

Bite size, snack size and supersized: Building a writing habit

DR. SHARON MCDONOUGH, SENIOR LECTURER, FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND ARTS,
FEDERATION UNIVERSITY AUSTRALIA

S.MCDONOUGH@FEDERATION.EDU.AU

Today's webinar

OUTCOMES

Strategies for developing a writing habit

Opportunity to engage in some bite size writing

Goals for your writing heading into the future

STRUCTURE OF WEBINAR

Part one - Getting to know yourself as a writer.

Part two – Strategies for making writing a habituated practice.

Getting to know yourself as a writer: The metaphor game

Courtesy of the Thesis Whisperer!

Imagine your writing practice as a car. What kind of car is it?

Does it go fast? Or is it slow but reliable and gets you there in the end?

Is it flashy? Or is it more substance than style?



The watcher at the gates: What does your watcher say and do?

“Watchers are notorious pencil sharpeners, ribbon changers, plant waterers, home repairers and abhorrrers of messy rooms or messy pages. They are compulsive looker-uppers. They are superstitious scaredy-cats. They cultivate self-important eccentricities they think are suitable for “writers”. And they’d rather die (and kill your inspiration with them) than risk making a fool of themselves”.

(Gail Godwin, 1977).



Knowing yourself – why it matters

Knowing yourself as a writer is a key part of being able to develop a productive writing habit.

It's important to recognise your strengths and what works for you as a writer, for example:

- what time of day you write best,
- what environment you write best in,
- what kind of tools you like to use, and
- how you like to approach writing projects.

Knowing your weaknesses is also useful! You might be aware of:

- Times that don't work well for writing,
- Things that you procrastinate with,
- Approaches and processes that don't enable you to move on

3 minute reflection

What works well for me in my writing?

What do I enjoy?

What do I find difficult about writing?



6 key messages about making academic writing a habituated practice

1. Be open to change – be willing to explore new ways of writing and new approaches
2. Examine the language and writing in your field – to identify the discourse and conventions of your field
3. Take a journey through the “ologies”- ontology, epistemology and methodology – where do you fit?
4. Start to see yourself as a writer –don’t just think of yourself as researcher – you’re a writer!
5. Make writing a habituated practice – find the strategies that work for you
6. Write yourself into knowing and being – through writing comes understanding

You know you're a writer when...
you're convinced every word of the manuscript you've just finished is the worst thing anyone has ever written.

someecards
user card



Writerswrite.co.za

Bite size Strategy: Read to write

Schedule time for reading in your calendar. Set a timer for 15 minutes and make a note at the end of what elements of the writing you can draw from in your own work.

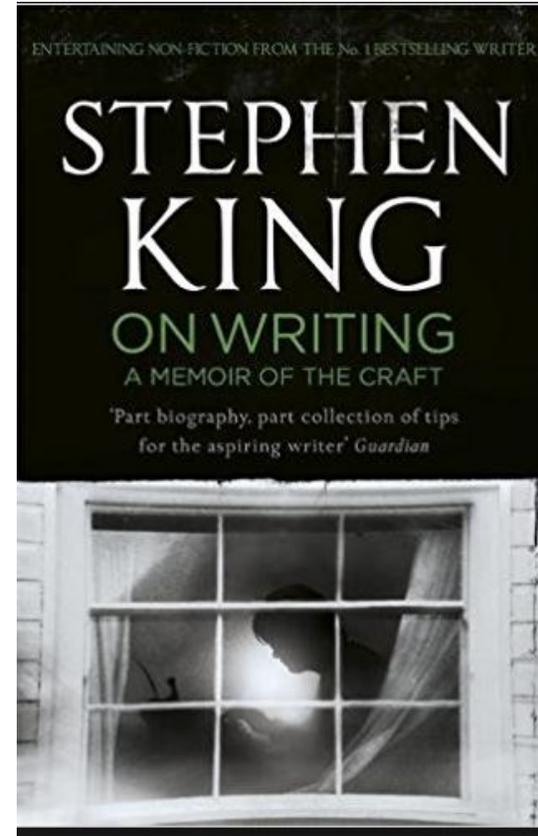
What are the conventions of your discipline?

What language and concepts do writers in your field use?

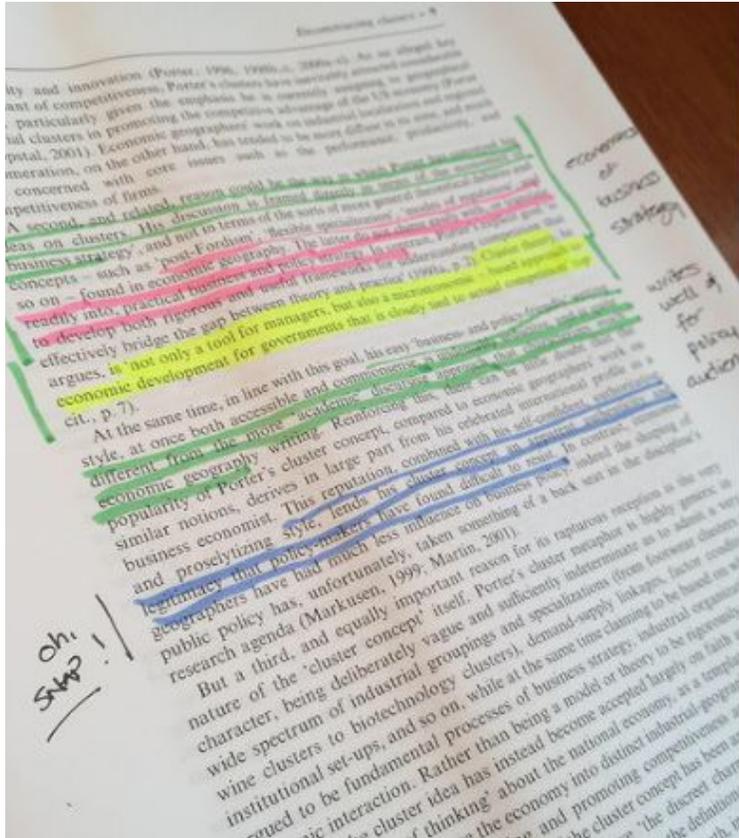
Are you comfortable with the language of the writing in your discipline?

What do you read outside of your study/academic work?

A framework for non-academic reading:
<https://researchthatcares.com/2017/07/13/non-required-reading-redux/>



Bite Size Strategy: Developing academic language and structure through reading.



Select 15-20 minutes in your calendar and select a paper from your field. Read it and identify how authors: introduce concepts; make claims about significance; describe data and findings.

Image from:
<http://www.raulpacheco.org/2015/10/color-coding-your-highlighting-when-reading-articles-and-book-chapters/>

Super Size Strategy: Find a writing community

Who is in your writing community?

Who can you discuss writing with? (other than your supervisors/ and colleagues?)



Virtual community
- @SUWTues:
Sessions run on the
1st and 3rd Tuesday
of each month on
Twitter from 10- 11
AEST.



Part Two

STRATEGIES FOR MAKING WRITING A HABITUATED PRACTICE –
SNACK SIZE, BITE SIZE, SUPER SIZE

Snack size strategy: The 5 minute Freewrite

Developed by Peter Elbow in 1973.

The idea is to write without stopping and to write whatever it is that comes into your head. This might be: *I have no idea what to write about!*

The concept of freewriting is that it enables us to write without censoring our ideas, without looking over what we've done and without imposing a shape or structure to our writing.

Freewrites can last from 5 – 30 minutes.

Modified freewrite is to use one short prompt to start you off. For getting unstuck with research writing I use either of these two prompts:

What's new?

Or

What am I thinking?



Bite size strategy: The Pomodoro technique

Developed by Francesco Cirillo in the 1980s the Pomodoro technique was designed as a way of overcoming distractions and providing the opportunity to work through tasks.

You pick a task or writing activity and set a timer for 25 minutes. When time is up you have a break and then make a note of your progress, have a 5 minute break and then start again. This is the model Shut Up and Write Tuesdays is based on.



Super sized strategy: Make writing a habituated practice



Johnson and Muller (2007):

Prolific academics create time where none exists and then carefully protect it from intrusion (p. 8).

Schedule **at least 3** writing sessions for the rest of this week and for next week.

Start with at least 15 minutes or 30 minute sessions if you're feeling confident!

Make a plan for completion and projects – Gantt chart/ EXCEL/ Word, whatever works for you. Set your goals and aim to meet them!

Snack - Supersize Strategy: Log your projects

Writing Log				
Project Title _____		Start Date _____	End Date _____	
Date	Section	Start Count	End Count	Total

Use a word file or journal

Document the date and what you want to achieve during the writing session.

Jot down questions, random thoughts that you want to capture and remember.

When you finish writing you can record how many words (but it's not all about the words!).

Always finish with NEXT TIME and a note of what you are moving on to next (you'll forget otherwise!).

Strategies for writing an abstract.

MY STRUCTURE

A global introductory statement

What is your contention/ argument? What will you explore?

Brief context

What methodology? What are you using in this paper?

Outcomes/ implications...

PAT THOMSON'S STRUCTURE

- is now a significant issue (in/for).. because.... . (Expand by up to one sentence if necessary)
- In this paper I focus on
- The paper draws on (I draw on) findings from a study of... which used..... in order to show that..... (expand through additional sentences)
- The paper argues that....
- It concludes (I conclude) by suggesting that...

Bite size strategy for editing: Reverse outlines



1. Start with a finished piece of writing
2. Number the paragraphs
3. Identify the topic of each paragraph
4. Arrange these topics into an outline
5. Analyze the outline –does the order work? What's missing?
6. Create a revised outline
7. Reorganize the text
8. Check for topic sentences and cohesion

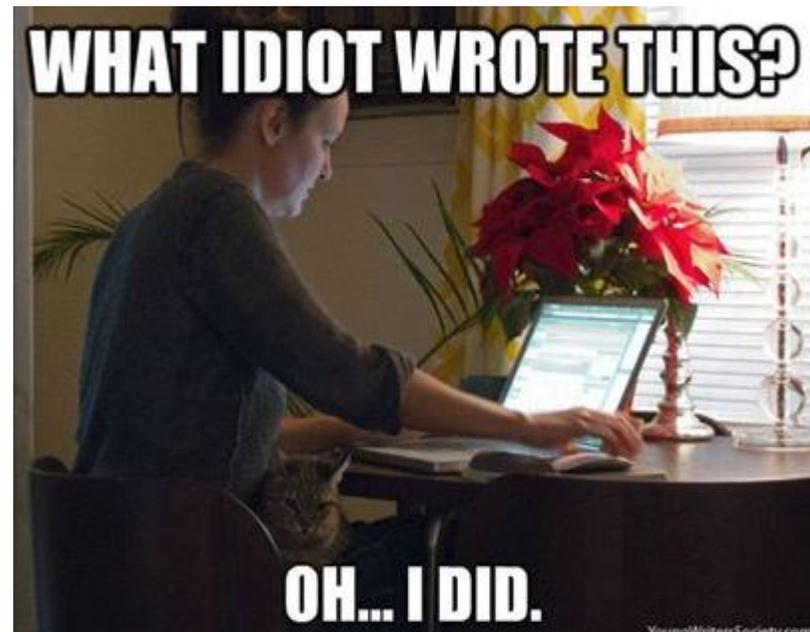
<https://explorationsofstyle.com/2011/02/09/reverse-outlines/>

Snack Size Strategies for editing

Writing traps- what are your traps? Making assertions? Being vague, rather than specific? Switching tense?

Read aloud

Tighten your paragraphs! Transition/ one key idea/ development of a key idea



Useful resources

WEB LINKS

<https://thesiswhisperer.com/>

<https://patthomson.net/>

<http://www.raulpacheco.org/>

<https://explorationsofstyle.com/>

Gail Godwin's "The Watcher at the Gates":

<https://www4.uwsp.edu/english/mbowman/101/watcher.pdf>

BOOKS

Goodson, P. (2013). *Becoming an academic writer: 50 Exercises for Paced, Productive, and Powerful Writing*. Los Angeles: Sage.

McMaster, C., Murphy, C., Whitburn, B., & Mewburn, I. (Eds.). (2017). *Postgraduate Study in Australia: Surviving and Succeeding*. New York: Peter Lang.

Thomson, P., & Kamler, B. (2013). *Writing for Peer Reviewed Journals: Strategies for Getting Published*. London: Routledge.

Take away messages



What will you take away from today?

What strategies do you think might work best for you?

What questions do you still have?