinets as one more delay tactic. Writing is producing new words, paragraphs, and pages. You will revise and edit later.

When you find a strategy among these described here that increases your productivity or concentration or motivation or endurance, make it a habit. Try it for two weeks, charting your increased productivity as a result of the new strategy. It will become part of your repertoire of writing and productivity tools.

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I am grateful to my graduate advisers at the University of Oklahoma and Purdue University, my graduate students at the University of Tennessee, former and current colleagues, and participants at my writing productivity workshops, especially at the Council of Graduate Schools' preconference sessions the past few years, who contributed ideas and encouragement.

I acknowledge and appreciate Random House/Penguin's permission to use a variety of Anne Lamott's (1994) quotations. Acknowledgment and thanks are also due to Keyes's (2003) publication by Holt, from which a variety of quotes are offered in this text.

I am also very grateful to the graduate school deans who allowed me to work with them; I especially thank them for their support of graduate students' academic writing and professional development. It is because of them that I had the opportunity to develop various graduate student writing resources. Thank you C.W. "Bud" Minkel, Rick Morimoto,

Andrew Wachtel, Henry Pinkham, Carlos Alonso, and especially Barbara Knuth. I think this book would not exist were it not for you!

1

Write Every Day

You must write every single day of your life.

—Ray Bradbury

This one strategy works for *everyone*: Write every day. Write something. Every day.

I know this is easier said than done, right? Here's how you can do it and why it will work to make you more productive.

Commit to writing at least 90 minutes every day. Why 90 minutes? That's about the maximum amount of time an individual can endure physically and mentally before needing a break (Ericsson & Pool, 2016). Write for 90 minutes without getting up from your chair. Seriously. No breaks, no interruptions, especially no checking e-mail or Facebook during your 90 minutes of writing each day. I promise, you will survive this strategy.

When I began encouraging my graduate students to write every day, I suggested a daily session of at least 15 minutes. It was a low-stress way to reduce the anxiety and fear of starting to write. Once students started writing, and the anxiety decreased, they would almost always continue writing beyond the 15 minutes. But eventually I decided that writing for 15 minutes seemed like wimpy advice, and

I began insisting that my students commit to writing for a minimum of 90 minutes each day.

Use this strategy of writing for 90 minutes every day for 2 weeks. For most of us, that is enough to make writing become a habit. If you do this, you will discover that you are a much more productive writer. Start today; do a word count before and after you write. In Microsoft Word, go to File, Properties, then Words. I see I've written 258 words thus far, and it's taken 16 minutes to compose this draft. (Must work faster; it's just a first draft.) Try it.

It is not your brilliance or creativity or innate talent that makes you a productive writer.

Ralph Keyes (2003) reminds us that it is this simple: Sit down to write, day after day. It's not inspiration, it's diligence. If you pity the poor author who said, "I don't know anything about inspiration because I don't know what inspiration is. I've heard about it, but I never saw it" (Keyes, 2003 pp. 49–50), save your pity. That was William Faulkner.

If you commit to writing every day for at least 14 days, what should you do when you have holidays to observe, when you are too ill to write, or when you can't possibly find even 90 minutes in a 24-hour day? That's when you must write for at least 15 minutes each day. No matter how busy or how tired or sick you are, write for 15 minutes. Here's why this is important:

- For some of us the hardest part of writing is getting started. We amateurs procrastinate minutes, hours, and days. The pros, some of the best and most prolific writers whose names you would likely recognize, report procrastinating for weeks and even years. We delay because we're afraid we won't have anything

to write. We're afraid that what we write will be terrible. We're afraid we're not up to the real pain that good writing requires. It's only when the pain of what we would lose—fellowships, degree completion, book contracts, jobs—by not writing feels more real than the pain of actually writing that we begin to write. I've known faculty who have resigned their role as adviser because graduate students were not making adequate progress at the writing stage. They seldom resign at the course work stage. It's always the writing. Realize that you can lose your adviser or mentor because of delayed writing, and that is painful, too.

- Get started, and you've overcome the biggest hurdle. I've never known anyone with the goal of writing for 15 minutes to be ready to stop after 30 or 60 minutes. The trick is for you tell yourself you have to write for only 15 minutes and that you can endure anything for that long. Once you start to write, the anxiety will begin to disappear, and you'll write for much longer.
- Working in 90-minute intervals maximizes your productivity. Anders Ericsson and his colleagues at Florida State University have found in their research that the most successful performers practice for 90 minutes without interruption (Ericsson & Pool, 2016). Several 90-minute sessions throughout the day, with rejuvenating breaks between the sessions (exercise, meditation, or a nap, not caffeine or sugar), lead to maximum productivity (Ericsson & Pool, 2016).
- Writing every day contributes to continuity in your thinking and generating the ideas you need to write. Your mind functions differently when you write every day. We all *think* about our writing every day, but the cognitive processes involved in writing about your ideas are different from those involved in just thinking about

> your topic. Your ideas develop, and your project moves forward when you write, even when you write a gosh-awful first draft.

Based on a faculty writing support program at the University of Tulsa, Jensen (2017) describes this approach to daily writing as "frequent, low-stress contact with your own writing" (p. xi). Isn't that a great approach? Frequent and low stress. Writing every day, as part of your routine, can lessen the frustration and anxiety that builds when you try to return to writing after a long period of avoidance and delay.

Lamott (1994), suggests the following: Place a 1-inch-by-1-inch picture frame next to your computer. Then write enough each day to fill the picture frame. I promise you will finish a thesis or dissertation with this method. (You'll finish faster if you use an 8-inch-by-12-inch picture frame.) But you must write every day, and the picture frame reminds you to do so. Similarly, Singleton (2008) suggests you "keep a small can of WD-40 on your desk—away from any open flames—to remind yourself that if you don't write daily, you will get rusty" (p. 59). During our dissertation-writing boot camps at Cornell, students select a focus word or phrase, such as *success*, *persistence*, *flow*, or *We've got this!,* to tape to their computer as a reminder to avoid distractions, refocus, and keep writing. Others write a mission statement (e.g., I will write today and every day so I will finish my thesis by [date]) and post it on a nearby wall. Perhaps one of the epigraphs about writing at the beginning of each chapter will serve as inspiration and a reminder for you. Or choose an image or object or statement that will motivate you and focus your energy and work. If you want, you can borrow our Cornell dissertation-writing boot camp slogan from

Appendix A: Wake Up. Write. Be Awesome. Exercise. Eat. Rest. Repeat.

Or perhaps the following will kick you into gear: Joe Hill, son of Stephen King, is a successful novelist in his own right. At age 11 he began writing 2 hours every day "with no exception for weekends or holidays" (Dominus, 2013, para. 32). So follow the lead of an 11-year-old, and write every day, no exceptions.

Commit to writing every day for the next 2 weeks. If you are without access to a computer one day, then use pencil and paper. But write every day. If you *never* have trouble getting started, if you *never* delay your writing until you've fallen days and weeks behind schedule (or fallen into despair), if you *never* sit at your computer for hours on end with nothing much to show for it, then you don't need this strategy. But if you have not written for 90 minutes yet today, then *start right now*. You can do this!

2

Schedule Your Writing

I start a picture and I finish it.

—Jean-Michel Basquiat

I start a page and I finish it.

—You

In the previous chapter I encouraged you to commit to writing for at least 90 minutes each day; every day without fail for at least 90 minutes.

Here's something else that can help you. Schedule your writing. Put it on a calendar and make it a commitment to yourself and to your success. It's as important and serious a commitment as attending a graduate seminar or teaching a class or meeting with your adviser.

It's true. You are more likely to complete a task if you set aside a specific time for it on your calendar and then stick to your schedule. When you make a schedule that includes everything you must do, or at least the priority items, you are much less likely to say you don't have enough time to get things done.

Try it. It may feel like you are micromanaging yourself, but it will help you do the following:

- Prioritize the most essential and important tasks that will, for example, help you finish a manuscript, complete your degree, get a job, stay healthy, and maintain important relationships.
- Become more realistic about how much time it actually takes to do anything—outline, draft, and revise. As a faculty member I would ask my graduate students as they started their thesis or dissertation to write down how long their work would take from start to finish. I would file their written estimate then retrieve it when they completed their degree. In every case, it took at least twice as long as students expected. Whether it's wishful thinking or inadequate estimation skills, writing takes longer because it's hard to anticipate the new questions, new directions, or new research we discover we must do only after we start to write.

Adhere to your writing schedule and time line, at least for those elements that are *under your control*. This issue caused my graduate students to misjudge how long it would take to complete their thesis. Even if they adhered to their planned schedule and self-imposed deadlines, many elements were not under their control, such as the length of time to secure Institutional Review Board approval for human subjects research, delays in finding and interviewing research participants, experiments not going as planned, and faculty not giving timely feedback on their drafts (ahem). Control what you can, but plan your project to allow enough time to overcome the obstacles and delays not under your control.

So in addition to writing for 90 minutes today, schedule, by putting it on your calendar, 90-minute blocks of writing for the next 2 weeks. If something is scheduled, whether

writing, running experiments, reading, exercising, or sleeping, you are much more likely to accomplish it.

Another strategy that helps us find time to write is to complete a reverse schedule. For an entire week, record your actual daily schedule, that is, how you spend your time rather than how you plan to spend your time. You probably are well aware of your most frequent and enjoyable time wasters. But it's often a surprise to discover how much time in a week you actually spend doing [insert your favorite time waster here]. I discovered nonessential activities to help me reduce stress in my life only to realize that having more time to write was the best stress reducer of all. Go figure.

Try compiling a schedule of how you actually spend your time to help you find more time in your day for writing and other priorities. Have you written for 90 minutes yet today? Get it done!

3

Write Early in the Day

A person who has not done one half of his day's work by ten o'clock runs a chance of leaving the other half undone.

—Emily Brontë

An hour in the morning is worth two in the evening.

—Proverb, author unknown

Schedule your writing as early as possible in the day. You are more likely to write every day that way. Why is that?

You are less likely to be interrupted early in the morning. When other unexpected things that invariably come up during the day start to happen, you will feel less guilty and anxious knowing that you have already written that day. If you find yourself with additional time to write in the afternoon or evening, you can always write more. If you wait until the afternoon or evening to start writing, there is almost no chance that you will find time to schedule multiple writing blocks for that day. Think of any additional time as *lagniappe* (a little extra), a Louisiana French term. Mark Twain (1883) described lagniappe as "a word worth traveling to New Orleans to get" (p. 361).

If you find there is little available time in the day to write, schedule your writing for an hour or two before you typically start your day; you won't worry about finding time again to write. Even if you are a night person, you increase the probability that you will write each day—and write enough each day—if you schedule your writing the first thing each morning.

If you write early in the morning you also will be less likely to attend to all the other (endless) demands on your time before you write. One strategy to help you focus on your writing during your early morning scheduled writing time is to make a list of everything you must do that day. If while you are writing some pressing need distracts you from your work, add it to the list and quickly return to writing. Do not stop writing to send an e-mail, pay a bill, or search for a citation. Just add it to your list and keep writing. (Chapter 12 provides other ways to avoid and manage distractions.)

Allen's (2003) book of productivity tips emphasizes the importance of making such a list in writing, and not a mental list, when he points out the inefficiency of our psychic random-access memory: "Your head is probably not the best place to keep something in a trustworthy fashion" (p. 27). Trying to keep a mental list "creates infinite loops" of competing conflicts that stall your progress, and "as soon as you make any commitment not [immediately] completed, your mind will demand and take psychic energy until it is resolved" (p. 27). So if a distracting thought of what you need to do later arises while you are writing, add it to your list and stop thinking about it until your scheduled writing time is over.

Finally, if you don't especially enjoy writing, you'll experience a tremendous sense of relief when you have the

rest of the day to do something else without having to write again until tomorrow. At a recent Cornell writing boot camp, one student marveled,

> I can't believe how much I enjoy the rest of my day after getting my writing done in the morning. I didn't realize how much dread I carried with me during the day wondering if I would find time to write. I'm a much happier, calmer person when I write in the mornings.

Zerubavel (1999) said, "Just as you optimize your other writing conditions, learn to identify the best times for your writing" (p. 21). Jensen (2017) suggests a strategy, called ABC, based on matching your writing time with your energy. A-time is your most energetic time, B-time tasks require "alertness and focus but not necessarily your most creative energy" (Jensen, 2017, p. 32), and C-time tasks are more rote. Write during your A time. Read and edit or prepare lectures and grade papers during your B time. Respond to e-mail, a "seductive energy sinkhole" (Jensen, 2017, p. 36), during your C time. How tempted are you to attend to e-mail the first thing in the morning, either out of curiosity or commitment? Your writing should take priority during the times when you have the most energy. And for most writers, A-time energy is usually earlier in the day.

Schwartz (2013) described his success with this strategy. He wrote 3 books, each taking a year of 10-hour days of writing. For his next 2 books, he wrote in "three uninterrupted 90-minute sessions—beginning first thing in the morning when my energy was highest" (para. 18). With this early-morning writing, and 4.5-hour days instead of 10-hour days, he wrote each book in less than 6 months.

Early-morning writing works even if you are not a morning person. Seriously. I personally know lots of converts among initially skeptical graduate students. Try it for a week. Early-morning writing, especially on your busiest days, works for all types of writers, especially procrastinators. (We know who we are.)

Have you written yet today?

4

Write a Very Bad First Draft

There is nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and bleed.

—Ernest Hemingway

I hope you have been writing for at least 90 minutes each day, and I hope that by now you have a very bad first draft. If not, we will start to really dislike you. Lamott (1994) wrote,

> I know some very great writers. . . . Not one of them writes elegant first drafts. All right, one of them does, but we do not like her very much. We do not think . . . that God likes her or can even stand her. (p. 21)

Lamott adds that her friend Tom, who is a Jesuit priest, cautions that "you can safely assume you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do" (pp. 21–22).

One obstacle to writing is the fear that what we write will be terrible. It's a common fear. Even prolific, successful writers describe the anxiety and panic they experience when they think about writing. They procrastinate and consider switching careers to something less stressful, like

air traffic controller or brain surgeon, or maybe president of the United States.

Keyes (2003) describes this fear as "the three-legged stool we sit on when writing" (p. 14). Anxiety, frustration, and despair, or AFD syndrome. Keyes reassures us that it is normal to be anxious; in fact, "the better the writing, the more anxious the writer" (p. 18). Use your anxiety as encouragement rather than discouragement. I often tell myself, "I'm feeling anxious about starting to write. That means I'm ready to begin."

If it helps you to get started, think of writing as only a necessary first step in producing a good manuscript. It's just prewriting. You have to write before you can revise and edit to get the draft you want. Especially for those of us who must work to manage perfectionistic tendencies, it helps to have as your goal today: Write a really bad first draft.

Many of us find it easier and less painful to edit than to write. If you are a better editor than you are a writer, then please stop striving for perfection. Lamott (1994) said, "Just get it down on paper, because there may be something great in those six crazy [imperfect] pages that you would never have gotten to by more rational . . . means" (p. 23). Lamott reassures us that in revising you might delete the first five pages when you discover that what you really need to be writing about doesn't appear until page six, but now you finally know what to write and which path will get you there.

By the way, throughout this book I quote Lamott and other writers, and I recommend some good resources at the end to help you with your writing and editing. But please note: Reading about writing does not count as your 90 minutes of writing. Organizing your desk does not count as writing. Reading, typing, and editing your notes do not

count as writing. Not even mentally composing paragraphs while you wash the dishes constitutes writing. Writing is fingers on keyboard or pen to paper and producing, even producing really bad first drafts.

I sat down very late last night with only 15 minutes to write. I wrote, and when I looked at the clock, it was 90 minutes later. Have you written your 90 minutes today?

5

Set Writing Goals

Writing is like driving at night in the fog. You can only see as far as your headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way.

—E. L. Doctorow

Are you writing daily now? Have you discovered how much more productive you are with one or more daily writing sessions? Here's another strategy to help you become more productive: Set writing goals for each writing session.

How many times have you sat at the computer with the goal of working on your dissertation or drafting your manuscript or writing your conference paper? It's hard to be successful with a vague goal, and it's easy to stop after 10 minutes because it seems, by a far stretch, that you did meet that goal.

Create a specific goal for each writing session. Whether for a 90-minute block, or a 15-minute block, put in writing in a spreadsheet or sticky note on your laptop what you intend to do. Write 1,000 new words, writing for 90 minutes beginning at 7:00 a.m. Draft the introduction to chapter 1 by writing for 30 minutes after breakfast. Outline the headings for chapter 3 for 5 minutes while on the bus. Insert the subheadings and topic

sentences for chapter 3 for 30 minutes on the train. Mentally draft a powerful first sentence for your fellowship application during your 5-minute walk between classes.

Your goal should be specific, measureable, and doable in the amount of time you have scheduled. You will become skilled at knowing how much you can write in an hour and whether you can successfully increase your pace to get more done in the time you have.

I have discovered that a good daily goal for me is to write four single-spaced pages. If I can do that in an hour, I can stop writing. (I usually keep writing.) If the four pages take more than my allotted time, I make time for another writing session before the end of the day. But four pages a day can really add up; it's an especially amazing output for us perennial procrastinators.

Setting goals also helps you to maintain focus and concentrate on your writing. Get off track or distracted? Look at the sticky note on your laptop and remind yourself that you can't stop writing until you meet the goal. It works as your mission statement for the day.

Goal setting can help you be accountable to yourself and others, such as a writing partner, a spouse, or a colleague. E-mail a friend the following: "I'm going to start writing at 9:00 this morning and will write for an hour, planning to produce 500 new words for chapter 3." When you are done, e-mail a report of what you accomplished.

Writing is a process that requires you to assess which writing and management strategies make you more productive and successful. Setting goals can help you make this assessment. It lets you reflect more accurately and learn about yourself as a writer and move your project forward.

At our Cornell writing boot camps we start each day by setting a goal and reflecting on the writing process, strategies, and resources we need to meet that goal. Appendix B contains an example of the goal and journal sheet we use. Some of our students use this as a daily journal, and others refer to it as their ritual, something they do before starting each writing session.

You might develop your own prewriting ritual. Just to be clear, this is not a procrastination activity. It must be something that prepares you to write more productively. It can be as simple as taking a few deep breaths while you envision yourself writing without anxiety. It can be a pep talk to yourself: "I can do this fearlessly today" or "I overcome my anxiety once I start to write" or, simply, "I'm a writer; I write."

What's your writing goal for today? It can be "Write a gosh-awful first draft!" We can all do that.

6

Chart Your Progress

Tomorrow may be hell, but today was a good writing day, and on the good writing days nothing else matters.

—Neil Gaiman

I'm always surprised how effective this strategy is for most people: Chart your progress. Record the number of new words you write each day to measure your writing productivity. This works especially well for people who are highly competitive (ahem).

By charting your progress you can assess the strategies, environments, and even the time of the day that promote greater productivity for you. Silvia (2019), in his perfectly titled book *How to Write a Lot*, suggests recording your daily word count in a spreadsheet; he posts a graph of his weekly word count on his office door to hold himself accountable to all who might pass by and see a slack day or puny week of writing.

At our dissertation-writing boot camp last summer at Cornell, one student missed the first two days because of illness. When I contacted her to ask if she would join us midweek, her response was, "No, I started that word count assignment you gave us last week, and that seems to be enough. I've never been so productive! I started trying to

write more each day than I had the previous day. It's working!" (D. Hackett, personal communication, August 16, 2017).

I think that's a good testimonial. Try keeping a word count to chart your progress and help you decide what makes you more productive. Appendix C shows the chart we use at our dissertation-writing boot camps.

Here's another strategy for the highly competitive among us: Try to start writing sessions earlier each day than the day before. If on Saturday I wrestle my procrastination tendencies into submission to start writing by 9:00 a.m., then on Sunday I try to start writing by 8:00 a.m., on Monday by 7:00 a.m., and so on. Sometimes I beat my previous record by just one 15-minute-earlier increment. I stop this competition when I begin writing at 5:00 a.m., the earliest I can force myself to start. My friend and former Columbia University colleague Steve Mintz writes every morning at 5:00 a.m. and has authored and edited 15 books with this strategy. (I feel like a slacker.)

Have you written today yet? How much? More than yesterday? You can do this.

7

Preparing to Write

Write. Rewrite. When not writing or rewriting, read. I know of no shortcuts.

—Larry L. King

Are you writing? Or are you instead still preparing to write? Let's be clear. These are both important steps in moving your manuscript to completion. These steps can be overlapping or alternating, but if trying to determine if you are ready to start writing is delaying your project or creating obstacles to your continued writing and productivity, consider the strategies I offer in this chapter to help you be more productive.

When are you ready to start writing? If you are writing a research proposal or prospectus, do you have your research question, topic, or hypothesis? Start writing. Any difficulty you encounter in writing at this step may reflect problems in clarity or specificity about your topic. Writing will help you to identify those gaps and develop a more coherent and refined description of your research topic or question or hypothesis. As you continue to the next step of writing your proposal's literature review, start with a list of questions your review must address or the topics it must cover. From that list, write a one-page summary. Where

are the gaps in your knowledge? Which topics require you to read more? Use this to guide your subsequent reading, and do the same with the methods section. Write a short draft or summary. Are there holes in your plan necessitating another discussion with your adviser? Do you need to read the methods sections of some journal articles? If so, schedule an hour to read, then go back to writing. For some, writing for an hour then reading for an hour, writing for another hour, then reading for another hour prompts good progress.

Are you writing a thesis, dissertation, journal article, or book manuscript? Have you run experiments or conducted library or archive or field research? Start writing. The writing process will help you identify the gaps in your experiments or analysis or reading or that lead to revisiting the archives or field. Alternating or overlapping these processes helps you to identify next steps in both of these essential elements to move your work forward.

Another prep strategy is to read other theses and dissertations in your specialty, including those previously submitted to your adviser as a guide to what is acceptable in your field and to your graduate committee. In our Cornell dissertation-writing boot camp, one doctoral student reported she carries her adviser's 200-page doctoral dissertation with her daily. When asked if she thought this was the best example of good writing, she replied, "Doesn't matter. My adviser thinks it is, and she is the only one that counts!" (O. McDaniel, personal communication, August 17, 2017). Whether readings are used as template or talisman, as inspiration or practical guide, read other examples but with the following caution: Do not let your own voice and originality be stifled by too rigidly following what others have written. And do not plagiarize, that is, use the words and ideas

of others, no matter how beautifully written. (See chapter 28 for more about ethical writing.)

What if you are working on more than one writing project? A faculty colleague cautioned his students against having multiple writing projects and instead focusing only on their dissertation. But what if you are writing a conference paper, completing a fellowship application, and drafting job application materials while writing your dissertation? Sometimes it's just not possible to have only one writing project as your focus. In fact, as a new faculty member I was encouraged to have several projects at different stages in the pipeline to publication: I wrote a new grant proposal while starting to collect data on another project while writing one or more manuscripts from an earlier project. This overlapping series of distinct and separate projects, rather than working sequentially on a single piece of writing, is essential for regular and frequent publishing. When I was an assistant professor preparing for tenure, my department's expectation for faculty research and publishing mandated that faculty submit two manuscripts per year and have one published and submit a grant proposal at least once every three years. As a result, we junior faculty had different research projects in various stages from start to completion. Otherwise, if it took a year or two or three to secure research funding, then a year or two to collect and analyze data, several months to write a manuscript, plus a year or so for peer review, revisions, and publication, a successful publication from start to finish would require a minimum of three years and maybe as many as six years. Do the math; this is not enough for tenure and promotion.

Most new faculty seeking tenure or promotion experience this demand for multiple, overlapping projects, not unlike the experience of many graduate students when

research, writing, fellowship applications, and job search materials all need their focused attention. Here is how I have managed and continue to organize multiple writing projects. Well before the writing starts, I label a box (plastic file bins but cardboard boxes work too) with the topic or title of my project. Right now I have a children and stress box, a Head Start box, and a box for materials for the book you are now holding or reading online. When I find a book or an article or a newspaper clipping related to my manuscript, I place it in the box. When I jot down notes on paper (as opposed to electronic notes) with good ideas or relevant stories or examples, I toss them in the box. About a month before starting to write, I begin to label file folders to help me organize by topic and use of the material: *intro*, *lit review*, *methods*, or *introduction*, *chapter 1: children in contemporary society*, *chapter 2: children's cognitive understanding of stressful events*, *chapter 3: children's psychological reactions to stressors*, and so on. If I don't know in which chapter or section folder to place an idea or a quote or a research article, I instead label folders by type of resource material, for example, *quotes*, *newspaper articles* (media reporting related to my topic), *other source materials*, and *miscellaneous*. There is also a *to-be-filed* folder. (It looks more organized that way than the tossed-into-a-box approach I've lived with up until now in the life of a project.)

As I start to write I discover that I can be even more organized; that is, I find things more quickly and spend more time productively writing rather than searching for something by refining and expanding the range of folder labels at various stages of my writing. For example, I keep a folder labeled for each draft. A folder labeled *edits that need to be entered* is for the times I grab a few pages to read and edit after putting away the laptop at night but I want to do

a little more work. Or when I edit away from the computer, I'll keep these folders until the project is complete, meaning the article or book has been published.

It's helpful to maintain your good organization system throughout, especially if there are any concerns or questions after publication. I still have multiple drafts from a project 25 years ago because one of the coauthors began to question whether credit and authorship were assigned fairly. The first draft was handwritten; those pages reveal clearly who wrote what. (But don't save all your paper drafts for 25 years. It's a fire hazard.) When thinking I've completed a chapter or an entire manuscript, I am guilty of tossing things in "undue haste and disorder" (*Merriam-Webster's* perfectly precise definition for *helter-skelter* [n.d.], a term I initially wrote but decided to replace) into the box, only to discover when I needed to find a reference or quote during the production phase that it would have been much more efficient to stay organized while the manuscript was in press.

Now that you are perfectly, or adequately, organized, schedule your writing time. For multiple projects, I encourage you to write something on each project every day. You must keep these important projects moving forward. Do not devote 1 week a month to each of 4 projects. That is too much time between projects. If you can't devote an hour a day to each project, then alternate days. You will find that 60 to 90 minutes on a project, then moving to another project can be an energizing break, and you will be more satisfied with your productivity when you are not neglecting one project for another.

One other strategy as you prepare and start to write is to create a style sheet or guide. List the items that must be consistent throughout your manuscript such as headings, spacing, citation style, and so on. Include things you might

have trouble remembering and have to look up at each occurrence. For this book, my style sheet served as a guide to aligning chapter titles with appropriate epigraphs and which chapters had appendix material (and on what page) so that when I moved chapters around, the related appendix could also easily be reordered and relabeled. I reorganized and reordered chapters quite a bit, and this guide saved me time and some sanity. Include in your guide whatever helps you to be more efficient and productive. Most editors will request that you include no formatting in your manuscript, so communicate early with your editor to determine the preferred way to indicate, for example, words you want emphasized instead of using boldface or underlining in your manuscript.

Cox (2018) described preparing to write and writing in the following way: In the first stage, invention, you read, take notes, conduct experiments, collect data, run analysis, develop an outline, and compose a first draft. In this step you also discuss your ideas and results with your advisers and peers. Your reading can also include *mentor texts*, which are published works on a similar topic or with a similar writing structure and format that provide a template to help you develop and sequence your ideas. In the second stage, revision, you begin to reorganize and revise your draft and use feedback from others to make conceptual and structural revisions. In the third stage, editing, you polish your writing by checking word choice, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and so forth. Cox describes effective writing as moving back and forth among these stages but never trying to do all three at once. The more you write the more attuned you will be to which action is needed when you feel stuck or need to move your work forward in a different way (Cox, 2018).

If you have not done so already, find a citation management tool that will help you from the start gather and retrieve your sources. EndNote (endnote.com), Mendeley (mendeley.com), and Zotero (zotero.org) are three popular tools; your library may support one or more of these, which gives you free online access. Your campus may also offer workshops and online tutorials to help you get started. Use one of these to help manage your bibliographic materials, such as journal articles, books, PDFs, and websites. You can import citations from online databases, and the software will then insert properly formatted footnotes, citations, and bibliographic entries in any style you choose into your manuscript, for example, the American Psychological Association, *Chicago Manual of Style*, or Modern Language Association. If you already have begun compiling your list of references in a Microsoft Word document, for example, you can import your existing list into Zotero using AnyStyle, the simplest of several options for moving all your citations from a simple list into a management tool that provides multiple functions.

One more suggestion as you prepare to start writing: Think about your audience. For a thesis or dissertation, you assume the readers are your graduate committee members, but you should also think and write more broadly. Richard Bulliet, a faculty member in history at Columbia University, instructs his doctoral students, "Don't write a dissertation. Write a book!" (R. Bulliet, personal communication, April 30, 2008) to encourage them to think about the broader audience for their scholarship.

Your preparation for writing and the writing itself will differ based on the audience, whether you are presenting your research at a conference, writing for a journal, or writing a book. Attend conferences and read journals and books

in your field to help you begin to plan and write for different formats and audiences. In some fields, most notably computer and information sciences, where the content changes rapidly, conference presentations are more valued than publications, which may be outdated by the time they are in print or soon after they are posted online. Determine what is most important in your field, and plan your writing so that your research gets to the relevant audiences in the most appropriate format as quickly as possible.

Appendix D contains a list of steps and questions I give my students as they prepare to start their thesis or dissertation. Use it to help you begin to think, plan, and write about your topic.

8

Write Before You Wake Up (What?)

You never have to change anything you got up in the middle of the night to write.

—Saul Bellow

The title is not designed to wake you up. In fact, sleep a while longer while you read this.

At first glance, this statement is based on a seemingly outlandish idea for increasing writing productivity. But what if you started writing as soon as you opened your eyes in the morning before you were fully awake or got out of bed? Grab a pen and some paper (no computer or other electronic device) and let your brain, particularly the right side of it, help you to write without analytical examination or critical judgment.

This suggestion is from Merrill Markoe (2014), essayist, playwright, novelist, and former head writer for *Late Night With David Letterman*. She discovered that when she writes first thing in the morning, before coffee or the newspaper or especially logging on to the Internet, she is much more productive. She writes up to 15 pages each morning and reports that she is learning "not to hate writing" (para. 5). She attributes this increased productivity to writing with

the "intuitive flow" (para. 8) of her "sleepy brain" (para. 10). She described, when fully awake, the "relentlessly negative . . . critical, tyrannical" voice that creates anxiety each time she starts to write, "the voices [that] would quickly remind me that I was too ill-informed to begin writing even a personal anecdote without undertaking years of painstaking research" (para. 6).

She believes her right brain wakes up first, allowing her to write without the critical judgment that comes from the left side of her brain. Writing is usually considered a task that requires logic, structure, analysis, and organization for which we rely on the left side of our brain. Writing with the sleepy, creative right side of the brain produces, for Markoe (2014), more writing, less anxiety, and fewer critical productivity-limiting thoughts.

Will you try this? I hope you are trying at least one new strategy a week. With each one that works for you, make it a habit. Continue to use it to increase your productivity.

At our weekly Cornell Tell Grads It's Friday, which gets graduate students out of the lab and the library for a 3-hour social event, a chemistry doctoral student told me he had found a new strategy to motivate himself to continue writing. He sets the timer on his phone to see how many minutes he can write before he starts looking for something to distract himself. He is up to 9 minutes of focused attention without wanting to interrupt himself. This is not the length of his writing sessions; this is how long he writes before his mind starts losing focus. Then he fights it and keeps writing (R. Walroth, personal communication, April 14, 2017). (It's happening to me now. I'm sleepy, I'm hungry, and I'm certain there is some momentous tweet or news happening in the world that I should be searching for on the Internet. I must fight it and keep writing.) But being a

highly competitive and successful individual, this strategy is motivating him to write for longer stretches and become more productive. A week later Richard sent an update. His new personal best is 17 minutes before he starts looking for something to distract him (R. Walroth, personal communication, April 23, 2017). Try to beat that!

Newport (2016) suggested something similar: Silence distractions so you can "wring every last drop of value out of your current intellectual capacity" (p. 66). He suggests charting the amount of time you actually engage in focused writing. For example, give yourself a check mark for each 15-minute block of time you can write without distraction. Then try to lengthen the duration of your focused, no-distraction writing sessions.

Following our dissertation-writing boot camp in January, one student said she woke up to an Ithaca, New York, snowstorm with no electricity—the perfect morning to go back to sleep. But she decided to start writing. She wrote for two hours until her laptop battery ran out, then grabbed pen and paper and kept writing for what was her most productive day ever. She did this all while in bed under a mound of blankets waiting for the power to be restored. But whether it was the beautiful snow (or insert your own adjective. I'm from Louisiana; snow is always beautiful to me) or the chance to stay in bed all day and write, this change was enough to motivate her to greater writing productivity.

Pick your strategy, and try to set a new personal best when you write today, you highly competitive and successful individual, you!

9

Write With Deadlines

I love deadlines. I love the whooshing noise they make as they go by.

—Douglas Adams

When are you most productive? When I ask my colleagues this question, the most frequent responses are along the lines of the following: "Right before I leave on vacation" or "the last few hours before leaving for a long weekend" or "before leaving for a conference."

Why would this be anyone's most productive time? Groppel (2000) says it's because you have a deadline. You must be out the door, on a train, or at the airport by a specific time. And you also know exactly what you must do, what your top priorities are, in the limited amount of time before departure.

What would happen if you worked like this every day? What if you made a list of priorities and then set a deadline for getting them done? Could these short sprints make you more productive?

Few projects are truly open ended, but they may feel like they are. Write a dissertation. Write a book. Write a chapter of 100 pages. Write an article of 30 pages. We know we can't accomplish that in a day. If we have months or years to

finish, what's the hurry, right? So we write as if we had no imminent deadline.

Let me emphasize: I am not suggesting that you create pressure or anxiety, no more than you already experience. Although some people say they work better under pressure, pressure and anxiety do not produce the best writing. You might produce decent writing and you might get the work done, but it's not the pressure that contributes to good writing. It's highly likely that your work would be even better without the pressure and anxiety. When people say they work better under pressure, what they really mean is they work better with a deadline.

So when you set your daily goals, set your own deadline: "By the end of the day I will have written 500 words." "I will draft 5 pages before noon." "I will write the first section of chapter 1 in the next hour." Then set your pace by the available time you have to write, and meet your goal and deadline. This method works especially well when producing the first draft of any text.

Would writing with a goal and deadline each day, rather than an open-ended 90-minute writing session, work for you? It may help you to reduce procrastination; avoid excessive writing or editing; and help you get the first draft, or the last draft, out the door.

Have you written yet today?

10

Develop and Use an Outline

I made outlines, spoiled a lot of paper, floundered and fumbled.

—Gustave Flaubert (while writing *Madame Bovary*)

In the fourth grade we learned to make an outline before drafting a paper, right? And then by the eighth grade, we were smart enough to know to write the paper first, then make an outline that followed precisely the content of the paper. Am I right?

I encourage you to return to those grade school lessons and begin to use an outline again. Here's why.

- An outline will help you record your ideas quickly and succinctly, much more so than drafting pages and pages of narrative to describe and defend those ideas.
- It is much easier to reorganize an outline before you start writing than it is to reorganize 30 pages of a manuscript draft or 300 pages of a dissertation.
- Once you start writing, an outline will keep you focused on the ideas and direction you need to follow and help you avoid writing extraneous page after page. Students ask me, "How do I know when to quit writing?" My response is always, "Have you answered all the questions or written about all the ideas you proposed in your outline?"

Use your outline to communicate with your adviser, asking, "Does this appear to be comprehensive enough or am I missing important topics?" and "Does it look like I am headed in the right direction with this paper?" One student at Columbia University told me she had written 3 dissertations, none of which her adviser liked. I suggested she get his approval at the outline stage. It's easier to change direction, add ideas and topics, or delete extraneous material in response to your adviser's feedback if you have written only 5 or 10 pages in an outline than it is if you have written 250 pages of text. An outline can save your time, energy, and good mental health.

You can also use an outline after you have produced a first draft. After you finish your first draft, and before you start to revise, set aside the draft, and then develop a new outline. If you were just starting to write today, but with the experience and knowledge that comes from having written your first draft, what would your outline look like? If your second outline closely reflects your first draft, then you may need little reorganization and revision.

But if your second outline varies significantly from your first, decide whether it is a better template for the paper or chapter you are writing. If so, then the second outline becomes your guide for what needs to be reorganized, revised, expanded, and deleted.

Try developing and working with an outline of what you plan to write today. Does it make you more productive? Have you written yet today?

11

Fill Your Reservoir

The most difficult and complicated part of the writing process is the beginning.

—A.B. Yehoshua

Are you using an outline yet? The next step is to try to fill the reservoir.

I thank Michael Zigmond and Beth Fischer, of the University of Pittsburgh, for teaching me this strategy. I use it, and I love it. It's a special kind of outlining that provides great comfort to those of us who panic when starting a new writing project. It can be very effective in jump-starting your writing and moving it forward more quickly.

When faced with a new writing project, let's say a 30-page article for a journal submission, begin by writting the title. Then insert your major headings into the document. Next add subheadings. If there's another level of subheadings, add those next. Now go back and add topic sentences, that is, a sentence describing the primary point or focus of each paragraph needed to develop that section.

The longer the draft, the more useful this technique can be. It helps you

- develop the content and its sequencing before you begin writing;
- identify all the primary points you need by section and subsection, which is especially useful if you do this for each section or chapter in a longer document before you start to write any chapters;
- move content from section to section to reorganize ideas before, not after, writing; and
- write more quickly with these guideposts to move your thinking and writing forward.

I first used this strategy for a 17-chapter book. It was months (okay, years) between writing the first and last chapters. The fact that I had all my ideas identified and tentatively organized before I even started writing the first chapter made starting to write each morning much less stressful.

Do you think filling the reservoir will make you a more productive (and less anxious) writer?

12

Avoid Distractions

A writer takes earnest measures to secure his solitude and then finds endless ways to squander it.

—Don DeLillo

Want to be even more productive? Avoid and reduce distractions.

Research on information workers and college students, who spend much of their day using a computer, has found that people are interrupted about every 12 minutes while they are working (Jin & Dabbish, 2009). So you will be more productive if you find a space to write away from your interrupters and distracters. Can you write behind a closed door? Or can you post a sign like this one: "Dissertation in Progress—Come back later!" (Kearns & Gardiner, 2006, p. 6)? When Stephen King (2000) began writing his first novel, he would hide out in the laundry room of his mobile home to work without distractions. You too can increase your productivity by reducing interruptions while you work.

But be aware that half of these every-12-minute interruptions are self-interruptions when we distract ourselves by checking e-mails, getting a snack, or cleaning the house. What's on your list of frequent or favorite distractions?

The most prevalent ways we interrupt our own work include (Jin & Dabbish, 2009)

- taking breaks, especially when the task at hand is too demanding, too boring, or too frustrating, by switching to something more desirable;
- distractions, when we "react to minimal external stimuli even when immediate action is not necessary" (p. 1802), such as when your computer pops up a new e-mail notification and you stop your writing to see if it's anything interesting or important;
- reminders to do a different task, such as paying a bill or ordering a book online;
- stopping to remove obstacles to our work with the goal of making us more productive by improving the work environment; and
- deviations from the primary task to other less relevant tasks.

These interruptions can alleviate stress, increase mental stimulation, and create a sense of accomplishment, for example, when a "reminder prevents forgetfulness through completion of short tasks" (Jin & Dabbish, 2009, p. 1804). Stopping your writing to pay a bill online or to e-mail a birthday greeting lets you check one more task off your list, and that can feel satisfying. But it also reduces productivity when these distracting behaviors stop the flow of your thinking and writing because of the time, which is occasionally significant, required to refocus and return to the task at hand—your writing.

Distractions and interruptions also cause you to use your A-level energy on B- and C-priority tasks. Instead, try to preserve your scheduled writing time, using your highest level of energy to write (Jensen, 2017). Work for

90 minutes without getting up from your chair or without checking e-mail or Facebook. Write 90 minutes without any self-interruptions.

Try it. You will be amazed at how much this one change in your behavior will increase your productivity.

Have you written yet today?

13

Think Ahead and Plan Backward

The road to hell is paved with works-in-progress.

—Philip Roth

How do you work on and finish a project when a deadline is not looming, when you have many weeks or months, or even years to finish? How do you schedule your work and your time to get it all done? Ironic, isn't it? When we have no imminent deadline, we tend to delay to the point of creating pressure and anxiety for ourselves once the deadline closes in.

One very effective strategy when beginning a new project or trying to finish a continuing one is to think ahead and plan backward. Identify the date when you must absolutely complete and submit a project. Then work backward. What do you want to be doing the day before your deadline? (I suggest relaxing and celebrating because you completed the submission early.) What about the day before that? Then the day before that? Work backward, day by day if the deadline you have is soon. Work backward week by week if you have given yourself time.

This strategy helps you to know what your goals must be each day going forward. It also helps you to know if you are

already running behind. (Yes, this is the scary part.) But it's much better to know, with six months remaining until your deadline, that you must work more quickly, for example, by scheduling more writing sessions or picking up your writing pace, rather than making this discovery with six days or six hours remaining and not being able to make up the time and work. We've all been there, right?

Appendix E provides an example of what a plan might look like for the seven months before graduation in May. Note that the student anticipating a May 28 graduation has a daily goal starting October 25 for the upcoming week and then weekly goals for the next six months. At the start of each week, develop daily goals so you stay on your schedule even when completion is seven months away.

Zerubavel (1999) suggests a slightly different planning method that requires you to predict with some accuracy how long it will take you to write each page or section or chapter in your manuscript. His method might be challenging for less experienced writers, but it's a good exercise. Appendix F shows my example using his approach to "estimating when you will finish writing a manuscript" (p. 76).

So choose a project, and then think ahead and plan backward to make a path to completion. You've got this!

14

Getting to Flow

A word after a word after a word is power.

—Margaret Atwood

Do you write with *flow*? When you start to write, do you eventually find yourself writing with more concentration, more ease, even confidence?

When you write with more focus, with less fear or anxiety, you may be getting in the flow as Csikszentmihalyi (1990) described it. He later wrote, "The task at hand draws one in with its complexity to such an extent that one becomes completely involved in it" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003, p. 40). Csikszentmihalyi reports that this flow is accompanied by up to eight conditions, and although he was not specifically describing the experience of writing, most of these eight are clearly what we strive for when we write:

1. Goals are clear.
2. Feedback is immediate.
3. Balance occurs between opportunity and capacity.
4. Your concentration deepens.
5. The present is what matters.
6. You feel in control.

7. Your sense of time is altered.
8. There is a loss of ego.

For example, when Csikszentmihalyi (2003) describes the third condition, the balance between opportunity and capacity, he explains that when we believe we are able to succeed, we are more likely to be completely involved in a task. For example, we don't fear doing our laundry or cleaning our apartment. We may not enjoy those tasks except as a form of procrastination to delay our writing. Admit it. But we don't fear them. But when we approach our writing believing that it is beyond our skill and ability, our response is to feel anxious. According to Csikszentmihalyi,

> Attention shifts from what needs to be accomplished—the anxious person is distracted by worries about the outcome. . . . The ideal condition can be expressed by the simple formula: Flow occurs when both challenges and skills are high and equal to each other. (p. 44)

The experience of flow serves as a motivation in itself to continue writing, even writing increasingly difficult material.

Have you ever promised yourself that once you start writing, you can stop after 30 minutes? A little while later, you look at the clock, or count your words, and it's 2 hours or 1,000 words later? That is the experience of flow.

If you've been writing every day, I hope you have experienced flow already. In this flow, you are likely to overcome the obstacles of fear and anxiety and persist with greater concentration and productivity for longer periods of time. If so, let me encourage you to shift from making yourself write for 90 minutes a day to making yourself write until you experience flow, that is, being totally engaged in

all the complexity of your task. You are fully involved and enjoy the writing. (If it hasn't happened yet, it will. I promise.) And when you get to flow, keep writing.

15

Avoid Binge Writing

Let me live, love, and say it well in good sentences.

—Sylvia Plath

Have you done any binge writing this semester? How's that working out for you?

I am a recovering binge writer. I try to avoid binge writing now because it's ineffective and unproductive. But in the spirit of true confession, I'll share. For many years, at least going back to my early years as an assistant professor, I found it impossible to write much during the week. So I tried to write all day on the weekends. Then when weekends were overtaken with grading papers, writing and grading exams, analyzing data, and writing grant proposals, I would set aside the week of spring break or two weeks of the semester break to write all day long. As it turned out, this didn't work very well. Binge writing, which is saving your writing for big blocks of time with large spurts of often frantic effort, seldom produces lots of writing and can create even more stress and anxiety about writing or the lack thereof.

What's wrong with binge writing? To start, if you are not writing regularly, that is, at least 90 minutes every

day, there is more pressure to produce lots of good writing when after a week or month or semester of trying to find time to write you finally actually start to write. My binge writing would look like this: I promised myself, after not writing during the week, that I would write from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday. There is so much pressure to produce for these 9 hours each day that anxiety builds, writing is delayed, more pressure builds, anxiety increases, and writing is delayed. Now realistically, what any mental or cognitive activity can you do well for 9 hours straight? I often would organize notes, do more reading, think about writing, or finish other projects that demanded attention and, 9 hours later, no writing. After weeks, even months, of this, I calculated how much more writing I could have produced if I had written every day for only 15 minutes versus my failed attempts at 9-hour writing days every weekend.

Another problem with binge writing is the amount of time required to return to focused thinking and productive writing when there is so much time between writing efforts. Recall Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) concept of flow. Writing every day allows us to more quickly and regularly reach this flow. Remember, without flow, Csikszentmihalyi said that "attention shifts from what needs to be accomplished—the anxious person is distracted by worries about the outcome" (p. 44). Focus on writing every day and less on the outcome, and you'll accomplish the outcome you seek.

Silvia (2007), who credits Kellogg (1994) with the term *binge writing*, offers another reason not to binge write: "Motivated by guilt and anxiety, binge writers don't find the process of writing rewarding"; after the long binge, writing is "followed by a burnt-out haze that confirms the binge writer's distaste of writing" (Silvia, 2007, pp. 128–129).

So if you are binge writing—and feeling the pain—then commit instead to writing for 90 minutes, or at least 15 minutes, each day for the coming week. Then see how that works out for you.

16

Overcome Perfectionistic Tendencies

One day I will find the right words, and they will be simple.

—Jack Kerouac

Are you trying to write a perfect thesis or dissertation? Do you postpone writing because you know what you write won't be perfect? Do you delay completing a writing project because it's difficult to consider it finished and let it go? Do you wait for just the right time, right environment, and right mood to write? Do you have to be inspired before you start writing?

Hogwash. Just write—perfectionism is not possible. If it were possible for you to write the definitive thesis or dissertation or manuscript, what would you do next? Switch topics for every manuscript you write because each will be the exhaustive work on that topic? (I'm exhausted just thinking about your writing life and career.)

Why are some of us perfectionists? Our desire to be perfect can come from becoming overly attached to the dissertation or writing project. It is a work of scholarship, it is not your life. It just feels like it sometimes. A dissertation is significant and has implications for successful and

timely degree completion, entry to postdoctoral and faculty roles, and launching a body of work and your reputation as a scholar. Yes, the dissertation may be the most significant scholarship you will produce up to this point. But the dissertation or any other writing project is not your life and does not define you. Perhaps it does professionally, but life is more than your dissertation and academic career. (Make sure there are people in your life who remind you of this regularly.) So don't become so attached to any one writing project that you can't finish it or even start it.

Hjortshoj (2001) encourages us to overcome this attachment to our writing and to be able to "release" (p. 25) our work to an adviser or a reviewer or an editor. Giving up this attachment requires knowing when and being willing to give your writing to an audience.

Not realizing how long it takes to complete the dissertation or write multiple articles or books for tenure and promotion can also contribute to the desire for perfection. Yes, you can take 3 years to produce your first chapter or 10 years to write a book but not while the time-to-degree clock is ticking or the tenure and promotion countdown has begun. It's better to get it done than to persist in trying to write the definitive, perfect work.

Inadequate guidance from your adviser; mentor; or, for faculty, the department chair can also contribute to perfectionist tendencies. Identify the expectations. What is necessary to receive approval for the thesis proposal, to get your adviser to sign off on your dissertation, or to meet the promotion and tenure committee's standards for retention and advancement? Meet those expectations. Even exceed them. But no one will ever tell you that your work must be perfect. (If they do, let me know. I'm taking names.)

My Cornell colleague Rachel Weil (2018) urged us to "give mediocrity the love it deserves. To be adequate is to have achieved the basic preconditions for participating in an activity without ruining it for anyone else" (para. 4). She argues that to develop adequacy does not mean abolishing our standards because "adequacy itself is a standard" (para. 13).

We also may have the mistaken belief that if we wait for inspiration to write, the outcome can indeed be perfect. Many, many successful academic and professional writers cite this waiting for inspiration strategy as the biggest myth of productive writing. They also agree on the biggest key to productive writing: routine, regular, repetitive writing.

Silvia (2007) describes this waiting for inspiration excuse as a "most comical and irrational" (p. 23) barrier to actual and productive writing. If you are waiting until you feel inspired or until you feel it will be easy, Silvia asks, "Are you happy with how much you write? Successful professional writers . . . are prolific because they write regularly, usually every day. They reject the idea that they must be in the mood to write" (p. 27).

Routine and repetition will be more reliable predictors of your productivity than inspiration. As Cantor (2017) said, "It's all about repetition, really—doing the same thing every single day . . . [and] the self-control to maintain this routine in a complete vacuum of social interaction or any positive reinforcement" (para. 14). Okay, I wish that last part did not make our writing process sound so isolating and pitiful. As Keyes (2003) put it, "Serious writers write, inspired or not. Over time they discover that routine is a better friend to them than inspiration" (p. 49).

Sternberg (1981) wrote the following: "The myth of the perfect dissertation creates problems for graduate students.

No dissertation, or for that matter, no book, is ever 'perfect,' or absolutely finished" (p. 160). Is he describing you?

In response to the editor of a top journal in my field stating that he had never received a perfectly prepared submission, a colleague of mine vowed to do just that. She worked tirelessly toward her goal. You know what happened, don't you? The editor found errors. Even without an editor finding mistakes, most writers can always think of changes they want to make, even in a published work. (I didn't learn the proper use of *that* versus *which* and which one of them requires a comma until after my first article was published. My mistake, repeated several times throughout, is memorialized forever in that journal.) Sternberg (1981) said, "I often suspect that after, say, two drafts of a dissertation, further revisions don't make a thesis better, merely different" (p. 160).

Another reason we may be perfectionists has very little to do with making our writing perfect and everything to do with procrastination. Luey (2004) describes this when she addresses writer's block, or,

> the inability to stop fussing about details. You cannot move forward because there are so many little things wrong with what you have already written that you feel compelled to clean them up. This isn't writer's block but a form of procrastination; it's much easier to fix what's written than to keep writing. Fight the temptation. (p. 237)

If you have not written your perfectly adequate, but less than perfect, 1,000 words yet today, get started.

17

Stop Procrastinating—Now

Desperation defeats far more aspiring writers than lack of ability. What they don't realize is that desperation is the writer's norm.

—Ralph Keyes

She had to overcome a mountainous obstacle: Her plan to do nothing.

—Wallace Shawn[1]

If you think writing is hard, try waiting until you face an imminent deadline; panic has set in; persistent reminders from your adviser or editor have begun; and, well, it's been so long since you've written, you can't remember the password on the computer that contains the manuscript in progress. (This happened, I kid you not!)

Can we agree to control the elements that are mostly under our control? Which means, stop with the procrastination already!

If you are a procrastinator (Is there anyone who does not do any of the following on occasion?), please take note:

- Be aware that when it seems that completing a writing project is taking longer than it should, it may be because you did not start early enough. This sounds

simple, but how many times have you said to yourself, "I'd be done with this darn [section, chapter, paper] if I had started a week ago or if I had written every day or if I had written for more than 15 minutes each hour instead of [your favorite procrastination activity]"? Take control of your time and your writing. Brause (2000) said, "If you cannot take control of your time, you will never finish" (p. 83).

- Try to minimize your procrastination tendencies by planning a start and an end time for your writing. Tell yourself that if you start at 8:00 a.m., then you can stop at 9:30 a.m. When the time is up, you can stop or not, but you must start on time (Kendall-Tackett, 2007).
- Use procrastination to your advantage by having multiple projects. Do you dread grading papers, specifically, really dreadful papers? Kendall-Tackett (2007) said that while grading papers, "suddenly I couldn't wait to work on my manuscript. I would tell myself, 'I'll just work on one chapter' . . . Before I knew it, I had taken a first pass through two thirds of the book" (pp. 38–39). Procrastinate writing your chapter introduction only if your delaying tactic is working on another section. At least you are writing.
- Consider this: Procrastination is a type of unproductive limit setting. When you procrastinate you limit yourself to a flurry of a few frantic and frustrating writing days rather than sustained writing day after day. Boice (1990) said that "what these procrastinating writers ignore, though, are the aversive properties associated with last-minute writing—fatigue, anxiety, lack of confidence about writing ability, among them" (p. 87). There are healthier ways than procrastination to set limits, and they result in more productive writing outcomes.

- Boice (1990) offers another suggestion, which may seem counterintuitive if you're having problems starting to write each day: "Start writing before you . . . feel you're ready. Finish writing before you . . . feel you're ready. Know when you've done enough with your writing project" (p. 86). Not waiting until you have the perfect plan for the perfect paper in mind and then allowing yourself to turn over the paper to reviewers before you think it's been perfectly written "teaches the value of giving up one kind of control, i.e., wanting to be perfect, for another, healthier kind of control, i.e., being able to work and communicate comfortably, without unnecessary anxiety" (Boice, 1990, p. 87).

So get some control over your time, your writing, and your tendency to procrastinate. And do it now!

Note

1. From Harvey (2018), quoting Wallace Shawn describing writer Deborah Eisenberg, with whom he has lived for 40 years.

18

Staying Motivated

I sit in the dark and wait for a little flame to appear at the end of my pencil.

—Billy Collins

Collins's approach is poetic, but it's not very realistic. What if you never feel inspired to write? It's foolish and unproductive to write only when you are inspired or ready. It's not okay to wait for the flame to appear. Try one of the following motivational strategies.

Set a daily writing goal. Make it something you can accomplish in your scheduled writing time, which by now should be a minimum of a 1- to 2-hour block at least 5 days a week. Try to write 2 pages every day or 1,000 words a day, or outline a chapter and write 1 summary paragraph for each heading and subheading. It's not about finding inspiration or waiting for the muse. Whether you are motivated or not, you must meet your daily writing goal.

It's an important job, and someone has to do it. That someone is you. Remember, you can't write a dissertation or a book today. But you can write three paragraphs or three pages, which will help move your project to completion.

Good writing does not exist; it's the good rewriting that counts. Lamott (1994) tells us to "get it down, so you can clean it up" (p. 14). Shaw (1993) adds, "There is no such thing as good writing. There is only good re-writing" (p. 36). If you need to think of your first draft as prewriting, telling yourself, "Hey, it's not really writing; I'll write for real later," then you can make speedy progress on a rough draft before the serious work of writing (and rewriting) begins.

Remind yourself of your priorities. One weekend when I had solitude and the whole weekend to write, I found myself procrastinating by working on other rewarding and much easier-to-complete projects. I mean, I had the entire weekend to write, right? It's similar to starting a dissertation, knowing you have a year or two years, so the voice in your head argues, "You don't really need to start today." To get myself to start writing, I asked that voice this question: "What is more important to do in the next hour than to write?" I wrote down the answer: "Nothing!"

Then I wrote the question, "What are the most important things to do today?" I wrote down the answer: "Call my mom. Mail a birthday card. Get some exercise. Fill the birdfeeders. Take the compost out. Write." But the answer to the question, "What is the most important thing to do now?" remained: "Write. I must write." That was enough to get me started writing that morning and each morning since. You'll recognize this as a variation on the strategy described in chapter 3 of making a list of everything you need to do after you complete your writing. Rarely is there anything more urgent in the next hour than writing to support your goal of degree completion, winning a fellowship, getting promotion and tenure, or getting recognition and reward in your career.

Chart your progress. I encouraged you in chapter 6 to create a spreadsheet or post a note on your office or apartment door, showing your progress in word count production. I used a version of this with a former graduate student who had delayed his dissertation writing by months and months. To encourage him with positive reinforcement and a very visual record of his productivity, I plopped a wooden box on my desk and insisted he put one new page in it every day. Just one page. The next day he arrived with his title page (wise guy). But that counted. Each of the next five days he arrived with a page of his reference list. That counted.

Eventually he ran out of easy pages to contribute to the growing stack of pages in the box, and he had to start producing chapter content. But concretely, visually, the pages began to add up, and he was motivated to add to the stack one page and then more each day.

Reward your progress. Some of us are adequately rewarded by the satisfaction of completing good writing. (We have an internal locus of control.) Some of us need something more—a tangible, real reward. (We have an external locus of control.) So reward yourself throughout your writing after you have completed something substantial. Silvia (2007) reminds us to "never reward writing with not writing. Rewarding writing by abandoning your schedule is like rewarding yourself for quitting smoking by having a cigarette. Don't lose your good writing habits" (p. 45).

Would you be more motivated with a writing intervention in which you were told to abstain from writing or to write only when you were inspired? Boice (1990) conducted a writing intervention with a group of faculty, each of whom reported problems getting their writing finished despite having perfectly manageable writing projects

to complete. Boice assigned faculty to 1 of 3 conditions. Perhaps the most desired assignment was given to faculty who were told not to write for 10 weeks except "in case of emergency" (p. 82). Faculty in this "abstinence" (p. 82) group assumed that the 10 weeks away from writing would allow them to develop more and better ideas for their writing.

Boice (1990) told a second group of faculty to schedule 50 writing sessions over 10 weeks but to write only if they felt in the mood to write. These spontaneous writers also predicted they would experience more creative writing ideas. Boice told the remaining faculty to also schedule 50 writing sessions over 10 weeks, but there was a catch. For those who did not write at least 3 pages during each of these scheduled times (for a minimum total of 150 pages), a check for a certain amount that they had previously signed would be sent to an organization they said they did not like (e.g., the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, the National Rifle Association, Planned Parenthood). Faculty in this "expensive contingency" (p. 82) group, clearly having drawn the short straw, predicted that they might be productive, but they definitely would not be creative.

What happened? The third group that was forced to write produced more than 3 times as much as the spontaneous group and more than 15 times as much as the abstinence group. The third group, forced to write with an expensive contingency, had a "useful, novel idea consistently more than once per day (Boice, 1990, p. 83). The rate was half as often for the abstinence group and a fifth as often for the spontaneous group. A faculty member in the third group, forced to write, said he was surprised at what he experienced, which was so very different from what he had expected: "I don't feel pressure. . . . It feels good to be so self-disciplined.

What I really like . . . is how easy it is to start writing. No struggle. Sometimes I'm tempted to start sooner. That sure doesn't sound like me!" (Boice, 1990, p. 83).

So if a writing intervention would help motivate you, schedule your daily writing session, write that check, and give it to a friend who will hold you accountable. A forced expensive contingency intervention: How is that for motivation?

If you find inspiration more motivating than writing checks to an organization you loathe, here is what helps me: thinking about other writers' ability to produce great work when there is little to no time to write. When I feel overextended, and when none of the time management tips seem to work, I look to other writers for inspiration, especially the examples provided by Keyes (2003). Consider Canadian poet and novelist Carol Shields. She was one of the most commercially successful contemporary fiction writer ever, as the author of more than 30 books with sales of over 80 million copies in the United States alone. Shields wrote from 5:00 a.m. to 7:00 a.m. each morning for 3 years to complete her first book.

Shields wrote in between diapering and nursing the 5 children she had in 10 years. When she did not meet her 2-page a day goal, she wrote in bed before falling asleep each night. "Nine months of two-page-a-day writing resulted in her first novel *Small Ceremonies*. Shields later observed that she never wrote this quickly again, or in such an organized way" (Keyes, 2003, p. 42). After winning a Pulitzer Prize for *The Stone Diaries*, Shields told National Public Radio's Terry Gross, "Now I have the whole day [to write] and my output is no more than it was then" (Keyes, 2003, p. 42).

According to Keyes (2003), Anthony Trollope wrote dozens of novels at night after leaving his British postal surveyor job. Agatha Christie wrote 12 novels in 6 years

while working full-time at a hospital. Margaret Edson, the Pulitzer Prize–winning author of *Wit* wrote after work at a bicycle shop. Attorney Scott Turow wrote *Presumed Innocent* during his 30-minute train ride into Chicago each day; bell hooks worked full-time at a telephone company while producing essays, and Debra Rienstra wrote her memoir, *Great with Child,* in 15- to 60-minute blocks and "was so sleep-deprived that she could not fully remember writing the book" (Keyes, 2003, p. 45). "Franz Kafka was a clerk, Herman Melville a customs official, T. S. Eliot worked in a bank" (Keyes, 2003, p. 44). I don't know about you, but after reading Keyes's description of these successful writers, I would feel foolish saying I don't have enough time to write.

Are you feeling overextended with school and work and life? Then write even when there's very little time to write. It works.

19

The Last Five Minutes of Writing

Long patience and application saturated with your heart's blood—you will either write or you will not—and the only way to find out whether you will or not is try.

—Jim Tully

An essential task in your last five minutes of writing each day will save you time and increase your productivity. Five minutes before you stop writing, make a list of your next steps and ideas for continuing your writing at your next session.

I discovered this recently when I returned to something I'd written a few weeks earlier. My last sentence was, "There are at least three ways to explain this phenomenon." I had stopped writing at that point and subsequently could not recall the three ways I had intended to describe next. When I finally did complete that section of my manuscript, I wasn't sure I had written about the same three ways I had originally considered. Maybe there were really six good ways. We'll never know.

Recall that we use different cognitive processes when we write about our topic than when we just think about it. So once you get in the flow of writing, your mind is working in ways that often lead you in the direction you need to go.

You can't always know when you sit down to write what you will write. The process of writing brings you there. So at the end of your scheduled writing time when you must stop, make a list or an outline or use stream-of-consciousness writing with the ideas that you would write next if you were continuing to write. The next day when you start writing, use this list to help you get started again more quickly. Stream-of-consciousness writing is simply writing down as quickly as you can all the thoughts you have about the ideas that come next on your topic. Don't worry about spelling or punctuation or format. Just write down what you think comes next, next, and next—enough to be able to continue your train of thought and ideas and to more quickly get into the flow the next time you start to write.

Some writers insist that when they start a new day of writing, they must spend 15 or 20 minutes reading what they wrote the day before as a warm-up to get back into their writing at the point where they stopped the day before. Unless you have unlimited time or no deadline, don't use your writing time this way. Instead, use the brief notes you made in your last 5 minutes of writing to help you know where to head next. You will become productive much more quickly with this strategy.

20

Your Writing Environment

There are three rules for writing a novel.
Unfortunately, no one knows what they are.

—W. Somerset Maugham

Are you thinking about reorganizing your space for more productive writing? If you postpone writing because you don't have a good place to work, stop it! Start writing. Now.

John Updike had rooms in his home for each of his different writing projects. He worked on a novel in one room with everything he needed for that project. When he stopped writing on his novel for the day, he simply moved to the next room and worked on an essay, then on to the next room to write a children's book, and another room for working on a criticism piece or a play. This is my dream home. I must stop fantasizing and start writing.

Stephen King (2000) described how he wrote *Carrie* and *Salem's Lot* at night after teaching in a Hampden, Maine, high school all day. He was earning $6,400 a year, his wife worked at Dunkin' Donuts, and they had no telephone because they could not afford one. He spent his summers working at a laundry where he handled bloody sheets from a local hospital, and from that experience he developed

his idea for the novel *Carrie.* King's writing space? He wrote using a portable typewriter, sitting with a child's desk on his lap and wedged into the laundry room of his double-wide trailer. King advises finding a room with a door you can shut and then writing at least 1,000 words before you open the door. Write every day. If you must, take 1 day off a week. King said, "Eliminate every possible distraction" (p. 152). Using this approach, King tries to write 10 pages, about 2,000 words, a day.

In *How to Write a Lot*, Silvia (2007) included a photo of his work space with the caption, "Where I wrote this book" (p. 21). He wrote 1 book and 20 journal articles in 8 years in that space. His writing chair was a metal folding chair. His desk was a $10 particleboard folding table covered with a $4 tablecloth. His writing areas have included the living room, bedroom, guest bedroom, and bathroom: "There's always a free bathroom" (p. 21). Silvia has no Internet connection to the home computer he uses for writing he said because "it's a distraction. . . . The best kind of self-control is to avoid situations that require self-control" (p. 22). This may be the best piece of advice ever.

It's not about the writing space. Being a productive writer is about writing every day. The essential ingredients in writing success are drive, durability, and tenacity (Keyes, 2003). "Determination is rare . . . more rare than native ability" (Keyes, 2003, p. 49). Writing your thesis or dissertation with an exacting adviser and multiple readers can be one of the most challenging tasks you will face. But you can do it.

When I worked at Northwestern University I visited a colleague on the morning of her 3-year-old's birthday celebration. When I entered the lobby of their Chicago apartment building, her husband, in the dissertation stage

of his doctoral degree in sociology, was settled on a couch there, with his laptop, writing. That morning he had decided not to drive the 20 minutes to campus, only to have to return a few hours later for the birthday party. He had also wisely decided not to write in their apartment with their 1-year-old and 3-year-old in party excitement mode. He was writing in the lobby of a busy Chicago apartment building. I asked if I could take a photo, and he agreed; now, 15 years later, this is the image on my bulletin board reminding me to write, no matter the circumstances and reminding me to stop fantasizing about Updike's house. It won't make me a more productive writer. (But I am certain it would make me a calmer person with a less cluttered writing space, right? I just can't let go of that.)

My favorite story about the unrealized fantasy that a writing space can miraculously and magically create productive writing involves a faculty member who purchased an old nonfunctioning minibus intending to remake it as a writing studio to put in her backyard. I believe it sits in her driveway to this day, still not functioning as anything; that faculty member has become a productive, prolific writer in spite of having no writing studio (Jensen, 2017).

One more story that inspires me, as I am sans writing cabin or studio, is about James Joyce. In despair about his writing, Joyce was being comforted by a friend. He lamented that he had written only seven words that day. "Seven? But James, that's good, at least for you!" Joyce's agonized reply: "Yes. . . . but I don't know what order they go in!" (King, 2000, p. 146).

Wherever you are writing, I know you can write more than seven words today and in the right order. You've got this!

21

Stuck?

If I am truly stuck, I read a book. I do not watch a twenty-two-minute sitcom as a break from the immense "stress" of waking up and sitting down at a desk.

—Hallie Cantor

Almost all writers experience feeling stuck or blocked in their writing. McPhee (2013) describes being stuck as the "masochistic self-inflicted paralysis of a writer's normal routine" (para. 1). Please note his use of the adjective *normal*. Nothing is wrong with us. (Most likely.)

So what can you do when this happens to you? Here are some suggestions.

Put your fingers on the keyboard and start typing. Make yourself type, even if you're just writing something like, "The witch in the graduate school told me I had to write every day, so I'm writing. Of course, what I'm writing is nonsense but I'm writing." Seriously. Start writing or typing. Think about your topic and what you're supposed to be writing about. For example, I might start my scheduled writing session with this:

> Okay, my topic today is philosophical and developmental theories of moral reasoning so I guess I should write

> about Rousseau and Durkheim and Piaget and Kohlberg. Okay, so I'll begin with Piaget. This Swiss psychologist, who originally wanted to be a biologist, wrote his first published paper on mollusks at age 15 and was offered his first faculty position as a teenager based on his published work. When his new employer met him in person and had to rescind the offer because of his age . . .

You will likely write some nonsense, but eventually you'll get to your good stuff, or at least decent stuff. You'll make it better when you get to the revising stage. W. Somerset Maugham used a similar process, writing at the same time every day. "Sometimes I just write my name [over and over] until an idea occurs" (Keyes, 2003, p. 49).

Here's what helps me get started. If I'm writing a chapter, I type each heading that seems relevant in order from the beginning to the end of the chapter. Then I go back and write in subheadings under each heading. Then under each subheading I write the thought or idea that will become each paragraph. By this time I am likely to have five to eight thoughts and ideas under each subheading. Then, and only then, I pick a section and begin to write. (This is the filling the reservoir strategy, described in chapter 11.) Doing it this way, I already know where I'm going with each section. I find that as I write a section, even if that section is going well, I start to feel anxious about the sections ahead, asking myself, "What if I don't know where to go next with this? What if I can't think of anything to write in the next section?" I don't feel so anxious because I've already (tentatively) decided what will be in each section. Because the entire manuscript or chapter already has many ideas and thoughts, I am convinced that this is doable for me. I can do this.

Describing the difficulty of getting started with writing, McPhee (2013) suggests beginning with, "Dear Mother," (para. 1) and tell your mother, or another sympathetic, encouraging person in your life, about your topic. Eventually you will have composed your first draft through this letter writing. Then remove the salutation and start to revise. (Although I am certain your mother would appreciate a letter or a call or a text message, even if it's sending her your first, imperfect draft.)

For kinesthetic writers, for whom movement helps with learning and retention, here is a strategy to try: Get up and move. Pace the floor. Go for a walk or a run. But you have to think about your topic while you do this. McPhee (2013) advised that thinking about your writing topic, sometimes 24 hours a day, even subconsciously while you sleep, is important to the process. But he cautioned that "until it exists [in writing], writing has not really begun" (para. 6).

This getting up and moving is not a break from physically typing or writing. It's using movement to come up with what you need to write. A colleague whose office is next to the school's track works on a manuscript by running around the track, then going back to the office and writing a section of the manuscript, running around the track again, then writing the next section, and so on. Another colleague told me that when she was writing her dissertation at the University of Minnesota, she scraped all the wallpaper off her mom's dining room walls. Apparently her mom wanted the wallpaper removed, so Cheryl would write a while, get stuck, scrape a while, and get the next paragraph set in her brain. Then she could sit down and have it flow out. So if you have a kinesthetic learning-writing style, try this. But moving and running and scraping wallpaper are

not writing. You must figure out a way that works for you to get unstuck and get back to your writing.

Remember, once you start writing, the process of writing prompts ideas. So don't be afraid to start writing each day. Even when you have nothing in your head to write, when you start writing, either the nonsense suggested earlier or your gosh-awful first draft, the cognitive processes change when you write rather than just think about what you will write. I started writing a new chapter today and had no idea at all how to start it. Even after thinking about it off and on for three days while I was writing something else I had no clue or idea at all. But once I started typing I wrote three great introductory pages that only occurred to me after I started typing.

If you find yourself getting stuck often in your writing, try this next intervention. Make a list of what you know to be your biggest obstacles. At what point in the process does each obstacle occur? Now for each challenge you listed, what is one action you can take to try to overcome this obstacle? Appendix G lists some common obstacles identified by graduate student writers. Use this list, and add your own challenges, then find strategies you want to try or perhaps strategies you have tried already that you know work for you. Keep the list handy for the next time you feel stuck and move quickly to overcome it.

If you're stuck, don't call it writer's block. Silvia (2019) argues that academic writers can't really get blocked in their writing. "Writer's block is nothing more than the behavior of not writing. . . . The cure for writer's block . . . is writing" (p. 44). He adds, "Just as aliens abduct only people who believe in alien abductions, writer's block strikes only people who believe in it" (p. 45).

Hjortshoj (2001) takes a similar approach in *Understanding Writing Blocks*. Although he used the term *writing block* in his book's title, he prefers to avoid it because of its "clinical ring" (p. 8) suggesting a psychological disorder. Instead he believes that "all serious writers experience at least minor forms of interference in the process of writing" (p. 8). What is commonly referred to as a writing block is actually a writing problem or obstacle, occurring at some specific point in the writing process. Problems with writing can be examined and addressed by learning new skills and trying different strategies. A campus writing center, a writing tutor, or an adviser can help you identify and manage writing obstacles. Identify the writing problem, then find a way to overcome it. Often, the brightest students with the most complex and brilliant research encounter these writing obstacles (Hjortshoj, 2001). Feel better?

22

Revising and Editing

If you try to write and edit at the same time you will do neither well.

—Charles Sides

Let's say you have 10 weeks to produce a chapter or an article for publication. How do you apportion your time between writing and then revising? Eight weeks to write, and then 2 weeks to revise? Please don't tell me your schedule is 6 weeks of procrastination, then 4 weeks of writing, and a frantic night of revising. We've moved beyond that ineffective routine of delay, doom, and despair, right?

Instead, apply a 20-80 approach, where you spend 20% of your time, in this case 2 weeks of your available 10 weeks, writing your first draft. Now you have 8 weeks to revise, which includes rethinking, reorganizing, revising, editing, and finally proofing.

Roy Peter Clark (2011) asks, "If you had more time to revise, what additional changes would you make?" (p. 242). No writer has ever said when submitting a manuscript or even publication, "This is perfect!" In fact, the day in 1925 that *The Great Gatsby* was published, Fitzgerald was consumed with anxiety, writing to his editor, "I am overcome

with fears and forebodings. All my confidence is gone" (Keyes, 2003, p. 16). So consider all the profound insights you would add, the compelling stories you would include, and the perfectly precise words you would insert if you really gave yourself enough time to revise. I don't mean you must write multiple drafts, just a draft and enough time for thoughtful revising. Schedule at least as much time to revise as you devote to planning and writing your first draft. Use at least a 50-50 approach, but 20-80 is even better.

How would that work?

Think of the first draft as the thing that gets you ready to write. It's prewriting or "raw writing," as a student described her first draft to me (A. Cooperstock, personal communication, January 17, 2019). You can start the first draft before you are ready or scheduled to begin writing. As an example, I started writing three chapters for a new book all in one day. Sounds ambitious and extremely productive, right? I started writing one new chapter, and within two hours I had written everything I could think to write. I started on another, and an hour later I was finished with everything I could recall about that topic. The third chapter took another hour. But those first drafts revealed to me where the gaps in my knowledge were, which articles and notes I needed to review again, and which topics required updated research. The quickest way for me to discover this was by writing about it.

Too often we get stuck in the stages of researching, reading, and taking notes. We linger in the lab and library and archives. It feels familiar and can be comforting when compared with facing the unknown of our writing and the blank computer screen and page. But this is why writing every day needs to be part of your routine and habit; make it routine rather than terrifying.

Once you have words on the page, even a very bad first draft, it's time to rethink, reorganize, rewrite, revise, edit, and proof. Some writers take a break from writing (hours or days) before returning to revise and edit. During this break, don't stop writing, just work on another chapter or project to give yourself distance. Saller (2016) suggests that this break between writing and editing is a "trick available only to those who work ahead, have no deadlines, or conduct research in fields that change slowly" (p. 69). That's you, right?

Get into revising and editing mode. Change locations; perhaps move from your desk to the couch, or print a hard copy and grab a pencil. Change music if you write listening to music. Do what you need to do to move into the frame of mind of an objective reader and editor.

The first step is to consider the big picture of your project. Are you asking the most compelling questions? Did you gather the right data or right literature to be able to answer these questions and tell the stories that answer your readers' questions? Does the approach or direction you have taken make for a coherent whole?[1] Does the ultimate outcome feel satisfying to you? Take time to rethink the scope of your project.

In the second step, examine your central thesis and the persuasive arguments that form the substance of your writing. Were you able to make convincing, compelling arguments? Does your writing flow from question or thesis to convincing evidence throughout?

Third, look at your organization and transitions to assess the flow of your writing. Your outline can help with this. Should some paragraphs be moved to other sections? Do some sections need to be reordered or moved to another chapter? If you can't find a good way to make the transition

between sentences or between paragraphs, then perhaps the sentence or paragraph should be placed elsewhere. It may not be a bad or unnecessary sentence; it's just misplaced and will work better elsewhere. Often we discover that our writing flows better if we add more subheadings. In some cases, we need to rewrite sentences that conclude one paragraph and introduce the next paragraph to improve the transition between paragraphs. As a final check of your transitions, after you have moved around paragraphs and sections, go back and read them to check for flow.

Fourth, and this can be a fun challenge, be a wordsmith. Does each word precisely convey what you want to say? You'll discover that when you replace a general or less precise word with exactly the right one, you may be able to delete many other words. Once you find the right, precise word, you'll likely be able to edit for length as well. Your writing will become more concise once you edit for precision.

Finally, proofread your final copy for format, typos, and punctuation. I once read an 800-page manuscript backward, word-for-word—yes, backward. I don't recommend this, but it can be effective for catching typos, spacing, and other small errors. I do recommend that you read your manuscript out loud. This will be slower, but you'll catch errors this way.

As you revise your manuscript, make a list of the type of revisions you make with each draft. This helps in several ways. Knowing what you can complete with each set of revisions helps you understand how long it takes to finish a manuscript. It helps prepare a clean and correct submission, which your editor and readers will appreciate. Using this list for subsequent manuscripts can also help reduce the number of revisions and drafts.

For example, for this book, the following are the changes I made with each draft. (I started with a revising plan, but I even revised the plan during the process.)

First, after my initial draft of the complete manuscript, I printed the document and read the hard copy. I reordered the chapters, decided to add two new ones, and moved content among chapters so it was more logically located. I also marked typos, missing information, and things I needed to double-check if I happened to catch them. In addition, I revisited and edited my preface several times throughout to make sure it forecast my purpose and content. In this revision I also tried to check that references were complete and that appendices were mentioned in the correct chapters and appropriately labeled. Halfway through, I decided these were too many tasks to focus on as I read each chapter, so I saved checking the references and appendices for another round of revisions.

In my second round of revisions, using an updated hard copy, I focused on reading for flow and improving the writing by changing and adding words and phrases. This level of reading also reminded me of additional research and examples, which I added where I thought they were needed. I also made a list by title of each of the appendices and noted the page and chapter where I referred readers to them. I moved several appendices to different chapters over the course of revising, so this made it easy to find and relabel them. This also gave me a look at the full list of appendices rather than flipping through pages each time as the manuscript got longer and longer. I examined this one-page list to see if the appendix material was in the correct order and mentioned in the most appropriate chapters. I also began to eyeball each page, which is much easier with a hard copy, for formatting errors such

as spacing. In this round of revising I also stapled the pages of each chapter together once I entered the revisions in the document. Once all the chapters' edits were in the document and all chapters stapled, I flipped through the stack and looked at each chapter's first page for consistency in appearance and formatting. In this revision I also began to catch things that I had not thought to include in my style sheet. The most frequently used inconsistent example was the phrase *dissertation-writing boot camp*; I did not use uppercase letters in 75% of the instances throughout, so I changed all examples to lowercase. In this revision I also removed about half of the exclamation points throughout the manuscript, which I tend to overuse, thus reducing their impact when needed. I also removed many parentheses when I discovered how often I used an opening parenthesis without remembering to include a closing one.

In my third and final revision, I used another clean hard copy. I know, I know, so much paper; but I reuse the paper and then recycle it once I know I will no longer need to consult a draft copy to track down a note or edit. I also keep these drafts so I can see if my editor changes anything back to the way I had it in a previous draft, teaching me to stop my incessant revising. I do a slow reading, making my way through the text as if I were a reader and not the author. I change things that are confusing, awkward, wordy, or annoying. I also try to find the most precise word to use. For example, I just now found a sentence where I had written *make your writing better*. I changed that to *write with more precision* to clarify the way writing can be made better. Also, I try to catch all remaining errors, such as typos and inconsistent formatting. In this revision I continued to find typos and missing punctuation. (I just changed that from

incorrect punctuation to *missing punctuation*. Is that more satisfying and precise to read?) I also found misordered mentions of appendix material, which I was certain I had caught and corrected in an earlier draft. This is an example of why we need that extra day or week as the deadline approaches. Build that time into your schedule. (It's also the reason I sent this manuscript to the publisher later than I anticipated. Sigh, do as I say, not as I do. Sigh.) One of the last edits I made to the book was to further reorder chapters, which, you guessed it, necessitated reordering and relabeling the appendix materials to align with their new location in different chapters.

With this reflection on my revising process, I should be able to use what I learned to make revising more complete, thorough, and more efficient with my next manuscript. Consider the ways you can reflect on your revising process to become a better writer and editor of your own work.

Note

1. In the literature on responsibly conducting research, *salami slicing* refers to an inappropriate writing practice of taking a larger research project or scholarship and slicing it into several small articles to submit each of these to different journals for publication. The U.S. Office of Research Integrity defines *salami slicing* as "the practice of dividing one significant piece of research into a number of small experiments simply to increase the number of publications" (n.d., p. 3). So in this first step of rethinking, consider whether your manuscript as a whole constitutes research or scholarship that is significant enough to make a contribution to the field.

23

Time Management

Time is that quality of nature that keeps events from happening all at once. Lately it doesn't seem to be working.

—Anonymous

How can you manage your time to become a more productive writer? How can you find time to write for several hours a day?

Well, how do you find time to do the other things you do every day—eat, sleep, attend to physical hygiene? You do these activities every day because they are important. So is writing. It's important if you intend to finish your degree, to be an academic, or to be a writer. You have to write. So you must find time to write each day, perhaps for no more time than you spend eating or exercising. Here are some suggestions that might help.

Make a checklist of all the steps you need to complete your manuscript and develop a plan according to the time needed for each step (Brause, 2000). This is good advice. I suggest adding another column to your checklist: To what degree is this step under my control? The more elements that are out of your control, the more likely surprises (and delays to your schedule) will occur. Your plan should have enough

flexibility so you can adjust it when things take longer than you anticipate (and they will) because of dire consequences, like your funding runs out, your housing lease ends, your spouse or partner threatens to leave you, or your adviser leaves the university or (heaven forbid) dies. One other tip when making your plan and schedule is to set your own deadlines in advance of deadlines imposed by your adviser or publisher. Then when things require more time, you are facing your own disappointment, not the disappointment of others. *Never miss a deadline set by your adviser.*

Some writers find it effective to schedule writing in smaller projects. You might be more productive if your schedule for working on chapter 3 resembles the following: Work on the introduction from 8:00 a.m. to 8:30 a.m., write five paragraphs on relevant literature from 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m., and draft a concluding paragraph for chapter 3 that provides a transition to chapter 4 from 9:30 a.m. to 10:00 a.m., rather than the more general, Work on chapter 3 from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. Make a doable goal for the time you have available to write, and work to meet that goal. "Work on chapter 3" is not specific enough for a goal.

Another time management strategy is, before you begin a new chapter or new section, think about the work you must do. How much content do you need to cover, what ideas or arguments will you include, how many subsections will you use? Then decide how much time you need to produce good writing on your topic. Write down that amount of time. Then start writing on your section and keep track of how much time it actually took to do what you planned. When you're finished writing, refer to the number you wrote down. (Do you ever finish sooner than you thought? Well, congratulations to you. That's never happened to me.)

It always takes longer. The next step is the most critical and important part of this exercise. Analyze why it took longer. Maybe you took more breaks, watched more television, or got distracted more often than you had planned. Do you know what action you should take? Identify and eliminate the distractions that prove to be your weakness. For example, do not connect to the Internet, do not check e-mail or Facebook, turn off your phone, and write for 90 minutes before you stop. Or did you just not give yourself enough time for this writing task? Do you anticipate that a task will be easier and thus quicker than it turns out to be? Do the thoughts make more sense in your head than they do on paper or on the computer screen so that you underestimate how much time you need to get your mental notes into written form? Does a project you believe will take an hour turn out to require double the time? It's okay to be a lousy judge of how much time something will take. It just means that you must adjust your schedule in one of two ways: First, you must start your project earlier. Give yourself additional time by starting a week, a month, or sooner based on the time you anticipate needing. Second, you must work much more quickly than you've ever worked before. I recommend the first option. It allows you to retain your sanity, not to mention that of friends and loved ones, and it improves the quality of your work.

Please understand that you don't really have time to write a dissertation or a book or even a manuscript today. But you do have time today to write a paragraph or a page or two. And that's all you need to do today. (Unless you waited far too long to start, and then maybe you do need to write a manuscript tonight. We've all been there.) The more you write today, the faster this will go. The more

days you write, the sooner you will finish, and the more you write, the better writer and editor you will become. I promise you.

24

Energy Management

Being challenged in life is inevitable; being defeated is optional.

—Roger Crawford

Once you start to better manage your time, your work, and yourself, you may still find it hard to get it all done because, frankly, we simply need more than 24 hours in a day. But try one more strategy: Manage your energy.

The following strategies will enhance energy and thus performance, although they are not always easy to do. Get enough sleep and rest. Exercise or meditate to support your physical, psychological, and cognitive health. Eat the right kinds of foods in appropriate amounts: small meals throughout the day with more protein and less sugar. Drink lots of water.

Unlike other resources such as time, energy is renewable. You can use energy and then get some more. How do you renew your energy? Some faculty find teaching energizing because engaging with students and seeing them understand new material and solve challenging problems is rewarding. Do you have more energy, at least mental energy, after you exercise, meditate, or eat a healthy snack?

Groppel (2000), in his work with executives, FBI agents, and Olympic athletes, insists that to maximize their performance and success they must get proper sleep, exercise, nutrition, and hydration. You know this. So allow yourself to perform to your maximum by taking care of your physical and mental needs.

Something else we all know but don't find easy to do is limiting our efforts to those things we can do reasonably well rather than overextending ourselves. Focusing your energy at critical times (e.g., an approaching deadline) to advance your work may mean saying no to colleagues, friends, and family or (gasp) your adviser. We don't like to say no. In fact, for years while I was a new assistant professor the word was not in my vocabulary. At one point my very generous, understanding department chair, Connie, told me, "Jan, when anyone asks you to do anything, your response should be, 'I am required to check with Connie before accepting any new responsibilities.'" Then I could return to the person who was asking for yet another use of my time and report, "Nope, Connie said I couldn't do it. Sorry."

Eventually I learned to say no and make it sound like yes, for example:

> Oh, my gosh, I'd love to coteach a course with you. That sounds like so much fun. So rewarding. Just think how great we'd be! [Pause, while still smiling and looking so agreeable.] But right now I can't devote the time to do it the way I know this project deserves. So let me get back to you when I can do it justice.

Allow yourself to say no at the appropriate time to some requests; it's another strategy for managing your energy: Sleep, exercise, eat, hydrate, say no. You owe it to yourself and to your work.

25

Adviser Management

Must avoid panic.

—Norman Mailer

Yes, it's a thing: Learn to manage your adviser. Call it the care and feeding of your mentor (not literally, but usually). It is possible to facilitate your adviser's proclivities to perform more effectively in that role to meet your needs (usually).

I discovered this when one of my students managed us, his graduate committee members, in a way that made us more organized and responsive to his requests for feedback and support. He scheduled more frequent committee meetings than other students did, which advanced his academic and research progress. He sent an agenda a week before any committee or individual meeting. This prepared us to discuss his new research ideas and answer his questions. Each semester he sent us an updated curriculum vitae with a description of his goals for the next semester (e.g., submit a conference proposal, prepare a poster presentation, register for an interdisciplinary graduate seminar, or start the job search). On and on he thought of new ways to manage us. My colleague Debbi Tegano, who served on many of these same graduate committees, prefers to think of students as

engaging us advisers rather than managing us. Engaged faculty may perform more effectively as advisers and mentors, so this chapter could be titled "Adviser Engagement," she advised. You decide if you manage or engage your adviser.

Strategies for working with your adviser during your thesis and dissertation writing can help your adviser be a better reader and reviewer of your work. Never give your adviser 30 or 300 pages and say, "Tell me what you think about this." Those pages will become part of a stack of many other pages on the adviser's desk or in an electronic queue, and you'll wonder weeks or months later when, or if, you will ever get feedback. Be alert to "the sense of guilt some professors have as they haul this weighty material around with them, hoping they will find a few extra minutes to devote to this daunting task you have assigned to them" (D. Tegano, personal communication, March 23, 2017). If you don't want a guilty or overwhelmed adviser, send instead a list of specific questions to your adviser and committee members, which is a much quicker and easier task than reading 30 or 300 pages.

For example, ask them,

> Please look at pages 30–35; do I need a stronger argument or more detail there, or can it wait until chapter 2? On pages 70–75, do I need more methodological detail? In discussing my work in light of the new Cunningham and Horm book, do I need to expand the section comparing and contrasting their research with my work? Do the Catron and Fletcher articles need to be reintroduced here?

Specific questions usually prompt quicker, and more useful, comments (Kearns & Gardiner, 2006).

Remember the think ahead and plan backward document you developed after reading chapter 13 and the example in Appendix E? Use it to communicate with your adviser. Advisers who have concrete evidence that you have a focused plan, reasonable deadlines, and an expectation to finish your degree in a timely way usually are more cooperative with those plans. Also, a postdoc or job offer in hand amazingly accelerates their cooperation to get you finished.

Communicate regularly with your adviser, electronically or in person, depending on your adviser's preference, when things are going well and especially when things are not. Working in the graduate school, I'm surprised how often I hear faculty report, "My student has disappeared. I haven't heard anything from him in a month. Or two. Or three." Appendix H describes the critical junctures during your graduate program when communication with your adviser is essential for preventing and overcoming obstacles, for example, when choosing or changing a research topic, encountering challenges in research or writing, and needing feedback or guidance from your adviser.

Early in the advising or mentoring relationship, both parties should discuss their expectations. Have this conversation early enough so if expectations don't align, you still have options to (a) accommodate, (b) change your adviser, or (c) seek a coadviser or multiple informal mentors. Part of setting expectations is knowing how much of your thesis or dissertation you must complete before submitting it for feedback. Is your adviser willing to review an outline, a chapter, or article summaries? Can it be a chunk, or must it be an entire chapter? Some faculty want an entire draft completed before they will read and review. In other words, know your adviser as you expect your adviser to know you. What is your adviser's most comfortable learning style?

Does your adviser want the big picture or details and specifics? Is your adviser the last-minute type or meticulous with planning? Learn how often your adviser will agree to meet with you during the writing phase, and make specific plans for communicating while you are away in the field doing research or when your adviser is away or on sabbatical. Appendix I provides a template for the work you need to do before and after meeting with your adviser to help communicate, clarify, and confirm (i.e., get it in writing) the next steps.

For most faculty, a student who takes the initiative on these issues is viewed as an outstanding student: well-organized, professional, respectful of faculty time, and someone we often secretly try to emulate. (That's you, Kathy Fitzgerald and Lisen Roberts!)

26

Practice Writing

The practice of writing every day made me remember that writing doesn't have anything to do with publishing. . . . It can be totally separate and private—a comforting thought.

—Nell Freudenberger

Are you reaching the end of a writing project? Are you ready to submit your draft, first or final, to a reviewer, your adviser, your editor, or an agent? Lucky you. Congratulations!

Please don't stop writing. Keep writing, just for practice. Think about it. What other area we hope to be highly skilled in requires us to wait until the big event to start to perform? Take a marathon, for instance. Who trains for a big race by resting and eating a lot, doing everything other than running? Then why do we wait until we have an assignment and a deadline to start writing?

When Jordan Love was an art history doctoral student at Columbia University, she started writing just a single page a day on her first day after the completion of her comprehensive exams. Within a year, by the time she was ready to start writing her dissertation, she had produced 150 pages effortlessly. So what did she accomplish with this writing practice? A lot. She was confident she could write a 300-page

dissertation, which was a piece of cake considering she had already written half of it. In addition, the idea for her dissertation developed from her daily writing practice (J. Love, personal communication, May 18, 2011). Love completed her dissertation faster than everyone in her cohort (and faster than several students who started ahead of her). Remember, writing about your ideas causes them to develop differently from just thinking about them. The process of writing moves your work forward in ways that just thinking, pondering, or fretting about your work will never do.

Has someone (your adviser, perhaps) ever told you that you aren't ready to write? You should write anyway. Just do it secretly. The process will help you to be ready to start the real writing sooner than if you were to only think about your ideas rather than write about them. Our dean of faculty at Cornell told me recently he instructs his students, "Write as you go along. Writing is not a phase you start at the end of your research. Writing *is* research" (C. Van Loan, personal communication, January 17, 2019).

A few years ago I organized a series titled Faculty as Writers for our Columbia University graduate students. Robbie McClintock, a faculty member who spoke during one of those sessions, encouraged us to write even when we don't have a writing project, to write when there is no assignment or deadline (R. McClintock, personal communication, April 20, 2011). This is one thing that will help you enjoy writing, improve your writing, and become a writer.

If you are looking for a writing assignment between writing projects, especially one that is low stress, write about any worries and concerns you have about your writing. Doing so can make you less anxious and able to perform successfully in spite of worrisome thoughts (Beilock, 2011).

You could also write about your writing and career goals for the next 5 and 10 years. What articles, essays, and books will you write, and how will you accomplish it? Another writing assignment (this one is a lot of fun) is to identify the people, experiences, and opportunities in your life that you are grateful for. Then express your appreciation. It can enhance your emotional and physical well-being, help you more effectively cope with stress, promote confidence, and even help you sleep better. Try it. Once you finish your writing today, write a thank-you message to someone who has mentored, advised, inspired, nurtured, encouraged, or fed you. Recount what they mean or have meant to you in your personal, academic, or professional life.

My inspiration has been Gary Schneider, a professor at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, who, every day for more than 30 years, has written a thank-you note to someone in his college, church, or community. (I plan to write him to thank him for being a role model.) Are you grateful to someone who has given you the time or place or opportunity to write? Are you appreciative of those who give you feedback or caffeine? Identify the good in your world, and be appreciative and encouraged by all the positives in your life. It can help you in your determination, focus, and persistence to write.

27

Using a Writing Support Group

Listening, not imitation, may be the sincerest form of flattery.

—Dr. Joyce Brothers

After each of our dissertation-writing boot camps at Cornell, we ask, "How can we take boot camp home with us?" Students report they would never have been as productive writing at home or in the library or in their lab as they were at the intensive, week-long writing boot camp. What made the difference?

It's often one or more factors related to their environment, schedule, motivation, and focus. I encourage students to develop a strategic plan that addresses each factor to help continue their productive writing. One element of this plan is usually finding a supportive writing community. Creating or joining a writing support group can meet several needs; determine which of the following characteristics you need from your writing community.

Accountability

Share your daily writing goals and deadlines with your writing peers. Your commitment to your writing becomes a commitment to the group as well. It's surprising how

effective being accountable to others can be. After the first dissertation-writing boot camp I conducted, students expressed appreciation for the writing environment, the food, and the tips for more productive writing. Then one student said, "But the most effective part was the peer pressure." (Really, for graduate students?) "Yes," he said, "When I look up from my computer and consider letting myself be distracted, I see my peers writing and realize, 'He will graduate before I will. She will graduate before I will. They will all finish before I do if I don't keep writing'" (G. Greene, personal communication, January 13, 2006). Accountability, peer pressure—they work. Use them to your benefit and find ways to make yourself accountable to a supportive peer or writing group.

Writing Skills

Not all writing support groups choose to read and give feedback on members' writing. It's time consuming, and many of us find it easier to provide feedback and edit the work of others than to do our own writing. Avoid this effort if it serves a procrastination function and slows your own writing. But those who use their group's time to read drafts and provide comments often find that weekly feedback can move their work forward more quickly.

Critiquing Skills

Critiquing the work of others is a valuable skill that puts you in high demand among your colleagues. It can also help you improve your own thinking and writing, and it's good training for subsequent professional service as a reviewer or editor for professional journals in your field. If you have

a substantial background or expertise in the same field as your group's members, you will be able to offer a critique of arguments, analysis, and other content-related issues. Even if your writing group is composed of members from across disciplines, as many of them are, your comments can bring a fresh perspective, offer questions from a brilliant but nonspecialist reader, and offer encouragement. Appendix J offers some guidance for peer critique.

Support and Encouragement

Writing groups help you know you are not along in your writing effort. As Dillard (1989) said, "It's easy not to be a writer" (p. 91). Having a writing support group helps you find motivation and persistence when being a writer is hard. Whether joining an existing writing support group, or creating one, consider the basic arrangements to best meet your needs.

How Often Will You Meet?

A group can meet weekly, monthly, or on any schedule of the members' choosing. The more time between group meetings or virtual check-ins, the more ambitious the writing goals should be.

Will Your Group Read and Provide Feedback?

If your group provides feedback, members should agree to e-mail their writing (a page, a section, a chapter) to the other members three to five days before the next meeting. Pages should be read by one or more members who offer feedback, either verbally during the meeting or verbally and

in writing. The group can select one or two writing samples for all to read or can assign one writing sample to each member so that everyone's work is read and everyone receives feedback at each meeting. Or design another arrangement that works for your group. Following our first writing boot camp at Cornell, students met three days a week to write as a group in the library. After six months of just writing, they began to use their weekly Friday gathering to share drafts and give feedback, but for efficiency they limited themselves to one hour of reading and giving feedback, a method I endorse. Spend your time writing, not hours and hours reading and commenting on others' writing. Five years later this writing group continues to meet, but its membership turns over about every two years as students complete their degrees and new graduate students arrive.

Golde (1996) suggests that if your group is providing feedback on a member's writing, the member should listen and take notes without commenting or responding. Listen to the conversation as peers explain, defend, and critique the work, which "can lead to a nuanced understanding of how you are expressing your ideas that might never emerge if you had been able to respond and explain immediately" (p. 4).

How Many Members Should Be in Your Group?

This is your call. Too few members, and you may lose momentum during conference or flu season. Too many members, and you may lose the sense of accountability and community. Three to five may be a good number to start with, and then see how this works for your group. You can always add members.

How Long Will the Group Continue to Meet?

Meet as long as the group works for the members. New and replacement members can keep the group going, and the logistics can change as the group deems appropriate and necessary.

What Are the Ground Rules?

Discussing concerns and challenges and fears and frustrations should occur in a safe and confidential environment. Consider how to create this space. Also, decide what to do when members aren't attending or contributing. The group should work, reciprocally, for all members.

There may be other mechanics the group will want to discuss and decide on in advance. Consider the merits of a meeting location like a library, someplace livelier, or where conversations won't be disruptive; food or no food; responsibility for meeting reminders; and recording stated goals and reported accomplishments.

Silvia (2007) describes a writing group formed with his faculty peers called the Agraphia Group, which refers to the pathological loss of the ability to write. Faculty talk about their writing, obstacles to productivity, and goals. Silvia suggests the following components for successful groups:

- "Set concrete, short-term goals and monitor the group's progress" (p. 52). Silvia and his colleagues meet every week, so instead of sharing writing they share their goals. At each meeting, minutes from the previous meeting are read, and members report whether they met their goals. "Our system prevents people from wriggling out of their goals or having false memories about what they said the week before" (p. 52). In Silvia's group, some members can meet only every other week, so they set

goals and deadlines that are slightly more long term than the group that meets each week.

- "Stick to writing goals, not other professional goals" (p. 53). Silvia's meetings are brief, often just long enough for each member to report on progress since the last meeting and then to announce next week's goals. Instead of reading each other's writing, members occasionally read and discuss books about writing.
- "Big carrots can double as sticks." Silvia suggests being supportive and celebrating progress and success among the group members. Just don't be "unconditionally supportive" (p. 54). Don't let a group member consistently fail to meet goals or contribute to the group. He suggests motivating with goading, pressuring, confronting, and electric shocks. (Okay, he was joking about that last one, at least I think; he's a psychologist, so that's psychology humor.)
- "Have different groups for faculty and students" (p. 55). Graduate students and faculty have different challenges, priorities, goals, and expectations. When it comes to writing groups, faculty and graduate students don't mix. You might want to occasionally invite faculty to inspire you, provide some guidance, or share their writing strategies, but Silvia suggests they should not be participating members.
- "Drink coffee (optional)" (p. 56). (If you want to also share cake with your group, see Appendix K for a delicious chocolate chip cake recipe.)

Instead of an in-person writing group, your writing community can be virtual and include peers who are not local. E-mail once a week to report your progress, goals for the following week, and any questions or obstacles you need help and support with. Or you can e-mail writing buddies

who are on the same writing schedule as you are; tell them, "I'm going to write from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. tomorrow. Anyone else writing with me?"

Appendix L offers a concise list of all the tips in the preceding chapters. Place this list next to your computer, and use it when you feel stuck or lack motivation to start writing. Print it out, cut the tips into strips, place them in a bowl, and choose one each day to help you focus on another good habit to keep your writing on track. And share this list with your very supportive and productive writing group.

Writing can be a very solitary and isolating activity. Surround yourself with as much support as you need. And give support; be part of a caring writing community. (Be part of a caring writing community that eats cake together.)

28

Responsible Writing

It makes all the difference in the world whether we put truth in the first place, or in the second place.

—John Morley

Responsible writing and adhering to the highest ethical standards must be the foundation of manuscript preparation and submission. This includes avoiding plagiarism by giving proper credit and acknowledging the ideas, work, and writing of others. It includes honest collaborations and decisions about coauthorship among colleagues. You must be the author of your writing. Too many academic scholars, professional writers, public intellectuals, and elected leaders have been accused of plagiarism, intentional and unintentional. I keep a binder with *New York Times* front-page stories and online articles about research and academic misconduct to share with my graduate students; the binder cover reads, *You do not want to find your name in this book!* The latest entry is from the *New York Times* and has the headline "Author Fights Plagiarism Charges" (Salam & Stevens, 2017). You do not want your name in the lead paragraph of this story. Plagiarizing the words and work of others, whether intentional or not, can be career limiting, even career ending. You are responsible for

> making clear what knowledge is [yours] and what is someone else's. [Our readers must] know whose words they are reading. No useful dialogue can occur between a [reader] and an echo or ghost. . . . To misrepresent one's work knowingly is to commit an act of theft. To misrepresent one's work ignorantly is to show oneself unprepared to assume the responsibility presupposed by work on the college level. (Cornell University, 2012, p. 17)

Intentional or not, the outcome can be the same. Plagiarism in your application to graduate school, in graduate fellowship essays, and in grant proposals can result in dismissal from your graduate program; loss of funding; bans from applying for new federal funding; and retraction of submitted manuscripts, published articles and books, or book contracts.

To avoid plagiarism, ask questions of your advisers and mentors. Discuss with your peers and colleagues ethical practices in writing and publishing. Specific guidelines and best practices vary by discipline; these are included in the author guidelines for most journal publications and in the code of ethics for professional societies in your discipline and profession. A good resource to consult is Roig's (2015) *Avoiding Plagiarism, Self-Plagiarism, and Other Questionable Writing Practices*: *A Guide to Ethical Writing*, which is available online. Purdue's Online Writing Lab is also very good for information about avoiding plagiarism as well as advice for improving your writing.

Understand what constitutes plagiarism, and don't do it!

29

Writing a Graduate Fellowship Application

There is one mistake that appears common to all unsuccessful graduate fellowship applications.

—Gisele Muller-Parker

Writing an essay for a graduate fellowship application requires a narrative that is persuasive, succinct, highly readable, and nearly flawless. In other words, your very best writing. Fellowship awards are highly competitive, and your writing should place you in at least the top 10% of submissions. Applicants attempt to convince a panel of reviewers that their graduate study and research is worthy of funding and other support, often up to a quarter of a million dollars in stipend and tuition support plus opportunities for international study and research, travel, and professional development.

For example, the National Science Foundation received more than 12,000 applications for its 2,000 fellowship awards in 2018 (National Science Foundation, n.d.). Winning a graduate fellowship not only provides funding for your graduate degree but also brings recognition and prestige to you, your mentor, and your institution—plenty of motivation, not to mention pressure. The following are

some suggestions for writing your research statement and personal essay for your graduate fellowship application.

Find Appropriate Fellowship Competitions

Which government agencies or private foundations fund research in your field and subfield? Which graduate fellowships have the more advanced students in your field applied for? Your faculty advisers may have received grants and contracts from government agencies that also have graduate fellowship competitions. Ask advanced students in your program which fellowship competitions they have submitted applications for. In addition, many graduate schools have searchable fellowship databases that allow you to search using key words for funding sources by topic. The University of California, Los Angeles, has one, and it is not password protected, so use it (grad.ucla.edu/funding/#).

Determine Your Competitiveness

There are three primary kinds of graduate fellowships. The first kind supports students as they begin graduate school, so for these you should market your potential for success as a researcher and scholar. The second kind supports students once they begin their research, so your research statement must present a strong, convincing project and demonstrate that you have the skills and the passion to complete it in a timely way. The third category is a dissertation-writing or completion fellowship that supports students in the final year of writing their dissertation. Once you identify the funder and kind of fellowship, determine if your adviser and other faculty familiar with your research believe you

will be competitive and if they are willing to write a very strong letter of support for your application. Don't just ask for a letter; ask for a *very* strong letter. If they agree, then you are ready to apply.

Read the Application Requirements

After carefully reading the requirements, make a list of steps and a schedule for completion, including interim deadlines for each component (e.g., requesting support letters, compiling your curriculum vitae, requesting transcripts, and drafting required essays). Include in your schedule enough time to get feedback from multiple reviewers. Applications that don't meet the requirements or the deadline are never considered.

Each fellowship funder, whether a government agency or private foundation, will release a request for applications, usually three to six months before the application's due date. This document describes the requirements, eligibility to apply, deadline, and criteria for review. Some competitions offer a list of frequently asked questions and tips for preparing a submission. Some provide lists of past winners; others feature brief bios of their successful fellows. An online search can bring you to these graduate students' websites where some post their advice and sample essays.

Start early enough to gather as much information as you need to write, revise, and improve your chance of success. At Cornell we maintain folders of winning graduate fellowship applications across disciplines and competitions. If your graduate program, graduate school, or writing center has sample copies for review, use them to help you develop your own checklist or rubric for a successful application.

Reading enough sample applications can help you determine commonalities among winning essays and help you write your own successful application. Make the effort to go beyond just knowing that an application is good. Figure out what makes it good by compiling a checklist of the qualities of the winning applications you read and use this checklist as a guide to producing good, persuasive writing in your first or second draft rather than by a fourth or fifth draft in case you don't have time for five drafts.

Draft Your Research Statement or Proposal

Don't just tell the funder—show your experience, skills, and enthusiasm for your research. Provide specifics, explain your role and responsibilities in collaborative projects, and be succinct, maximizing every word, given the word limits on most fellowship applications.

Draft Your Personal Statement

Most students write an acceptable research proposal. The personal statement is often what distinguishes a winning application from the others. A reviewer for one of the most prestigious fellowships in science, technology, engineering and mathematics told me:

> We don't need to fund more researchers who stay in the lab all the time. We want to fund students who excel in the lab but who also engage with the larger community to raise awareness about the importance of research for society. We want students who tutor high schoolers, advise middle schoolers on their science fair projects,

> visit elementary school classrooms with cool math activities, write letters to the editor about science policy, or participate in legislative advocacy days to argue for the importance of science education funding. (L. Henschen, personal communication, April 30, 2004)

Some fellowship competitions refer to this kind of engagement as *broader impacts*. Review carefully the mission statement of the agency you are applying to. Show how your research, scholarship, and community engagement align with the agency's mission and funding priorities.

Request Feedback on Your Drafts

Ask faculty and your peers familiar with your research topic for feedback. Consider their comments and revise your drafts accordingly. Get as many reviews as possible so you can anticipate the questions and critiques of the agency's panel of reviewers and address these as you write subsequent drafts. Remember your audience. It's likely a panel of brilliant scholars and researchers who may or may not be experts in your specific subfield. So write for a more general audience than you might when preparing a manuscript to a journal in your specialty.

Own Your Research

In reading hundreds of graduate fellowship applications over the years, I find one big challenge for many students is finding a strong, confident voice. Graduate students' writing can sound tentative. For example, a faculty member might write, "I study the effects of social interaction on children's

moral reasoning." A graduate student might write, "The purpose of my research is designed to find whether there is any impact of children's social interaction on their moral reasoning." Besides being wordy, this sounds tentative, almost like the author would consider changing the direction of a life's work if the reader found fault with it before reaching the end of the sentence. The faculty sentence is stronger because the subject and verb start the sentence—a concise one-two punch. Find the right balance, however. and don't sound cocky or overly confident.

There's another way to own your research. Reviewers know whether a student wrote the fellowship application or whether it was written by a faculty member or lifted from a faculty-drafted research proposal or manuscript. As one reviewer told me, "We want to fund students, not their faculty adviser" (M. Linder, personal communication, October 12, 2012). So avoid submitting work that is not your own. If your proposal reflects collaborative work, make that clear, and specify your role in prior and proposed research. Being ambiguous on your contribution in a collaborative project might make it appear that you are taking credit for a much larger role and set of responsibilities. Be specific. If your role was indeed smaller, which is likely if this research occurred when you were an undergraduate or first-year graduate student, emphasize what you learned by your participation, such as how to work as part of a team, how to conduct research with the highest ethical standards, how to overcome obstacles or failures in research, or how authorship and acknowledgment credit are determined among many collaborators. These are all essential parts of serious science and scholarship, and that you observed and learned about these elements, especially when they are not explicitly discussed, will impress the reviewers.

Start Early

The director of the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship program, Gisele Muller-Parker, reports the primary mistake students make when applying is "they don't start early enough" (G. Muller-Parker, personal communication, October 12, 2008). How does she know this? From the number of reviewers who indicated that they really liked the application but found too many typos and easily corrected errors in it and from reviewers who really wanted to fund some applications but found details lacking in the methods section. These deficiencies could be corrected if the applicants had started earlier and worked more on their applications. If a proposal was so close to being placed in the *definitely fund* pile that even the review panel wishes the applicant had started earlier, do yourself a favor and start early to draft and revise your proposal.

Ready to get an early start? Today? Even before you decide which fellowship to apply for, you can develop a first general draft by answering the following eight questions. Then revise and customize your answers for almost any graduate fellowship application you later submit.

1. What is your research question? What is the purpose or aim of your proposed research?
2. What is the relevant literature and research (yours and others) that serve as context and a springboard for your proposed research?
3. What methods will you use?
4. What do you expect to find? What are your anticipated outcomes?
5. What is the significance of your proposed research? What will it contribute to the field and to society?

6. Do you have a compelling research or life experience that makes you especially well suited to succeed with this project?
7. Have you won awards, recognition, or other fellowships to support your research? What were you able to accomplish with these awards? You likely will list awards on your curriculum vitae. Use the narrative to show what you have gained by winning these awards. Did you broaden your network of collaborators, gain an additional mentor, present an invited paper, or give a talk?
8. What makes you so passionate about this research? Why you? Why fund you?

Answer these questions, then revise as needed, and follow the specific instructions for various fellowship competitions. Only one action guarantees your failure: not applying. So do it. (A more extensive list of tips with advice for each step in the process is available from www.graduatementor.com.)

30

Writing a Grant Proposal

I don't need an alarm clock. My ideas wake me up.

—Ray Bradbury

If you write fellowship applications as a graduate student, you will use many of these same skills in writing proposals for grants and contracts as a postdoctoral fellow and faculty member. In fact, success as a graduate student in securing funding makes search committees view you very favorably for faculty positions. Some of these positions, especially in the health sciences, will require you to bring in up to 90% of your own faculty salary by securing external funding for yourself and to support your graduate students and postdocs. No pressure, right?

If you recently finished a graduate degree at a PhD-granting institution, surrounded by research labs, expensive equipment, and funded research assistants and postdoctoral fellows, it's reasonable to assume that most research funding goes to research-intensive universities. But be aware that faculty at smaller institutions, including those primarily focused on undergraduate education, can get their share of funding for research too, especially funding designed to help engage and mentor undergraduates in research.

Funding agencies release a request for proposals with detailed guidelines. For each funding competition, whether at a government agency or foundation, a program officer oversees the competition. Contact the program officer and describe your proposed research. Ask good questions. Let the program manager get to know you and your work.

Successful proposals often have several elements in common and arise from the following systematic process.

Identify funding opportunities designed for postdoctoral fellows and new faculty. You can be successful in these smaller competitions and gain needed skills before seeking larger grants that are more competitive.

Locate and use the resources at your institution. In fact, a good question to ask when you interview for a faculty position is, What resources are available here to help me get an early start seeking funding? (You'll sound smart and eager to get started.) Your college might provide funds to secure an outside reviewer who is highly respected in the field to review and offer feedback on your grant proposal draft. Someone will help you tailor your budget to the specific requirements of the funding agency, especially helping to determine indirect costs required by your institution and allowed by the funder. Your department might provide release time from teaching or other responsibilities during the semester you are writing an important first funding proposal. More senior faculty might invite you to work collaboratively on a proposal as a coprincipal investigator to help you get started. (All of these are examples from institutions where I have worked.) Find out what help is available, and use it. Ask for what you need to help you be successful.

As you did when you were a graduate student, *ask your more experienced colleagues at your institution and elsewhere about likely funding sources*. Who has funded the research

you hear about at conferences and in journal articles you read? Ask these colleagues if they will share copies of their successful proposals.

Make sure your research is a good match for the mission and focus of the funding agency. You can glean this information from the funder's website and in conversation with the program officer.

Get good reviewers, as recommended by Coelho (2004) at the National Institutes of Health. How? Meet all technical requirements specified in the request for proposals. Make sure your ideas are original and significant, include a reasonable budget, and make your proposal reader friendly. For reviewers who may been reading dozens of proposals, make sure your writing is clear and specific and can convince reviewers that you have the knowledge and skills to conduct research that will fill a critical need in your field. Reviewers will be very pleased to read a proposal that is the next great idea in the field.

According to the National Institutes of Health, the following are *the primary reasons proposals don't get funded*: lack of original ideas, an unfocused plan, lack of knowledge about literature, uncertainty about direction of future research, absence of acceptable scientific rationale, inadequate reasoning in experimental approach, unrealistically large amount of work, lack of sufficient experimental detail, and an uncritical approach (Coelho, 2004). Use these as a checklist for you and your peer reviewers to assess the strength of your proposal drafts.

Start early enough to get feedback from multiple colleagues in and outside your field. Have conversations about their feedback to help you clarify your ideas and writing.

Most institutions, whether large doctoral-degree-granting universities or smaller colleges that focus primarily

on undergraduate education, have a person or an office with multiple staff devoted to helping you prepare a successful grant proposal. When I was a faculty member, my department chair and my dean were very encouraging and helpful when I wrote applications for internal and external funding from state and federal agencies and private foundations. My chair reviewed all my proposal drafts, and my dean often said, "Give me that budget. I'll do it for you." Find these staff, colleagues, and mentors who will help you successfully compete for funding.

31

Writing a Research Proposal

If we knew what we were doing, it would not be called research, would it?

—Albert Einstein

If you are in a research master's or a doctoral program, you might have to write a research proposal. Certainly in the humanities and most social science programs, students write a proposal describing their planned research. Some disciplines refer to the proposal as a *prospectus*. But in degree programs such as science and engineering, where graduate students have research assistantship in an adviser's lab, students' own thesis or dissertation research can be an offshoot of their adviser's ongoing research. Usually students develop a research question or hypothesis that is an extension of the adviser's funded research. Research in the lab or group is often collaborative, with graduate students and postdoctoral fellows researching novel aspects of a larger project. The lab's policies guide research assignments and authorship order and credit. All this may be done informally, without a conventional proposal and committee review for approval. It's more organic and develops as a student's research progresses and coalesces into a thesis or dissertation project.

Regardless of your discipline or degree program, the following steps can help develop a research interest into a significant and feasible project. There are also specific requirements of your adviser and degree program, so be sure you are asking questions to identify and adhere to all expectations. (See Appendix D for a list of questions to guide you.)

Once you have your research topic, even if you have not yet identified your specific research question or hypothesis or argument, compile your reading list. Include books and articles recommended by your adviser and faculty as well as ones you have discovered through your courses and any previous research. Begin to organize these readings by broad topic areas, which you will refine and narrow as you proceed. For example, you may start reading about children's social cognition, then children's moral development, then moral reasoning, and then children's moral reasoning related to their social interactions. As you narrow your topic, you will focus your reading list more specifically and begin to identify research questions that interest you and have some degree of novelty or originality. You will read the classic literature in the field and perhaps even related fields. For example, as a graduate student I read in sociology about gender roles and identification for my master's thesis, and I read philosophy and the historical thinking about human morality and decision-making even though my research is in developmental child psychology. You also need to find the newest published or soon-to-be-published articles to read by contacting researchers and scholars who have published in your specialized area and who may share their drafts in progress or copies of their soon-to-be-published work.

As you read, take notes, which you may eventually use in your thesis or dissertation in your review of the literature. Even if you don't use all your notes as thesis or dissertation text, writing about what you read will help you understand and retain the information, which will guide you as you develop your research question and thesis argument. To be clear, I'm using *thesis* in two ways here. Thesis is the overall project and document you produce to complete your master's degree. Thesis also refers to the approach you take to exploring your research question; it's the main argument you plan to make in your project. A thesis example might be, "There is a relationship between children's moral reasoning and the type of interaction they experience with their peers, including positive and negative social interaction." Then you set out to prove your argument or examine the variables to determine their relationship. In this example, positive and negative social interaction are the independent variables you observe, control, and measure; moral reasoning is the dependent or outcome variable. It's all right if you don't know about these yet; this and much more will be covered when you take research methods and statistics courses.

By the end of your second semester in your master's program, and during the second or third year of your doctoral program, you will design your research methods and get final approval from your adviser and graduate committee to conduct your research. In addition, if you are interviewing or observing children or adults, you will use what you have written in your proposal to apply for approval to do research with human subjects. This process is referred to as Institutional Review Board approval. All institutions have a committee that reviews and approves research that includes

human subjects prior to its start. Each institution has its own process and forms for review and approval, all of which have been developed under federal guidelines. You will provide the committee with information about

- the purpose of your study, including research questions and hypothesis;
- details of your methods (observation, survey, experiments, etc.);
- methods for recruiting participants (subjects);
- participants' tasks;
- time commitment and compensation, if any, for participants;
- demographic or personal information you will collect about or from participants;
- plans to get informed consent from participants before starting research and permission from parents for participants under age 18;
- any risks or possible harm to participants and how you will minimize or ameliorate them;
- any benefits to participating in the research; and
- plans to maintain confidentiality and data security

If you are doing research with animals, your adviser or the lab you are working in is required to receive approval for research with animals from your institution's Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee before any animals are procured.

In your proposal you will describe your research and the literature that provides the background and context for your research. You will write your proposal in three sections: the introduction, review of literature, and methods. Later, you will revise and expand these sections to become the first

three chapters of your thesis or dissertation. The methods section can be written in the future tense, for example, "I will identify 3 groups of 20 children and will interview subjects in each group using 1 of 3 experimental conditions." Once your research proposal is approved, and you've completed the research, simply change the text to past tense, "I identified 3 groups of 20 children and interviewed them. . . ." Some advisers encourage students to write the proposal using past tense, as if the research had already been conducted, to save effort and time changing the tense for the completed thesis.

In the proposal, you will do the following. Describe your research question or hypothesis. This should be something that is beyond interesting to you; you should be excited, even passionate about this topic. It should also be something that is manageable by you. Be realistic about your access to the research materials or equipment and advising you will need to complete the project in a reasonable amount of time. A master's thesis does not need to be original research, but a dissertation should be. Ideas will come from your course work; your broader reading beyond classes; and the research being done by your adviser, lab mates, or research group. Be sure your topic is narrow enough so you are able to complete your thesis with the time and resources you have (and your adviser's time and patience). State your research question in such a way to show that it can be operationalized. In other words, it should be a question that can be answered by your measurement or analysis.

Describe the literature that situates your proposed research in the relevant empirical, historical, philosophical, or cultural context. This section is referred to as the review of the literature. As you start to consider your research

question you will begin to gather articles and books about your topic. Faculty and advanced graduate students can suggest good resources. You should also search relevant online databases, such as GEOBASE (for earth and environmental science, www.elsevier.com/solutions/engineering-village/content/geobase), Historical Abstracts (for world history, www.ebsco.com/products/research-databases/historical-abstracts), and PsycINFO (for psychology, www.apa.org/pubs/databases/psycinfo/index.aspx), which are a few of the dozens available. (See chapter 7 for information about citation management, including importing citation information directly from an online database.) The literature review in your proposal should be extensive enough to demonstrate your breadth of knowledge about your topic. You can expand it for the thesis, especially if you find unanticipated results from your research that you decide to address. (New literature is not usually added to the results or discussion sections; you revise the literature review to include them.)

In describing your research methods, write about the methods you will use to gather your data, whether they are experiments, surveys, observations, fieldwork, or archive research. Describe your methods in enough detail so another researcher could replicate your study from your proposal. In this section you also describe any analysis, whether quantitative or qualitative, that you will use to examine and report your results.

These three sections constitute the research proposal you will submit to your adviser and graduate committee. Use this information as a guide for drafting your proposal or prospectus and for asking your adviser about the expectations for a proposal in your field and specific graduate program. Some graduate programs provide their students with a guide or template for starting to draft the proposal.

Identify all the good advice and helpful resources, and get started. Once completed and approved, you are ready to begin your research.

32

Writing a Thesis

You must write a thesis that you are able to write. This rule may seem trivial, but it is true, and many a thesis has been dramatically aborted because this rule was broken.

—Umberto Eco

Graduate students pursue a master's research degree, usually a master of science or master of art, because they want a career doing research or want to pursue a doctoral degree, which is also a research degree. Other, nonresearch master's degrees are referred to as a professional master's degree or terminal master's degree. They are designed to prepare graduate students for careers other than research, and although they may include a capstone experience such as an internship or a project with a final paper, the degree requirements don't include a thesis. Most research master's degrees require two years, occasionally more, of course work and research, and they culminate with the presentation and defense (an oral exam) of the research project.

Your thesis research may be historical, theoretical, or experimental. Or you may be doing an evaluation study of some clinical practice or educational application. The following description of thesis research is not meant to

be definitive. Your job is to ask questions of your adviser, your program's director of graduate studies, your course instructors, advanced students in your programs, and your graduate program administrative assistant. (The administrative assistant is often the most knowledgeable and the most helpful in directing you to information and resources you need as a graduate student.) In fact, one of the most important things you will learn in graduate school is to ask questions, along with learning whom to ask. Conducting research and writing a thesis in the humanities, life sciences, or social sciences vary according to standards of the discipline. Your graduate program as well as your adviser and graduate committee will also have specific requirements. The graduate program requirements should be described in a graduate student handbook; your adviser's expectations may not be in writing, so use the information provided here to guide you in knowing what questions to ask to get the information you need at every step throughout the process.

A master's thesis is not necessarily original research. It might be a replication study that repeats and confirms research previously conducted by others. It is usually small in scale (certainly smaller than the scope of a dissertation) and limited by the shorter time it takes to complete the degree and the resources for conducting the research. For graduate students in a doctoral program, a thesis completed in the first two years of the program can be a pilot project that serves as the foundation for the later and larger dissertation research.

Your thesis, which might be the first research you've conducted, especially from beginning to end, includes the following five steps:

1. Choose a research question.
2. Create a conceptual or theoretical framework.
3. Design the methods of your study.
4. Collect and analyze data, which may be from experiments, interviews, observations, surveys, fieldwork, or archives or library research.
5. Write and communicate your results to various audiences, which include your adviser and committee, your peers in department colloquiums and seminars, and the larger research and scholarly community in your field at conferences and in printed and online journal articles. Your research may have even broader appeal, and you could publish essays and opinion pieces in newspapers or be cited or quoted in phone or e-mail interviews by other writers.

At the writing stage you may be producing multiple manuscripts based on the needs of the audiences (print or presentation or invited address). In some fields you have opportunities to present your work in progress, which is a different manuscript from the one you will produce when your research is completed and you are reporting results and directions for future research.

Research you may have done as an undergraduate provides a good start, regardless of the role and responsibilities you had. Even being part of a research group or lab allows you to observe collaborative science, ethical research practices, and how to address delays or dead-ends in research. This is all valuable knowledge when you begin independent research as a graduate student. Master's students are expected to work more independently than undergraduates, doctoral students more independently than master's students, and postdoctoral fellows more independently than doctoral students.

As you prepare to write your thesis, read theses written by others, especially your adviser's students. They provide a template and guide to format, length, and structure. Another good early approach is to develop a schedule and deadline for each step, which helps you identify all the important and necessary things you need to do from start to completion. It helps you to be realistic about the time you need. If your project can't be accomplished with the time and financial resources you have, can you reduce its scope? Can you extend your time in graduate school? Do you really want to, and will your adviser allow it? A schedule gives you a plan, which should include weekly and daily goals, to follow for the next 6 to 12 months.

After you have received the necessary approvals to begin your research, you will collect your data, through experiments, observations, surveys, fieldwork, library or archive research, or other methods, in accordance with the description in your proposal. Any deviations from your plan should be approved by your adviser; some modifications in research with people may need to be reviewed again and approved by the Institutional Review Board.

After you have gathered your data, you will begin to analyze it, either quantitatively or qualitatively. You will have already made decisions about analytical methods and described this in your proposal. Most institutions have a statistical consulting office to answer questions or help resolve problems at this stage, so find these resources at your school. Once you have analyzed your data and have results, your first writing task is to prepare the tables, figures, or images you will include in your thesis. Once you have prepared these graphic depictions of your results, it will be easier to start to draft your content. The tables and figures serve as an outline to focus and guide your writing.

Also meet or check in with your adviser regularly at this stage to get the adviser's agreement that you are focusing on the most significant findings. Don't get too far in your writing only to discover your adviser has different expectations about the final product.

If you are in the humanities you also analyze your data, which are in the form of your notes taken from the field, library, or archives. Your analysis is developing and reorganizing your outline, or you may identify themes you have discovered in your reading or fieldwork. Then you write. Communicate regularly with your adviser as you begin writing. Students in labs and research groups typically see their adviser every day, even while writing. Students in the humanities can begin to feel isolated when they write, so they should make a plan to get regular guidance from their adviser, especially if their progress is slowed or delayed because they need guidance.

One of the best pieces of advice for writing a thesis, or any document of considerable length, is, "Write everything that comes into your head, but only in the first draft. Your thesis exists to prove the hypothesis that you devised at the outset, not to show the breadth of your knowledge" (Eco, 2015, p. 151). Be certain you focus on your argument. Use your outline to guide your writing, which helps you to stay on schedule and meet your deadline.

Schimel (2011) encourages writers (and this applies to writing in the humanities and the social sciences as well) to focus on telling the story of your research. Citing the work of Heath and Heath, he suggests writing a thesis story in the following ways:

- Keep it simple. This does not mean being simplistic nor lessening the academic and intellectual rigor

of your research and writing. Find the core essence of your complex ideas and describe them in a clear, specific, and concise way. Schimel (2011) said, "Cut through the clutter to see the simple in the complex" (p. 18).

- Make it unexpected. Focus on the unknowns of new questions, new insights, and new knowledge. The knowledge gap you are addressing in your thesis may be small, but this small step could be very important in making a contribution.
- Keep it concrete. According to Strunk and White (1999), "The surest way to arouse and hold the reader's attention is by being specific, definite and concrete" (p. 21). Identify the fundamental, foundational building blocks of the important more abstract concepts, and describe those with data, examples, and illustrations.
- Be credible. You make your work trustworthy by grounding it in previous research and acknowledging those whose work precedes yours.
- Be emotional. What does emotion have to do with writing about your research? It shows curiosity on your part and elicits excitement on the part of your readers. Involve your readers in the exploration you made in finding your research question and gathering the data.
- Tell stories. The last element you should include in your writing is the story of each step in your exploration, and make it compelling. Schimel (2011) said, "You are not just presenting your results, you are telling a story (p. 67).

Use these elements as a checklist when you write each chapter of your thesis. Your thesis may be the longest paper or manuscript you have written to date. Don't be discouraged by the length of time it takes or the challenges you may face. Focus on the satisfaction you will experience

when it is complete and you are holding a bound copy in your hands.

Even if you don't plan to write a doctoral dissertation subsequent to your master's thesis, I encourage you to read the next chapter about writing a dissertation. It includes additional strategies for organizing and completing your writing.

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Writing a Dissertation

Coming up against a brick wall is what writing often feels like. You work and you work and you work and you work. And for months or years on end, you're just a total dray horse, and then you finally finish something, and the next day you look at it and you think, "How did that get there?"

—Deborah Eisenberg

If you are ready to begin your research and write your dissertation, then congratulations! You likely have successfully completed your course work. Perhaps you have passed a first- or second-year exam (sometimes referred to as the *Q* or qualifying exam). Your adviser and graduate committee have approved your proposal (also called a prospectus, usually in the humanities), and you have successfully completed the general or preliminary exam, usually at the end of the third or fourth year of a doctoral program. At the University of Tennessee it's called the comprehensive exam, at Columbia University it's the MPhil exam, at Cornell University it's the A Exam, and at Northwestern University it's the qualifying exam. Regardless of the name of the exam, determine when your adviser expects you to have completed it. Not everyone passes on the first attempt,

but your program's policy may allow you a second chance. In advance of the exam, do the following:

- Make a plan for preparing for the exam. Think ahead and plan backward.
- Identify the books and articles you must read. Start by compiling a list with suggestions from your adviser and graduate committee members; some departments have a program-wide list.
- Start an electronic folder or cardboard box to organize your materials.
- Consider the note-taking system you will use to help you retain what you read. Outline or write your notes; don't just highlight them.

Preparing thoroughly and in such an organized fashion for your comprehensive exam gives you a head start in researching and writing your dissertation.

After you have successfully completed the exam, you are admitted to candidacy for the doctoral degree; research and writing the dissertation is the next step. (Sometimes this is referred to as *ABD* [all but dissertation]). This term sometimes carries negative connotations because of the number of doctoral candidates who never move beyond ABD to PhD. Remember, PhD is a degree; ABD is not. Don't get stuck at this point. The prep work you have done to be ready for research and dissertation writing should move you quickly into this fun and challenging stage.

Even if you previously completed a master's thesis, I encourage you to read the previous chapter on writing a thesis. It includes some organization and writing strategies that will help you write your dissertation. A thesis differs from a dissertation in several distinct ways. A dissertation takes longer to complete for reasons of scope and resources.

Writing a master's thesis might be your first time to independently conduct research; you will usually work with more supervision than you will as a doctoral student doing a dissertation. But the knowledge and skills needed for preparation, planning, and the organization and management of your time and project are similar.

Another way a dissertation can differ from a thesis is the format. A thesis and a dissertation may be written in the more conventional chapter format: introduction, literature review, methods, results, and discussion. Increasingly, however, advisers are encouraging students to instead write the dissertation as three publishable or published papers with a separate introduction and conclusion to integrate or link the three papers into a coherent body of research. For some students, one or more of their papers might be published before they enter the job market. Discuss this option with your adviser.

So your dissertation awaits. How to start? The following contains the essential steps from formulating the research question to the dissertation defense. Note that there are differences and distinctions in these steps based on your discipline. Most graduate schools cluster programs in broad disciplinary categories, usually humanities, social sciences, life sciences, and physical sciences including engineering. There are some within-category differences, some of which vary by institution. That's why it's important to learn as much as you can about the requirements and expectations specific to your institution, degree program, and adviser. The following should help you ask pertinent questions.

On the first day of my doctoral program, I was trying to locate Purdue University's student union for new student orientation, and an advanced graduate student offered to show me. While we walked, his first question was, "So

is your dissertation going to be empirical or theoretical?" Oh no, I'm in big trouble, I thought. I don't know what that means. I had just completed a thesis for my master's at another institution, but I don't think I knew the word *empirical*. What is a theoretical dissertation anyway? This did not bode well for my graduate school success. But I learned to ask a lot of questions, and you will too. I finished my doctoral degree 3 years, 8 months, and 21 days later, and you will, too—finish, that is.

Many students begin their graduate program with some idea of what they want to research. Research experience as an undergraduate or master's student can focus your interest on a topic. Many graduate students apply for admission to a specific program and institution explicitly to work with a faculty member whose research aligns with their interest. Or it may be that students identify, refocus, or change their research direction based on course work, lab rotations, or conversations with faculty and advanced graduate students. Some graduate students arrive not certain of what their research topic might be. That's okay. Ask a lot of questions, have robust conversations with your peers, and do a lot of reading. You will catch up. You may decide on a topic and then choose an adviser with expertise in that area, or you may choose an adviser first, and under that adviser's guidance, explore various topics before deciding on one.

Your fellow graduate students are a good resource at this stage. Talk to others in your entering class. What are they working on? What is their strategy for identifying and developing a research question? Talk to students who are one, two, and three years ahead of you. Ask for their advice about plans and strategies they found effective. There are many paths to a successful dissertation and degree

completion. Find the strategies that fit your needs; use new strategies as your needs and motivation change and especially as your deadlines approach.

Once you choose a topic, start writing about it. Write what you know already. Make a list of what you need to read, start reading, and write as you read. Single (2010) describes this as interactive reading; if you highlight text instead of taking notes as you read, then you won't bother reading it. She encourages students to "collect notes, not books" (Single, 2010, p. 58). Taking notes as you read allows you to interact with and think critically about the material. Single's (2010) system for academic writing with interactive reading and interactive note taking reminds me of what I began doing as a freshman in college. First, I took notes in outline and summary form as I read, then I reviewed these notes right before class. I reviewed them again each evening following the lecture and discussion, annotating and elaborating on my notes. (My choice of taking notes rather than highlighting was based on the childhood admonition to not write in books.) Second, I would pretend to do a mock lecture or presentation on what I had read. (You know you really understand something once you have to teach it to others.) Third, I would write out questions and try to use what I learned from the readings to answer them as a practice test. These multiple ways of interacting with the material helped me to identify what I understood from my reading, identify gaps in my understanding, be able to better recall the material, and ultimately write more coherently and concisely for exams and papers.

Whether you are in a lab, the field, or an archive doing your research, you should continue to write about your discoveries as you conduct the research. This integration of

your research and writing will keep critical elements of your dissertation moving forward. Don't think of them as separate and sequential stages. If one should slow or bog down, you can continue to progress on the other, which keeps your motivation and momentum going.

A dissertation can take a year or more in the sciences and three or more in the humanities and social sciences. Develop a long-term plan and schedule. (Remember, think ahead and plan backward.) Develop immediate short-term goals that guide you to the next essential task you must do to continue your progress. Start early and make writing a part of your daily routine and schedule; this helps you avoid slowing or stopping your progress when you encounter obstacles.

One more consideration: Who will be your dissertation support partner or team? This is important. When you entered graduate school, from orientation through course work, you probably experienced a sense of camaraderie and community with your cohort. Your program and the graduate school had events and activities to help you develop a sense of belonging and support. Once you begin your research, you can feel isolated from your peers when you travel to faraway field sites or archives or spend endless hours in the library or in the lab conducting research. Your research may take longer, sometimes for reasons out of your control, and your progress is slowed. Your adviser begins to encourage greater independence, which can lessen the sense of community you found earlier in your program (Allen, 2015). A writing partner or group can provide the support and encouragement you need. (See chapter 27 for ways to start and use a support group.) Appendix M provides a list of resources for writing your thesis or dissertation and

journal articles and books. But remember, you should do your research and write rather than read about writing. At Cornell we have used some of these articles and books for our summer book club, where we read and discuss writing strategies over a meal. But then we write.

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Writing a Journal Article

Fortitudine vincimus (*By endurance we conquer)*
—Latin adage

As a graduate student you will be expected to submit manuscripts for publication in the major journals in your field. Your experience as a student thus far has prepared you to some extent for journal writing and publishing. In graduate seminars you have been reading your field's top journals, including those published by your field's disciplinary society and other (sometimes referred to as second-tier) journals. You may have been noticing the topics and type of research that get published. You may have noted the format and writing style required for a manuscript submission. You may have read the journals' guidelines for researchers wishing to submit their manuscript for review and publication. What you learn about writing from your extensive reading in graduate school will be very useful when you start to write your own manuscripts for journal submission prior to writing your dissertation. In fact, in some fields it has become very common not to write a conventional dissertation of five or six chapters. Instead students write three journal articles, submitting each for publication as they are completed. Then for the dissertation, the articles are compiled

with an introduction and a conclusion. This compilation becomes the dissertation presented to the student's graduate committee for defense. Manuscripts that are coauthored can be included in a student's dissertation as long as the role and contribution of the doctoral candidate is significant and specified. The following steps and strategies can help you prepare a manuscript for journal submission.

Decide Authorship

An early step in writing an article for publication, even before you begin your research, is to learn about your adviser's, lab's, or research group's authorship policy and practices. This is essential in fields where your research is funded by a faculty member or collaborative research where your project is a component of a larger project with a faculty adviser or other students as collaborators.

A good way to start is to inquire about your adviser's policy for determining authorship. If you are working collaboratively in a lab or research group, your adviser will likely assign authorship responsibilities and the resulting order of authorship. As first author, you should have a significant role in the design, data collection, analysis and interpretation, and writing the first draft of the manuscript. Throughout the research and writing, your adviser may reassign roles and responsibilities, with a resulting change in the order of authorship if any of the coauthors are not fulfilling their responsibilities. So be sure you understand the work and contributions you are expected to make and the deadlines for completing them.

The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (2018) has developed a very useful guide and

discussion of the issues related to authorship and acknowledgments. The professional society in your discipline likely also has a policy and best practices to guide you. I get more questions from graduate students about authorship issues than any other topic in research ethics. Unfortunately, these questions almost always arise long after the manuscript writing has begun and after authorship should have been openly discussed and decided.

If you are writing a journal article in the humanities and many social sciences, you might be the sole author, or your adviser might be a second author. In programs where graduate students' research does not require labs, equipment, and multiple students and postdoctoral fellows, you are more likely to be the only author navigating the submission process and related decision-making.

Select a Journal

An early step is to select a journal for submission of your article. Make your first choice, perhaps a top-tier journal, and a second one. Depending on your field, your adviser may make the decision or direct you to a specific journal. Either way, the choice will be based on the relevance of your research for a particular journal. The primary journals always include peer review whereby the editor asks researchers and scholars with expertise on the topic of your research to review, critique, and make recommendations regarding publishing, such as advising to publish (often with some requested revisions), to revise with more major changes and resubmit, or to reject the manuscript.

Once you identify your journal, read the author guidelines, which indicate

- the length of the article (the top journal in my field has a maximum length of 40 pages; manuscripts beyond that are returned with the expectation that the author will shorten the manuscript and resubmit),
- format (research articles, research reports, reviews, etc.),
- citation style and other elements required by the journal,
- details of the licensing agreement and copyright transfer, and
- any information requested in the cover letter, for example, whether you have similar manuscripts already published or under review elsewhere.

The author guidelines may also request that you identify any financial or other conflicts of interest and for you to refer to the code of ethical standards of the journal (or professional society that publishes it) and any authorship policies the journal recommends. For example, the journal *Science* (2018) requires that anyone listed as a coauthor should have made a "substantial contribution to

- the conception or design of the work, or
- the acquisition, analysis or interpretation of data, or
- the creation of new software used in the work, or
- the drafted work or substantial revisions to it" (para. 1).

Each coauthor must review and approve the final manuscript before it is submitted, including making any revisions to a coauthor's work. In case there are "questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work," all authors must cooperate with the ensuing investigation and resolution (*Science*, 2018, p. 2). For additional guidance for graduate students on determining authorship in the sciences, see Noble (2001).

Create a Journal Article Template

Once you have identified the journal you will submit to, create a template for your manuscript. Your template should include the following: title, abstract, introduction, literature, methods, results, discussion, conclusions, references, and supporting information, (e.g., links to images, video clips, or appendices). Include your position or title, your affiliation, your source of funding for the research, and an acknowledgment of the contributions of anyone who is not listed as a coauthor (only if the journal publishes this information). Keep a copy of the blank template; you will likely submit subsequent articles to the same journals as part of the larger research project you've drawn your data from, and this will make it quicker to get started with each new manuscript draft.

The sections of the article will vary depending on the journal and type of article (empirical, review, report, commentary, monograph, etc.). But creating a template, a variant of developing an outline or filling the reservoir (see chapter 11), promotes efficiency and helps you avoid a delay in starting your writing because you have an early draft when you start each journal manuscript by using this existing template.

Construct the Figures

For empirical articles, your initial step is to construct all the data tables, charts, and images you need to show your results. Include titles for your illustrations and legends to explain the statistical analysis. Once you do this and discuss your findings and these figures with your adviser and any coauthors, it should be fairly easy to draft the text for

your results and discussion sections organized around your figures.

Start Writing

Use the decisions you and your adviser have already made about authorship to start compiling and writing your article, or the sections for which you are responsible. As first author you will likely write the complete first draft. You can gather text from your earlier unpublished work, your research proposal, as well as from the prewriting you did while conducting experiments or doing fieldwork or library research.

Even while you are still doing your research, whether experiments or fieldwork or library research, you can start writing. Remember, you will think about your research in different ways when you write about it. You can also more quickly identify the gaps that need more experiments or more reading once you start writing. Even if you don't think you are ready, write.

Write Each Section

Unless you have coauthors writing components of the articles, prepare an outline and fill the reservoir for each section in your template to write your first draft. Use the 20-80 approach (described in chapter 22). Once you have completed your analysis and constructed your figures, use 20% of your time before your deadline to write your first draft, then use the remaining 80% of your time to get feedback from your adviser, coauthors, and others and revise and complete your manuscript. As a final step, decide on the title and write your abstract. As you know by now, the process of

writing may take you in a different direction from what you expected. So once you have your draft, determine the best title and abstract that most accurately reflect your research and that will attract readers. Readers usually scan the title and abstract first, then the figures and references to decide whether to read your article (Pain, 2016).

Write the Author's Note and Acknowledgments

In the note, provide all authors' names in the correct order and their affiliation. Some journals require you to indicate any conflicts of interest and specify the contributions of each coauthor. For example, who conceptualized the study, developed the methods, provided the software and other resources, conducted data analysis, drafted the manuscript, revised the manuscript, supervised the research, and provided funding? In science publications the last author listed is usually the principal investigator who wrote the funding proposal, hired staff and postdoctoral fellows, and served as adviser to the graduate students conducting their research in the lab.

You should also provide the name and address of the corresponding author, who is the person responsible for answering inquiries related to the article content once it is published online and in print.

Revise Based on Feedback

This step is as critical as your writing. Feedback is a gift from your adviser, coauthors, and reviewers and can help you improve your manuscript in ways you may not have noticed. Conversations with these reviewers about their feedback can also help you improve your ideas and writing.

Finalize and Check Your Manuscript

Read the author guidelines again to make sure you adhere to the journal's requirements for content, format, and the specifics of submission. Send a final copy to your adviser and to any coauthors so all can agree that the article is ready for submission.

Submit and Wait for a Response

Your article may be accepted with a request for minor revisions, you may be invited to revise and resubmit for another round of reviews, or your article could be rejected. If the decision is the latter, work with your adviser and any coauthors to determine if the article can be rewritten substantially, perhaps with new data or additional analysis, and resubmitted to the same journal. Most likely, you will decide to do some revising and submit to your second-choice journal.

Respond to Feedback

If your diligent efforts are rewarded, and your manuscript is accepted, make the requested revisions as soon as you can. After the final revised version has been accepted, the editor places it in the queue for publication. For the top journal in my field, standard production time is two to three months for online publication and up to eight months for print publication. The review, editorial decisions, and revision processes can take at least that long depending on the journal. Your journal may be in a field where information needs to be published quickly (health-related fields) or where information can become outdated because the state of the

knowledge is advancing so rapidly (computer and information science). If you are encouraged to revise and resubmit, make your revisions in a reasonable amount of time. One graduate student I know was scooped by another researcher who published two weeks before the student's dissertation defense. The two works were so similar it took the student an additional year to revise his dissertation to include a critique of the newly published research so it would not appear he plagiarized the first-published work nor failed to know about the new and significant contribution it made. So work quickly, and don't get scooped.

Once you and your adviser and any coauthors have completed your revisions, draft a cover letter that responds point by point to the reviewers' suggested revisions. Explain the reason for any recommendation you have chosen not to address or decided to address in a way that differs from what the reviewers requested. Providing all this information can help the editor review and move your manuscript to publication more quickly.

The journal may send you a copyedited manuscript for final essential editing and initial proofing. Many journals skip this step. If so, the last step is to review the page proofs (sometimes referred to as PDFs) once the editor sends them. You usually have a very brief time to do this (maybe only two days). Your goal is to make sure all content (especially the figures) is exactly as you intended and that there are no errors in this final copy.

Ready to start writing a journal article? If it's your first, and if you are writing without a coauthor, read Fischer and Zigmond (2004) for more advice about content, from the title to the references.

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Writing a Book Proposal for an Editor or Agent

Being a writer is a very peculiar sort of a job: it's always you versus a blank sheet of paper (or a blank screen) and quite often the blank piece of paper wins.

—Neil Gaiman

If you want your writing to appear in book form, you likely will need to write a book proposal to send to an editor or an agent. I'll share some tips for getting started. But first, I will confess that my first book did not come from a proposal to an editor. I was in my faculty office late on a Friday afternoon, when someone I thought was a textbook representative knocked on my door. We spoke briefly about my classes and current text selection, and as she left, she inquired, "Are you writing anything?" She left my office with seven chapters of a textbook-like manuscript a colleague and I had written to use in our own classes. By Monday she e-mailed asking if she could send it out for review. A few months later she e-mailed asking if we could write an additional seven chapters, and two years later we had a published textbook. It's now in its fourth edition; we learned a lot about textbook writing and publishing only by doing it.

The next book came about because a publisher approached me after a conference presentation and suggested that the content would make a good book. I wrote a proposal, guided by the editor's suggestions for the book, which was far more help than I expected to receive at such an early stage. The next book, the one you are reading now, I wrote and used with graduate students and then sent to an editor, who agreed to publish it without seeing a book proposal. I have since written a book proposal for a trade book. Just know that there are multiple paths to publishing your book, some of them very unplanned and unexpected.

If you are submitting your book proposal to a specific publisher, your task is easier because most publishers describe on their website what they require in a proposal. Their guidelines are specific and not too onerous at this first step. In fact, some publishers will accept a letter of inquiry before you submit a formal proposal. The letter can be a page or two and include a brief description of your research or scholarship, its contribution to the field, and your manuscript's fit with the publisher's mission.

As an essential step, look at the catalog of recent titles from a publisher. Do they publish in your topic area? Would they be a good fit for your book? If you have colleagues who have worked with the publisher you are considering, ask about their experiences and any advice they would offer. My colleague and I did not talk to other textbook authors when we first started writing, which we came to regret. Later we were surprised to learn how many of the nonwriting tasks we took on that our editor would have done if we had known to ask.

My publisher for this book, John von Knorring, suggests that early in the process of preparing a book proposal, all prospective authors should ask themselves these three questions:

1. For whom are you writing the book? (your audience)
2. What is the book about? (description of the content)
3. What is new and distinct about your book? (compared to existing competition) (J. von Knorring, personal communication, March 14, 2018)

The third question, how your book compares to the competition, is the most important (and likely most time-consuming) part of the exercise. Perform a critical analysis of the other books on the market. How will your book contribute to and improve on the existing literature? How is your book different or better than those already on the market? If in this exercise you believe you can make a convincing case to editors that they should consider publishing your book, then proceed to writing a proposal.

Once you identify a publisher you wish to contact, review its guidelines for proposals and prepare your materials accordingly. Most proposals should address the following elements:

- What is the scope and content of your book? Emphasize the new contributions to the topic you can make. Avoid jargon. Show how clearly and simply you can present your ideas.
- Describe the audience for your book. Are you writing a scholarly monograph or a general interest book? Who will buy it? Individuals? Libraries? Obviously, the larger and broader the audience, the more likely an editor can justify the cost of publishing and marketing your book.
- Is your book likely to be adopted as a textbook? What are the potential markets for the book? Is it for undergraduate courses or graduate seminars, courses commonly taught at most colleges, or is it for a highly specialized course? What textbooks are currently being

used for this course, and how will your book compete? Frequently, very popular books are already on the market for the course you have in mind, so describe how your proposed book will compare and compete. When I first began teaching I used a very popular introduction to child psychology text in my field by Guy Lefrancois (2000). It was very comprehensive, skillfully written, funny, and the author included updated photos of his children in each new edition. I swore never to try to write a textbook to compete. Try to be that author, the one who is so good, there will never be any competition.

- Do you have a great title? Many writers assume their editor will help them develop a compelling title for the book. Do this yourself, create a title that compels your editor to want to publish your book.
- Will your book include illustrations, photographs, or other features that will affect the cost or length or require special formatting? If so, be sure to describe these.
- What related professional activities underscore your qualifications and expertise on this topic, and which of them can also function to help you market the book and your expertise? At which conferences do you regularly present your research and scholarship? Have you been invited to other schools for guest lectures and presentations? Do you have a following on social media related to your research? Do you have a website that can help promote your book and any speaking engagements related to its publication? This information can demonstrate your expertise on the topic of your book as well as help you and your editor develop a marketing strategy using your existing network and professional opportunities.
- Unless a completed chapter is requested, include only a table of contents, annotated with a brief summary (a

few sentences) of each chapter. Later the publisher may request a chapter or previously published essays or articles you have written on the same topic. These provide evidence of your writing skill, and published articles demonstrate interest from others in your topic.

- Indicate when you think the proposed book can be completed. Be realistic. Don't overpromise.
- Does your institution have a subvention program, either with funds or services? Subventions help new faculty support the publication of their first book, especially if the book is highly specialized and not likely to sell many copies, or if there are extra costs associated with special features or the format of the book. If a subvention is available, let the publisher know in your proposal or cover letter. Luey (2010) has a helpful section on whether authors should pay a subvention from personal funds to help get the book published. In brief, Luey says you should do this if (a) you have the funds; (b) it's a reasonable amount, up to $5,000 for a standard book, but more if there will be color, illustrations, lots of tables, or complex typesetting; (c) your contract allows the return of your subvention if the book sells well enough to become profitable; and (d) you need a published book for tenure or promotion. Under these conditions, your investment will be worth it.
- Include a copy of your curriculum vitae with your proposal.

At this stage you may submit your letter or proposal to more than one publisher as you determine the fit between your work and a publisher's needs. But be sure you state in your cover letter that you are submitting to multiple publishers. Publishers spend time and money for peer reviews

at this stage, and they want to know if there is a chance you may commit to another publisher.

A publisher may respond by requesting a sample chapter or the complete manuscript if it's ready as they move forward considering your proposal. After this step, a publisher may offer you a contract to lock in your commitment to publish. If so, once you have read and agree to the terms of the contract, you should withdraw the proposal or manuscript from other publishers still considering it. Read the contract carefully; ask a colleague or an attorney to review it if it's your first book contract.

You do not need an agent to contract and work with a publisher. Authors of scholarly and professional books rarely, if ever, receive an advance, so you don't need an agent to negotiate any financial terms. But if your topic is likely to attract attention beyond the academic world, you may consider working with an agent.

What do you need to do if you are trying to interest an agent in working with you to develop and sell your book to a publisher? An agent's role is to represent you, help you develop your proposal to send to publishers, and to oversee what is referred to as an *auction* of your book. The proposal you submit to an agent should include an introduction, annotated table of contents, a sample chapter or other published writing samples, and your curriculum vitae, which shows you will be a marketable author, that is, you have the skills, credentials, experience, and expertise (Lerner, 2010).

The agent will present your proposal to multiple publishers and work to get as large an advance as possible, which is the amount the publisher will agree to pay up front to secure publishing access to your book. Very skilled or very fortunate authors will have more than one publisher wanting to secure the rights to publish their book; on the

other hand, some very skilled or very fortunate authors are delighted when even a single publisher is interested.

As the author, you get about 25% of the amount of the advance on signing the contract to publish, an additional 25% when the manuscript is submitted, and the rest when the book is published. Agents typically receive 15% of your advance (Lerner, 2010).

An agent will guide you through this process, act on your behalf, and advocate for you. He or she can help you draft a proposal to send to one or more publishers that is better than the proposal you submitted to secure an agent. However, authors must also advocate for themselves and work in partnership with the publisher to promote the book. When Betsy Lerner published her memoir, a story of her mother's 50-year-and-counting weekly bridge group, she hired college students and provided pizza and beer as they scoured the Internet to find every bridge club in the country to e-mail with a blurb about her book (B. Lerner, personal communication, October 19, 2017).

Some agents will charge prospective authors a fee to read their manuscript as they consider whether to work with a new author. Avoid these agents and instead find one through a colleague or the PublishersMarketplace.com or LiteraryMarketplace.com websites.

Lerner (2010) is an excellent resource for learning more about working with editors and agents. Lerner has worked as a writer, an editor, and an agent, so her advice is very much an insider's view of the process.

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How to Think and Act Like a Writer

Exhilaration and groaning. Frustration and freedom. Inspiration and uncertainty. Abundance and emptiness. Blazing forth and muddling through . . . eking out, when all went well, my minimum daily allowance of usable prose.

—Philip Roth

It's simple. You must write. You can also think, worry, read, fret, take notes, agonize, organize your materials, worry, buy a new desk, worry, sharpen your pencils, agonize, wash your dishes, eat a snack, worry—but this is not writing. You must write. Writers write.

You must want to write, not to finish, or publish or get a job or receive approval or affection or recognition but to write. Tell yourself, "I really want to write today and will create all opportunities to do so, rather than avoiding all opportunities to write. I am writing today because I want to write." So all you have to do is write. You don't have to finish, you just have to write. It's freeing. Don't wait until you're ready. Don't wait until everything else is done. Don't wait until you are well rested. Don't wait until you've read

every book or article on the topic. You will never do all these things. If you wait, you'll never write or be a writer. Writers write.

Writing is hard, and there is nothing wrong with you if you find writing a challenge. Even the very best writers say it's hard, very hard. In an article about Random House editor Robert Loomis, Smith (2007) described Loomis's gentle suggestions to his writers. To Jim Lehrer he said, "Eureka! You did it, Jim. It's a wonderful novel." Then after a pause, "Almost. That is, except the space between the beginning and the ending" (paras. 9–10). To Maya Angelou he responded, "It's really good—almost" (para. 13). And to Calvin Trillin he said, "It's almost there. Everything is great but the beginning and the end. Which, of course, leaves the middle to be completely rewritten" (para. 7).

Commit to writing at least 90 minutes every day. When you absolutely do not have 90 minutes, then write for 15 minutes. Bribe yourself. Reward yourself. Hold yourself accountable. But write every day. Once you have made it a habit, then you can begin to write only 5 or 6 days a week.

Try to get into the flow and don't stop writing when you encounter challenges. Write through the obstacles. But remind yourself to keep going, keep writing. Remember: There is no such thing as writer's block. Writer's block is simply not writing. Write until you get in the flow and then keep writing.

Good writing takes time. You must start early. Give yourself time when not much is on the line. You must not procrastinate.

You will become a better writer the more you write. Drafting, even editing, will occur more quickly. After you

begin to think like a writer and act like a writer, you may begin to think like an editor as you write. It may never get easier. Sorry about that, but I know you can do this.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

YOUR WRITING SLOGAN

Wake Up
Write
Be Awesome
Exercise
Eat
Rest
Repeat

Appendix B

WRITING GOALS AND JOURNAL

Date

1. My writing goal for today is _____.
   I will write ___ new words today.
2. What new obstacles or challenges are you facing today?
3. What will you do to overcome these obstacles?
4. What new strategies have you learned that could make you a more productive writer?
5. Identify and list at least 2 of these strategies you will begin to use in the next 24 hours. Then, if they work for you, *make them a habit*.

At the end of your writing today,

1. How did you do in meeting your goals today? How many new words did you write?
2. Were there any obstacles or challenges you faced?
3. What will you do so these obstacles do not stop or slow your writing productivity?

4. Write an assessment of how your writing process worked for you today; include a brief summary of your work and use it as a guide to help you start to write and get to flow at your next writing session. Getting to flow means you are working with clear goals, deep concentration, a sense of control, and a belief that your abilities to accomplish the task surpass your anxiety and doubts that you can't (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). Chapter 14 discusses flow and its role in your productive writing.

Appendix C

WORD COUNT PROGRESS CHART

Date	*New words on primary project*	*New words on other projects*	*Writing goal(s) today*	*How did it go? What worked?*
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				

Date	*New words on primary project*	*New words on other projects*	*Writing goal(s) today*	*How did it go? What worked?*
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				

Appendix D

TWENTY STEPS TO WRITING YOUR THESIS OR DISSERTATION PROPOSAL OR PROSPECTUS

Do you like adventure? Are you excited by exploration? Are you okay with this not being a linear process and instead feel as if you were in a continuous loop of discovery, reading, writing, then more discovery, reading, and rewriting?

1. What interests you? (And why?)
2. What can reasonably be answered or addressed in the time you have with the support (all kinds—financial, mentoring, etc.) that you have?
3. Can this topic/project be a book (if you are in the humanities) or a published manuscript (if you are in the social or natural sciences)?
4. How interested in and supportive is your adviser/mentor/sponsor of this topic? This is essential for research requiring a lab, equipment, and lots of funding. It's less of a deal breaker in the humanities and some social sciences, but it prompts another ques-

tion: How independently can you work on this topic if it is not an area your adviser has much expertise or interest in?

5. Have you talked to your adviser about expectations and requirements for your proposal, including any guidelines and requirements of your graduate program and the graduate school?
6. Have you read other proposals, especially those written by your adviser's students who entered the program before you did? Offer to treat one or more of these students to coffee in exchange for their advice on writing a successful proposal for the adviser. Or e-mail several students asking, "What is the most valuable piece of advice I should follow when writing a proposal and doing research with our adviser?"
7. Have you completed a lot of reading, perhaps even written class papers on this topic? Now start writing. Even if you don't feel ready to write, start writing. It will help you to know what else you must read or discover or research.
8. One more thing before we get to content: Who is your audience? Think of the audience as you write. Seldom do you write for yourself or just your adviser or only your committee.
9. Does it help to consider a first draft as a series of questions?
   a. What is the issue or research question(s)?
   b. How is your work situated in the existing literature and context of previous research?
   c. What is your plan of work? What will you do?
   d. What do you expect to find?
   e. Why is this significant? Original? Of long-term interest to you?
   f. Do you have pilot data and earlier research work that is relevant?

   g. What sites or archives will you visit? What sources will you consult? What experiments will you conduct?
   h. What is your outline or the major points for each chapter?
9. What time line do you expect to follow to completion? Can you complete your proposed project within the time you have, that is, before your funding ends, your adviser loses patience, or you feel frustrated or bored with your topic? You must retain your good health and relationships. Research and writing that go on and on and on can cause both to suffer.
10. Can you prepare an outline or summary for your introduction (statement of purpose), a review of literature, methods (research design), analysis, and other necessary sections? (Steps 11 to 18 are additional steps you discover along the way in consultation with your adviser that are specific to your subject, discipline, department, or adviser. Add them to your list.)
11.
12.
13.
14.
15.
16.
17.
18.
19. Are you anxious about your research and writing? Anxiety is not a sign of incompetence, just inexperience. And none of us will ever do a research project we have done before because we're all inexperienced to some degree. Anxiety is normal. Make sure you know about and use the university resources available to you. At Cornell we have a Graduate Writing Service (for draft review and consultations), the Graduate School's Proposal/Thesis/

Dissertation Writing Boot Camp (and then monthly Reboots), the Graduate School Write-Ins at the Big Red Barn Student Center (morning writing space with a supportive peer community), and the English Language Support Office writing classes, workshops, and tutoring for international students. Find the comparable resources at your school and use them sooner rather than later.

20. Do you know the ethical dimensions and decisions at each step of your research? Failure to know and follow responsible and ethical conduct in research and writing has serious consequences for your academic and scholarly career. It is critical to your success for your research to be sound, responsible, and ethical. When you fail at this, all scientists and scholars suffer.

I used the following sources in preparing this list of questions and suggestions: Booth, Colomb, and Williams (2003) and Zinsser (1988, 2006).

Appendix E

THINK AHEAD AND PLAN BACKWARD

Date	*Task*	*Completed on [Date]*
May 28	Graduate with PhD!	
May 5	Submit final copy to Graduate School	
April 30	Submit revised copy to committee	
April 15	Dissertation defense	
April 1	Submit exam form to Graduate School	
March 15	Submit reading copy to committee	
February 15	Revise based on adviser feedback	
February 1	Revise and submit complete final draft to adviser	
January 22	Outline and draft conclusion	
January 15	Outline and draft introduction	

Date	*Task*	*Completed on [Date]*
January 10	Outline and draft discussion chapter	
January 8	Revise results chapter	
January 2	Outline and draft results chapter	
December 15	Outline and draft methods chapter	
December 8	Draft literature review	
December 2	Complete additional analysis	
December 1	Review analysis results with adviser	
November 22	Run analysis and draft tables for Experiment 3	
November 15	Run analysis and draft tables for Experiment 2	
November 1	Run analysis and draft tables for Experiment 1	
October 30	Draft list of tables and charts	
October 29	Outline and fill reservoir for literature review	
October 28	Outline and fill reservoir for introduction	
October 27	Meet with adviser to discuss completion plan	
October 26	Review lab notebooks	
October 25	Wrap up Experiment 3	

Appendix F

SAMPLE SCHEDULE FOR MY NEXT WRITING PROJECT

Section/Chapter	*Length (pages)*	*Pace (pages per day)*	*Time (days)*	*Revising and additional research (days)*	*Deadline*	*Date completed*
Preface	8	4	2	2	May 4	
Introduction	4	4	1	2	May 7	
Children's cognition and stressful events	16	4	4	4	May 15	
Children's psychological and emotional response to stress	12	4	3	3	May 22	
Helping children cope with stress	16	4	4	4	June 1	
Children and death	16	4	4	4	June 10	
Children, illness, and hospitalization	12	4	3	3	June 19	
Children, separation, and divorce	16	4	4	4	June 25	

Section/Chapter	*Length (pages)*	*Pace (pages per day)*	*Time (days)*	*Revising and additional research (days)*	*Deadline*	*Date completed*
Children and violence	12	4	3	3	July 2	
Children and natural disasters	12	4	3	3	July 11	
Children and war	16	4	4	4	July 20	
Children and new siblings	10	4	2.5	2	July 19	
Children and family moves	8	4	2	2	August 2	
Children and beginning school	8	4	2	2	August 6	
Children and political understanding	12	4	3	3	August 11	
What parents can do	8	4	2	2	August 18	
What teachers can do	8	4	3	3	August 23	
What government and society can do	4	4	1	1	August 28	
Conclusion	10	4	2.5	3	September 3	
Totals	208		53	54		

Note. Based on Zerubavel (1999).

Appendix G

OBSTACLES TO PRODUCTIVE WRITING

To what degree is each of the items listed here an obstacle for you? Use a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the greatest obstacle. What will you do to overcome this challenge?

Obstacle or challenge	*1 to 5*	*Strategy I will use to overcome this obstacle*
Making and sticking to a writing schedule		
Setting and meeting goals		
Setting and meeting deadlines		
Developing and using outlines		
Overcoming procrastination		
Overcoming perfectionistic tendencies		
Avoiding writer's block		
Staying motivated		

Obstacle or challenge	*1 to 5*	*Strategy I will use to overcome this obstacle*
Communicating with adviser		
Getting feedback from adviser		
Writing skills		
Revising and editing skills		
Finding a supportive writing partner or community		
Others:		

Appendix H

WORKING THROUGH WRITING OBSTACLES

The following are a few suggestions for communicating with your adviser.

Develop a focused research question for your thesis or dissertation that is feasible based on your available resources, especially time and budget. Ask your adviser and your graduate committee members if they agree that this is an appropriate topic and methodology in terms of scope and resources. Make a plan for how changes will be communicated to and approved by your adviser and committee. Remember: Your thesis or dissertation is not your life's work. If the scope appears limited to you (yes, you do have so very many innovative, cutting-edge, ground-breaking ideas; your adviser and committee are truly amazed by you), you can pursue additional research later or use some of your research data and scholarship gathered for your thesis or dissertation for books and articles beyond your dissertation.

Do not delay asking for help when you have concerns about your progress or challenges you are facing with your research and writing. You are not incompetent, just

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Adapted and used with permission from Hjortshoj, K. (2001). *Understanding writing blocks*. Cambridge: Oxford University Press.

inexperienced. This is your first time writing a thesis or dissertation, right? Fear, anxiety, and not knowing what to do are normal. Asking questions and asking for help are not signs of weakness. If you don't know enough about the research and writing process to ask questions of your adviser, then ask questions of your peers. But don't delay your research and writing because you are afraid to ask. Your funding may run out. Your adviser may lose patience or leave the university for another position (or die, heaven forbid, but it happens).

Make a plan for regular communication with your adviser, and ask your adviser to agree to this plan, especially the parts that require feedback from your adviser. Will there be weekly e-mail updates from you? Monthly meetings (especially at the research and writing stages)? If you or your adviser are away for the semester or year, how will you communicate? By e-mail, phone, videoconference, or all of these options?

Make a plan for regular communication with your committee, which might be less frequent than with your adviser. Committee members can be very helpful about their own areas of expertise (that's why they are on your committee). And in times of disagreement or outright conflict with your adviser (hopefully that never will happen), a committee member can step in to offer another perspective or to mediate or to take over as adviser if needed (heaven forbid, but it happens).

Figure out how to help your adviser remain engaged and responsive to your work. In addition to sending regular updates about your progress and chapter drafts once you start writing, keep your adviser updated in writing at each stage of your work, for example, when applying for graduate fellowships, writing proposals for conference presentations,

going on the job market, and so on. Make it easier for your adviser to know what you are doing and how to help you.

Following each meeting with your adviser or mentor and your committee, send a follow-up e-mail to summarize the discussion and confirm next steps. This can be a useful remedy for poor memory or note taking, to clarify confusing instructions, and to secure agreement on what needs to happen next on your part and that of your adviser and committee. Appendix I contains a form to record essential information before and after meetings with your adviser; it helps you to communicate with your adviser and committee about next steps, confirm what decisions were made, and serve as backup when there are differences of opinions.

Ask your adviser and committee for good examples of the writing they expect, either from their previous students' theses and dissertations or from articles or books in the field. These are referred to as mentor texts. They are not texts written by your mentor, although I'd be curious if your adviser or mentor recommends his or her own dissertation as the best example. If so, you might want to get a second opinion. I'm kidding.

Be specific about the feedback you are seeking when you submit a writing draft to your adviser (see chapter 25). Ask specific questions or direct your adviser to certain sections where you have determined there is a problem or gap. Hjortshoj (2001) says that faculty should not be line editing your writing, that is, checking spelling, punctuation, and word choice in an early draft. Although some faculty might do this for you with your final draft, other faculty will advise you to hire someone, but this can be expensive and may not be possible in the limited time you have allocated for editing. Is there another graduate student you can exchange time-sensitive editing services with? Faculty

should be commenting on your theoretical and conceptual framework, methodology, persuasive arguments, and conclusions, and helping guide the direction of your work.

This advice for graduate students is inspired by and adapted from Hjortshoj's (2001) "preventive" suggestions for faculty advisers to help students avoid "isolation, neglect and misunderstandings with their advisor" (pp. 141–142).

Appendix I

PROPOSAL, THESIS, DISSERTATION PROGRESS MEETING DATE

Checkpoint	*For today's meeting*	*Notes*
1	My action items since last meeting:	
2	Adviser action items since last meeting:	
3	Other developments since last meeting:	

Adapted and used with permission from Gardiner, M., & Kearns, H. (n.d.). Meeting agenda. Retrieved from https://www.ithinkwell.com.au/resources?product_id=84

Checkpoint	*For today's meeting*	*Notes*
4	Progress update on drafts: Introduction, literature review, methods, results, discussion, conclusions, other:	
5	Feedback from adviser:	
6	Questions and issues that need clarification:	
7	Adviser's questions:	
Before the next meeting		
8	My action items:	
9	Adviser's action items:	

Checkpoint	*For today's meeting*	*Notes*
10	Am I on schedule? Are there any challenges? How will I manage or address them?	
11	What is the next milestone or deliverable? By what date?	
12	When is our next meeting? (Send a reminder, with any deliverables, on [date].)	
13	What is the next most important thing you must do?	

Appendix J

PEER REVIEW AND CRITIQUE

The following are some suggestions for serving as a reader and reviewer for your peers. These suggestions were adapted and are used with permission from a handout by my colleague Michelle Cox, director of Cornell University's English Language Support Office.

This type of peer review is different from the peer review by anonymous colleagues when a manuscript is submitted to a journal for publication, and the reviews inform an editor's decision about whether to publish. Review and critique for your peers is more supportive and should help the author with the writing process, especially with rethinking, reorganizing, and revising. Peer review with your graduate colleagues involves (usually) an in-person meeting in which the author describes the work, purpose, and goals for this piece of writing. Your role as a reviewer is to offer feedback, support, and encouragement. You will want the same when it's their turn to critique your work.

- The author starts by describing the current stage of the writing process as well as questions or challenges that might be addressed by peer review. The author may request specific feedback that would be most useful at this point.

- The reviewer should provide initial feedback that is positive before providing critical or constructive comments. The reviewer's feedback should help motivate the writer to continue. Questions can prompt the author to clarify intent, and the reviewer can suggest concrete steps for revision.
- During the time of peer review, the writing is a work in progress. It may be messy, which is okay.
- Writing in progress typically contains many surface-level or editorial issues, the messy parts. This is a natural occurrence during the writing process as the author creates ideas, prose, connections, and organizational structures that focus on global issues in writing. In fact, if you see an early draft from a colleague that is clean, it may mean that the writer wasn't able to quiet the inner critic and just plain write. Surface-level issues are typical of early drafts, so it doesn't make sense for a reviewer or writing group to spend time focusing on these issues during peer review sessions. If the writer is near the end of the writing process, simply circle or highlight editorial concerns on the draft. There is no need to correct errors or explain them during the peer review session. If the writer is early in the writing process, there's no need to point out editorial concerns at all. The draft may change so much by the end of the process that pointing out these errors may only serve to embarrass the writer.
- Writers own their draft. We may have our own expectations for other people's writing, but we should honor the writer's vision, goals, and direction. Try to leave control in the writer's hands. If you are unsure about a writer's intention, ask. If the writer is in the midst of making a decision, ask questions until the writer is able to envision the path forward.

Appendix K

CHOCOLATE CHIP CAKE RECIPE

The following recipe is from Doris Vise, my sister-in-law's mother-in-law, who lives in Nashville, Tennessee.

Ingredients

1 package (15.25 oz/432 g) yellow cake mix

4 large eggs, lightly beaten

¾ cup (178 mL) canola oil

1 cup (237 mL) milk

1 (3.4 oz/96 g) box of instant vanilla pudding

1 (4 oz/113 g) semisweet chocolate bar, grated (Use a food processor or blender; you will never make this cake if you have to grate the chocolate by hand.)

1 bag (11.5 oz/329 g) milk chocolate chips

Confectioner's sugar for garnish (optional)

Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. For a convection oven, preheat to 340 degrees Fahrenheit.

Mix together the first six ingredients. Fold in half the bag of chocolate chips. Pour batter into a greased Bundt pan. Sprinkle remaining chocolate chips over the top of the batter. When you invert the pan after baking, this makes a chocolatey crust on the bottom of the cake. If this is too much chocolate, you can use fewer chocolate chips. (If this is too much chocolate, what is wrong with you?)

Bake for 45 to 55 minutes (43 minutes if a convection oven). Remove from oven and let cool 20 to 30 minutes in pan.

Carefully invert onto a serving plate, and sprinkle top with confectioner's sugar before serving if desired. (I don't.)

Appendix L

WRITING TIPS AND STRATEGIES

The following strategies can help you overcome obstacles and become a more productive writer. Try one of them. If it works for you, make it a habit.

1. Write every day.
2. Schedule your writing time
3. Write earlier in the day if at all possible.
4. Find your best energy and write. (That's usually earlier in the day.)
5. Write in 90-minute blocks.
6. Can't find 90 minutes? Write for 15 minutes.
7. Set a goal. Small and soon.
8. Make two lists before you start writing.
9. Remove, reduce, avoid distractions.
10. Don't stop writing when it's hard.
11. Don't stop writing when it's easy.
12. Your scheduled writing time should be about producing new words.
13. Find a place to write, anywhere.
14. Use deadlines to your advantage.
15. Don't wait for inspiration.
16. Begin to write before you feel ready.

17. Develop outlines or chapter summaries.
18. When you stop, make a list of what comes next.
19. If you don't know how or where to start, then start in the middle.
20. Don't write and edit at the same time.
21. Don't call it writer's block.
22. Write until you are in the flow, then keep writing.
23. Write bad first drafts.
24. Do not binge write.
25. Make yourself accountable.
26. Use a writing support group.
27. Write with others.
28. Get feedback.
29. Think forward and plan backward.
30. Request feedback from your adviser by asking specific questions.
31. Write with integrity.
32. Breathe. Meditate. Hydrate. Be Awesome. Exercise. Eat. Rest. Repeat.

Appendix M

RESOURCES FOR ACADEMIC WRITERS

I encourage our graduate students not to read about writing but to instead use their time to write. When they want to know more about a strategy or an author I mention during our writing boot camps, I provide them with this list of the books I've read that contribute to my own writing process and inspiration. This list does not include sources I have cited in the preceding chapters; those are in the references section. For other good lists, see Keyes (2003), who recommends 34 books and essays about writing and explains his reason for including each one. Germano (2016) recommends 15 books and articles, although he cautions, "Few are crucial" (p. 243). Just write.

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Jan Allen is associate dean for academic and student affairs at the Graduate School at Cornell University. Prior to that she was a faculty member at the University of Tennessee (1982–2002) and assistant dean of the Graduate School (1997–2001); associate dean in the Graduate School at Northwestern University (2002–2005); and associate dean for PhD programs at Columbia University (2005–2012). She received her PhD in child development from Purdue University, her master's degree from the University of Oklahoma, and her bachelor's degree from Oklahoma Baptist University.

She still treasures the very first college paper she wrote, at Louisiana Tech University. The instructor Corre Stegall noted, "This is one of the very best papers I have ever received." (Allen has yet to ask Stegall how many years she actually had been teaching at that point. She suspects it was a mere two years.) Allen's current research and writing focuses on children's political socialization, children's cognitive understanding of and emotional responses to stress, graduate student mentoring and professional development, and graduate student academic and research ethics. She can be contacted at jan.allen@cornell.edu, 2janallen@gmail.com, or graduatementor@gmail.com. More strategies for developing graduate school survival skills can be found on her website, www.graduate-mentor.com.

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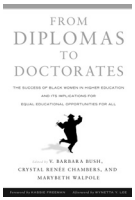

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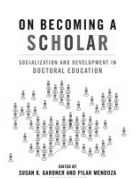

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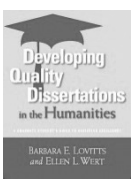

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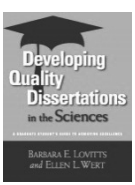

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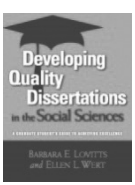

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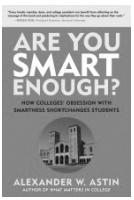

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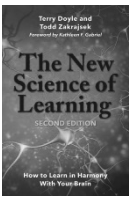

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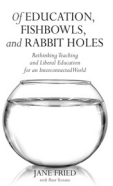

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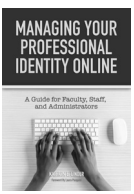

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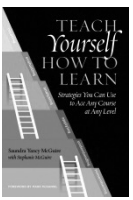

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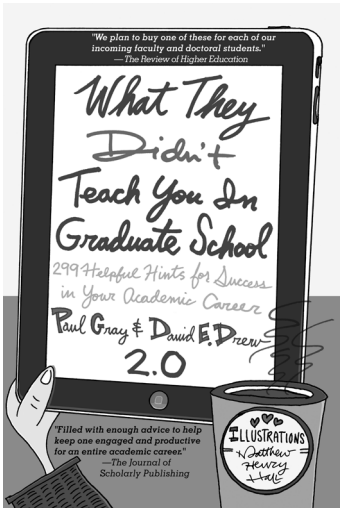

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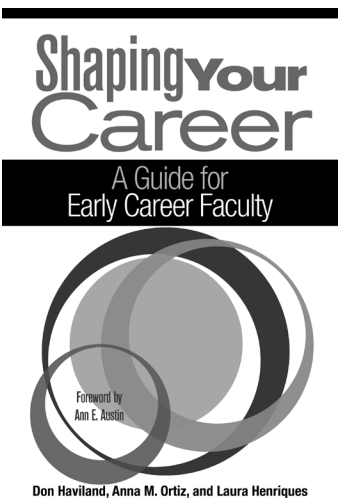

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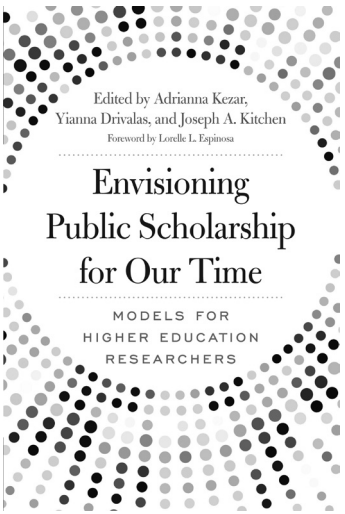

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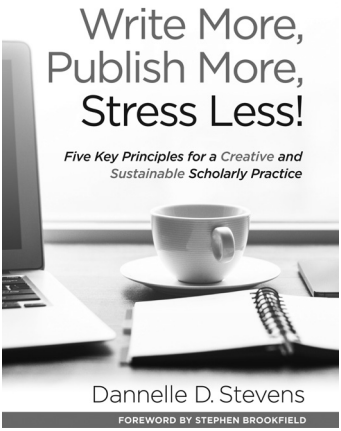

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Five Key Principles for a Creative and Sustainable Scholarly Practice

Dannelle D. Stevens

Foreword by Stephen D. Brookfield

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