

# Writing Tips

## Negative thoughts and writing myths

Banish negative thoughts! Avoid thoughts such as: “I’ve never been very good at writing” or “My sister is more academic than me”. Instead, focus on past and present successes and remember that the act of writing is about learning to write. You will make mistakes and it will get messy. Research writing takes time and gets chaotic. It is not a clean, simple process!

## Writing is not:

Writing is NOT editing, reading, referencing or formatting. Writing is putting new words onto the page or substantially rewriting existing drafts. Do not make the mistake of using your writing time for other things. Schedule a separate time for these and stick to writing new words during writing time.

## Planning and Preparation

Ensure that you are well organised prior to sitting down to write. When your writing time starts, that is the time to put pen to paper or fingers to keyboard! Ensure you:

- Turn up at the desk on time
- Have a specific writing space and be organised with computer access, stationery, space for open books or resources, enough light etc.
- Get into the headspace for writing with a ritual, e.g.: make a coffee, sharpen pencils, turn off phone (prior to writing time)
- Tell family you are unavailable at this time – writing is work

It is also important to have a plan and goals for that session. You could try:

- Setting time or word targets for getting new words on the page, e.g.: 500 new words each session or write new words for 2 hours
- Writing every day (or several days a week) for a set time. Mark this time clearly on your calendar so you and others know when your dedicated writing time is, and stick to your schedule.

A regular writing schedule reduces anxiety about not writing. It gets you into a routine and makes writing a normal part of your daily or weekly schedule. It encourages you to have clear plans and goals and gradually moves you closer to your end goal.

## Snack writing

Snack writing is writing for short periods of time. You could write for 15 to 30 minutes at intervals throughout the day. One way to fit in snack writing sessions is to make use of otherwise wasted time (sitting on the bus, waiting at the doctors etc.). Try breaking writing tasks into smaller, 15 minute sections and crossing them off a list. This way you can see you are making progress. Keep a note of The Next Thing (TNT) to write and pick up the task where you left off.

## Sprint writing

Imagine a nice reward waiting for you at the end of a sprint! A nice hot coffee? A quick walk around the block? When you sprint write, you write for a longer period and reward yourself when the timer goes off. Set the timer for 30-60 minutes. The goal is to produce **draft-quality** new words on the page.

- Decide the topic/purpose of your writing
- Set the timer
- Do nothing except write for that time. No eating, drinking, stopping, talking, cleaning or even toilet breaks—JUST WRITING!
- Reward yourself at the end

## Free writing

Free writing means that you put pen to paper and just write without stopping or overthinking.

- Don't re-read what you have written
- Don't worry about spelling, punctuation or structure or mistakes
- Don't think logically, just write whatever comes to mind
- Don't even look up from the page!

Academic Learning Support offer free individual consultations and group workshops for HDR students. For more writing, study, and academic support contact [learningsupport@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:learningsupport@newcastle.edu.au) or call 02 4921 5350.