

## Panicked about Writing your Honors Thesis?

First of all, it should be comforting to you to know that all of us - faculty, graduate students and undergraduates – are experiencing or have experienced the same feelings about our academic writing: angst, fear of failure and of peer criticism, anxiety and self-doubt about the importance of our research and writing. This applies to grant proposals, scholarly articles, dissertations and theses. To keep you from feeling stuck with writer's block and procrastinating to a point where you no longer have the time to write a quality Honors thesis, here are a few hints and tips you may find useful. These were adapted from two blogs about successful academic writing that can be found [here](#).

- **Manage the many different demands on your time during your senior year as you prepare for graduation and your professional career beyond.**
  - Review and prioritize your main academic, professional and social life goals.
  - Be realistic about what you can achieve each day and don't forget that you cannot be at two places at the same time.
  - Adjust your daily routine to free up time for thesis writing.
  
- **Develop a plan and establish a daily thesis writing routine.**
  - Choose the time of day during which you think and write best (morning or evening) and set aside a block of 60-90 minutes on your daily calendar for thesis writing.
  - Choose a quiet location (e.g. a library carrel) and eliminate external distractions (turn off your cell phone, email, the Internet, and don't let your friends chat with you during your scheduled writing time).
  - Do not let internal distractions (worries about the thesis advisor's feedback, feeling overwhelmed, exam deadlines, etc.) keep you from writing.
  - Do not let other activities (*"I'm too busy to write today"*) interfere with your daily writing time and do not wait until you are in the "mood" to write!
  - Use a kitchen timer to manage your writing time, if you think that may be helpful, and take a break every 30 minutes or once you have achieved a set writing target.
  
- **Set daily writing goals and hold yourself accountable.**
  - Set SMART goals (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-bound) = small, manageable daily writing assignments.
  - Write a concrete, manageable portion of your thesis every day (e.g. a specific portion of the Results section, several paragraphs of your Introduction, etc.).
  - Measure the progress you have made on your goal by looking at the number of pages or words you have written, or which tasks you have completed already.
  - Assess how realistic (attainable) this goal was for the allotted time period and revise your goals, if necessary.
  - Assess if what you wrote that day furthered your goal and thesis progress (was relevant), or whether you simply got side-tracked.
  - Set specific deadlines for completing each writing goal (time bound).

- Track your thesis writing progress regularly and send portions of your thesis to your advisor for feedback on time according to your thesis completion timeline.
  - Reward yourself for meeting daily and weekly writing goals and thesis writing milestones by taking some time for yourself (take a walk, chat with a friend, have a coffee, etc.)!
- **Some Reasons for Procrastination and Writer’s Block.**
    - You feel overwhelmed by how hard it is to write or even get started.
    - You are easily distracted from your writing routine and frequently engage in other activities (“*This will only take a minute*”).
    - You worry about all the details you have to think about when writing the thesis (checking and ordering the sources, annotating and formatting figures and tables, etc.).
    - You have self-doubt about being able to produce a high quality thesis and therefore consider writing a futile activity.
    - You are bored with and/or do not enjoy the writing process.
    - You are afraid of what your thesis advisor will say about your draft.
- **Some Writing Tips that may Help You Deal with Procrastination and Writer’s Block.**
    - Allow yourself plenty of thinking time (don’t rush!), then put your thoughts on paper.
    - Do not strive to create perfect sentences, paragraphs and thesis sections, just write SOMETHING.
    - Allow yourself to make mistakes, take multiple (possibly wrong?) approaches to express your thoughts.
    - Talk about your ideas with a friend or your thesis advisor.
    - Trust yourself and don’t worry if you do not see the “bends in the road” and the “light at the end of the tunnel” immediately.
    - It is normal to have to edit your first drafts (often several times) to develop what exactly you want to convey in the final version of your thesis.