

Silvia, P. J. (2007). *How to write a lot: A practical guide to academic writing*. Washington, D. C.: American Psychological Association. (Reviewed by Nancy H. Covell, Ph.D.; February 12, 2008).

Schedule time to write!

- Try to schedule at least 4 hours into your work week to write; protect the time as an unchangeable commitment (e.g., like teaching a course during those hours). If you wait for time, it will never come.
- Do not skip writing time as a reward - either for writing extra during a week or accomplishing a particular project.
- Avoid "binge" writing and waiting for inspiration (this isn't poetry; if you wait to become inspired to write specific aims, you will be waiting a long time).
- Where possible, schedule times when you feel you can write best.

Writing time can be used for any writing task including:

- Setting goals/planning (recommends once monthly)
- Reading articles
- Outlining articles you plan to write (the author notes that those who complain about writers block often don't take the time to outline - clear thinking produces clear writing)
- Conducting data analyses
- Writing the prose
- Reviewing manuscripts or grants as a peer reviewer (the author notes that timely reviews are critical for productive academic writing)

Set goals and track your progress

- Project goals are specific projects that need to be written (grant, paper 1, etc.)
- Concrete goals for daily writing should be **very** specific within each project goal (e.g., write 200 words, write first 3 paragraphs of discussion, add missing references and reconcile reference list, read reviewer comments and make list of things to be addressed in revision, brainstorm and outline a new manuscript).
- Track your progress on spreadsheet or database (the author uses SPSS to track number of words written per day per project, as well as whether he met his writing goal for the day; in addition to providing positive feedback for accomplishing small goals, it helps the author plan future manuscripts in that he has a sense of how many days it took him to write X project with Y number of words).
- Create an 'agraphia' group - other writers who meet at least every 2 weeks (beyond that, goals become too unfocused) to publicly set and review concrete writing goals.

Set priorities (recommended general order follows)

- Checking proofs and copyedited manuscripts
- Finishing projects with deadlines
- Revising manuscripts for resubmission to a journal
- Reviewing, as peer reviewer, manuscripts and grant proposals
- Developing a new manuscript

Writing style tips

- Write first, revise later.
- Use active voice (author notes all good texts on writing implore the use of active voice).
- Use familiar words, many of your readers will not have learned English as a first language.
- Avoid vague words like "individual" (individual what - trees? Cells?) and "study participant" (participants can be non-human); instead use words like "people" or "adult humans".
- "Abbreviations and acronyms are useful only when they are easier to understand than the tortuous phrases they represent" (page 64) - useful examples include ANOVA, SES. Readers often find re-reading abbreviations more tedious than re-reading the words.
- Delete useless words like very, basically, actually, virtually, extremely, remarkably, completely, at all, etc.
- Good writers use parallel sentences - for example, People in condition A did X; people in condition B did Y.
- Omit "such that"; instead, delete clause preceding "such that" and use semi-colon to join. For example, "We created two treatments such that people in one condition received clozapine and people in a second condition received risperidone" becomes instead, "People in one condition received clozapine; people in a second condition received risperidone"
- Avoid "wobbly compound" sentences where commas are used to denote natural pauses in speech, but the clauses can not stand on their own.
- Try to move words like "however" and "for instance" away from the sentence beginning. "However, clozapine was superior to other SGA in terms of reductions in hospitalization" becomes instead "Clozapine, however, was superior...".
- Spend some of your writing time reviewing books on writing style.

Other information

The book includes useful chapters with tips for writing books and journal articles (including responding to reviewer concerns and how to write a review article).