



UNIVERSITY of
DENVER

UNIVERSITY WRITING CENTER

Sustaining Major Writing and Research Projects

Dr. Aubrey Schiavone

November 2021



Agenda

Developing a daily writing habit

Strategies for tackling big writing projects

Daily Writing Habits

Make it a routine

Establish a regular writing schedule so that writing becomes a habit or routine for you. You might decide to write at the same time each day or draft a certain number of pages or paragraphs each day or write for a certain amount of time each day.

Find a physical space and routine that works for you and stick with it.

Complete a writing session and set goals “at the top of the hill.”

Daily Writing Habits

Set SMART Goals

Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic/Results-Focused,
Time bound

Like This

- Read two articles and write a paragraph about each
- Work on drafting my methodology section for 20 minutes
- Reread my results section (8 pages), making notes for where I may need to include additional data or analysis
- Create a chart summarizing participant demographics

Daily Writing Habits

Write a Strategic Plan

Be realistic about your time commitments (professional and personal). Create a strategic plan at the start of each new quarter or month or whatever works best for you. Be flexible and generous with yourself about your plan.

Build in breaks

Take the weekends off from writing, or a couple days during the week if that works best for your schedule. You can't pour from an empty cup. You need time away from the writing in order to return with fresh eyes and renewed energy.

Daily Writing Habits

Build in Daily or Weekly Rewards For Yourself

Walk your dog, paint your nails, buy a fancy coffee drink, take a hike, watch your favorite movie, visit your mom. Plan your rewards and write them down so you know what you're working towards.

Have a Weekly Planning Meeting with Yourself

I do Friday afternoons, some people do Monday mornings, some folks do Sunday nights (but that breaks the no writing on the weekend rule). Take 20 minutes each week to check in with your strategic plan and set realistic writing goals for the week.

Daily Writing Habits

Prioritize the Writing

In terms of academic labor, writing is more important than teaching or service, and writing makes us better teachers and community members. How can you make your other commitments smaller, more manageable, or put writing first?

Form a Writing Group and Meet with Them Regularly

Consider organizing a writing group with peers to support each other's writing lives. These writing groups might comment on each other's work, write together, or simply help keep participants accountable. Form your own groups or consider joining DU's graduate student writing accountability groups.

Daily Writing Habits

Let's reflect

What seems helpful or useful to you from the workshop so far?

Which of these strategies do you already use as part of your writing?

What challenges or difficulties do you see for developing a daily or regular writing habit?

Name one or two strategies you could try out as part of your writing in the next month or two.

Tackling Big Writing Projects

Plan

Make a plan for your project with specific dates and deadlines for specific sections or smaller tasks involved with the project. Be flexible and generous with yourself and your plan.

Build in breaks

Scheduling short breaks (taking a week off between research or field work and writing, for example) will help you clear your head and ensure that you begin working again promptly.

Tackling Big Writing Projects

Take the path of least resistance

Start writing whichever portion of your project feels easiest, even if that's the middle of it. By the time you get to the harder sections, you'll have had plenty of preparation for them.

Consult with mentors

Talk regularly with mentors, peers, or faculty who can offer you support while you plan, draft, and revise for a major project. Do some reflection to figure out what your needs are, and then advocate for yourself to make sure you're getting the support you need.

Tackling Big Writing Projects

Stop researching and start writing

OR

Keep researching but start writing

Don't wait to write! Beginning to work on portions of the writing even as you continue to research or analyze your data will help you focus your research and analysis as precisely as possible, and you won't be left with one large chunk of writing at the end of the project when the data no longer feels fresh or exciting.

Tackling Big Writing Projects

Rhetorical Genre Analysis

Gather helpful examples of works you care about. This could be articles published in journals you hope to publish in, works on topics similar to your own topic, works with methodologies similar to your own, or works published by people you know so that you can talk to them about the process and lifecycle of a project. As you read or reread these pieces, keep track of writing strategies you might want to adopt or adapt in your own writing.

Tackling Big Writing Projects

Read for How to Write

“Where are the Women?: Rhetoric of Gendered Labor in University Communities”

Rachel Riedner—George Washington University

Literacy in Composition Studies 3.1 (2015): 122-30.

KEYWORDS inclusion, access, gendered labor, university community, university discourse

I recently attended a panel of feminist scholars at the Conference of College Composition and Communication entitled “Rhetorical Inquiry to Change Realities: Why Feminist Methods Matter” (Belanger et al.). The question that framed the presentations was “where are the women?” There was considerable discussion from the panel and among audience members about women’s inclusion and equal participation in disciplines, university governance, and university communities, with a particular emphasis on underrepresented fields such as engineering. The discussion emphasized that women, individually and collectively, deserve access and inclusion to institutional governance and knowledge production in all areas of universities because women are demonstrably valuable members of institutions and systems. Certainly, inclusion and access are important feminist issues. Inclusion and access have been used as by feminists as keywords, “‘particular formations of meaning’ that provide ‘ways not only of discussing but at another level of seeing many of our central experiences’” (Williams, qtd. in *McRuer* 6).

As keywords used by feminist scholars and activists, access and inclusion can help secure recognition within legal systems and religious organizations, from employers and professional organizations, and within public space and public cultures. However, given the range of women who work at universities, and the close relations and dependencies among differently, and often unequally, situated women, the particular question raised at the panel “where are the women,” with its call for access to academic employment and inclusion in university governance, seems too narrowly focused on women who do intellectual labor, i.e. faculty. At many universities, keywords of access and inclusion are not used to address the range of labor that women do at

Comment [1]: Cites very current research

Comment [2]: Identifies framing question

Comment [3]: Establishes nature and concern of discussion: topics, emphases, argument

Comment [4]: Acknowledges importance of those emphases

Comment [5]: Situates these emphases as keywords

Comment [6]: Notes value of keywords

Comment [7]: But...problematizes keywords as overly narrow

Tackling Big Writing Projects

Form Inspires Content

IMRD for Sciences and Social Sciences

- Introduction
- Methods
- Results
- Discussion

Some fields are receptive of anecdotal or personal connections in introductory sections or throughout—is your field?

Does your field encourage visual representations of data? How might you feature graphs, concept maps, tables, images, charts, videos, infographics or other multimodal features in your writing?

Tackling Big Writing Projects

Getting Stuck

Writers block happens to all of us. Here are some strategies for dealing with it:

- Take some time away
- Work on another project or another section of your project
 - Consider developing a system for yourself wherein you always have two or three projects going that you can bounce between when one gets stale for you
- Print your draft out in hard copy and write notes for yourself about revisions to make
- Read your writing aloud to yourself or to a friend and note possible places for revision. Or have your computer read your writing aloud to you.

Tackling Big Writing Projects

Getting Stuck. You Are Not Alone.

- Go to the writing center with a draft—Get some outside feedback!
- Graduate Writing Accountability Groups through the DU Writing Center
- Consult with a colleague, friend, or mentor. Ask them to read some portion of your work that you need help with.
- Read an article that you love or admire or aspire to, do some rhetorical genre analysis, how can you jumpstart your writing with some model strategies or moves?
- Submit proposals to conferences in your field, present at conferences, meet other scholars, discuss your work

Tackling Big Writing Projects

Rejection is an Opportunity

- Rejections come with feedback!
- Rejection can be an opportunity to retool your work for another venue.



Tackling Big Writing Projects

Celebrate Whenever You Can

Big milestones or small, celebrate your work and progress whenever and however you can



Tackling Big Writing Projects

Let's Set Some Goals

Do any of the strategies mentioned today seem immediately useful to you? Could you try out one or two of these strategies during the remainder of the retreat this afternoon? Will you be working on any writing projects over the winter break? Why or why not? (There is no right or wrong answer here. Just hoping to get you to check in with yourself). Would any of these writing strategies be useful to you over the winter break?