Organizing Your Work Time
Presented by the UW-Madison Writing Center
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» Devise a schedule and make sure that it includes time for reading, field or lab work, and library research in addition to writing.

» Keep the place and time you write sacred. Don’t counter-schedule events during your work time as if it were free time. It’s not free time; it’s time that you’ve marked off specifically for your work, and you thus have an obligation to yourself to keep it reserved for work.

» Find a time that works best for you.
  • Make a schedule of times when you can or want to work. To do so, first block off the times when you absolutely cannot work due to other obligations. Then schedule your work time around these obligations.
  • Experiment with different times of the day to see during which times of the day you’re most focused and productive.
  • After experimenting with different times of day, designate certain times as “A times” and others as “B times.” Save the A times for your most demanding work (such as writing or lab work). Schedule other work (such as reading or library research) for B times when you’re not routinely at your best.

» Once you begin a writing schedule, try to avoid going more than one day without writing. The more often you write, the less time it will take for you to get into your writing in each session—and thus the more productive those sessions will be.

» Set achievable goals, both for daily writing and for larger blocks of time (weeks, months, semesters).
  • Larger blocks of time: working with WC instructors and with dissertation groups can help you meet the weekly or monthly goals you set.
  • Daily goals: decide whether you work best with time or page goals.
    • Time goals: easier to plan according to a regular schedule; make sure that you work during the time you’ve set and avoid distractions
- Page goals: might occasionally allow you to finish earlier than you expected, giving you refreshing free time that you hadn’t planned on; can be difficult to schedule, especially for sections of your project that take unexpectedly long amounts of time to complete.

- Whichever type of goals you choose to set, be sure to experiment with limits. Not everyone works at the same rate, so choose a time or page length that works for you. Experiment with different lengths. If you tend to become less productive after three hours, schedule your writing in three-hour rather than four- or five-hour blocks.

- Think of writing your proposal and working on your dissertation as your top professional priorities. Completing these will get you out of grad school, despite the fact that teaching or other work likely pays the bills.

- Establish habits and rituals that help you write or work: music, coffee/tea breaks, motivating objects, or other muses.

- Work on a system of rewards rather than one based on punishments. Promise yourself a reward whenever you achieve a goal, and try to hold out until you’ve actually achieved it.

- "Park on the downward slope" by giving yourself a good place to begin working at your next session.