



Let's Get Ready for Summer Writing

Wherever you are in the academic calendar, you know what this time of the year means: the summer writing season is right around the corner. Throughout the spring term, I kept hearing from beleaguered faculty and graduate students who couldn't wait for summer so they could "get some serious writing done." And yet, every August I hear from just as many folks lamenting about how another summer has passed by and, once again, they failed to make progress on their intellectual projects. As we head into the summer break, I'm feeling motivated to help eradicate end-of-summer regret amongst academic writers! To that end, this summer's Monday Motivators are designed to be your week-by-week support system for your summer writing and productivity.

Summer Writing Challenges

While we often fantasize about the freedom that summer represents, there are some important challenges to consider during the summer months. The most important challenge is the deception of unstructured time. Freedom from teaching, committee meetings, advising, and the day-to-day drama of campus life can create the illusion that we have lots of time. Imagining that we have infinite time can lead us to procrastinate and/or belabor tasks unnecessarily. Additionally, for those of you who aren't daily writers during the academic year, you may experience the challenge of heightened expectations. In other words, putting off writing until the summer can create intense pressure (particularly for tenure-track faculty) that you must complete a year's worth of writing in 12 weeks.

Childcare poses yet another challenge to summer writing. Schedule changes for school-aged children, gaps between the end of school and the beginning of summer camps, and the increased expense of additional childcare during the summer months can leave some parents struggling to manage additional childcare *and* a rigorous writing schedule. Finally, some of you are simply exhausted from the intensity of the academic year and, more than anything else, you feel the need to address all the neglected areas of your physical health, social life, and personal relationships during the summer months.

While it's important to understand the challenges academic writers face during summer breaks, they point to the keys for a productive summer. I believe those are: 1) knowing what you need as a human being and what you need to accomplish as a writer and researcher, 2) creating a realistic plan to meet all of your needs, and 3) connecting with the type of community, support, and accountability that will sustain you through the summer months. I think each term or semester should start with a plan, so for this week I want to encourage you to set aside 30-60 minutes, grab your calendar and a piece of paper, and develop a clear and concrete plan.

How to Create a Summer Plan

When you have a plan for your writing and personal goals this summer, you automatically lower the possibility of experiencing end-of-summer regret because you will have proactively and consciously chosen activities that lead to specific endpoints. A summer plan allows you to define your goals, identify the activities that will help you achieve them, and provides you with the confidence that when August rolls around, you will have accomplished all the things that are important to you and your future success.

FEEDBACK

Step #1: Start With Your Goals

Start by writing down all of your personal and professional goals for the summer. I make sure all of my goals are SMART goals. In other words, I try to state my goals in Specific, Measurable, Attractive, Realistic, and Time-Framed statements. So, instead of listing "make progress on my book" and "learn how to cook" as goals, I write "complete the first ugly draft of chapter 2 by July 1st" and "take one cooking class each month." Listing your goals is the fun part, so enjoy it.

Step #2: Outline The Tasks That Are Required To Achieve Your Goals

For each of your end-of-summer writing goals, determine all the tasks necessary to achieve the goal. For example, if one of your goals is to submit that R&R that's been sitting on your desk all year, then ask yourself: What specific tasks do I need to complete in order to revise and resubmit my manuscript? Your list could look something like the following:

- Read the editor's and reviewers' comments.
- Cry a little.
- Create a list of necessary revisions.
- Read for revision.
- Re-analyze data.
- Revise the writing and update tables.
- Submit to a [professional editor](#).
- Draft a cover letter explaining how you addressed the reviewers' comments.
- Submit the revised manuscript to the journal.
- Celebrate the submission.

Each of your goals will require specific tasks in order to be accomplished by August. If you're a visual person (as opposed to a list-maker), then try mapping out a flow chart for each of your goals. Some will be simple and others will be complex; the main point is that if all you're doing is setting goals without identifying all the small steps that are necessary to achieve them, you are unlikely to finish the summer with much progress or productivity.

Step #3: Map Your Projects Onto Time

Here's where it always gets ugly. Take a long hard look at your calendar and make sure you have blocked out all of your summer commitments (vacation, moving, conference travel, childcare, summer teaching, etc.). What is left is the time you realistically have to complete all the projects necessary to accomplish your goals. Use your best estimate as to how long your projects will take and find specific weeks in your calendar when this work will get done. I estimate the tasks associated with the R&R example would take me four weeks, so I have to find FOUR WEEKS in my calendar to complete all the tasks in order to meet my goal.

I believe that this is where things get ugly because inevitably you will have more projects than will fit into 12 weeks. In fact, your summer break may suddenly seem shockingly short! Don't worry, this happens to everyone, and the point of this exercise is to force this realization in May (as opposed to August) because now you can proactively make decisions about the work that doesn't fit into your calendar by scaling back your goals, re-negotiating deadlines, requesting additional support, prioritizing, delegating, and/or letting some things go. Whatever you decide, you will feel far more empowered making your decisions in advance than simply hoping you'll meet all of your goals and then ending another summer disappointed and frustrated over all the work that didn't get done.

Step #4: Execute The Plan On A Daily Basis

Once you have a plan for your summer activity, it's up to you to actually do it! I sit down at the beginning of each week to review what writing tasks I have planned for that week and figure out what specific day and time I will complete them (aka [The Sunday Meeting](#)). We are all motivated by different things, so try to figure out what

motivates YOU and build it into your daily life. Personally, I am motivated by treats, so when I finish my writing each day, I get a treat. My treats don't have to be expensive or extravagant; they're just a little dose of personal pleasure for a job well done.

Step #5: Create Support And Accountability

Summer is a time when you will need extra support and accountability because the structured activities of the academic year (events, classes, and meetings) cease. This is an ideal time to start a writing accountability group, create a write-on-site group, join the monthly writing challenges in the [NCFDD Discussion Forums](#), and/or join the next session of our [Faculty Success Program](#). Whatever you do, don't try to go it alone! There are many wonderful communities of support that already exist, and you have the power to create them in your own local environment.

As always, adapt these steps to fit your life circumstances and personal needs. And once you have a plan, I encourage you to share it with your mentors to get their suggestions, feedback, and ideas. This way, no matter how your academic year ended, you (and your departmental mentors) will know that this summer, you are a scholar with a clear plan!

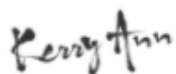
The Weekly Challenge

This week, I challenge you to:

- Take 30-60 minutes to sit down and construct a plan that provides all the rest, fun, support, and community you need to be productive this summer.
- If you need help creating your summer plan, register for our May core curriculum webinar: [Every Summer Needs A Plan](#).
- Find or create a community of support that will keep you motivated throughout the summer months.
- Share your summer plan with at least one of your mentors for feedback.
- And if you wanted to participate in our Summer bootcamp but missed the deadline, go ahead and add your name to our [waiting list](#) (or register early for the [fall session](#)).

I hope that going through the process of making a summer plan will help you to identify your priorities, clarify how all of your personal and professional needs can get met, and energize you for the summer months.

Peace & Productivity,



Kerry Ann Rockquemore, PhD
Founder, National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity

Questions, Comments, or Concerns?