

Developing a strategic writing plan to get you to completion



Writing a proposal, thesis, or dissertation is not something you must do today. But it is important that you accomplish something today and every day to move your writing project to completion. How will you do that?

1 Think ahead and plan backwards.

“Time is that quality of nature that keeps events from happening all at once. Lately it doesn’t seem to be working.” Anonymous

Make a plan for completion so you have a schedule that keeps things from happening all at once.

When will you defend?

When do you need to distribute your reading draft to your committee?

When do you need to give your final complete draft to your advisor for approval to distribute to your committee?

Then what do you need to do the week before that?

The week before that?

And the week before that?

... keep going working backwards to make your weekly goals.

Then for the upcoming week, set a daily goal. When you start each daily writing session during the curzeq, you know where to begin: your daily goal.

2 Set a goal for every day between now and when you plan to defend.

Having a goal will help you.

- Focus on what you need to do in the time you have scheduled (rather than time available) for writing.
- Limit extraneous tasks and writing.
- Be accountable – your goal can be shared with others to help you stay on task and on track.

Remember, your goal should be something **small** that you can do **soon** (next 24 hours). Write specific daily goals for at least one week in advance. Remember to use your lists:

- What I must do **after** my writing is complete (*pay bills, get groceries, prepare for class, email advisor with a progress update*).
- What I must do **later** to be ready to write productively tomorrow (*download book, read and take notes on 3 articles, edit yesterday's writing*).
- And, what I want to focus on when I **return to write** (*5 minutes before you stop each writing session, write down as quickly as you can what comes next, and next, and next, and next. Then when you start writing again, you have a roadmap that gets you to more productive writing more quickly*).

Beyond your daily writing goals for the next week, and then weekly writing goals through the completion of your project, you also need writing-related goals. These also move your writing project forward. (Regular meetings with and communication with your advisor; data analysis; more reading; and you should schedule time for sleep, exercise, and eating in healthy ways at regular intervals.) Make a plan, goals and schedule for these writing-related activities as well.

3 What obstacles are you likely to encounter in your writing and meeting your goals? What are the biggest challenges and roadblocks ahead of you?

Write these down, and add to your list as new ones occur. Then search your “toolkit” for what will work to help you overcome this obstacle. If you encounter a new obstacle and there’s no strategy in your toolkit to address it? Review the Productive Writing Strategies list. Ask someone. But don’t let this obstacle stop your progress.

4 What will I do to be accountable?

Will you have a writing buddy? Will you work with a writing support group? A virtual community? Will you share your goals with your spouse, partner, roommate, bathroom mirror?

5 What will you do to celebrate when you are done?

Writing can become its own reward – a terrible first draft is a good start! But it can be encouraging to think about the sense of accomplishment, perhaps relief, and new adventures ahead when you finish this milestone. You can do this!