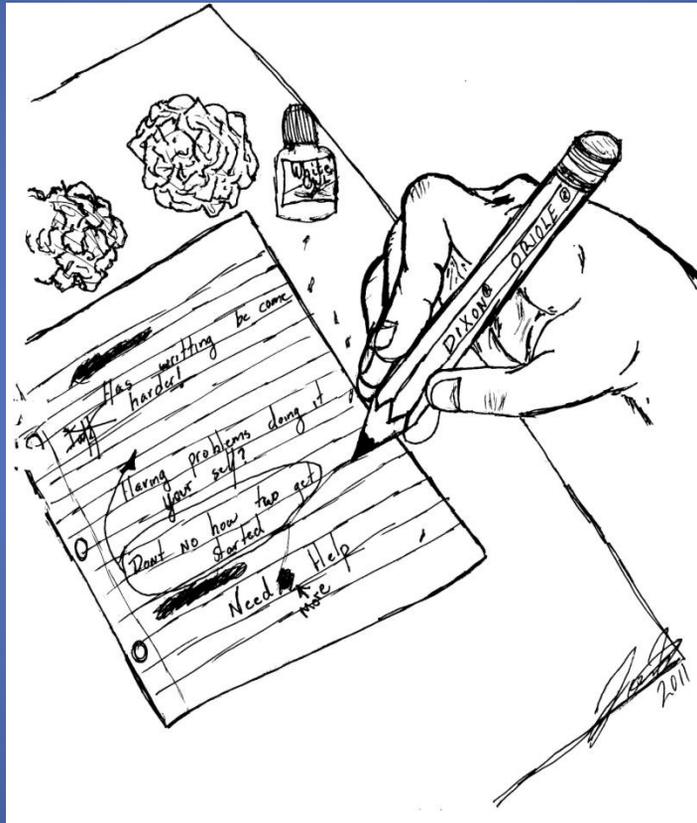


From Procrastination to Productivity:

Writing Strategies for College Students with (and without) Learning Disabilities and ADHD



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Introduction for Writing and Disability Services Professionals: The ideas, research, and practice that inform this handbook

Welcome to “From Procrastination to Productivity: Writing Strategies for College Students with Learning Disabilities/ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (LD/ADHD),” and thank you for your interest in our project. This introduction—meant for faculty members, writing professionals, and disability services administrators—explains the practice and theory that inform the handbook in order to assist you in deciding whether and how to incorporate it into your campus’ disability services, writing programs, and pedagogy. This handbook is meant for people who want to help students with disabilities but would like new resources to help students reach their full writing potential.

This handbook has been written as part of a yearlong collaborative project involving the City University of New York/ College of Staten Island Writing Across the Curriculum/Writing in the Disciplines (WAC/WID) program and the College of Staten Island Office of Disability Services (ODS). We believe that WAC/WID programs and Disability Services offices can work together to provide specialized writing instruction to students with LD/ADHD and to encourage faculty members to design courses and assignments with the concepts of Universal Design and WAC/WID in mind. Universal Design is the idea drawn from scholarship on disability accommodations that things like buildings, assignments, and technology designed with the needs of people with disabilities in mind can also benefit people without disabilities. For example, ramps cut into sidewalks that were intended for people using wheelchairs also assist those who are pushing carts and strollers, as well as people who are walking but have limited mobility.

This handbook is not a style manual or a general book on writing. We know that writing is one of the most important skills that determine a student’s success in college, but college students with learning disabilities and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder do not currently have a guide to college writing that is tailored to the way they learn and designed to help them develop the skills with which they most struggle. General-audience books on college writing do not address the needs of students with LD and ADHD in depth. And the handbooks currently available intended for college students with LD/ADHD address broader issues than writing—including things like developing social skills.

A guide like this does not currently exist, and research shows that a handbook on writing specifically for college students with LD/ADHD is needed. The strategies selected for inclusion are those that research and practice have proven to most help college students with LD and ADHD improve their writing. These strategies can help all students produce their best written work but have been selected and presented with the needs and struggles of college students with LD and/or ADHD in mind. Students with LD and ADHD have many of the same writing problems as students without diagnosed disabilities. Yet research also shows that students with LD and ADHD can go about writing in different ways and struggle with different elements of the writing process than students without disabilities.

We believe that a handbook is a good way to convey writing instruction to students with LD and ADHD. Research on college students with LD/ADHD shows that they suffer particularly from writing-related anxiety. A tangible guide with multiple strategies that students can keep next to them when writing will help ease this anxiety. Anecdotal evidence suggests that students with LD/ADHD who feel unable to commence writing feel immediately calmer and more able to start writing tasks when having a trusted guide at their disposal.

We offer specific metacognitive strategies intended to help students with LD/ADHD use what they already know about writing more effectively. We believe that a handbook is a good way to convey writing instruction to students with LD and ADHD. Studies show that the writing struggles of college students with LD/ADHD cannot be attributed to a lack of general writing instruction. The handbook’s structure and focus is supported by anecdotal evidence and research that shows that college students can permanently correct one or maybe two grammatical errors in the course of a semester. Correcting grammar and spelling errors takes a lot of time and feedback, but strategies that teach students how to plan their writing time, deal with distractions, and beat procrastination can be quickly adopted without the long learning period, allowing students to make major changes in their writing more quickly.

The handbook teaches self-regulation strategies that we describe more simply as tools for beating procrastination, a problem many people face, with or without a diagnosis of ADHD or LD. According to researchers specializing in strategies for teaching college students with ADHD and LD, self-regulation appears to be the most effective way for college students to improve their overall writing. Self-regulation is like metacognition, or thinking about your own thinking, but it also incorporates affective/emotional, motivational, and behavioral monitoring and self-control processes. Self-regulation includes planning (generating ideas, self-instruction, prior knowledge activation); monitoring (monitoring content, process control, self-questioning); and revising (rereading plans, rereading essay, evaluating text, revising text).

Self-regulation appears to be the most effective way for college students to improve their overall writing.

Our handbook is an example of Universal Design; we wrote it with the needs of students with LD/ADHD at CUNY-CSI in mind, but the advice offered in it can also help students at all colleges without diagnosed disabilities potentially improve their writing. WAC/WID pedagogy encourages faculty in all disciplines to teach writing using different types of assignments ranging from memos in a business course to ungraded reflections on a reading in an anthropology course to formal essays in a biology course. The principles that WAC/WID encourage faculty to use in designing their courses and assignments can be adapted and taught to students for their independent use.

We encourage students not affiliated with the CUNY-CSI Office of Disability Services to also use this handbook. The strategies described in this book can work for any student who seeks to improve his or her writing, and they may or may not be practiced in conjunction with school-sponsored disability services.

“From Procrastination to Productivity: Writing Strategies for College Students with (and without) LD/ADHD”
Written by Tracy E. Robey with the CUNY-College of Staten Island Office of Disability Services
and Writing Across the Curriculum/Writing in the Disciplines Program

We also encourage universities and schools to make this handbook available to their students. The City University of New York retains all rights to this work and our identification should remain on the individual pages, however institutions of higher learning and secondary schools may distribute this handbook for free.

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Introduction for Students

Hi.

I not sure about you, but sometimes I feel like writing sucks, and other days I get into a “flow” and love it. Or, at least don’t want to run away from my computer.

The point of this handbook is to help you to find ways to have more of those good writing days by making it easier to beat procrastination. Procrastination is something that hits everyone from time to time. But in my research and in talking to a lot of students—including students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and/or learning disabilities (ADHD and/or LD)—it seems like we all want to be more productive writers.

Yes, I just said *us*. I’m a PhD student with ADHD, so I’m writing from experience. When I was in college and starting out in a History PhD program, I was a mess. I would sit down to write and feel terrified that I wasn’t smart enough or good enough at expressing what I wanted to say. I would try to numb my fear by writing papers under pressure at the last minute or eating snacks that I otherwise wouldn’t touch. I associated writing with feeling out-of-control and stupid. No wonder I didn’t want to do it regularly.

If you sometimes feel this way, you are not alone. Not at all.

Only after my diagnosis a year and a half ago did I realize that I needed to learn some strategies for managing my writing so that I wouldn’t go through my whole life as an academic train wreck. I read lots of books about writing geared towards professors. I read any research I encountered about productivity. And I started to learn how people like us—students with LD and ADHD—can work on specific things that will make our writing improve really quickly.

I had to wait until I was almost done with graduate school and starting to write a 300-page dissertation until I learned what the research said about how to write better, but you don’t have to. It didn’t seem fair to me that professors and graduate students got their own books about how to write a lot without a lot of stress, but somehow college students with LD and ADHD didn’t get the same advice. So I decided to write a handbook with the help of my colleagues in the CSI Writing Across the Curriculum/Writing in the Disciplines Program and Chris Cruz-Cullari and Sara Paul in the Office of Disability Services.

These are two big things I’ve learned along the way:

1. Writing only gets done if you’re writing. It sounds preposterously obvious, but I didn’t get it for a very long time. I used to wonder how professors, professional non-fiction writers, and novelists could write so many books and articles. Then I realized that they would come into their offices every day and write. They weren’t super-geniuses who could just sit down at the last minute and magically crank out a great book—they worked at their writing projects every day. The reason I perhaps had never noticed this was because they didn’t seem

stressed and dramatic about writing. They just wrote a bit at a time, and then got on with life. I tried that out and—OMG—it works really well. Why didn’t I try this before?!

2. Good writing is tough work, even for professional writers. If writing is tough work for us, that’s because good writing is just tough work. Again, why did it take me so long to figure this out?!

If you know or learn these two things right now, you’re already smarter about writing than I was until just a short time ago.

So here’s how we suggest using this handbook:

- To make this handbook easier to use, even as you’re writing a paper, we’ve put the big ideas that you should really read in text boxes. If you’d like further explanation or if you have a bit more time, then check out the advice that isn’t in bold, too.
- We have provided a variety of strategies for each stage of the process. Not every strategy will work for you, so keep testing them until you find your favorite ways to write.

Trying out even one technique can make a big difference...

We divided the strategies for productive writing into 5 categories, which are the sections of the handbook:

- I. Habits for Productive Writing
- II. Tips for Managing and Scheduling Your Time
- III. The Writing Process
- IV. Troubleshooting
- V. How Productive Writing Works

Feel free to read the section that most interests you, and just test various techniques haphazardly. Research shows that you’re more likely to achieve success if you attempt to integrate new habits slowly, so don’t feel like this is a system that won’t work unless you do everything we talk about right from the start. You can even do an experiment: keep track of how much writing you produce and how you feel about writing when you write your usual way and then when you use strategies from the handbook. Trying out even one technique can make a big difference—trust me, I know!

Let’s write!

TRACY

I. Habits For Productive Writing

Researchers tell us that the following habits can help us self-program our brains for getting the most out of our writing time. The purpose of these habits is to establish some writing momentum. Just like runways for jets need to be clear to allow them to take off, getting your writing runway clear can help you have really productive work sessions that you can feel good about. When you feel like you're on a roll with writing, it gets easier and easier to make the time for getting started and just doing it.

Get Regular Sleep, Try to Relax, and Get Some Exercise

Getting regular, quality sleep is a great way to make writing easier. Sleep is natural, free, and it feels awesome—if it were expensive or illegal, I suspect that we would cherish it a lot more. Research has shown over and over that being sleep-deprived robs us of creative ideas and makes us more likely to make silly mistakes. I have to remind myself of this when I'm faced with the choice of watching “just one more episode of *Bones*” or “playing just one more Xbox game sequence” when I should be going to bed. Going without sleep for a long time can have the same effect on your brain as being drunk! No wonder all-nighters result in some pretty “iffy” papers.

In addition to helping you avoid weird typos and half-supported arguments, sleep is a great way to work out writing problems. Research confirms that people who think (but don't obsess) about a problem they can't immediately solve before going to sleep often wake up with the answer. That's because your brain wants answers, so it can naturally work on the problem even when you're not consciously thinking about it. Sleep is also necessary for storing permanent memories of the things you've learned and encountered throughout the day.

Sleep is effective for learning and writing because it can lower stress and thereby make it easier for you to locate all of the good ideas you already have. There are plenty of other ways to lower stress, too. When I was teaching regularly, I'd always tell my students—not in a creepy way, I hope—to take a shower if they had a writing problem they couldn't work out. They would always giggle when I first told them because it sounded so weird, but then they would often report back that something about it helped them sort out huge problems that had otherwise been making them miserable. Yelling while watching sports, particularly outdoors where you can just go wild, does something pretty similar. Moderate exercise produces the same relaxed-yet-alert feeling that has a magical way of focusing your brain.

If you need more reasons to love sleep, consider that scientists have shown that people who get more sleep are rated as more beautiful. With the help of sleep, you can look awesome *while* writing awesome papers—what's not to love?!?!

Find Your Place To Write

Write in the place that works for you, and don't be afraid to try something new. People often get really attached to the places where they write, and the places are as different as the people who write there. When I was in college, I used to drag my computer to a Starbucks 30 minutes from my house so that I could write without friends and the Internet distracting me (this was before Wi-Fi was everywhere).

Sometimes it is nice to have a few different places to work. Right now, I type at a desk, but I read and edit my papers in a comfortable chair that is away from computers and my phone so that I can focus and not think all the time about what’s going on with my fantasy football team. You can walk, wiggle, and stand—don’t feel like you must stay perfectly still at a desk in order to get writing done.

Going to your writing place can help make getting work done so much easier. I have this really cool office in my house with all sorts of books in it and a super computer with a giant monitor, but I never really use that room for writing. I realized that I needed to pack up my stuff and “go to the office” outside my house each morning in order to get work done. I set a basic schedule for myself, and I tell myself that I’m heading “to work,” as if I’m paid for sitting at my desk and writing. I’m so used to “going to work” that I schedule appointments at other times and don’t take calls when I’m at my desk. Trust me, it has taken a long time to get to that point! But it really works!

The other trick that you can use to keep yourself focused on writing is to write in places where other people are being really productive. It isn’t all that inspiring to write next to a bunch of people who are just hanging out. In fact, you might find yourself yelling at them. But if you find a place where people are really focused and busting through work, it can be helpful for keeping you on track. I write in a public computer lounge, so when I see people who are doing serious writing all day walk by to get their coffee at three in the afternoon, I feel pretty embarrassed if I’m just scrolling through Facebook status updates. This is an example of using good peer pressure to help stay on track with writing.

Don't Worry Too Much About Prepping Your Workspace

There's no single right way to get your desk ready for work. It doesn't really matter if you like your workspace piled with notes and research, or if you prefer a clear desk. What's key is spending a few moments getting your workspace prepared for how you like to write.

Teachers always used to tell me that I should write on a clean desk. Well, the clean desk made me feel kind of crazy and imprisoned, but the ritual of getting my workspace ready for writing was useful. Taking five minutes or so to do something that you associate with writing is a physical signal to your brain that work is about to start. That can make transitioning into writing—an important skill for productivity—so much easier.

The problem with the clean desk obsession is that a lot of people get so hung up on the clean desk that they never quite make it to the writing stage! If that's the case for you, just push your mess off to one side or put it on the floor. In general, getting ready to write seems to inspire lots of people to clean and organize things. Resist the urge to over-clean your workspace—if it is clean enough to type or write, get rolling. And certainly resist the urge to clean the oven instead of writing, (unless you have a family of rodents camped out in there).

Find the Right Noise (or Silence)

Some people I know need a very quiet place to work. Other folks tell me that they really need to listen to music as they write just so that they aren't distracted by all of the thoughts in their heads. One of my friends listens to instrumental music because he needs some noise, but he finds that music with

words makes his brain fry if he’s reading or writing, too. As far as work noise, just go with whatever works for you, and don’t feel bad if you really like doing the opposite of what your 10th grade writing teacher said to do. I wrote every paper in college and the beginning of grad school with the help of rap music—with the bass turned way up. If your noise strategy works for you, just go with it.

Try To Write Consistently

When you write all night to produce a paper before a deadline, I suspect that you get a skewed vision of how much time writing actually takes. Overnight writing requires trips to get coffee, texts whining about our predicament, and dealing with wandering attention due to lack of sleep. Writing like this isn’t very efficient, and it can produce some truly dreadful papers.

Here’s an example of how working consistently can add up over the course of a week:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Weekly Total
Minutes spent writing	30	30	90	30	60	4 hours

By writing consistently, little bits of time can add up to 4 writing hours in the course of one week!

By fitting smaller segments of writing into your most productive times, you can get more done with less stress.

Abandoning last-minute writing takes a lot of bravery. When you write at the last moment, there’s a surge of adrenaline and fear that helps you to focus. But there’s another thing that can make writing at the last moment attractive: if you screw up, it doesn’t feel like it’s your fault. Simply turning in an essay is a victory for last-minute writers. If you don’t get the grade you hoped for and your professors aren’t wowed by your brilliance, you can chalk it up to writing at the last minute, not your own struggles with writing. The students who work steadily and put lots of effort into their writing do something incredibly brave: they produce their best work and don’t create excuses to hide behind.

It is tough to make the transition from last-minute writer to a few-minutes-at-a-time writer. The key, I think, is to accept that you’re going to feel vulnerable and unmotivated at first. If you’re usually a last-minute writer, you can create deadlines for yourself to help re-create the pressure-filled situation in which you once wrote. For example, you can tell yourself that you *must* write a reasonable page of your paper in the next hour. Over time, you may not need to do this bargaining and goal-setting quite so much.

The awesome news about this strategy is right in the chart above. You’ll notice that there are no Saturdays or Sundays on the chart. I’ve decided that I don’t like to work on weekends, so I’ve structured my work so that I put in quality time five days each week, then completely ignore my work on the weekends. It feels so luxurious, and I’m able to go to brunch and the movies on Saturday afternoons without feeling guilty at all about not doing work. You may prefer to structure your time so that you work on the weekends or never after six in the evening on weekdays, for example. The way you divide your work and play time is completely up to you, but keeping to a

schedule can make you feel like you can really relax when you’re not working. This will make you more productive when it is time to write.

Use Rituals To Help You Start Work

I’d suggest doing some rituals that take just a few seconds to signal to you that it is time to start work. These seem to work best if they’re physical—*moving* an object, for example. Instead of looking at my three favorite websites, I plug in my flash drive with all of my notes and papers on it. Once the drive is in, it’s almost like I can’t help but start work. Getting your sense of touch (plugging in the flash drive), smell (smelling the tea you associate with writing), taste (having a bite of your favorite power snack), or sound (hearing the kitchen timer go off, letting you know it is time to start writing) involved in the process of beginning can help you get over the hump of wanting to get going in theory and actually putting your first words on the page.

II. Tips for Managing and Scheduling Your Time

To-do Lists and Calendars

To-do lists and calendars for keeping track of all of your assignments help you not only avoid forgetting about an assignment until the last minute, but they can also make life a lot less stressful. I realized awhile back that if you don’t make a to-do list, then you end up spending all kinds of energy reminding yourself over and over to do the same thing. I’d be trying to write or watch TV or hang out with friends, and I’d keep forgetting and then reminding myself of something I had to do. It’s annoying. And exhausting.

The problem with to-do lists is that people can sometimes get stuck just on making the list. I have a friend who seems to spend more time on making lists and schedules for doing work than actually doing the work itself. The point of a list is to just keep track of everything you have due and your plan for doing it.

These days, I have a really simple system for keeping track of projects and plans for doing them. I write the name of one project and when it is due on a sticky note. I have a row of them next to my desk. I move the sticky notes for projects I'm working on that day under another sticky note that says “today.” If I didn't have a to-do system, I'd end up jumping ahead to write the big book review I'm excited about instead of the essay that I'm nervous to start, but need to turn in much sooner.

Each morning, I jot down which smaller parts of each project I want to do that day. Telling myself that I need to write a whole dissertation chapter is really scary. But if I write on my to-do list that I just want to write 3 pages about x, pick up those two books I need, and make notes about an article, then I can manage to get my work done that day. And working consistently adds up to huge results.

Spend Your Brainpower Strategically

Think about your “brainpower” as a limited resource that can grow over time. I tell myself that I only have so much thinking juice every day, and I have to be careful about where I spend it. Some activities don't require a lot. Some things, like writing, quickly deplete my supply. Being an effective writer in college is not just about managing time, but also managing the precious resource of brainpower. For example, I devote my mornings—my best time for brainpower—to my most

important and most difficult projects. I know that I burn through my brainpower supply pretty well in the morning, so I plan to read and research in the afternoon, which I find less demanding.

Think about where you're spending your brainpower and motivation. One simple trick to make sure that you're utilizing your writing brainpower is to do your writing before other, less important things. Notice that when I mentioned writing in the mornings, I said that I write before doing my other reading and research. If I tried to write after reading and researching, I would probably get frustrated easily and wouldn't be as efficient. Finding the *right* time for different types of work can make you phenomenally more productive.

You can experiment with writing at different times of the day to find out when you write best.

You can experiment with writing at different times of the day to find out when you write best. A lot of professional writers say that they like to write first thing in the morning or late into the night. There's something about mid-afternoon that for most people is just terrible for writing. I can attest to that because three or four o'clock in the afternoon is when I observe professors on the phone making dinner plans and stepping out for a cup of coffee.

If you're pretty organized and start on writing projects early, you can actually structure your time so that you do the most difficult thinking at the times when you're most focused and alive. Feel free to let some other less intellectual tasks happen during the times when you're feeling less perky and brilliant. For example, I can blow through tons of writing for a few hours earlier in the day, but I can't keep that up forever. That's when I switch to reading books and translating sources that I'll use

in the next day’s writing. When I’m sick, groggy or don’t really want to work, I do things like update my bibliography or get books and articles that I might need. I figure that if I’m always working on something important during work time, then I’m going to get my projects done on time without having to feel super stressed.

You can even make a list of the stuff that is harder and easier for you so that you have a guide to structuring your work time to get the most out of every minute you work. Again, the point isn’t to torture yourself, but to make work easier and get it done faster so that you can move on and really enjoy the things you like doing outside of school. If you feel like beating your head against the wall while trying to do work and you feel like you *just can’t do it*, the problem may be that you’re attempting to do a given task at a time when you should be working on the easier stuff.

Here’s my list:

Brainpower-draining:

Writing a first draft

Figuring out my argument

Reading whole chapters or books
in French or Italian

Easier:

Searching for sources online

Updating my bibliography

Reading books in English

Here’s what your list might look like:

Brainpower-draining:

Reading and taking notes

Easier:

Typing notes and drafts already handwritten

Writing a first draft

Brainstorming using a graphic organizer

Updating citations in an unfamiliar style

Updating citations in a style you already know

What does your actual list look like? Does your list explain why work goes so well for you at some times, but not others? You can create your own list to post in your workspace or keep with your school stuff so that you can use it to plan your time and use every minute effectively.

III. The Writing Process

Reflect On Past Experience When Writing Essays

One of the most useful things you can do before starting to work on an essay is to think about what worked and didn't work when you wrote essays in the past. The things you can consider range from your work habits to how you came up with an argument to grammar issues you struggled with.

For example, when I'm starting a new project, I can think back and create a bunch of warning signs for myself based on where I've screwed up on essays in the past. I remember how my arguments tended to be kind of one-dimensional and needed more supporting parts. I also know that when I'm thinking really hard about my argument, my writing tends to be horrible. Since I know this, I can just accept that as I'm drafting and not stress out about it too much. Then I leave lots of time at the end of writing to edit my words and make it sound like I'm human, and not a half-formed robot who hasn't mastered writing yet.

I consider the good things that I did, too, and think about how I can do those again. I may be really happy with how quickly and easily I wrote my last essay, and decide that I want to stick to the writing schedule I used then to try to get the same results. I may have tried out a new brainstorming technique that gave me some awesome ideas that I want to try again. I could have found a cool way to search for sources using a database or Google, and decide that I want to do that again for this project.

Thinking about our past experiences before starting to write gives us a road map to writing a good essay. Make sure to think about past essays before diving into any project; you have lots of resources for how to write a successful paper right in your own memory.

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You may want to reflect on writing resources that you’ve used on past assignments. For example, you may recall using a webpage that provides a quick guide to MLA style that helped you produce a polished bibliography and a section in a writing guide that helped you avoid comma splices in your last paper and decide to use those again. You can keep a list of your favorite resources in order to remember to use them in future papers. I’ve often found that I forget about even the most amazing resources unless I use them every week—a list helps keep track of everything.

How To Think About Your Audience

It is really helpful when you’re writing a paper to think about writing for people other than your professor. Honestly, your professor probably isn’t that excited to read papers that are written in a way that only she would want to read. To write for a broader audience, I imagine that I’m writing

the paper for someone specific other than a professor. Often, I try to write a paper that my mom would understand. My mom is a good person for me to think about when writing: she’s super excited about reading my work, but she isn’t a historian, so she won’t understand what I’m talking about unless I make it clear. I’ve been trying to write some big new arguments lately, and I’ve been struggling to make them make sense to anyone other than me. When I write a draft, I use weird jargon and my sentences are too long, so what should be really impressive just reads like the word equivalent of a 65-car pile-up on the expressway. If I think about how to write the same ideas in a way that my mom can understand, I end up going through and finding ways to clear things up. Doing this really pays off because not only can my mom read my work, but other historians can understand what I’m actually talking about instead of making a fuzzy guess based on what they *think* I’m talking about. When you’re editing a paper, think about which parts of writing you want to work on, and who you could imagine writing for that would require you to make those aspects of the paper really good.

Do One Writing Task At A Time

Imagine that your brain is like a computer. I think about my brain as a laptop I used for years and years. It would freeze up if I tried to run iTunes, watch a movie, and check my email at the same time. Like that computer, I do just fine if I try to do one part of writing at a time. I first organize my ideas. Then I write a draft. Once I have a draft, I edit and proofread it.

When we try to write and edit at the same time, for example, it can be really exhausting and unproductive. This is like when my laptop would slow down and eventually stop running if I tried to run several programs at once. It was just too much for it to handle, and I ended up getting less

done by pushing the computer to edit photos, download music, and check PerezHilton.com all at the same time because it kept crashing. Trying to do too much all at once can burn through your brainpower like crazy. If you’re doing a bunch of different things at once, try cutting out just one thing and see how that changes your writing. For example, if you’re trying to watch TV, check Facebook every five minutes, and write a paper, try just checking Facebook every ten minutes and writing without the TV on. You may find that you wrap up your writing a lot faster this way, and you can actually enjoy watching TV because your assignment is done.

It seems almost impossible, but you may actually write more efficiently and write better papers by just going through the steps of writing one by one.

Here’s how lots of experienced writers suggest going through the writing process:

Start with a Quick Thesis to Get Things Rolling (Your Intro Can Come Later)

Don’t feel like you have to start with writing the intro of your paper. Most of your professors start by jotting down a thesis, and then move right on to writing the body of the paper. Introductions are just tough to write, especially before you’ve written the paper. Usually what happens when I make the mistake of trying to start with writing the intro is that I write all kinds of fluffy, useless garbage that I end up tossing out later. I suspect it is because I’m still figuring out my ideas, and I want to hide my uncertainty and lack of a clear thesis under mounds of generalizations and piles of pointless junk. You *should* need to write the paper and really think about your evidence and analysis before knowing what you’re arguing—it is totally natural. Expect to revise your initial thesis based on what you discover while writing your paper.

It is important to really understand your assignment before even starting to plan your paper. One way is to describe the assignment in your own words. Once you feel confident that you understand the assignment, quickly describe what your paper will do by finishing a sentence that begins with “This is what my essay will do in response to this.” This brainstorming exercise can serve as a map for your paper that helps you get on—and stay on—the right road.

If you jump into the section of your paper that you feel really good about, you can take advantage of the snowball effect.

The snowball effect is when you have one successful thing happen to you—like passing an exam or banging out a really great section of a paper—and you feel so good about

yourself that you do another thing along the same lines really well. These successes build on each other to the point that, after a bit, you’re just riding a wave of awesome and you end up doing things without a problem—like writing a tricky introduction—that would otherwise seem painful and hard.

Give yourself an opportunity to get on a roll, and just start with writing whatever comes most naturally.

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Sometimes I compare writing to being locked in a very cold freezer. The moment you stop moving, the colder you get, and the less and less you want to move; it is a cycle. Now when you write, you can tell yourself something similar: I just have to keep writing. You can jump from section to section, type and write by hand, and write garbage first drafts just to get and stay on a roll with writing. For me and maybe you, starting with the intro feels like trying to run a sprint after spending

the night half-frozen in the freezer—in many cases, it just isn’t going to happen, and you’ll waste a lot of time trying.

Organizing The Body Of Your Paper

You don’t actually have to write the body of your paper in order, either. Just start with the parts you feel like writing. I think that a lot of writing instruction is based on how people used to write in the “Land Before Time,” that is, before computers. Now that we can copy and paste like crazy without having to re-type things on a typewriter, there’s really no reason you need to write everything in order.

Now that we can copy and paste like crazy without having to re-type things on a typewriter, there’s really no reason you need to write everything in order.

One of the most important things that you should consider when writing a paper with an argument is why your paragraphs are in a certain order and how they support your thesis. Paragraphs are the building blocks of your argument. If you’ve ever taken a logic class or seen lawyers and doctors on TV (I’m thinking Dr. Temperance Brennan on *Bones* here), then you know how strong arguments are supported by a bunch of statements that you can prove to be true. Each of these true statements builds on top of each other, in order, so that your big, overall argument is strong. You can think about the paragraphs in your paper doing the same thing. This is why starting with writing the body of the paper makes so much sense: you won’t quite know if an argument will be airtight until you see what your paragraphs add up to. You won’t know what your paragraphs really say until you write them. Therefore, it makes sense to start with the body of the paper, then work on your introduction, and finally refine your thesis, instead of the other way around.

Sometimes people with ADHD and learning disabilities organize things differently than other folks. I really struggle sometimes with organizing my papers. Like, really struggle. What makes perfect, logical sense to me does not seem logical and orderly to most other people. For the longest time, I just thought that I was a mess or not smart or not getting what other people saw. Now I just realize that I structure ideas and information differently and that I have to work on organizing my ideas so that they make sense to my audience.

I think of this process as “translating” my ideas so that more people can understand them. If someone wandered up to me and started speaking Hungarian, I’d think that it sounded pretty awesome, but I wouldn’t understand much of it at all—and yet the language would make perfect sense to the person who spoke it! Paper organization works in much the same way: we can’t communicate with each other unless we’re on the same wavelength and speaking the same language, so to speak. Organizing paragraphs takes work, just like learning a new language does. But once we learn how to translate our arguments for the widest audience possible, it’s really cool because we can think in two different ways: in the native thinking pattern that comes very naturally and also in the form that we’ve learned in order to communicate our ideas.

Learning new types of organization that lots of people seem to understand doesn’t mean abandoning your natural way of thinking. I think that my way of thinking and organizing is a huge asset because my job as a historian is to create new knowledge about the past. Thinking about everything in different ways than most folks makes it easier to come up with out-of-the-box

arguments. I just have to then translate my ideas so that lots of people can appreciate and learn from them.

I come up with ideas the same way I always have and organize my paragraphs the way I think that they should go in drafts, but I review how my paragraphs are organized before editing my paper and check to make sure lots of people can follow my argument.

- One easy way to do this is to print out a copy of the draft, cut each paragraph apart, put all the pieces on a big table or the floor, and experiment with how you could organize the parts in different ways by moving them around.
- Another option is to write a new outline based on what you’ve already written. Write down your thesis and the main point of each paragraph, in order. Does it seem like they’re in the right order or could you try moving some around?
- Another strategy is to ask someone to read your paper just to see if your paragraphs seem like they’re in the right order and support your thesis.
- You could also read only the first sentence of each paragraph aloud to someone and ask if the paper makes sense.

When I’m finally getting close to putting everything together in a way that will convince other people of what I’m trying to say, my ideas feel different. They were good ideas before, but when they’re all in the right order, it feels a bit like I’m doing math. Each paragraph builds on the one before and by the end, they all add up to my thesis.

Keep in mind that your thesis statement is where you make an argument, but your paragraphs and how they're organized is how you back that argument up. A lot of folks find it really hard to make an argument, especially when the assignment requires them to make one. It feels scary to make a strong claim! I suspect that the difficulty comes from the organization of the paragraphs. When I've been stuck and can't make a strong and clear argument, sometimes it has helped to shake up my organization.

What Is Revising:

Many great writers claim that they write just like everyone else, but they produce astounding work because they're really good at revising. “Revising” means a lot of different things. Here are some points that count as revision:

- Checking your sources
- Looking at how your paper is organized
- Comparing your essay to a rubric
- Comparing your essay to a model essay
- Checking the arguments of each paragraph
- Writing the story of how you get between the paragraphs to make sure that your organization is solid
- Proofreading

As you can see, revision covers a lot of things, many of which involve more than just patching up surface errors. That said, you still need to proofread your work, even when you make bigger changes to sentences and paragraphs. This is why it is smart to allow plenty of time to revise.

Here are some tips for when writing isn't happening the way you had hoped. First of all, it's completely normal to hate writing from time to time and feel like you just can't do it. When I hear people who claim to “love writing” I start to suspect that they don't actually do a lot of it. Odds are, if you're writing regularly, writing is going to feel like torture at some point.

On the other hand, maybe the people who love writing just have some good ways of getting through the painful parts more quickly.

IV. Troubleshooting

Here are some ideas for getting through the rough patches more quickly:

Keep moving.

It is totally normal and ok if you get stuck during a work session. Just move on to something else work-related. You can refer to your to-do list and your list of brainpower tasks for ideas. But don't stop working--keep moving through your list.

This is helpful because people are far more efficient when they're actually working and not just staring at a screen. It is also gets so much easier to work during work time if you associate work time with getting lots done without tons of pain.

The More Often You Write The Easier Writing Should Get.

I would really love to run a marathon. But I would probably injure myself pretty badly or crash and burn at mile two if I just strapped on my shoes and ran toward the finish line without doing some training first.

Think about your writing ability and stamina as something you must exercise over time. If you attempt to crank out a paper the night before its due, you might end up feeling awful about writing because you associate it with sleep-deprivation, the pain of sitting in a chair for hours, tired eyes from staring at the computer screen, and feeling a bit disappointed with what you’ve produced.

If you build up your writing stamina over time, you may find that you’re able to get a lot more done and writing isn’t quite the awful task it can become when you’re stressed and tired. You can “train” your brain in intervals, like athletes do. Try setting a timer for ten minutes, and just write. Once the timer goes off after ten minutes, set it again for two minutes, and give yourself a break. Once the timer signals that the break is over, start the whole process over again by giving yourself another ten minute writing burst. Repeat as necessary. As you get used to interval training, you may find that you can work for longer than ten minutes, which will mean that you bust through writing faster and more efficiently. This is a great way to learn how to make the most of every bit of time you get throughout the day; ten minutes of pure writing power can actually produce quite a bit of writing!

Pay Attention To Motivation.

If you're feeling really perky and excited about your work for the day, dive in. But if you're dragging, put a few things that take only a few minutes on your list and do those first to get everything rolling.

Even if you're just sending an e-mail to a prof, ordering a book, and printing some reading---all tasks that take a total of 20 minutes---crossing three things off your list to start the day when you're not heading in super motivated feels incredible. That said, watch how many of these little things you put on your list and how much time they take.

Know That Your Work Shouldn't Be Perfect From The Start.

It really is ok if your work isn't mind-blowingly awesome from the first word you put on the page. In fact, lots of people realize that their first few paragraphs are pretty junky and will probably get deleted. Your writing *shouldn't* be good at first—revising and proofreading make writing good, so don't stare at your screen until the amazing stuff comes out.

When your professors publish articles and books, they usually have to have anonymous readers review their drafts and tell them where they're making mistakes. One author, Anne Lamott, talks about writing “Shitty First Drafts” that get the writing process started.

Give yourself permission to get writing without judgment so that you have time before turning in your work to do the editing and proofreading.

Talk To Someone About The Assignment.

Find a friend or family member, and explain the assignment to them in your own words. Tell them what the professor wants. Explain how you’re going to write the paper. Describe any parts of it that you’re struggling with.

This technique is pretty magical. I think it works so well because you can test out ideas without the risk of typing a bunch of pages only to figure out that the ideas aren’t great or that you’re not answering the professor’s prompt question. There’s little risk involved, and I’ve seen people who were horribly stuck on a problem almost run away from conversations in order to write because their ideas are suddenly so clear to them. This is because they had to communicate their ideas to another person without writing getting in the way (at first).

Just Start Typing Your Name and The Title

When you need to get started on a paper but feel stuck, try just typing your name and title on the paper and set up the right font and line spacing. You can send signals to yourself that it is time to start writing by consistently performing a ritual like this. As I mentioned before, my daily ritual that lets me know that it is time to start working is plugging in my USB flash drive into my computer. Once the flash drive is plugged in, it feels weird not to start working.

Switch To A Different Way of Writing or Writing Location

Approaching writing in a way that feels different from your normal method may feel less like writing, and therefore easier.

If you usually type, try writing by hand for a bit instead. I suspect that part of the reason this method works so well for people who usually type is because you partially focus on writing the letters, and partially focus on what you’re actually saying. This is really useful for when you’re feeling like your brain is all jammed up and your inner critic is ripping every sentence you almost put on the page. Sometimes, *overthinking* everything we want to write keeps us from writing at all. If you try to write by hand, you might find that it borrows just enough brainpower to keep you from being too critical of what you want to write. This is also a really good way to get away from the temptation of the Internet.

Switching to a different writing location can do something similar. Sometimes, my desk just feels too serious. This is the reason I can’t write in a library: the place makes my skin crawl because it is just so serious! If I already have tons of pressure crushing down on me, and I want the paper I’m working on to be amazing, I sometimes have to change up my routine to keep from pulling my hair out. In cases like this, the local bagel shop, the laundromat, or a park can be a great place to get your writing on track.

Set a Timer and Journal About Writing For 10 Minutes

Tell yourself that it doesn’t matter what you write or how good it is, just that you only have to write about your writing for 10 minutes.

You could write about what went well on past assignments:

- a. What have you done in past assignments when you couldn’t start?
- b. What did you do in your past essays that was really good?

Writing about what you did well on past assignments can be really great for remembering the writing strategies that work best for you. It’s also a nice way of giving yourself a pep talk to sort of fire up before starting a paper.

You could also write about why you’re having a tough time getting started:

- c. Why is the assignment so hard?
- d. What are you nervous about on this assignment?

Research shows that writing for ten minutes about all the negative thoughts flapping around in your brain is a really effective way to clear your mind and do better work. For example, a recent study showed that students who were really stressed out and did this for ten minutes before exams earned much better grades than those who didn’t. The researchers who did the study think that the reason is because taking all of those distracting thoughts and putting them on paper gives your brain more space to focus. You can do the same thing before writing to maximize the space in your brain for composing sentences and coming up with ideas.

Another strategy is to use journaling to pull out some ideas for your paper. You could ask yourself:

- e. What am I trying to say in this paper?

Go Back and Work on Your Writing Plan

Sometimes, particularly when you’re already working on a paper, the reason you get stuck is because your outline and notes don’t end up matching the paper you figure out you’re really writing. That’s

ok. It’s good, in fact. In that case, revise your writing plan so that you can move forward. Check and make sure that the paper still matches the assignment prompt, and carry on.

Fixing up your writing plan doesn’t really feel like writing, and nailing it down will hopefully help you feel good about the paper.

Start Writing Whatever Section You Feel Best About

Don’t feel like you have to write paragraphs and pages in order. Take advantage of the wonders of copy and paste, and just dive into the paragraph or idea that seems most appealing to you.

To be honest, I started writing this section of the handbook first. I thought that other parts seemed kind of daunting, so I came here to the troubleshooting part. (You hopefully won’t know that without me telling you because we will edit and proofread the whole handbook to make it mesh together).

Instead of being stuck on the first section, and sitting at the computer feeling like a prisoner, here I am at the end of this section, feeling pretty good about what I’ve accomplished. I certainly won’t dread the next time I sit down to write.

Leave a Little Bit of Writing Energy and Enthusiasm In The Tank

When writing is going great, it can be tempting to use every last drop of your writing energy each day. This is called “binge writing,” and it is really unhealthy for your writing life. The problem is that we can only do that so long. Writing professors sometimes talk about stopping the day’s writing on a high note—leaving your writing when you feel great about it, not when you’re frustrated with it.

Other professors say that they like to “park on a downward slope.” They’re referencing how cars that have manual transmissions are much easier to start when they’re parked to head down a hill instead of up. This means that they stop writing halfway through a paragraph or sentence that they feel good about so that they know exactly where they want to start the next day.

Go On A Technology Diet

A lot of folks check a series of news and social websites before getting started with writing, but I find that it is so easy to get sidetracked if I do that. I’m just not able to control my web browsing enough to go there. Its like going to Shake Shack while on a diet—things are going to end badly. So, I’ve set up a news reader account (I use Google Reader) that saves all the stories from my favorite websites for me in one place so that I don’t have to worry about missing something. That lets me forget about the Internet and get working so that I can get done with work faster and get on to the things I really love. Computer programmers have created some plug-ins for the Internet browsers Chrome and Firefox that let you block certain websites or block you from the Internet altogether after a timer you set goes off. This article explains one way to do this: <http://bit.ly/hPCsWQ>. Other people set just a kitchen timer that signals to them that it is time to stop browsing and start working. The key to not letting stuff distract you from writing isn’t to focus

more; its not putting yourself in the way of temptation. If you don’t struggle with shutting off the phone, text, and web from time to time, I’m really, really jealous!

Don’t Be Too Hard On Yourself

Speaking of diets, researchers doing a study about dieting found that people who were told to take it easy on themselves before eating as many cookies as they wanted actually ended up eating fewer cookies than people who weren’t told not to beat themselves up about indulging in a sweet treat. It turns out that the people who weren’t discouraged from saying mean things to themselves felt awful about having a treat and then ate more cookies to make the icky feelings go away!

When your writing plans don’t work out perfectly, don’t beat yourself up. Just keep moving. A friend of mine beat herself up about comments she got back on a paper so bad that she just didn’t do any writing for weeks—and the comments weren’t bad at all! When I get feedback from people that doesn’t just gush over how brilliant I am, I have to remind myself that falling off your bike hurts and can result in some broken bones and nasty scars, but laying in the road for a few weeks after a fall isn’t the answer. Pausing to say nasty things to yourself will just make it harder to feel like writing again.

Super-Secret Advanced Technique: Using Rewards To Produce Writing

There was a point a few years ago when I just couldn’t write. I was a mess. I hated writing; I wanted to drop out of school and study to be a chef. Boo. Not surprisingly, this was before I was diagnosed with ADHD.

In those dark days, I came up with a killer writing trick that I think can get anybody on a roll when they're really stuck. Here's how it works: think about the thing that you really want to do more than writing. TV works great, particularly shows with tons of episodes available to you that you've never watched before. Come up with a reasonable exchange rate for each page or paragraph of writing. I decided that I would write one page for each 44 minute episode of *House* I got to watch on DVD. The page would have to be pretty good, then I would get to collect my reward instantly. This really works well when you can reward yourself immediately. This strategy is also awesome because it allows you to work for a reasonable length of time, then take a good break, and then work again. It is good preparation for making the most of smaller breaks you might have throughout the day in which you can actually get a good deal of work done. I got to the point where I could crank out a good page in under an hour.

The other awesome side-effect of this is that you begin to associate writing with fun things that you like. It doesn't feel so awful to sit down and write because it is sort of surrounded by this happy glow. The other fantastic thing is that if you really, really want your reward, you'll end up producing incredible amounts of good writing. I somehow managed to make myself go from completely stuck and unable to write anything at all to cranking out pages and pages per day, all because I had many seasons of *House* to catch up on.

V. How Productive Writing Works

A lot of students feel like they don’t have time to sit down and write a paper or adapt these techniques to their lives. This is the real world—we work, have families, friends, people we love, gym schedules to maintain, and episodes of *The Jersey Shore* that aren’t going to watch themselves. But writing doesn’t necessarily have to be a big, traumatic bang-out-five-pages-and-collapse experience that I think many folks have at least at some point.

Then again, sometimes even people who are working steadily all the time hit a point when everything possible is due and they have to scramble. This is when writing frequently and knowing which writing techniques work the best really pays off because you know how you can best kick your writing into high gear. For example, despite hauling tail on my writing for a long time now, I somehow have three writing projects due tomorrow, which means that in the next 30 or so hours, I need to produce ten double-spaced pages of quality writing (!!!). This wouldn’t be such a huge problem, except I’m working here at CSI all day, away from my desk, and I have a five-hour roundtrip commute.

A Sample Writing Plan For Me:

Write 5 pages of this handbook

This project means a lot to me, and I want it to be helpful for y’all, so I’ve broken the writing down into five-page-per-week assignments for myself rather than try to write it all at once. By Friday at 5pm, I send my collaborators (Chris and Sara!) five new pages of text. I know that keeping up with my goal this week is going to be tough, so I’ll have to find creative ways to slip writing into my day. I like writing this, and the words and ideas just sort of flow out, so I can do it pretty easily. I’ve decided to sit at a table in Building 2S near the vending machines while I’m between meetings and write by hand for a bit. Writing by hand is pretty enjoyable for me, and sometimes it’s less intimidating than typing. I won’t have everything done by the time my meeting starts, so I’m going to use my long bus ride and train ride to write the rest. I’ve realized that I can type a fair amount on my iPhone while I’m stuck commuting, and nothing feels quite so good as copying and pasting a nice chunk of text into a document to start the next writing session. If you don’t have a smartphone or find it difficult to type on one, you could use a notebook to do the same thing. By the time I arrive at home, with an otherwise-wasted one-hour break and a boring commute, I should have five pages written—I’ll be 50% to my overall writing goal.

Writing by hand is pretty enjoyable for me, and sometimes its less intimidating than typing.

Write a 2-3 page personal statement for a job application

This essay is where the idea of brainpower really comes into play. A job that I’m applying for requires a new, two- to three-page personal statement. My chances of getting the job are slim, but I still want to be competitive by writing a good essay; who knows what could happen if they like what I say. I’ve decided that I’m going to try to manage my brainpower to produce a good essay. When I arrive home from CSI, I’m going to use the last bits of my brainpower to write a garbage draft of the essay—it can be too long, sloppy, and kinda sad—but a draft has to get done tonight. I’ll relax after

that and look it over before bed. I can make notes on the printed copy of the draft, and then type up the corrections as I’m getting ready to go to the office tomorrow morning. I’ll print a fresh copy for myself and let it cool off for a few hours until the afternoon. Once I’ve done my next writing task (see next), I’ll re-read the essay, and make sure that it is well-structured, the sentences read well, and there are no typos. Then I’ll submit the application. With a pretty minimal amount of brainpower spent, I’ll have a good application submitted for a job that is a long shot. That will be another three pages or so done out of my ten page goal.

Write one paragraph, a few stray sentences, fix footnotes, and revise an essay for a competition

This is the assignment that I’m most nervous about—I’m submitting a paper for an essay contest that I really want to win. Some important professors in my field might judge the contest, so I want to impress them with my work. I’ve been working steadily on getting this essay ready for weeks now, and I’m in the home stretch. Since this paper is so important, I’m going to work on it tomorrow morning, when I know that my brainpower is going to be really strong and I can just bust through even the hard stuff without a lot of problems.

If I tried to do the essay tonight, when I’m tired and just want to watch TV or hang out, I know I would probably get next-to-nothing done on it, and I’d be tempted to just submit the thing without really looking it over and making the improvements that I know will impress my readers. So, I’ll work hard in the morning, have lunch, proofread the essay, and drop it off (with my fingers crossed!). With that, the final 2-ish pages out of the ten will be done, and I’ll be looking to celebrate my huge victory.

A Sample Writing Plan For You:

I’m imagining that it is now the second half of the semester, and you’re in the middle of dealing with a huge wave of work. That said, your other responsibilities haven’t let up, so you’re going to need some great strategies for getting through tons of work without cutting into your sleep or feeling preposterously stressed.

Draft the remaining two pages of a 4-page paper for Political Science

Although you have plenty of other work that you might be tempted to do instead, try to put your big writing assignment in the prime brainpower spot—maybe for you, it’s between classes from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. in that corner of the library where you can focus really well. Whereas during less crazy weeks you might use this time for completing reading assignments, drafting and major revisions get done so much faster if you do them at the time you feel sharpest. Having the goal of writing two pages in two hours is really helpful, too. Instead of having a huge block of time to work with that might make you feel like you can check out Facebook and Hulu, you have a limited amount of time and a clear goal that can help you get working faster and make the most of every minute. And because you’ve been working steadily over the past few days, you have only two pages to draft and tons of notes to rely on, which makes sitting down to write a lot less stressful than if you were just starting to think about the assignment.

Brainstorm for another essay in History

A great time to brainstorm for an upcoming essay is right before and after you have the class in which the essay is due. As an instructor, I often answered questions about what I was looking for in essays, did brainstorming activities in class, and gave feedback on paper outlines over e-mail. I’m not the only one. Even if your teacher is less directly helping you to get ideas for what to write about, the stuff that comes up in class can help you decide how to approach the topic.

I’m imagining that your class is discussing *Candide*, and your paper requires you to write about the novel and how it relates to French culture and society. While the class discussion and lecture doesn’t exactly spell out everything you need to write, you may end up having a brain-flash as class is wrapping up as you find a connection between themes that would serve as a basis for your paper’s argument. Instead of hoping that you’ll have that thought appear to you when you need it again, I’d recommend sitting in the classroom or standing outside in the hallway for five minutes to jot down your ideas once class is over. Connecting with the sources you’ll use to write your paper over and over—by consistently doing the reading, keeping alert during class, and planning ahead for your essays—will make brainstorming more manageable, and perhaps allow you to get a great idea almost spontaneously without requiring you to plan a writing session in your busy day.

Write one journal entry

Handwritten journal entries that your instructor checks off for credit are something you are really meant to do in small segments of time, so don’t feel like you need to do them during your peak productivity times. One trick I’ve found for carving out time in my day is to determine which classrooms are empty before my class starts and try to arrive there a few minutes early in order to get some work done AND be on time for class. I used to have this huge problem with lateness, so I

decided that I'd try to arrive 15 minutes early to each class. I then discovered that I had 15 minutes of pretty quiet work time in which I could do brainstorming or make some notes without the stress of watching the clock and worrying that I'd miss the start of class. I imagine that you were concerned about arriving to your Biology class on time and managed to make it there 10 minutes early. This would be a good time when you could quickly write a journal entry without having to worry about it later.

By slipping smaller nibbles of writing into your day and working consistently, you can better keep up with the demands of school, even when you have a lot on your plate.

Goodbye and Good Luck!

I hope you can use these tips to make the most of every minute you spend writing. You can bust through procrastination and find strategies for writing (and life, really) that you'll be able to use well into the future.

More productive writing can help you have more control of your life, allow you to fully enjoy the fun times when you should be relaxing, and help your grades. If you want to be a more productive writer, just try one strategy from this handbook and go from there. Trust me, one change can make all the difference.

The Author

Tracy E. Robey is a dissertation student in History at the CUNY-Graduate Center. She is writing her dissertation on "Glory and Infamy: Making the Memory of Duke Alessandro de' Medici in Renaissance Florence." Since she was an undergraduate student at Grand Valley State University in Michigan, Tracy has been researching topics that made people very upset and angry in the past. She has studied how and if people perceived race before the Atlantic slave trade, what people thought of children born to parents who were not married, and violent cannibalism, which inspired her interest in the history of how and why people remembered the dead in the Renaissance. Tracy taught History for three years as a Graduate Teaching Fellow at Queens College before coming to the College of Staten Island to work as a Writing Fellow. Tracy has also taught at The New School and Hunter College. Professor Robey is pictured here with her puppet, Tracy, who has occasionally given a lecture on the French Revolution toward the end of the semester in order to help students stay interested in class despite their mounting need for sleep.

This is the second year that Tracy has teamed up with the Office of Disability Services as a Writing Across the Curriculum Writing Fellow. So far, Tracy, Chris, and Sara have written and designed a poster for faculty members about how to give "accessible" and clear writing assignments, presented several workshops for faculty and tutors, and produced this handbook. When Tracy is not reading and writing, she enjoys playing Xbox, beating her friends at poker, and watching TV's *Bones*.



The WAC/ WID Project

Writing Across the Curriculum/
Writing in the Disciplines

Hildegard Hoeller, WAC/WID coordinator

Created by a CUNY mandate in 1999, the WAC/WID program at the College of Staten Island works with faculty, programs, and departments to explore ways in which writing can enhance student learning, engagement, and success in all disciplines. Each year they supports six projects (proposed by these faculty, programs, and departments) with stipends for faculty and the assistance of an assigned writing fellow for each project. They also conduct roundtables for all faculty on campus.

The Office of Disability Services

The College of Staten Island/
The City University of New York

Christopher Cruz Cullari, Director

Sara Paul, Assistant Director

The Office of Disability Services facilitates reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities ensuring equal access to academic and co-curricular programming in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Through robust student support programming, comprehensive services, and a commitment to student learning, staff members work toward creating an environment that fosters empowered students who will realize their potential in a higher education setting. The Office of Disability Services believes students need the best preparation possible for success in a global society and competitive workforce. The Office of Disability Services, (ODS), is a part of the Division of Student Affairs.

The Front Cover Artist

Javiel Valdes is a sophomore at The College of Staten Island. An Art major and a Psychology minor, his work has been showcased in many campus publications.