

GETTING STARTED WRITING YOUR THESIS

3 MOST COMMON WAYS TO GET STARTED WRITING:

- Write to find out what you know. You always know more than you think you do!
- Use your introduction as a way of organizing the rest of your thesis.
- Create a loose outline or map of where you want to go.

Most writers use a combination of the above depending on what they're writing, how they feel, the weather that day, etc. On Monday you may need to write in your head, but on Wednesday you may be typing like crazy.

DRAFT METAPHORS

- The first drafts are the zero drafts – drafty drafts – the “make a mess” drafts.
- The next few drafts are the “arrange the mess” drafts.
- The final few drafts are the “clean it up” drafts.

OTHER MOTIVATIONAL TECHNIQUES:

- Start anywhere you want – you don't have to start at the beginning.
- When doing freewriting or “sloppy topic” writing, try to forget spelling, sentence structure, order, and word choice. The objective is to just get something down.
- Eventually $\frac{3}{4}$ of what you write will get tossed, so don't fall in love with sentences or paragraphs.
- Change directions. Don't hold yourself too tightly to your outline, since it may cut down on the possibility for new insights and “a-ha” moments.
- Start with what excites you the most about the thesis.
- Even when you don't want to write, write anyway.
- Talk about your thesis with everyone.
- Think about your audience—what would pull them into the paper?
- Use ‘action’ verbs (e.g., look at how often you use “is”) and avoid passive voice.
- To avoid the drama/trauma of last-minute writing, schedule lots of buffer time (i.e., schedule your procrastination).
- **DO NOT discard anything** until your thesis is turned in. **Be sure to set up some sort of organizational system so you can find things (maybe dating the drafts)**
- Withhold judgment on what you write for a week or so. Right now it may sound unintelligible, but it may actually be good when you read it later
- “Park on a downhill slope” -- sketch out in writing what you intent to tackle the next day, and perhaps stop in the middle of a sentence, so you know exactly where to start the next day (Hemingway did this).

YOUR WRITING ENVIRONMENT:

- Try writing with the screen turned off.
- Turn off the games in your computer.
- Switch from typing to handwriting.
- Go for walks or get exercise to get oxygen to your brain.
- Pick some non-distracting music and play it only when you are writing (8tracks.com has some great mixes built for studying!)

SETTING GOALS (3 COMMON METHODS)

- Sit and write.
- Write until you come up with some ideas.
- Write a set # of pages each day.

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT:

- Give yourself a reward after you write a certain number of pages (go play video games, go do some retail therapy, etc...)
- Set realistic goals – set a realistic daily writing goal and stick to it.
- Write yourself a letter detailing everything you've accomplished thus far; you may be surprised at how much you've done, and it's often gratifying to see it written down.
- Practice self-compassion and not self-criticism. As Wikipedia defines it: "Self-compassion entails being warm towards oneself when encountering pain and personal shortcomings, rather than ignoring them or hurting oneself with self-criticism." Be kind to yourself; you are doing great!

IF YOU DON'T REMEMBER ANYTHING ELSE, REMEMBER THIS:

- Write it down.
- Find an honest additional reader – a peer, NOT a faculty member – to read your work, preferably out loud while you're listening. It may perhaps be cringe worthy, but helpful to you.
- LOCKSS – Lots of Copies Keeps Stuff Safe, so keep at least one hard copy of your thesis, and **keep it backed up digitally in at least two places**. For example, several students save their work on Google Docs as well as a flash drive. Bring out your inner squirrel and store away multiple copies in case the unthinkable happens.