

## 4 Writing Myths

### 1. The myth of the muse

- a. "I need to be in the mood to write," "I need to feel inspired," "I need to feel motivated" or the corollary, "I do my best work under pressure."
- b. Do you wait to be inspired to: see your patients, teach your classes, attend meetings, send emails?
- c. Writing is no different. There is NO writing muse. Writing is our job!
- d. Suggestion: Write a little every day (10-30-60 mins.) Schedule it in your calendar – respect it, show up, come on time, come prepared, be in the moment (no distractions), and STOP when your time is up. What will happen? Writing will become automatic, mechanical, and less emotional.

### 2. I can't find time to write

- a. "I have too many interruptions at my office," "I have too many competing obligations," or the corollary, "I can't write unless I have a big chunk of time – I need at least 4 hours..."
- b. Everyone has the same 24 hours – clinical duties and schedules vary; teaching responsibilities; administrative duties; families – children, elders, etc. Is there something you find time to do every day (e.g., exercise, reading the news, internet surfing)? Why not writing? Productive writers report the same amount of free time as less-productive writers.
- c. Don't multi-task – it kills your focus; delegate; schedule your priorities – don't prioritize your schedule;
- d. Suggestion: Look in the right "places" (physically and in your calendar) for time. Review your schedule (track your time for a week, is your time and effort aligned with your life mission?). Lesson: you need less time than you think. People who write for long stretches (unplanned/binges) get less done with more stress than people who write for brief, daily stretches. Why? You don't waste time figuring out where you were. Writing is less emotionally-charged. Can't find 30 minutes? How about 10?

### 3. I can't start writing until I'm ready

- a. "I need to finish data collection," "I need to finish running my stats/need to run more models," "I need to read more literature." Corollary: "I am stuck because I'm waiting for a co-author's feedback."
- b. Are you ever REALLY "ready to write"?
- c. Suggestion: Start writing the paper as soon as you have the idea; write throughout the process – it will help you refine your ideas; you will get more done and waste less time. Writing is not what you do AFTER you've figured it out, writing is HOW you figure it out.
- d. Expand your definition of writing. Writing is ANY activity that directly/indirectly causes more lines to appear on your biosketch! (e.g., freewriting about an idea, reviewing notes, working on a table, entering references, writing a cover letter, reviewing a paper).

### 4. I don't know where to start

- a. "I've been putting off the \_\_\_\_\_ because I hate that part." Corollary: "I spent all my time on the \_\_\_\_\_ because I love that part."
- b. Is this your checklist: "Work on grant" "Write XYZ paper"? Of course this is an overwhelming task!
- c. Suggestion: Imaginary robot. If you tell your robot: "Finish results section" – it wouldn't know what to do. Instead, tell the robot: "Open data file, run descriptive on final study groups, double-check ANOVA results, copy means, SDs, and p-values into table...." Then calculate how much time each of those tasks will take (1 minute to open file or 20 because you can't remember where it is? 2 minutes for descriptive or 10 because you can't remember how you coded the groups? 2 minutes to double-check ANOVAs or 15 to re-run just because you're compulsive?) – your 10 minute task might really be a 50-minute task! So plan for the time each task actually takes, NOT the amount of time you want to spend on it.

## **Writing is your job. Do your job every day.**

*Kharma's rules:*

- Prioritize writing
- Schedule your writing
- Write early and often
- Be your own research robot
- Know how long things actually take and give yourself the time you actually need
- Join a WAG!

**Join the WAGon train on Facebook!** <https://www.facebook.com/HopkinsWAGs>

### **References:**

How to Write a Lot, by Paul Silvia (2007)

Advice for New Faculty Members, by Robert Boice (2000)

### **Other Recommended Reading:**

The Power of Habit: Why we do what we do in life and business, by Charles Duhigg (2012)

Getting Things Done: The art of stress-free productivity, by David Allen (2002)

### **Writing Apps & Programs**

Scrivener

writeordie.com

Academicladder.com

### **Time Mgt. Apps & Programs**

Basecamp

Focus Booster

FocusTime

MyLifeOrganized (MLO)

Pomodoro

Remember the Milk

Rescue Time

Timeful (Intelligent Time Assistance)

Toggl

### **Blogs**

<http://getalifephd.blogspot.com/>

<http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/>