Tips and Tricks
Tuesday, April 28th, 2015

- It can be productive to have a timer and this way you can force yourself to work for even short periods, like ten minutes. There are dice that can be bought online that have different time periods on them. So, for example, a ten minute time period might be listed on the top of the dice and it will count down the time. You can work for that time and then work into greater time periods.
- Sometimes it works well to not necessarily have a formal timer, but to set aside a period of time to work on the project. Start with twenty minutes and then take a break to do something around the house before getting back at it again. There are different tips for different stages, but this works well when just getting started. Once a first draft is done you can leave it for a few days and then come back to look at it with a fresh pair of eyes.
- There is a fair amount of subconscious work that goes into the process. Eventually conscious ideas come, but the subconscious mind is often at work. There should be an environment where the mind is open and free. For example, driving is often good because the body is forced to be still, whereas the mind is not.
- Working with other people is an advantage because other people are relying on your section of the paper. This is a huge motivator!
- Writing the conclusion first helps to focus on what needs to be said in the paper. Not writing the thesis first is sometimes.
- Keep a journal of the work that gets done. Often when you have a more broken-up schedule it can be helpful to work short hours at a time. This helps to connect to the long-term work and by looking back it can remind you that you are working towards something bigger.
- Keep a diary and determine self-imposed deadlines. The sense of reward as you see how much has completed is important. Listen to a CD and listen to it through until it is finished. Then you will have a sense of how long you have been working. Avoid working from 4:30 to 6:00, because for some this is the most unproductive time of day. Sometimes you can start the work before breakfast and then reward yourself with breakfast once you have completed work.
- Organizes yourself until everything is to the point and she knows what you will write for the one paragraph. It might take all day and it doesn't mean that you needs to write linearly, but it helps to know what is being written.
- Look for an environment where the mind is forced to be free – a vibrating, stimulating environment. Jazz music helps to free the mind.
- Distractions can be good! If you get bogged down with a conceptual problem you can sometimes just sit and focus on it, which is not productive. Doing laundry helps because you are not distracted for long, but it gives a much-needed break and allows you to come back to the problem with fresh eyes.

- Organize everything in a pile on her desk, and you can bring that out at another time to organize and work on. Learn to forgive herself if not everything gets done at once.
- Work at home from your own computer with a pen and paper beside you. When inspiration flows you can hop on it and write until you can't anymore. Don't force yourself to write.
- Keep note-cards and write notes as she thinks of new ideas. Make a comprehensive to-do list and cross items off as they are completed. Limit sessions to two hours and get as much done in that time period as possible.
- Go to the fridge and reorganize; it is like a visual puzzle and will help to "unlock his head." After the fridge is clean you can move on to the cupboards!
- Try to explain what you are working on to some random stranger or someone not in your field. I
- Train yourself in a way that works for you. There is so much information on what works for people that can be found online that we can go through this information and take ideas from them. We learn how to get what's in there (in the head) to out there (on the paper). There is no right way to do something – there are many different ways that work for people.
- Don't be your own editor while you are writing, just let it flow onto the page – just get it out – and then edit it later.
- When dealing with writers block for a section of the text, just put a placeholder of [...] and fill it in later.
- When writing a paper, start by writing the results (and Methods) first and then the introduction last – somewhat the opposite of how the paper is read.
- Work on building your solidarity team – your mentors, friends, past professors – so that what is written is done with the (historical) support of others.
- Planning with the end in mind-what are your goals, what is a clearly outlined timeline, what needs to be accomplished in 6 months in order to get to the goal.
- For overall structure of a paper, consider printing out the entire paper, cutting out the paragraphs and re-structuring the paper in a way that is more logical or presents the arguments more logically (also done using Scrivener software).
- Sometimes, be less ambitious and focus in on a particular topic. This makes a paper feel less overwhelming.
- Consider working in a team and setting deadlines so as to be beholden to other people.
- Use a trusted friend or colleague for editing of a manuscript. It is often easier for a colleague to edit and trim-down (unnecessary) text than it is to do it ourselves.
- Write with the purpose of your text being able to make a change – in society, in knowledge, in education, in policies, etc...
- For writers block, go back to the literature and read, read, read.

- Have an explicit structure to a document, using subheadings and bulleted points, such that the text can just be "filled-in" later.
- Use CASP tools (see several websites) – a rubric for how study design and write-up is evaluated by editors. What needs to be included in various types of studies, any specific information that needs to be included, a checklist that editors use, etc...
- When writing in groups, consider using something like either Google Docs or Dropbox to share and edit what has been written.
- Omm software (http://www.ommwriter.com/) is useful to establish background noise.
- Build a comfortable writing environment, with natural light, a good chair, ability to stand and walk around once each hour or two.
- Some people work well in a coffee shop, surrounded with people, because there is a sense of accountability (ie, you somehow feel accountable to the strangers around you and are thus less likely to spend the day surfing or on Facebook). There is also https://coffitivity.com/ to create that environment at home if the white noise is important.
- Schedule in your writing within a week's schedule. At the beginning of the week, assess the teaching and meeting obligations, and other life/family obligations. From the remaining free blocks of time, schedule in writing time.
- "Breadcrumbs": when finishing-up a writing section, layout what the next writing topics need to be. When returning to the writing, it is easier to pick-up where things were left off.
- "The Drop Ball": while writing, keep a list of non-writing related tasks that need to be done. This prevents writing interruptions – stopping writing to reply to an important email, do an important task.
- Some individuals use Dragon dictate software to be able to speak and have the computer transcribe their text.
- Pomodoro.org or app software allows one to time writing sessions without interruptions. Some versions of the timer software do not allow pausing, such that "stopping the clock" results in resetting it.
- Ask, "Why am I stuck?" Why am I doing this? Why did I agree to do this? Do I really have to do this?
- The best approach for one to get "unstuck" is trying to "chunk" my time. Ts more effective times turn to be in the summer. A second effective approach is to write in teams with members who have different assets.
- Visualize what change your writing can effect and identify the audience to help make the change. Write for that audience!
- If you haven't tried it before, try collaborating on a presentation or paper! Even if you aren't a student anymore, try going to the library. This is a great place to write!
- Enjoy a coffee shop environment and make it a special place to write.
- Write the result first – write around any necessary figures then the introduction and the abstract last.

- Dedicate a specific time every day to writing.
- Ambient/meditation music can help with concentration – there is a coffee shop sounds app called coffivity!
- Have some unfinished thoughts for next time so you're excited to get back to writing!
- Stay motivated and focus in a soothing environment.
- Know who your solidarity team is and access them to help you through any writing blocks.
- Use different software tools to keep the writing process fresh. For example, using Dragon Naturally Speaking to "change things up" from writing to speaking.
- Have a comfortable – but not too comfortable – workspace.
- Have all work materials at hand.
- Keep distractions out of the workspace.
- Step away from your work and take a break.
- Don't forget to write your ideas as you do your writing and question the ideas (this helps find better sources).
- When everything is overwhelming, let it go!
- Make a list; expand the list as needed; check off items as completed; add items you have completed (that are not originally on the list) so you can check them off; always think of what you can do that day and that moment to be productive.
- Use Dropbox to write collaboratively.
- Use time management tips like GANTT chart, weekly planners, and lists.
- Use reverse outlining.
- For writing proposals: evolve project ideas over months or years. Seek feedback from others via conversations as opportunities allow.
- Keep it real and in perspective!
- Sleep on problems! Tackle them when your mental focus is the highest.
- Subdivide the problem into smaller chunks, asking oneself what information, reading, and thinking needs to be done in order to attain progress.
- Foster an environment of research.
- Set personal work time and protect it like a meeting!
- Try not to worry about the things that you cannot get done. Tell yourself to move on.