

High-output writing programme

Schedule regular times for writing

Set aside 30 minutes in your schedule for 5 to 7 days of the week — 7 days if possible. Guard this time as if you were teaching a class: do not allow any clashes.

If it's the same time each day, that's an advantage. It's not essential.

For most people, mornings are better. Don't read email or search the web until *after* you write.

Plan your writing topics

Decide on a sequence of writing topics for the next week. The point is to decide in advance what you'll be writing about each day. When you finish one topic, then go on to the next. It's reasonable to rethink the sequence at any time — except during your writing time.

Some possible topics: an article; a book/thesis chapter; summary of ideas from recent reading; how you're collecting material for your research; explanation of your thesis project to a non-expert; what ideas you'll cover in a talk; what conclusions you expect to find; a letter to a friend about your topic.

Prepare a series of dot points for the things you want to cover on the topic, maybe 5 to 20 points per 1000 words.

Eliminate distractions

At your scheduled writing time, remove or turn off all possible distractions: email, web, phone, open books, etc. Close the door and do not answer knocks.

Do not read previous writing — your own or anyone else's — just before or at this time.

Have your dot points available as guidance. That's all.

Just before you start writing, write down the time (e.g. 9.13am).

Pause for a few seconds to think what you want to say.

Write!

Write for 5 to 20 minutes on your topic. Do not stop to look up references, revise the previous paragraph, or read or check anything. Just write on your dot-point topics and keep going. Your aim is to produce words, not to judge them — you can do that later. Concentrate on expressing your ideas.

Option

If, after a minute or so, you can't get started on your topic, then do some *free writing*. Just write about anything that comes into your head, for example the colour of the wall, the weather, what happened yesterday. After a few minutes of free writing, write instead on your topic if you feel able.

Finish writing

Record the time you finish and calculate the time you spent writing. Calculate the number of words you've written. Enter these two figures into your log.

After you finish, note down your current ideas about what tomorrow's writing topic. (If additional ideas come to mind during the day, write them down too.) In other words, revise and add to your dot points for upcoming writing.

Self-talk

Do you ever think to yourself, "This is no good," "This is bound to be rejected" or "I'm no good at this"? This is called "self-talk." It's part of your mind trying to sabotage your efforts.

If you experience negative self-talk, here's what you should do. At the beginning of your writing session every day, notice any negative self-talk and criticise it ("What a silly thought!");

“Go away and don’t come back”) and replace it with positive thoughts (“Once I start writing, I’ll enjoy it”; “If I do the work, I’ll get better”). Then try to write without hearing or listening to any self-talk about writing.

Don’t worry if you continue to experience negative self-talk. Just keep noticing it, countering it and trying to write without it.

Everything else

Once a week, send your daily writing minute and word totals to someone else who will support you in the programme. This person doesn’t need to understand your topic, but does need to be supportive of your desire to write regularly.

Outside of the writing time, carry on your research as usual: reading, collecting data, thinking, discussing, etc. If you do revisions (reorganising your text, polishing your expression, checking references), do it on previous writing — not the current week’s writing. Aim to separate producing new words from the process of critically analysing words, either your own or someone else’s.

Sources

This programme is based on ideas from the following sources, among others.

Robert Boice, *Professors as writers: a self-help guide to productive writing* (Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press, 1990).

Robert Boice, *Advice for new faculty members: nihil nimus* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000).

Tara Gray, *Publish & flourish: become a prolific scholar* (Teaching Academy, New Mexico State University, 2005).

Joli Jensen, *Write No Matter What: Advice for Academics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

W. Brad Johnson and Carol A. Mullen, *Write to the top! How to become a prolific academic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

Paul J. Silvia, *How to write a lot: a practical guide to productive academic writing* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2007).

When I will write

Wednesday _____

Thursday _____

Friday _____

Saturday _____

Sunday _____

Monday _____

Tuesday _____

Where I will write

Wednesday _____

Thursday _____

Friday _____

Saturday _____

Sunday _____

Monday _____

Tuesday _____

My sequence of writing topics for the week

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

(One topic may be enough for the whole week, but have several just in case.)

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<http://www.bmartin.cc/>

For more documents about the programme, see <http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/hop/>

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