



# Week 1

## *Designing Your Plan for Writing*

Day to Do Task	Week 1 Daily Writing Tasks	Estimated Task Time
Day 1 (Monday?)	Read through page 10 and fill in the boxes on those pages	60 minutes
Day 2 (Tuesday?)	Select a previously written text to develop for publication (pages 11–18)	60 minutes
Day 3 (Wednesday?)	Choose and improve your writing site (pages 18–19)	60+ minutes
Day 4 (Thursday?)	Design a daily and weekly writing schedule for twelve weeks; anticipate obstacles and interruptions (pages 19–39)	60 minutes
Day 5 (Friday?)	Start documenting how you spend your time currently (pages 39–40)	60 minutes

Each week you will have specific tasks designed to aid you in accomplishing your goal of sending your academic article to a journal in twelve weeks. Above are the tasks for your first week, broken down day by day for five days of work and about five hours of work for the week. Some find it helpful to work on their article a bit every day of the week, to keep it fresh, in which case you should spend fifteen minutes revising the article on the sixth and seventh day. The first task, for Day 1, is to read the material below. This week has the most reading of any of the weeks.

## **UNDERSTANDING FEELINGS ABOUT WRITING**

Writing is to academia what sex was to nineteenth-century Vienna: everybody does it and nobody talks about it. The leading researcher on academic writers found that most academics were more willing to talk about even their most personal problems, including sexual dysfunction, than about problems with writing (Boice 1990, 1).<sup>1</sup> The prevalent belief among academics seems to be that writing, like sex, should come naturally and should be performed in polite privacy.

Because of this silence, writing dysfunction is common in academia. A recent survey of over 40,000 U.S. faculty revealed that 26 percent of professors spent zero hours a week writing, and almost 27 percent had never published a peer-reviewed journal article (Lindholm et al. 2005). In addition,



43 percent had not published any piece of writing in the past two years. The majority, 62 percent, had never published a book. Put another way, only 25 percent of faculty spent more than eight hours every week writing and only 28 percent of faculty had produced more than two publications in the past two years. Furthermore, these statistics are self-reported and reflect the activities of only those organized enough to respond to the survey. Some scholars believe the figure is much lower, estimating productive academic writers as less than 15 percent of faculty (Moxley and Taylor 1997, Simonton 1988). Since publication is the major marker of productivity in academia, these statistics are surprising. Or are they?

You do not have to be Freud to figure out that academia's silence about writing may be repressive. Writing is, after all, a creative process and like any such process, depends on connection. If you try to create in an environment where sharing is discouraged, dysfunction is the inevitable result. Certainly, many have found that talking about their struggles with writing has been very freeing, both for them and their chosen confidant. The lesson: Learning to talk about writing is an important key to becoming a productive writer.

One of the reasons that academics do not talk about writing is that it involves talking about feelings. Academics tend to be more comfortable with the rational than the emotional. Therefore, even if we do manage to talk about writing, we are more likely to talk about content than process. In fact, many of us have feelings about writing that we rarely acknowledge in public. The first step to success is understanding your relationship to writing.

So, let's get started with a very broad question. What feelings come up when you think about writing? I recommend that you call a classmate or colleague and discuss this question with them before using the chart below to jot down your answers. Or you can compose an e-mail to a friend or family member.

<b>My Feelings about My Experience of Writing</b>

(If you skipped this last exercise, do go back and write down at least one feeling. The following will make more sense if you take the time to write something there.)



When I ask this question about feelings in class, usually negative feelings come up first. I have cited these verbatim from my class notes:

I feel both terror and boredom. . . . I get depressed when I think about having to write. . . . I feel discouraged because I feel like I have never done enough research to start writing. . . . I have fun in the beginning but I really hate revising. . . . I enjoy revising, but I hate getting that first draft down. . . . My advisor is so critical that whenever I think of writing I feel inadequate. . . . I feel like there are rules that everyone knows but me. . . . I feel like procrastinating whenever I think of how much writing I have to do and how little I have done. . . . I feel ashamed of my writing skills. . . . I wish my English was better. . . . I feel that if people read my writing they will know that I’m a dumb bunny. . . . I feel like I work at writing for hours and have so little to show for it. . . . I spend so much time critiquing my students’ writing that I shut down when I come to my own. . . . I get a good idea but then I feel a fog come over me. . . . When I think about the fact that my entire career depends on publication, I feel completely paralyzed. . . . I feel confident that I could do anything, if I could just get out of bed.

Guess what? You are not alone! Most writers, even accomplished writers, hear these inner negative voices that whisper their fears to them whenever they think about writing. Using this workbook will diminish those voices, but the most important step is to realize that these feelings are warranted. Writing is difficult and scary. Feeling anxious is an entirely appropriate response.

It is worthwhile to spend some time thinking about what links your negative feelings. Do they revolve around one or two anxieties, perceptions, habits? Do they point to a particular fear, such as what others will think of you? Or to a particular negative self-assessment, such as labeling yourself lazy? Use the next chart to identify these links.

<b>Common Elements in My Negative Feelings about Writing</b>

(You will spend time later in the chapter on how to address your negative feelings, but for now, just write them down.)

When I ask students to discuss their feelings about writing, some positive feelings usually come up, too. Students say things like:

I feel excited when I think up a good idea. . . . Sometimes I write a sentence that comes out more coherently than I expected and I feel great. . . . I feel euphoric when I realize that I have a good conclusion that ties the paper together. . . . I love the feeling of having just finished a paper. . . . When I reread something I wrote a year ago, I'm impressed and I think, did I write that!?

In order to feel better about your writing, then, remember the context in which positive feelings arose.

For instance, do you have any particularly good memories of writing? During that experience when you felt good, what was making that happen? What are the lessons you can learn from those experiences?

Lessons to Be Learned from My Positive Experiences of Writing

(You will spend time later in the chapter on how to use these lessons, but for now, just write them down.)

When I ask this question in class, students list good experiences like:

I had a deadline that forced me to sit down and do the writing. . . . I had an advisor/friend/spouse who was encouraging. . . . I was working on a paper that meant a lot to me personally. . . . My parents took my kids for a week. . . . I got into a rhythm of writing every evening after *Seinfeld*. . . . I had a part-time job that forced me to use my time more efficiently. . . . I read an article that really inspired me and got me going. . . . I asked my advisor to meet with me once a week and to expect some writing from me every time.

Interestingly, the lessons students learn from these experiences are similar. Apparently, happy writers are all alike, to paraphrase Tolstoy. Successful academic writers share similar attitudes and work habits. I call them the keys to academic writing success.

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## KEYS TO POSITIVE WRITING EXPERIENCES

I've designed this workbook to help you develop skills around the four keys to academic writing success. These essentials can also help you design your own program.

### Successful Academic Writers Write

Samuel Eliot Morison, author of several academic classics including *The Oxford History of the American People*, had the following literary advice for young historians, "First and foremost, *get writing!*" (1953, 293).

It may sound tautological, but the main key to a positive writing experience is writing. Most students' negative experiences of writing revolve around not writing (i.e., procrastinating) and most students' positive experiences of writing revolve around actually doing it. That is, when students write, they feel a sense of accomplishment and the pleasure of communicating their ideas. In this sense, writing is the same as exercise. Although it may not be easy at first, it does get easier and more pleasurable the more you do it. As the very productive academic writer and my colleague Chon A. Noriega tells his graduate students when they embark on their dissertations, "One usually gets better at whatever one does on a regular basis. If one does *not* write on a regular basis, one will get better at *not* writing. In fact, one will develop an astonishing array of skills designed to improve and extend one's *not* writing."

Those who do not write often claim that they are "too busy." Indeed, people today are very busy. Some students have long commutes, others have full-time jobs, and still others have young children. So, here's the good news and the bad news. Lots of busy people have been productive writers. Are they just smarter? No. If you pay attention to the way you actually spend time, you will find that you may not be quite as busy as you suppose and that writing doesn't take as much time as you fear.

Robert Boice, the leading scholar on faculty productivity, proved this by finding faculty members who claimed to be "too busy" to write and then following them around for a week. With Boice staring at them all day, most had to admit that "they rarely had workdays without at least one brief period of fifteen to sixty minutes open for free use" (1997a, 21). His subjects spent this free time in activities that were neither work nor play. Boice also found that those likely to describe themselves as very "busy" or very "stressed" did not produce as much as those who were writing steadily. In other words, you are not too busy to write, you are busy because you do not write. Busy-ness is what you do to explain your not writing. (If you skimmed over those last two sentences, I recommend you go back and read them one more time. It's essential.)

No matter how busy your life is, make a plan for writing. Successful academic writers do not wait for inspiration. They do not wait until the last minute. They do not wait for big blocks of time. They make a plan for writing



every day and they stick to it. Much of this workbook will be devoted to your developing writing into a habit.

### **Successful Academic Writers Make Writing Social**


The myth that writing should be a solo activity is just that, a myth. Yet, the popular image persists of the writer as someone who works alone for months in a cold garret, subsisting on bread and cigarettes while coughing consumptively and churning out page after page of sui generis prose. It's a lonely, hard life, but that's what writing takes.<sup>2</sup>

Academics in the humanities persist in believing that texts spring fully formed from the mind of the writer. In the sciences, this myth is not so prevalent since most science articles are the result of a team of researchers who publish as coauthors. Students in the sciences work as secondary authors, contributing sections or data to faculty members' articles, long before they ever become primary authors. That is why the rate of writing dysfunction in the sciences is so much lower. Scholars in the sciences consistently see writing as a form of conversation. When this idea of collaboration is lost, many of the writing problems so common in the academic community arise—writer's block, anxiety over having one's ideas stolen, the obsession with originality, the fear of belatedness, difficulties with criticism, even plagiarism. All rise from the myth that writing should be private and isolated.

Just look at the host of reviewers, friends, and family members thanked in any published book. This is not just civility on the part of the author; authors are usually understating the case. Those thanked may have performed research, suggested theses, recommended resources, and actually written conclusions. This was especially true in the past, when faculty wives not only typed and edited manuscripts, but also sometimes wrote sections of their husbands' texts. The recent legal suit against the *Da Vinci Code* for copyright infringement suggests that such wives are still around. According to Dan Brown, his wife Blythe Brown did most of the research for the *Da Vinci Code*, suggested the idea of centering a book on the suppression of women in the Catholic Church, and insisted that the book include a child of Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalene (Collett-White 2006). Because the myth of originality is so strong, authors rarely give these laborers coauthor credits. This variation on the repressive silence discussed at the beginning of this chapter is the result of not recognizing that writing is collaborative labor.

A useful corrective to the myth of the solitary writer is the experience of Indonesian novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer, who was Southeast Asia's leading contender for the Nobel Prize. Toer spent fourteen years as a political prisoner on Indonesia's infamous Buru Island. Denied paper and pen, from 1969 to 1973, Pramoedya composed oral stories for the eighteen prisoners in his isolated camp, who would whisper the latest installment to other prisoners during their only daily contact, in the showers. These stories were so rich and human that many prisoners attributed their survival

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to them. Pramoedya himself has called the Buru novels “my lullaby for my fellow-prisoners, to calm their fears, they who were suffering so much torture” (Belcher 1999). The prisoners, in turn, did his work and gave him their food to enable his creation. When his captors finally allowed him to write in 1975, “it was like a dam breaking.” Toer wrote continuously to capture the stories from memory, sitting on the floor and writing on his prison cot. Only four of these books were smuggled out; six others were destroyed by prison guards. The first, *This Earth of Mankind*, is one of the best novels of colonialism ever written in English. The quartet of which it is a part is a defining work of this century. Is Toer’s story unusual? Yes. But his experience of writing highlights a persistent truth: The best writing is created in community with a strong sense of audience.

So, work to make your writing more public and less private, more social and less solitary. Start a writing group. Take a writing class. Convince another student to cowrite an article with you. Meet a classmate at the library or a café to write for an hour. Attend conferences, participate in electronic discussion lists, join journal clubs, and introduce yourself to scholars whose work you admire. Do not get distracted into reading yet another article when a conversation with someone in your field can better help you to shape your ideas and direction. You should be spending as much time on establishing social scholarly connections as you do on writing, for the best writing happens in active interaction with your potential audience.

The more you participate, the better your experience of writing will be. This is partly because others give you ideas and language. But it is also because you must relate your ideas to others’ ideas. You must know what theories professors in your discipline are debating, what their primary research questions are, and what methodologies they consider appropriate. You can only know this if you are an active member of the community.

Students usually experience several problems with making their writing more social. First, many students feel real horror at the prospect of networking. Some feel awkward or invasive attempting to contact someone they admire. Others experience deliberate attempts at befriending others as superficial or brown-nosing. Certainly, reaching out socially takes courage and tact. Yet, you will find that others are often interested in meeting you and even grateful to you for taking the first step. Many established scholars enjoy being asked for advice on the field. So, whatever your comfort zone, try to push outside it.

Second, many students are hesitant about showing their writing to anyone. The university environment can encourage students to see their colleagues as adversaries rather than advocates. Classmates and professors can appear too busy to read and comment on your work. Students can be afraid that sharing their work will reveal them as impostors and demonstrate their deep unsuitability for the academy. Fortunately, if you manage to share your work, you usually find that others are happy to help and that you are not as much of an idiot as you thought you were. Moreover, others can quickly identify omissions and logical breaks that would take you



weeks to figure out. Of course, some readers will be too critical and others will give you bad advice. But an essential part of becoming a writer is learning to sift useful criticisms from useless ones. The more often you deal with others' subjective reactions to your work, the more readily you will be able to deal with peer reviewers' comments down the road.

Third, some students are good at sharing their work, but only when they consider the article complete. Avoid waiting until your manuscript is "done" before sharing it. You will be disappointed when you share it with others, expecting compliments. Instead, you will get recommendations for revision that you are little interested in addressing. The point of sharing is to improve your writing, not to convince others of your talents. So, share your writing in the early stages. Show outlines to classmates, faculty members in your discipline, or even journal editors. Exchange abstracts. Give out drafts and ask for specific comments about aspects of your writing that you suspect are weak. Learn to share your writing at all stages.

Fourth, students fear that sharing their work will lead to their ideas being stolen. Like so many of the anxieties named in this book, there is a rational reason for this fear: students' ideas are stolen. Stories are always circulating among graduate students about stolen intellectual property. But hiding your work will not solve this problem. In fact, getting your work out to a number of people will protect it. Furthermore, no one can articulate your idea like you can. You may suspect that anyone could do a better job of presenting your ideas than you could, but this workbook will help you see that's not true.


All these activities will help you counter the myth of the lonely writer. Nothing is as collaborative as good writing. All texts depend on other texts, all writers stand on the shoulders of other writers, all prose demands an editor, and all writing needs an audience. Without community, writing is inconceivable. This workbook will help you to develop social writing habits and to share your work. If you are using this workbook with a writing partner or in a group, you are making excellent progress already!

### **Successful Academic Writers Persist Despite Rejection**

The writing life is filled with rejection. This is one of the few shared experiences of great writers and terrible writers. A quick read of *Pushcart's Complete Rotten Reviews & Rejections* offers the comfort of knowing that most canonical authors (for instance, Hermann Melville, T. S. Eliot, and Virginia Woolf) had their work rejected in the strongest possible terms (Henderson 1998). Jack London received 266 rejection slips in 1899 alone (Kershaw 1997)! The economist George Akerlof received three rejections for a journal article that later won him the Nobel Prize (Gans and Shepherd 1994). Indeed, studies of Nobel Prize winners found that editors had rejected many early versions of their award-winning work (Campanario 1995, 1996). If you write, you will be rejected. This is unavoidable. The important thing is not to let it stop you.



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Although it is tempting to let others' criticism be the measure of your writing or even your own worth, don't let it be. The business of reviewing is a subjective process rife with bias and carelessness. Work rejected by one journal is often embraced by another. The only difference between much-published authors and unpublished authors is often persistence and not worthiness. Published authors just keep submitting their work. If one journal rejects their article, they send the article to another. They keep a positive attitude. A professor I know has fond memories of her dissertation advisor, who papered his office with his article rejection notices. To see him working away amidst the negative notices of a lifetime, she says, was inspiring and encouraging.

Several of my students have exemplified the usefulness of persistence. In one of my classes, Carrie Petrucci revised her wonderful article arguing for introducing the apology into the criminal justice system. She knew that resistance to her argument would be high, but felt committed to demonstrating that criminal apologies provided some real benefits for victims and perpetrators. So she was very disappointed, but not surprised, when the first journal rejected her article. Petrucci stopped everything she was doing and took two days to make changes based on the comments she had received from the editor and previous readers. She then sent it right back out again to another journal, this time to a social science journal rather than a law journal. After that second journal also rejected her article, she again devoted two days to making changes. Making writing social helped her persevere. "What kept me going through two rejections," she e-mailed me, "was the fact that I had had several people read it prior to my submitting it to any journal and a handful of those people, who had nothing to gain by it (including yourself), had given me the impression that it was strong. . . . Believe me; I clung to those comments as I got some pretty negative feedback on rounds one and two."

So, she sent it out a third time, to an interdisciplinary journal in law and social science. A few months later, she got a message from that journal accepting her article for publication and stating that the reviewers were extremely enthusiastic about the piece. "Congratulations," the editor exclaimed. "It is quite unusual to have a manuscript accepted without requiring any changes. But yours is a high quality product. Good job." Her persistence paid off. She later won the first Nathan E. Cohen Doctoral Student Award in Social Welfare in 2002 for this article and then got a job working to improve the criminal justice system (Petrucci 2002).

One of my students told us the story of a friend who was more faint-hearted. When she received a response from a journal, she opened the letter with trepidation. The first paragraph included the sentence: "The reviewers' reports are in and both agree that your article is severely marred by poor writing." Upset, she flung the letter aside and spent an hour in bed ruing her decision ever to enter academia. When her husband got home, he picked the letter off the hallway floor, read it, and entered the bedroom saying, "Congratulations, honey! Why didn't you tell me your article got



accepted?” Upon actually reading the letter through, she found that the editors had accepted the article pending major revisions. She hired a copy-editor to work with her on her prose and resubmitted the article. When starting out, harsh criticism can stop you in your tracks, but if you persist, you often find that things are not as bad as they seem at first.

### Successful Academic Writers Pursue Their Passions

When students list positive experiences with writing, they often note genuine interest in a topic as a real engine. Successful writers do not write primarily for their professors, their classmates, or their hiring committees. Rather, they focus on the questions that fascinate them.

For example, one of my students was writing about the negative effect of welfare reform on Cambodian women. She drafted and revised her article in record time because she was so angry about the policy’s consequences. A Korean student who grew up in Japan persevered despite several obstacles to publish her research showing that Koreans in Japan labor under legally imposed hardships. A student who wrote about pedigreed dogs and another who wrote about food metaphors always worked steadily because the topics were also life-long hobbies. Other students used their own experiences of ethnicity, gender, or nationality to reinterpret canonical texts, placing the traditional in a completely new light.

The lesson? The world changes quickly, so you are more likely to have positive writing experiences if you follow your deepest interests rather than passing fads. As the authors of *The Craft of Research* point out, “Nothing will contribute to the quality of your work more than your sense of its worth and your commitment to it” (Booth, Colomb, and Williams 1995, 36).

My model for this is an artist I discovered while doing research on street art in Washington, D.C. I spent a summer walking the inner city photographing everything creative I could find: murals, street games, hair weaving, garbage can musicians, fence art (Belcher 1987). I spent a lot of time in alleys looking at graffiti and I kept coming across the same thing. Huge spray paintings of women’s shoes. Not just life-size, but ten feet across. All of the shoes were portrayed from one side, in profile, and all of them were pumps. I became an expert on the development of this artist whom I never met, soon able to distinguish early pump (when shoes went untitled) from later pump (when shoes appeared with titles like “Black Evening Pump” or “Leopard Skin Pump” and were signed “Ray (c) 1987”). Whenever I found a new one, in yet another out of the way place, I was delighted. Because this artist took his or her idiosyncrasy and pushed it, unafraid to paint feminine footwear across an entire urban landscape. So obsess about things, pursue your passions, do not be bullied. Whatever your pump is, paint it.

## DESIGNING A PLAN FOR SUBMITTING YOUR ARTICLE IN TWELVE WEEKS

As mentioned in the Introduction, just knowing what the habits of the successful academic writer are does not automatically put them within reach. Many of us find it especially hard to pick up the most difficult key to success: making time for writing. The most important step is making a plan. When you design a plan, you set up goals and deadlines. Once tangible, these goals and deadlines can be realized. This workbook aids you in designing a plan to send an article to a journal in twelve weeks. So, let's move into the next exercise and build a plan for writing.

### Day 1: Reading the Workbook

On the first day of your writing week, you should read the workbook up to this page and answer all the questions posed up to this point.

### Day 2: Selecting a Text for Revision

Many students believe that in order to be published they must start from scratch. Nothing will do but to begin a brand new article on a brave new topic. This is not true. Most students have already written classroom essays, conference papers, or thesis chapters that contain the seed of a publishable journal article. Some students have drafts of coauthored articles that their professors have asked them to improve. Others have been asked to write up parts of a research study they did not conduct. Since revising is the key to publication, I recommend that students focus on reworking an already written text, however poor. The trick is to identify which text provides you with this fertilizable seed. Answer the questions below to help you identify such a text.

#### *Considering a Text You Have Already Written*

**Praise.** Has a professor ever suggested that you submit a text of yours for publication? If not, has a professor ever suggested that a text you wrote was particularly strong or intriguing?

<b>Title:</b>	
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**Pleasure.** Are there any texts that you enjoyed writing or researching and that you still think back on with gratification?

<b>Title:</b>	
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**Relevance.** Do any of your texts address some aspect of a current debate in your discipline? In your recent reading or conversations, do you find yourself thinking of something you wrote and its relevance?

<b>Title:</b>	
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**Research.** Are any of your texts particularly well researched? Did you do substantial reading for one and still have all the sources?

<b>Title:</b>	
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**Findings.** Do any of your texts have particularly strong or unusual findings? Do any contain an original insight that could carry a whole article?

<b>Title:</b>	
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**Conference paper.** Have you ever given a conference paper? Did you get a positive response? Did you get useful comments that would help you in revising the paper for publication? (Several studies suggest that about 50 percent of conference presentations are later published as articles [e.g., Autorino et al 2007].)

<b>Title:</b>	
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**Thesis.** Have you written an M.A. thesis or Ph.D. dissertation? Are parts of it worth revising for publication?

<b>Title:</b>	
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**Rejected article.** Have you ever submitted an article for publication and gotten a revise and resubmit notice? If not, have you ever gotten a rejection notice?

<b>Title:</b>	
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### *Texts that Offer Particular Challenges*

If reading through the above brings several texts to mind, remember the following when making your final choice of which texts to work on.

**General: Broad surveys.** Articles surveying the field or the state of the discipline are rarely published. When they are, veterans in the field write them. The conventional wisdom is that a junior scholar hasn't been following the debates long enough to be able to weigh in on such matters. If a professor tells you that you are an exception to this rule, go for it. If a professor hasn't, why attempt to scale entrenched obstacles? You don't have to throw the work away—use the survey to write an introduction to an article.

**General: Purely theoretical.** Articles are rarely published that only explore the strengths and weaknesses of a particular theory without any case study or textual evidence. Junior scholars can make the mistake of assuming that an article that helped them think through something theoretical will be useful to others. Sometimes it can. Just make sure that a colleague or professor has read the article and agrees that it would be a fresh contribution. Editors will quickly reject theoretical articles on topics that they think have been exhausted or are virtually unassailable. Also, make sure that you send such an article to a journal that is open to very theoretical articles. And remember that most important theories were launched with case studies or textual evidence.

**General: Dated research.** If your paper is quite old, and subsequent research may have vitiated its findings, you may want to think twice about picking it for revision. Some research articles are “evergreen” as they say in the magazine business. Others address a particular academic concern that has waned or have findings that have been superseded or disproved. Such papers can be updated, but you will need to do additional research. If you are not sure where your paper stands, you may want to ask someone in your field to read it with an eye for its current relevance. It is safe to say that choosing to revise anything you wrote more than ten years ago will take a lot of extra work; something you wrote five or six years ago should be carefully reviewed for relevance.

**General: Outside your discipline.** It is harder than most students think to write for another discipline. Just because you took one film class and wrote a paper for it, despite being in the political science department, does not mean that you know how to write for film scholars. You might, but be sure that someone in that field has sanctioned your approach. Many times your ideas will not be new enough or clearly enough related to the field to warrant publication. One study has shown that those from outside a discipline are significantly less likely to get published in a journal within that discipline (Goodrich 1945).

**General: Polemics.** The world is a racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, classist, and (insert your own concern here) place. However, you can't get published by simply asserting that this is the case, no matter how




much the journal editor may agree with you. You must do more than declare that some institution is not working, that some particular artwork is problematic, or that some social condition is egregious. In the social sciences, you must have proof. Without proof, you are simply writing a newspaper editorial. So, if you've written a classroom essay stating that Latinas face many obstacles in graduating from college or that welfare is destroying the fabric of American society, you must have evidence other than your own casual observations and experiences. Both can be extremely helpful to you in designing a study to test your hypothesis, but without a study, you have no proof. In the humanities, you must have something more interesting to say than pointing out blatant racist or sexist statements in a famous text. To get published, you are going to have to make more developed arguments about how the text is working. For instance, you can sometimes get published by arguing against the common wisdom and asserting that a text widely thought to be racist is actually more open, or that a praised text is covertly sexist. Just be aware that simple readings will not get you into peer-reviewed journals.

**General: Too similar.** When you are starting out, this is not such an issue, but don't pick a paper to work on that is very similar to something else you have published. If the paper has different data (whether experimental or textual) or a different argument (or hypothesis), then it is probably fine, but if it shares both with a previous publication of yours, select something else.

**General: Master's or undergraduate thesis.** It is a great idea to revise your thesis for publication. Be warned, though, most students struggle with the massive amount of cutting that is required. Most theses need to be cut by two-thirds to be viable. Of the students I know who have been successful in turning a thesis into a publication, most of them read through the thesis, opened up a brand new empty electronic file, and typed up what they remembered. It may seem counter intuitive, but they found that starting over took less time than cutting. Just taking out a sentence here or there is not going to do the job. Starting from scratch sounds scary, but the students I know who did this found that much of the paper flowed for them, once they escaped the strictures of the fifty- to seventy-page draft. If you can do this, master's theses tend to do quite well in the peer review process, as they have a richness that impresses reviewers.

**General: Dissertation chapter.** Revising a dissertation chapter is a standard route to publication. The challenge for most, however, is that you must both shorten and lengthen the chapter. You must shorten because chapters are often twice the length of journal articles; but you must lengthen because the article must stand alone, unlike the chapter, and needs additional information. When cutting, be ruthless; when adding, be judicious. Readers often need less background information than authors assume they do, and peer reviewers easily ask for more if they need it. See below for additional information on what types of chapters to chose.

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**General: Unwritten dissertation.** If you are in your first years of graduate school and you have a paper that you think is going to be the basis of your dissertation, or an important chapter in your dissertation, you might want to think twice about revising it for publication now. The reason is that your ideas may change radically as you write the dissertation and then you may wish you had waited to publish on the topic. If you really want to work on a prospective dissertation chapter for publication now, do not let my advice here stop you. If you are wondering, however, whether to choose future dissertation research or something that will not appear in your dissertation, I recommend the latter. Likewise, if you think you will be writing your dissertation on a particular author/place/culture and you have one paper about that author/place/culture that contains your dissertation argument and another paper on that author/place/culture that does not, pick the latter paper for revision.

**General: Not in English.** This workbook aids you in revising an English-language article. If you are planning to revise and submit an article in a language other than English, be aware that non-English-language journals often have quite different standards for publication than English-language ones. Therefore, you may have to extrapolate quite a bit from this workbook. If, however, you plan to revise in that other language but translate the completed article into English, the workbook can help. A perennial debate in my international workshops is whether nonnative speakers of English are best off drafting articles in their own language, and then later translating them into English, or whether they should start drafting articles from the very beginning in English. Some authors insist that they find it better to draft in their own language and then translate the article into English. They like the smoothness and logical flow this drafting process enables, although they find they spend some time rooting out the syntax and structure of the original language when doing the translation. Others say that it is easier to be analytical or argumentative in English than in other languages, so it is better to start from the beginning in English. These are some of the trade-offs that you must weigh before deciding how to proceed with an article that is not in English.

**General. Too introductory or descriptive.** To get published, your paper will have to go beyond introducing an object or practice, or merely summarizing the research about an object or practice. Some students have papers describing a particular geography, agricultural technique, painting style, literary movement, and so on. Without an argument, theoretical approach, or a study, such a piece of writing is more suited to an encyclopedia than a journal.

**Humanities: Narrow close readings.** As an undergraduate in literature, doing a close reading of a single literary text can gain you admiration and an A. Among peer-reviewed journals, it is likely to gain you a dismissal. Journal editors want to see something more than an unpacking of



the various meanings of one text. Single-text journal articles are still published but most journal editors will expect the article to speak to disciplinary debates. If you have a single-text paper, make sure you can take it beyond merely unpacking your text. It helps if you are using the single text as a leaping off point for theorizing about a broader issue, or if the single text is obscure but important.

**Humanities: Popular text studies.** Be wary of picking a paper you have written on one widely discussed text. I know of one journal that used to reject automatically any paper that focused closely on Morrison's extraordinary novel *Beloved*, because they got dozens every year. It is not easy to know what a popular text is—especially in literary fields that focus on canonical texts—but it is safe to say that any text that is taught in every literature department in the country is in this category.

**Social Sciences: Reports.** Social scientists working for public agencies often have written many reports, whether for funders, internal purposes, or policymakers. While such reports can hold amazing data not available in print, reports are very different beasts than articles. A report is rarely argumentative, something an article needs to be. You will have to do a lot of work to transform a report into an article. If the data in the paper was carefully collected and supports a strong argument, then go ahead and pick it, but be prepared to do much revising.

**Social Sciences: Literature reviews.** Many students would like to try to publish literature reviews from their dissertations or master's theses; that is, long summaries of others' research. I discourage students investing in such essays. Most journals are interested in original research, not in a re-presentation of others' ideas. Editors spot plain literature reviews a mile away and usually send them right back without doing more than skimming them (unless written by a very well-known scholar). If you have read almost everything on a topic for which there is no published literature review, and if you really think you have something original to offer—a new and useful critical take on what has already been written—then proceed, but be sure to ask people in your field first. You also might consider submitting it to a journal as a review essay. This does not “count” as much a journal article, but it is a very good publication to have on your curriculum vitae.

**Social Sciences: Teaching experiences.** At some point in their careers, everyone wants to write an article about their experience of teaching a particular class. Some of these articles are excellent, some are poor. The problem for both is finding a place to publish. Short articles on the topic are perfect for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*; most peer-reviewed journals won't be interested in publishing such pieces. If you really want to publish such an article, search hard for a journal that has a record of publishing them.

**Social Sciences: Small sample size.** If you have based your paper on a qualitative study with just two subjects, even qualitative journals may



reject it. Most social science fields are so quantitative now that the sample size of even qualitative studies has become an issue. Speaking to others in your field can be helpful in identifying an adequate sample size in your field, but anything under five is probably too small.

**Social Sciences: No study.** In some social science fields, it is perfectly acceptable to theorize and conjecture without a quantitative or qualitative study; in many, it is not acceptable. If you have a paper in which you speculate on the causes of social conditions or the motivations of individuals without a study to back up your speculations, find out if your field is one that accepts such work. A journal will want to see evidence showing that, for instance, racism is the cause of student failure, sexism is preventing male nurses from doing their jobs adequately, or parents would be willing to pay for their children to attend better public schools. You will need interviews with or surveys of such students, nurses, or parents to back up your claims.

### *Prioritizing Among Several Paper Choices*

If the questions above have brought to mind a good paper, great! I recommend that you revisit that paper and consider reworking it for publication. If several papers rose to mind, and you are unsure which one to pick, you have several options.

If a professor has recommended that you think about publishing a paper, you should definitely consider this paper. One professor told me that he had given up recommending publication to students. Although he had several times offered to meet with students to talk about revising their papers and choosing a journal venue, no student had ever taken him up on the offer. I have since heard other professors comment on how rarely students take advantage of such an offer to help. If you have such an offer, take advantage! Although it can be scary to work this closely with someone, a more advanced scholar can get you to publication so much more quickly than you could by yourself—by recommending sources, identifying debates, and contacting editors.

If you are sitting on a revise and resubmit notice, you should definitely consider this article. It always surprises me how many students are sitting on articles that journals have asked them to revise. Many students read revise and resubmit notices as rejections, but they are not. It is better to think of them as an editing stage in the publication process. Even if your article was rejected, you may want to consider it for revision, especially if the reviewers gave you solid recommendations for revision.

If none of these situations is the case, you can pick the one that you think requires the least amount of work to get ready for publication, or you can pick the one you feel most excited about working on. For those just embarking on a publication career, it is wise to choose a paper that will provide you with the energy to remain motivated. Keeping all this in mind, use the chart below to identify the paper you will revise. Feel free to talk this over with others first.



<b>My Chosen Title</b>			
<b>Class/Conference</b>	<b>Professor/Moderator</b>	<b>Date/Semester</b>	<b>Length</b>

### Day 3: Choosing Your Writing Site

Having a customary writing site is part of forming the habit of writing regularly. It is worthwhile to spend a few minutes thinking about which study site has worked best for your writing. Many graduate students have a variety of writing sites, including library stacks, reading rooms, coffee shops, bedrooms, and kitchen tables. (One prolific professor I know could only write while lying on a futon on his left side while using a red pen on a yellow legal pad. Now he can only write in a coffee shop.) Since you will be writing every day (more on this below), will it still be feasible to work at the library, for instance, where you do not have access to your computer? What changes will you make to your writing site to ensure that it is comfortable, convenient, and nondistracting? Can you use your day-job office when you cannot get to your usual writing spot?

If feeling lonely while writing is a problem, you might want to think about writing at a nearby café. You could also write in a university common room, but you will have to be firm with friends who want to sit down and chat. If distraction in a busy household is a problem, you might want to buy earphones. If you work at a computer, be sure to have a proper chair and to place your keyboard at the proper height. If you have been thinking about getting an ergonomic chair, I recommend you do it now. It's a great way to reward and encourage your decision to complete an article.

Some students tell me that they are itinerant writers. Fixing on one writing spot doesn't work because, after working in a space for a week or two, the place becomes tainted for them. As you become a better writer, you may find that this phenomenon fades. Otherwise, notice when a place is no longer working for you, and move on to the next. May you live in a town with many coffee shops!

The point of writing regularly is to develop a habit of writing, and part of that is having a habitual writing spot. Use the chart below to indicate your writing sites.

	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.
<b>Regular Writing Site</b>							
<b>Backup Writing Site</b>							

Use the chart below to indicate what improvements you will have to make to these writing sites to ensure that they are comfortable and nondistracting.

<b>Regular Writing Site Improvements</b>	
<b>Backup Writing Site Improvements</b>	

It's interesting to note that some students have a site that they use to get themselves in a positive writing mood before moving to their writing spot. One student would enter the bathroom, close the door, and sit on the floor while wearing a particular hat. In that odd sanctuary, she thought through her writing plan for the day and initiated her writing mindset. Another student with a long commute would talk aloud to herself in the car. Speaking the words helped her to gain focus and to argue with potential critics. Use the chart below to note anything you do to start writing.

<b>Preparatory Writing Activity</b>	
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### Day 4: Designing Your Writing Schedule

Many students believe that in order to write they must have long, uninterrupted stretches of time. Nothing will do but to be at their desks eight hours a day, all night, or six days a week. Only then will they be able to concentrate. Such stretches are elusive, however, so they wait for the weekend, and then for the break between classes, and then for the summer. Waiting becomes a permanent state, with writing something that you will do after, for instance, your qualifying exams or your first year teaching.

Others forcefully create blocks of time. As one of my students put it, "If I wait until the night before to write my paper, I will only be miserable for



eight hours!" Such students believe that containing the process will reduce the painfulness of the experience. What they don't understand is that this irregular practice is producing the painfulness. Imagine deciding that "Running marathons is painful, so I'm never going to run except on the day of the marathon." Of course, the marathon is then an extremely painful experience you never want to repeat. By contrast, people who run a mile or two every day really enjoy running and often feel lost without it.

Study after study shows that you do not need big blocks of time to write.<sup>3</sup> In fact, writers who write a little bit every day produce more manuscripts than those who alternate weeks/months without writing with extended writing sessions. Writing just thirty minutes a day can make you one of those unusual writers who publishes several journal articles a year.

Those who write in regular, unemotional sessions of moderate length completed more pages, enjoyed more editorial acceptance, were less depressed and more creative than those authors who wrote in emotionally charged binges. (Boice 1997, 435)

When I make this assertion in class about how little time it can take to be productive, most students look at me skeptically. It is by far the most controversial idea that I introduce in my course—simultaneously the most contested and the most embraced. Not surprisingly, many immediately voice their disbelief. "No way," I hear. "That's impossible." When I ask why, this is what students tell me:


I need whole days to write; otherwise I forget what I'm working on. . . . I lose track. If I don't stay in one mental space for an entire week, my ideas don't cohere. . . . I need to get up a head of steam and just keep on going because if I stop, I'll never get started again.

I listen to the students' objections, but then ask them to indulge me. "Just as an experiment," I say, "try writing fifteen minutes a day for the next week." I remind them that we all manage to get to work, use a microwave, and answer e-mail without having to do it for ten hours at a stretch. "But writing is different," they argue. "It's intellectual; it's about ideas." Just indulge me, I reply.

The next week, the student who protested the most is usually the first to volunteer that, wow, it really does work. One student told me that he had reorganized his entire life into fifteen-minute chunks arranged around work and childcare. "Not only did I do fifteen minutes of writing a day, I did fifteen minutes of gardening, fifteen minutes of cooking, and fifteen minutes of reading!" Another student told me she had solved an important revision problem while standing in line at the Department of Motor Vehicles. Yet another student set herself the goal of writing a 2,000-word essay for a trade magazine in her field without ever writing more than fifteen minutes a day. In two weeks, she had submitted the essay.

One student explained it like this: "I'm usually an environmental perfectionist when it comes to writing, I have to be at my computer, it has to be silent, I must have coffee. But I was stuck waiting at the airport for a

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flight to a conference, and I thought about what you said. So I decided to try writing for fifteen minutes. It worked fine. Then I worried about having to take the time to type up my penciled notes, but I found that in transcribing them I revised them as well, so it wasn't wasted time. A busy airport would still not be my writing site of choice, but I can see how, by being flexible, I can ensure that I write a little bit everyday and keep my ideas fresh."

Another person told me that, "I can't do the fifteen-minute thing. But I believe in the concept of writing daily so the way that I've interpreted that concept for myself is that I always have whatever journal article I am working on open on my computer. It's the first thing I open when I turn on my computer and the last thing I close. That means that every day at some point I do something to the article—I add a citation, change the spaces in the table, cut a few words from the methods and so on. It keeps it fresh."

Almost all of my students who actually do the exercise admit that they get a useful amount of work done in fifteen minutes and that they have no problem remembering where they are or what they are doing when they start up the next day. Writing every day keeps the article in the forefront, so that you think about it while driving or doing the dishes, instead of forgetting about it. Furthermore, if you write in the morning you feel so productive that the rest of the day seems much more manageable.

For many of us, writing more than fifteen minutes is preferable and given the choice, we will set aside one to four hours for writing. If you have financial support and no other obligations, you can ratchet your hours as high as you can stand it. But what if you don't? What if you are a new professor teaching three new courses? Or a new father who isn't getting much sleep? Large blocks of time don't exist. The good news is that you can get some writing done in the few minutes that do open up and they will be effective. It means if you suddenly spend half-an-hour writing, you can be pleasantly surprised and not disappointed that it was not a full day. You can rearrange your thinking to value any and all writing opportunities. Writing in short daily bursts is especially helpful if you only have one block of time a week. That is, your Saturday afternoon of writing will be much more productive if you spent fifteen minutes of writing each of the four previous days. You are limbered up and don't need much warm-up time. Some find that the short sessions are best for revising and the long sessions for drafting—discover what works for you. Some consider that writing time includes writing up their notes on reading. Whatever works for you is fine with me.

The moral? Writing daily works. Writing in painful binges does not. The problem with binge writing—where you don't write for weeks and then stay up all night (or the whole weekend) writing—is that the less you write, the harder it becomes to write. Part of the reason students feel they need big blocks of time is because it takes them so long to silence their inner critic. In the absence of the small but satisfying successes of daily writing, that critic becomes harsher and louder. If you have been writing every day, you don't have this problem. The more of a habit that writing becomes, the more likely you are to complete writing projects and to enjoy writing.



Therefore, I can guarantee you dramatic improvement as a writer if you commit to being at your writing site and writing five days a week, for fifteen to thirty to sixty minutes. The key is to establish a regular, reasonable writing schedule and then discipline yourself to maintain it.

Few graduate students, in my experience, have good writing schedules that they discipline themselves to maintain. In this, they are little different from most faculty members, as you learned at the beginning of this chapter. One study of new faculty followed them over the course of the first two years of their tenure-track appointment. The new faculty had estimated that they would spend at least ten hours a week writing and would produce at least two articles. But, over that period, they spent an average of only thirty minutes a week on writing and produced only a third of one manuscript rather than two (Boice 1997, 24). Clearly, making time to write is a widespread problem. So, let's focus on setting up a reasonable schedule. This next section is long, so be sure to allot enough time to do all the tasks.

### *Establishing a Firm Deadline*

I designed this workbook to aid you in sending an article to a journal in twelve weeks. I recommend that you consider this current week as Week 1 and eleven weeks later as your deadline for sending the journal article. Alternately, you can identify external deadlines that will keep you disciplined, such as the conference date when you must present the article. Once this firm completion date is set, you can plan your time accordingly.

If you do not feel this is a good week to begin, choose next week. You could even choose the week after or set the book aside for next summer, but I do not recommend this. Then you are falling into the trap of thinking you can only write with large, uninterrupted chunks of time. If you think this way, you will start by waiting for the break between classes to write, and then for the summer, and then for sabbatical, and then for retirement. And then, let's be frank, you will be dead!

There is no time like the present. If you've read this far in the workbook, you are definitely prepared to undertake this task. Since I designed this workbook to accommodate writing to your life, rather than the other way around, you can reach your goal of sending your article out even if this is a busy time for you. In the next session, I am going to address the writing anxieties that may prevent you from starting *right now*, but before that, please set your final deadline by using the twelve-week calendar on page 24.

**Weeks.** Under each of the twelve week boxes, fill in the exact dates between now and your firm completion date.

### *Setting a Realistic Writing Goal*

This workbook sets a goal of writing and submitting a journal article in twelve weeks. To do this, you must write between fifteen minutes and one hour a day, five days a week. It is unlikely that you will need more time than this (fifteen to sixty hours) to complete your article. If you very rarely write now, it is best to start small and set a goal of writing fifteen minutes

a day. If you have developed some good writing habits, you should set a goal of writing one to three hours a day on this article. If you are on fellowship or your sabbatical, with no other responsibilities, you may write for more than that, but recognize that there often are diminishing returns after three or four hours. Short and steady sessions will also win the race.

Make sure your goal is realistic rather than ambitious. For instance, recent research suggests that being a morning or evening person has deep psychological roots that you ignore to your detriment (Diaz-Morales 2007). If you are not a morning person, do not determine to get up every morning and write at 5:00 a.m. This is not realistic. Pick a time of day when you are most alert and energetic. If you work full time Monday through Friday, don't determine to write every evening for four hours or to set aside your entire weekend. This is not a realistic goal and will only discourage you. Aim instead to write fifteen minutes a day during the week and for several hours on Sunday afternoon, for example. This will keep your ideas fresh during the week so that your weekend session is productive. If your schedule is to write one hour Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, still try to get in fifteen minutes on Tuesday and Thursday so that you don't grind your gears on fuller writing days.

The most unrealistic writing schedule is none at all. Don't believe that somehow, miraculously, your article will get written in the next couple of months simply because you need it to be submitted.

You may have to adjust your goal as you go along, but for now, you should focus on what is doable given your obligations and work habits.

With but a few exceptions, writers who remained in a schedule requiring an hour or less a weekday of writing mastered a sequence of strategies for remaining truly productive over long periods of time. (Boice 1990, 3)

**Weeks.** Under each of the weeks in the twelve-week calendar on page 24, note the days and weeks when it will be especially difficult to find time for writing. For instance, perhaps certain days of the week regularly fill up with childcare or teaching. Perhaps you or someone in your family is scheduled for surgery. Perhaps relatives are coming to visit for a week. Perhaps you have a deadline for another piece of writing. Use the calendar to anticipate packed schedules. You may want to skip a particular week in your twelve-week writing plan, if that week is harried, and stretch the plan to thirteen weeks.

**Days.** Under each of the seven days in the weekly calendar on page 24, cross out the times unavailable for writing in the next week, such as when you have classes, work, appointments, meals, sleep, and so on. Fill in the exact times when you plan to do your daily writing. If you can schedule the writing for the same time every day, all the better. If you cannot, still try to come up with a regular pattern. Don't forget to schedule two hours each week to go through the workbook. Here are some samples:

- Sample: Monday–Friday, 15 minutes when I wake up in the morning.
- Sample: Wednesday–Sunday, 8:00–8:30 a.m.





**Weekly Calendar for Planning Article Writing Schedule**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>	<b>Saturday</b>	<b>Sunday</b>
5:00 a.m.							
6:00							
7:00							
8:00							
9:00							
10:00							
11:00							
12:00 p.m.							
1:00							
2:00							
3:00							
4:00							
5:00							
6:00							
7:00							
8:00							
9:00							
10:00							
11:00							
12:00 a.m.							
1:00							
2:00							
3:00							
4:00							
Total Minutes Plan to Work							
Tasks Aim to Complete							



## Day 4 (continued): Anticipating Writing Obstacles

The best laid plans oft go awry. The key to following through on the plan you just made is to anticipate the kinds of interruptions and excuses that are going to arise. In my classes, students have named entire minefields of writing obstacles. I have listed the most common below and some of the solutions.

**Obstacle No. 1: I really am too busy!** If you really are too busy to fit in fifteen minutes of writing a day, then this workbook cannot help you. I recommend that you plan, in the very near future, a weekend away from it all where you can really think about your life. If taking this time off means you cannot meet some obligations, do it anyway. Serious thinking about the quality and direction of your life is in order.

**Obstacle No. 2: Teaching preparation takes up all my extra time.** A common complaint of graduate students (and faculty) is that teaching preparation takes up the time they had hoped to use for writing. Certainly, preparing for class can devour time, especially if you have rarely taught before and want to avoid appearing like an idiot in front of thirty undergraduates. There is always more preparation and reading you can do for any class. Teaching assistants in the humanities can easily spend a forty-hour workweek just on meeting with students and grading.


The best solution for this very real problem is to set limits on your preparation time. You should learn to do this if you plan a career in academia since preparation will be an ongoing reality. Schedule your writing time before your teaching prep time. For instance, do not start to prepare for class until you have done half an hour of writing. That way, teaching preparation cannot spill over into your writing time. Now that you know that writing does not have to take hours and hours, and can be done daily, you should be able to fit writing in before other tasks.

Finally, if you are dedicated to being a good teacher, you should know that, among untenured faculty, having a commitment to your students correlates positively with higher rates of writing productivity (Sax, Hagedorn, Arredondo, Dicrisi 2002). Being well-rounded matters!

**Obstacle No. 3: I will write just as soon as (fill in the blank).** Many students explain to me that they will get to writing just as soon as some more important task is completed. This list is varied and fascinating; that is, as soon as the apartment is clean, my lecture notes are organized, exams are over, the divorce is final, my advisor comes back from sabbatical, my medication kicks in, and so on. Only you can tell if these situations really do demand a break from writing. I suggest to you, however, that if you have not been writing regularly, none of these is an adequate excuse for not writing fifteen minutes a day.

Oddly enough, the most common “important task” of this sort is cleaning the house. Apparently, it is a common fact that many people simply cannot write if the house is dirty. My advice to you: Clean your house! In fact, if the way you get yourself in the writing mood is to spend fifteen

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minutes of cleaning before you spend fifteen minutes of writing, I'm all for it. Many of these same people feel that once they start cleaning they cannot stop, however. If so, I recommend that you reverse the order and do your fifteen minutes of writing first.

In other words, you don't have to "clear the decks" before you can get started on a writing project. Writing seems to thrive on messy decks.

**Obstacle No. 4: I'm too depressed to write.** This is a very real problem and should not be underestimated. Depression among graduate students and faculty members is a common reason for underproductivity. Depression is variously defined, but some causes are useful for academics to remember.

Depression is an emotional disorder usually triggered by environment. Some researchers believe that continuous stress over a long period tricks the brain into responding to all events as stressful, which in turn triggers depression (Blackburn-Munro and Blackburn-Munro 2001). Since there may be no better description of graduate school than operating continuously in stress mode, it is not surprising that depression is such a common problem in academia. Although the trigger is environmental, the effect is chemical—an imbalance in the neurotransmitters called dopamine, norepinephrine, and serotonin. Low levels of these natural brain chemicals prevent the nerve cells in the brain from transmitting signals normally. This slow down makes people feel that performing daily activities is like struggling to walk through mud.

The terrible curse of depression is that it impairs the very faculty you need to solve that problem. So, if you suspect that you are depressed, go to your campus clinic and ask for an appointment with a doctor. If you don't have such access, e-mail a few people for references and make an appointment with a doctor. This is the easiest step I know of to start moving beyond depression. The doctor can then refer you to a counselor, whose services are often provided free for graduate students, or can recommend an antidepressant. Taking any medication is a serious step, but antidepressants aren't designed to make you feel euphoric or to take away your blue feelings. They are designed to help you get up in the morning and complete tasks. They are about escaping that feeling of moving through mud; they are not about escaping your life. The doctor may also recommend exercise, which has been found a good antidote to mild depression.

If you are depressed, I know how hard it can be to take the steps to take care of yourself, but you simply must. Your academic future and maybe your life depend on it.

**Obstacle No. 5: I'm going to make writing my number one goal in life.** This may seem counterintuitive, but focusing all your energy on writing will not result in more productivity. In fact, research shows that whatever goal you make your highest priority you most likely will not attain. That's because "the most valued activity" always "carries demands for time and perfection that encourage its avoidance" (Boice 1997, 23). Writers who make writing a modest, realistic priority are more productive.



Do not establish self-defeating writing goals that relegate everything else in your life to mere backdrop. Aiming for a forty-hour writing week will only make you feel guilty, not productive. Furthermore, the feeling that you should always be working will haunt every pleasurable moment. You do not resolve desires by suppressing them entirely. Make time to go to the beach, meet a friend for dinner, or play basketball. A well-balanced life—with time allotted for friends and family, games and sports, movies and light reading, as well as writing, research, and teaching—is the best ground for productive writing.

Making writing your last goal won't work well either. In some cases, you may need to think long and hard about what your real goals are. You may need to work on seeing your number one goal as completing your dissertation, not perfecting it.

**Obstacle No. 6: I couldn't get to my writing site.** "Living in limbo" is the graduate student's theme song. One is always standing in some line, stuck in some meeting, stranded in traffic, lingering for delayed public transportation, or sitting around until someone shows up for an appointment. Whole days can be frittered away in waiting. If you find these times useful for planning your day or just relaxing, then all power to you. Most people, however, waste this time on feeling frustrated. It can be useful to carry a draft of your article everywhere. You can review the draft and make notes to yourself on improvements or do line editing. Many students I have worked with get their fifteen minutes a day done during these down times. There is nothing like doing two things at once to give you a marvelous feeling of efficiency!

**Obstacle No. 7: I have to read just one more book.** Many of us tend to bog down in research. We find it difficult to get to writing because we are lured into the forest of no return, otherwise known as the library. Each article leads to another and then another, especially online. We wander deeper and deeper into this forest, rarely finding a path out. Why do we do this? While we remain in the forest, we are safe from the perils of writing. The idea that just one more article is going to give us mastery is an illusion. If such a thing as mastery is possible, it comes from writing not reading.

The best way I know to get out of the research bog is to do your writing and research at the same time. Do not take endless notes and underline huge sections of books, and then feel overwhelmed because you have to go back through all of those notes and texts. Read and then write an actual paragraph, however loose, about what you have read.

The point here is that you do not have to "finish" research before you start writing. You do not have to complete your literature search or finalize your data analysis or even read your advisor's book. You do not have to know everything on the subject. Start writing and find out what you must know. As Boice puts it, "Writers who learn to leave holes in manuscripts to be filled later master valuable skills in writing: they learn to proceed amid ambiguity and uncertainty" (1997, 29). I know a graduate student who

claims that she finished her dissertation by posting this quote on her computer and looking at it every time she wanted to reach for another book.

Erich Auerbach's masterpiece *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* is a good example of this principle of research. Discharged from his university position in Germany by the Nazi government, Auerbach emigrated to Turkey, where he wrote *Mimesis* from 1942 to 1945. In his epilogue, Auerbach explains that the book lacks footnotes and may assert things that "modern research has disproved or modified" because the libraries in Istanbul were "not well equipped for European studies." Then he adds a fascinating note. "It is quite possible that the book owes its existence to just this lack of a rich and specialized library. If it had been possible for me to acquaint myself with all the work that has been done on so many subjects, I might never have reached the point of writing" (1953, 557).

Don't feel bad about not having done enough research. In the twenty-first century, it is no longer possible to be comprehensive. As knowledge expands and ways to communicate that knowledge explode, accelerating ignorance is an inevitable state. The best future researcher will be someone who learns to make a path through this immensity without getting overwhelmed.

**Obstacle No. 8: I just can't get started.** Many students find sitting down at the computer and starting to write to be the most difficult challenge facing them. Indeed, the horror of the blank page is a frequent theme of literature. The literary scholar Richard D. Altick talked about "First Paragraph Block" (1963, 190). Françoise Sagan described writing as "having a sheet of paper, a pen and . . . not an idea of what you're going to say" (Brussell 1988, 618). Getting started is painful. One of the reasons for this, as one of my students put it so well, is that "if I never start, then I never fail."

An excellent way of dealing with the difficulty of getting started is to make a preferred task contingent on a nonpreferred task, as the behavior management experts put it. In this case, writing is the nonpreferred task you have to complete before you get to something you prefer. For instance, do not allow yourself to read the morning newspaper or check your e-mail before you write for thirty minutes. Tell yourself that you will call a friend or watch a favorite television program after writing for an hour. Most students flip this and tell themselves "I'll watch TV for an hour and then write." But it is better to make the pleasurable activity a reward. Turn your procrastination tactics into productivity tools.

One warning on this tool. A friend of mine, when invited to socialize, always told us that she couldn't get together because she had to write. When we called her the next day, however, she usually admitted that she had just watched bad television. It's better to feel guilty about really enjoying something than to feel guilty about misspending your time *and* not writing. Denying yourself a real pleasure in order to force writing rarely works. Delaying a pleasure does.

Another method is to start by writing something else. Some students begin by typing a quote from their reading. Others write a plan for what



they would like to do in that writing session. If you really feel shut down, it is useful to start by writing down the thoughts of your inner critic. You know, “It’s hubris for me even to pick up a pen, I haven’t a prayer of actually finishing this article in time,” etc., etc., etc. When you get bored with this inner critic and think, “Oh come on, things aren’t that bad,” then you can start writing your article. Eventually you get bored with this voice. It’s not very good company and writing becomes preferable to whining.

Another method is to focus on writing badly. If you can’t get started because your first sentence has to be perfect, this method can be useful. For fifteen minutes, write down every thought you have about your article without stopping to edit. Just let it all hang out. This is writing what Ann Lamott has celebrated as “a shitty first draft.” I could use the more alliterative word fecal, but shitty gets at the real feelings of shame and revulsion many have about writing. If you set out deliberately to write something horrible, this roadblock is erased. Again, eventually you write a sentence or have an idea that, despite your best efforts at producing ghastly work, sounds pretty good. And then you are on your way.


Still another method is to have a phone or e-mail partner. Arrange with another prospective author to agree to write at the same time. Check in by phone or e-mail when you are supposed to start, encourage each other, and then get started writing, knowing that someone else is going through the same horrible suffering, I mean, wonderful process that you are. Lots of my students have found this really helpful. It seems to be more helpful than the plan of meeting at someone’s house to write together, which often ends up being a talking session rather than a writing session.

A final method is to plan the agenda for your next writing session at the end of the last one. That way you will know what to do when you sit down to write. This will also help you stay focused on your article as a series of small tasks. Some authors even recommend that you always stop in the middle of a sentence, so that you have somewhere to pick up. I prefer to recommend pushing a bit into the next section.

**Obstacle No. 9: I’m afraid of writing because my idea is very controversial or emotional.** Again, this is a very real concern. As one of my students put it, “sometimes I’m afraid my idea will come back and bite me.” One student had done a study on earnings and ethnicity, hypothesizing that salaries would be lower for a minority group in a certain profession. Her analysis of the data revealed that there was no significant difference. This finding went against her own experience and was disturbing to her advisor. Whenever she thought about writing, she felt shut down. Even if her initial findings were true, were they what she wanted to associate her name with? She felt an obligation to the truth, but also to justice and her career. How could she write when she was caught between such hard places?

As is so often the case, she found her way out through writing. She used the discussion and conclusion section of her article to suggest some alternative approaches to understanding the findings. She then used them as a platform for extending her future research to incorporate a more

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detailed investigation of earnings by adding qualitative in-depth interviews to her previous quantitative approach. In other words, she used an obstacle to become a better scholar. If you find yourself in a similar position, talking and writing can be the cure.

**Obstacle No. 10: I'm afraid of writing because publication is so permanent.** This fear is one that professors often aid and abet. Graduate students in the humanities are often warned not to publish until they are completely ready and in absolute control of their topic. Professors caution that early articles can come back to haunt and embarrass the author. Nevertheless, the benefits of publication outweigh its dangers.

The argument for waiting to publish goes something like the following story, told to me by a friend who is a professor. An assistant professor in the department was up for tenure when hostile committee members dug up the professor's first article. They proceeded to lambaste the professor with it, calling it a "vulgar tract." In this case, my friend pointed out, publication had hurt rather than helped.

I asked my friend two simple questions. First, had the professor gotten tenure? My friend had to admit that the professor had. Perhaps the professor told the committee that the article was early work, and that if the later work could develop so far beyond the first article, this boded well for the trajectory of the professor's career. Apparently, whatever the defense, it won the day. No one expects that scholars are going to have the same theoretical or ideological approach over the course of a lifetime.

My second question was, had the professor published the article in a peer-reviewed journal? In fact, the professor had not. The article had been published in a collection of conference papers, where the papers were not properly vetted. That's why I emphasize that students send their work to peer-reviewed journals only. The review process, however faulty, provides a safety net. If a peer-reviewed journal accepts your article, it probably won't embarrass you later.

Other professors are more to the point than my friend. "There's enough bad writing out there, why increase it?" one said. "Most graduate students have nothing worth publishing." All I can say in response to such critics is that they have not read my students' articles. Students' first drafts for the classroom can be rough, but those students willing to do real revisions often produce fascinating, cutting-edge work that many professors would be proud to publish. Certainly, if quality were the only criteria for publication, many a faculty member dedicated to the obtuse would have to recuse him or herself from this debate.

**Obstacle No. 11: I'm not in the right mood to write.** Many people believe you have to be emotionally ready to write. If you are not in the right mood, they argue, don't even try getting started because it's not going to work. Yet, many can testify that it is possible to get in the writing mood. Behavior modification theory shows us that emotion follows action, not the other way around. If you don't feel like doing something, then start doing it and usually your feelings will follow.



Individuals who procrastinate frequently confuse motivation and action. You foolishly wait until you feel in the mood to do something. Since you don't feel like doing it, you automatically put it off. Your error is your belief that motivation comes first, and then leads to activation and success. But it is usually the other way around; action must come first, and the motivation comes later on. (Burns 1999, 125)

David D. Burns's book *Feeling Good* describes many techniques for thinking positively about your life and work so that you can overcome perfectionism and guilty feelings.

You can also use ritual to overcome feeling unready. You can jumpstart the mood for writing by lighting a certain candle, playing a certain song, or doing certain stretches. When someone I know was writing her first book, she started every writing morning by reading a section from the King James Version of the Old Testament. The beauty of the passages always called up a writing response in her. Even on those days when she didn't much feel like writing, she responded to the ritual. If Pavlov's dogs can do it, so can you.

So, don't wait until your feelings catch up with your goals. Just make a plan and follow it.


**Obstacle No. 12: My childcare responsibilities are preventing me from writing.** Interestingly, students with children are often the best practitioners of the tenets of this chapter. Caregivers simply do not have big blocks of time, so they get used to working in time-bound segments of one to four hours. They cannot make writing their number one priority, so they do not fixate. They cannot stay up all night binge writing and then take care of the baby the next day, so they plan ahead. For those of you who don't have kids, no, I'm not recommending that you adopt. But if you have friends who are caregivers as well as students, you might want to study how they get it all done. You can learn good lessons from them.

If you are not getting writing done due to childcare responsibilities, you already know the answer: getting others to care for your children several hours a week. Many students would love to have such help, but are far from family and cannot afford to pay someone. Perhaps you might look into a shared childcare arrangement. Find another student who is a caregiver and arrange to trade baby-sitting so that each of you gets a full morning for writing. Or, if what you really need is some sleep or to run errands, exchange for that as well. Just remember to get fifteen minutes of writing done in that time. If none of this is possible, focus on working with the small amounts of time that crop up. Write for half an hour after you put the kids to sleep and before you start cleaning up.

If it's any comfort, studies differ as to the effect of marriage and dependents on faculty productivity. One study found that female faculty with children have lower tenure and promotion rates, while male faculty with children have higher tenure and promotion rates (National Science Foundation 2004). Another study found that family has little effect on the



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actual productivity of either female or male faculty (Sax, Hagedorn, Arredondo, Dicrisi 2002). These scholars speculate that the gender gap in publication rates, which has steadily been closing, is not explained by the weight of domestic responsibilities. Rather, this slightly lower rate seems to have more to do with women's prioritizing of "social change" over advancement and field recognition. This isn't to imply that male and female faculty experience family responsibilities in the same way. Among men and women with the same publication rates, female faculty did more work around the home and spent fewer hours per week on writing and research than male faculty (ibid.). That is, women were more efficient, producing the same amount of writing in less time.

**Obstacle No. 13: I really can't move forward on this writing project.** Sometimes, through no fault of your own, you cannot write. Perhaps you must wait for a result or further funding or your advisor's response. If the way is blocked on one project, turn to another. Success correlates with authors who are not monomaniacal but have several writing projects going at once. If bored or frustrated with one, you can switch to the other. Do not fall into the trap of thinking that only full-time dedication to a single project will result in success. If you're brought to a standstill, work on a grant application, revise an old article, or draft ideas for another article. You should always be moving forward on some front.

**Obstacle No. 14: I can't write because my idea sucks.** Many students do not trust the composing process. They dismiss their initial ideas as derivative or silly and stop writing in the hope that better ideas will somehow show up. As one of my students said, "I feel like writing should be perfect and easy the first time. If it's not perfect, I feel I need more time to think before I start."

But writing and thinking are a loop: thinking leads to writing, which leads back to thinking. I often write in order to find out what I think. Certainly, one need not have a fabulous, publishable idea to start writing. Writing generates its own answers.

So, to have positive writing experiences, allow yourself to develop ideas without immediately critiquing them. Spend a page or two fleshing out an idea and then call a classmate to develop it. If you encourage yourself in this way, you will find ideas flowing more readily and quickly. By ignoring your inner critic when developing a project, you encourage your mind to be a fertile ground for new growth.

**Obstacle No 15: My thesis advisor is more of an obstacle than an aid.** A student once volunteered that he was having trouble writing because "my advisor is the anti-Christ." For some odd reason, of all the negative feelings about writing that students have voiced in all of my classes, this one got the biggest laugh. Perhaps it was nervous laughter rather than sympathetic laughter, but the truth remains that a hypercritical mentor is a real obstacle. This is especially the case if you must work closely with him or her on the article you are revising for this workbook.



If you are in this situation, you have three choices. First, try telling your advisor that research shows that when drafting an article it is a good idea to focus on what is working rather than what is not working. Add that you would like the space to develop your project without too much detailed feedback and that when you are done with a second draft you will welcome all of your advisor's comments, negative and positive. If your advisor argues that he or she is just trying to head you off at the pass, before you dedicate too much work to an errant direction, state that you are happy to revise when the time comes and to throw out sections if need be. This technique is risky, because your advisor may be even more critical if he or she has not had the opportunity to be so early on. But, since you will have had more time to develop your ideas, and defend them on paper, your direction may seem more palatable than it would have in an early draft. Professors can describe as wrong or untenable those ideas that you simply have not yet fully defended. Once you marshal more proofs, their objection fades.

If this sort of rational conversation is not possible, you might want to consider switching advisors. There is nothing wrong with letting an advisor know that you think you would both be happier working with others. There is no need to say specifically why or to offer the professor a critique of his or her advising style. Just focus on moving on. Make sure you have found another professor who is willing to be your advisor before you take this step.

If neither of these approaches are options, make sure to have some arena where you go for responses that are more positive. I recommend a writing group that focuses on offering support and encouragement. Feel free to tell the group that you are getting all the negative feedback you can handle and you would be grateful if they would focus on the positive.

**Obstacle No. 16: I can't sit still.** Some energetic people find it hard to stay in one place. As one student put it, "I was writing when I suddenly found myself sweeping the kitchen. I have no idea how I got there!" Aiming to write no more than fifteen minutes at a stretch can be very helpful for this problem. It's easier to sit still if you know it's not for hours and hours. One student would set a kitchen timer for fifteen minutes. "When the alarm went off, it reminded me that I was supposed to be writing. I would often find myself doing something else and the alarm would help me refocus." I know one professor who belts himself into his chair. He pulls his belt out of some loops, threads it through the back of his work chair, and then belts it back up. That way, if he gets distracted, he is quickly reminded to stay seated! This technique seems extreme to me, but he swears by it.

**Obstacle No. 17: I feel guilty about not writing.** It's ironic that the very tool most of us use to spur ourselves into action also prevents us from acting. Guilt can be a useful goad, but it can also be a terrible obstacle. Most graduate students feel too much guilt about not writing. Some feel so guilty that it actually prevents them from writing. My unauthorized theory of why feeling guilty doesn't work is this: If you already feel guilty about

not writing, you do what you can to avoid feeling even more guilty. The longer you go without writing, the less guilty you have to feel, because writing is clearly an impossible task. Following the exercises in this workbook and its model of a slow and steady pace should help overcome this feeling.

**Obstacle No 18: I write so slowly that I never seem to get much done.** Remember that it is extremely rare for a writer to churn out perfect first drafts. Even those who are famous for composing quickly may not have been so quick. The prolific eighteenth-century writer Samuel Johnson once wrote an essay in about half-an-hour while the printer's runner was at the door. When a friend asked if he could read it, Johnson handed the essay to the runner and told the friend, "Sir, you shall not do more than I have done myself" (Boswell 1793). These are the kinds of stories that people use to make themselves feel bad about their pace of writing. But these stories are mythical in several significant ways. First, Johnson composed much of his writing in his head and then wrote it down in a short space of time. Second, he was not writing for academic publication. If he had been, editors would have regularly rejected his articles for plagiarism and inaccurate quoting of sources (which he did from memory). You are working under different constraints! So, don't torture yourself with these examples. While some people who have been writing steadily for more than a decade can quickly write good first drafts, they are still the exception rather than the rule. Most people plod along, deleting one sentence for every three sentences they write and having to repeatedly read and revise their work to get it right. This does not make you a bad writer, it makes you a good writer. Over time, you will get faster. For now, applaud the amount of time you spend on writing instead of bemoaning your low output.

**Obstacle No. 19: If I have a long, productive writing day, somehow it is harder to get started the next day, rather than easier.** Boice observed this phenomenon during his research—that it was possible to have too much of a good thing. His advice is to limit the amount of time that you write (Boice 2000). While this can seem counterintuitive (What?! You want me to stop writing when I am really moving along?!), I have heard from those who tend to "overwrite" that the advice is sound. One student told me that his writing got better, smoother, and quicker when he started to limit the amount of time he spent writing. He tended to spend many hours a day writing, not due to any deadline but just by nature, and so limiting the amount of time he spent writing prevented him from "fussing with it." Others simply can't avoid spending long days writing; for instance, those whose first job depends on their finishing their dissertations in several months. If that is you, don't let me stop you. But there is a cost. I have noticed that those who had to binge write their dissertations often struggle later with post-traumatic dissertation syndrome. The feelings associated with writing for so long were exhaustion and anxiety so they recoil when faced with writing now. Avoid the marathon session.




**Obstacle No. 20: I know my writing habits are bad, but that's just who I am and I can't/don't want to change.** Only you can tell if the way that you write is fundamental to your being or just an accident of your life experiences and education. If you feel strong resistance to any of my adages, you should pay attention to that. Believe your resistance, as they say. Not every tactic works for everyone. But do pay attention to whether you are feeling resistance or fear. Resistance is positive, the sense that something just isn't for you. Fear is negative, the false sense that you just can't do something. So, watch what's happening because of "who you are." If who you are is preventing you from attaining the goals that are valuable to you, you may have to think hard about how you can turn that character trait into a positive or whether you want to go on being yourself. Behavior modification asserts that you are not a Russian doll, with layers of wooden selves to your very core. Rather, you are a protean being who does not take advantage of half your potential, skills, or smarts. Be wary of labeling some dysfunction as your essence. Sometimes you have to choose being productive over being unique.

**Obstacle No. 21: I am eager to write but I don't have the material or scholarly resources.** In some circumstances, you may not have access to a computer or to research publications. Maybe you are no longer at a university or your university doesn't have these resources. One Sri Lankan scholar tells the story of having to choose between writing his article submission by hand or on an ancient typewriter with a threadbare ribbon (Canagarajah 2002). He had paper only because he had bribed someone for it. EuroAmerican editors are rarely aware of the deep challenges facing scholars from countries outside of Europe and North America. Faced with a handwritten submission, editors may automatically return it. What can you do to improve your odds? This workbook is one attempt to level the playing field by giving you some solid knowledge of what U.S. journal editors expect.

I have two other recommendations. Plan now on sending your submission with an explanation of your circumstances. If material conditions limited your research, not your own thought, it is important that the editors know that. Few U.S. editors will know what you face. If they know, they can be more helpful. Many journal editors wish that they received more submissions from outside the United States and say that they would be willing to work with foreign authors who asked for some assistance. The key to inspiring such help is your data. Since you don't have access to the secondary literature (and so can't relate your research to the field), you will have to depend heavily on possessing exceptional data. Fortunately, scholars from outside the United States often have unique data and texts to offer U.S. journal editors; for example, a quantitative study never done in your nation or an epic poem undiscussed in a European language. You are more likely to get a EuroAmerican editor's assistance for a data-rich article than a theoretical one, unfortunately. Find a way to keep going.

**Obstacle No. 22: I have to make progress on several writing projects at the same time, and I am in a panic.** The writing research shows that

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those scholars with more than one writing project going at a time do better than those with only one (Boice 2000). Perhaps this is because you can switch from one to the other when you get stuck. Whatever the reason, having more than one writing project is a plus, not a minus. You probably have to prioritize one, but make a plan for working on both.

**Obstacle No. 23: I would love to ask someone to read and comment on my work but everyone seems so busy and I don't want to bother them.** It can be tough to ask people to spend their precious time reading your work. One way to make it easier for others to do this is to make that reading social. That is, instead of handing over your prose and asking your reader to get back to you when they have had a chance to read it on their own, read each other's work together. Schedule some time at a café or someone's home and read the work right there, then comment on it. It can be easier to read work when someone else is keeping you company and when you know that it is an exchange. Exchanging writing is often more effective anyway, as your reviewer knows he or she is about to be reviewed and will take care to be kind.

**Obstacle No. 24: I'm beginning to wonder if being a professor is really the career for me, so what's the point of writing? I probably won't get a job anyway.** It is easy to get discouraged when you have to keep doing something you don't feel good at. Being a professor depends on developing skills in teaching, writing, research, socializing, organizing, and discipline. Few jobs require so many different skills. It's a really difficult job! In fact, it is so difficult that most people spend decades figuring it all out, often after they have gotten their first jobs. So, be nice to yourself. In this workbook, you are going to work on one facet of being a professor—writing. Fortunately, learning to write well is a skill that will serve you in any profession so it is not a waste of time even if you don't plan to be a professor. When you are done with this workbook, you may feel better about your skills and may be more willing to spend the time to develop them. Or, you may feel more clearly that being a professor isn't for you. If that's what you decide, be kind to yourself about that too.

**Obstacle No. 25: I'm not smart enough to do this kind of work.** Sometimes, the most comforting response to our feelings of insecurity is to allow them. Maybe you are not smart enough to do statistics, learn several languages, understand complex theory, lecture without notes, or write without agony. For me, though, that's not the right question. The right question is not "Am I smart enough to do this work?" but "Am I passionate enough?" Do you love your topic or project? Do you believe it can make a real contribution? Sometimes it is easier to believe in the project than in yourself, and that's okay. Many average people have accomplished extraordinary things through their commitment and passion. Through hard work, they develop skills that were not innate. Maybe you are smart enough, or maybe you aren't. But if you care deeply about what you are doing, it may not matter. In the timeless words of that great sage Professor



Albus Dumbledore, “It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities” (Rowling 1997).

**Obstacle No. 26: I get distracted by web surfing, e-mailing, and text messaging.** As more than one scholar has argued, our communication technologies have “become both utterly integral and a major source of exhaustion and disquiet . . . E-mail must rank as one of the most time-devouring timesavers of all time. Too often it makes nothing happen—fast” (Nixon 2000). A student of mine resorted to working in a nearby fast food restaurant undergoing renovation because it had no wifi and the noise was so loud that she couldn’t hear her cell phone ring. I hope that you find an easier method than this to cut down on your connectivity. Try closing your e-mail software or web browser while writing. Try checking e-mail only in the evening—or whenever you have the least energy. Don’t make the mistake of thinking that you will get started after some quick web browsing. Try to do writing first, not second.

**Obstacle No. 27: It is so difficult to write in English!** My sympathies! Writing in English when it isn’t your native tongue is difficult. Whole books have been written about the bizarre spelling, pronunciation, grammar, and syntax of this crazy language. If you are fairly good, hiring a copyeditor may be useful. If you have a long way to go in improving your English, read academic works in English. Then read some more and then read some more! Reading helps you absorb the structure of the language at an intuitive level so the more you do of it, the better. Finally, support journals in your own language, if possible. I know universities in many countries now prioritize publishing in English-language journals, but it is extremely important to keep research going in native languages.

**Obstacle No. 28: I need big blocks of time to write, and my schedule doesn’t allow such blocks.** I addressed this topic earlier, in *Designing Your Writing Schedule*, but let me repeat. The first question I like to ask people who make such claims is: Have you ever tried it any other way? Many students believe that in order to write they must have long, uninterrupted stretches of time and yet they have never tried it any other way! It is unscientific to have such firm beliefs without having tested them. According to actual writing tests, there are two problems with this big block of time theory. One, such stretches are elusive, and virtually nonexistent once you become a professor. Two, people who use only big blocks of time to write are less productive and more unhappy than those who write daily. They have problems getting started and they often don’t feel good about their writing. Study after study shows that you do not need big blocks of time to write. In fact, writers who write a little bit every day produce more manuscripts than those who alternate extended writing sessions with weeks/months of not writing. Writing just thirty minutes a day can make you one of those unusual writers who publishes several journal articles a year.

**Day 4 (continued): Overturning Writing Obstacles**

Use the chart below to note each of the major obstacles in the way of your writing goals—whether mentioned above or not. Also, note whether its interference level is high, medium, or low.

Estimated Interference	Writing Interruptions and Obstacles

So, what do you intend to do to interrupt your interruptions and overcome your obstacles to writing? If need be, review the interruptions and solutions listed above and return to the lessons you learned from noticing your feelings about writing earlier in this chapter.

Solutions to My Writing Interruptions and Obstacles

**Day 5: Documenting How You Spent Your Time**

On the weekly plan given earlier, you graphed out what time you would like to spend writing. Now, I would like you to spend some time every day this week filling out the weekly plan on the next page with how much time you actually spent writing and what you did with the rest of your time. List everything: watching television, attending class, commuting, sleeping, caring for family members, performing household tasks (e.g., cleaning, laundry, cooking), etc. This is an excellent exercise for finding out where your time goes and a useful tool for identifying how you to use your time more efficiently.

Week 1 Calendar							
Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
5:00 a.m.							
6:00							
7:00							
8:00							
9:00							
10:00							
11:00							
12:00 p.m.							
1:00							
2:00							
3:00							
4:00							
5:00							
6:00							
7:00							
8:00							
9:00							
10:00							
11:00							
12:00 a.m.							
1:00							
2:00							
3:00							
4:00							
Total Minutes Actually Worked							
Tasks Completed							



At the end of the week, look back at this record and consider your accomplishments. Even if you did not get as much done as you hoped, you have gained understanding of your patterns and are poised to do better next week. Remember, feeling too much guilt is counterproductive!