In the previous posting I encouraged you to commit to writing at least 90 minutes each day. Everyday without fail...at least 90 minutes.

Here's something else that can help you. Schedule your writing for the very first thing in the morning. You are more likely to write each day that way. Why is that?

You are less likely to be interrupted early in the morning. Once the other, unexpected things that invariably come up during the day start to happen, you will be less guilty and anxious knowing that you already have written that day. You also will be less likely to wait to start writing until you have attended to all the other demands on your time when you plan to write first thing in the morning.

This works even if you are not a morning person. Seriously. Try it for a week. Early morning writing, especially on your busiest days, works for all types of writers...especially procrastinators. (We know who we are!)
Make a List

One strategy to help you focus on writing during your scheduled writing time is to make a list before you start to write of everything else you must do that day. If while you are working some pressing need distracts you from your writing, add it to the list and quickly return to writing. Do not stop writing to send an email, pay a bill, or search for a citation. Just add it to your list and keep writing. David Allen, in his book of productivity tips, emphasizes the importance of making such a list (in writing, no mental lists) because of the inefficiency of our psychic RAM. "Your head is probably not the best place to keep something in a trustworthy fashion....These self-commitments create infinite loops that make no progress and produce inner conflicts and stress. As soon as you make any sort of commitment...not completed in the moment, your mind will demand and take psychic energy until it is resolved" (2003, p. 27). So if a distracting thought of what you need to do later arises while you are writing, add it to your list, then stop thinking about it until you are finished writing.

After you have begun to write every day and become more productive than you've ever been, writing will become a habit for you. Many of us as graduate students and faculty find that we have very little control over our schedule. Something more important or urgent occurs at just the time we planned to write. "Oh, well, there's always the next time, the next day, the next scheduled writing period." But we've lost a day of writing. We've lost continuity. We've lost the chance to generate the ideas that occur only when we actually write. But if you are writing every day, no matter what occurs, you know that before you finally call it a night, you MUST write for at least 90 minutes. If you get that 90 minutes done at 5:30 a.m., or noon, or 4:00 p.m., then great. You're done. But if it's midnight, and you haven't written yet today, then no matter how exhausted you are, you must write. No excuses.

Reduce Warm-up Time

Silvia (2007) advises: Make a schedule and stick to it. "The secret is the regularity, not the number of days or the number of hours" (p.13). You can write only on Mondays from 8 to 12. Or weeknights at 9:00 p.m. But you must stick to your schedule.

However, if your regular writing schedule is every day, rather than once or twice or three times a week, you will be more productive (like writing enough to fill a 1-inch by 1-inch picture frame versus an 8 x 12 picture frame, suggested in the first posting). Single (2010) explains one reason for this: "Warm-up time necessary to return to a problem increases exponentially with the time that has lapsed since you last worked on it" (p. 132). When your writing sessions occur more frequently, you return to productive writing sooner each time you start to write.

References


Some of the information in the Productive Writer draws from previously published work, and I have tried to properly attribute the ideas and work of others. If I fail to do so, please let me know so I can clarify and correct.

Resources

Avoid Binge Writing

Another problem with two- or three-times-a-week writing periods is that when we have missed too many, we try to make up the time by binge writing. For example, if you schedule your writing for every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 10:00 a.m. to noon, and you miss those three days -- because of illness or travel or other important projects, you might decide to make up for missing those three writing periods by writing for six or more hours on Saturday. An upcoming posting will focus on the dangers and ineffectiveness of binge writing, but for now, let me advise ... **don't do it.** It seldom leads to greater productivity; it often leads to burn-out.

It's true, the hard part of writing... is the writing. Fingers to keyboard. Pen to paper. Getting your ideas from mental representation in your brain to actual representation as coherent, thoughtful, beautiful words on paper.

Have you written yet today?

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