

Writing Tips in the midst of a pandemic

Reduce your expectations

We're all doing our best to adjust to new working realities, different work environments and sharing workspace with family or housemates. We are working under sub-optimal conditions to say the very least. Worry about the health of loved ones and our own health means we are all working to the heartbeat of underlying anxiety. Do not expect perfect - settle for good enough.

Set small SMART goals.

Focus is difficult at the moment. Our desire to connect with news and loved ones is natural, and it's very possible that it is overwhelming our interest in and ability to focus on the tasks at hand. One way to overcome this is by setting SMART goals. A SMART goal is

Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-specific.

A *small* SMART goal is think about what you think you can achieve in a 20 minute period and half it. The goal is to get things done, no matter how small, so set small specific tasks. It may be overwhelming to say your will 'do your assignment' this afternoon, but can you commit to opening the assignment guidelines and selecting your essay topic, at 9 am? You may not feel up to writing your assignment but can you select an article to read at 10.00 am? By lowering your expectations, and focusing on a small SMART goal, you will find yourself building momentum over time . Focus on winning the moment, and the day will look after itself.

For great tips on how to increase you productivity while maintaining your wellbeing please see the blog hosted by The Professor Is In, and curated by Kelle Weinholt available at <http://theprofessorisin.com/category/productivity/>

Make it social – Shut up and Write

Writing is often a lonely experience. As we physically distance from one another, loads of conferencing apps are becoming widely used. Can you connect with classmates and organise a 'Shut up and Write' session? Here is how it works.

- Agree parameters in advance:
 - Select your writing buddies; you can do this alone but it's nicer to do to it with friends.
 - Timetable a Shut up and Write Session – I suggest blocking out at least 90 minutes for this, but this is entirely up to you. See Point 1 above – Reduce your expectations
 - How long do you want to write? I suggest 20 minutes writing sessions and with a 10 minute break between sessions. Try to do at least two sessions back to back. But please revert to Point 1 – Reduce your expectations.
- Decide what you are going to work on during the writing session – remember, set a small SMART goal.
- Meet your friends online at the arranged time. I suggest turning off all alerts on your phone, and closing all tabs you do not need for the next hour.

- Optional extra – timetable 10 minutes to facilitate general chat, moans or freak outs between you and your writing buddies. However, set a timer. After the 10 minutes is up move to the next step.
- Go around the virtual table asking everyone what their SMART goal is – this will help ensure everyone is clear on what they want to achieve.
- Set a timer for 20 minutes and get to work. If your brain starts to rebel remind yourself you only have to focus for 20 minutes, now it's only 19 minutes.
- When the 20 minutes end, stop writing and take a 10 minute break. Set a timer. For those ten minutes check in with your writing buddies, get up and walk around the room, get yourself a cup of tea, do a few Sun Salutations, juggle, check Twitter, have chocolate. Do whatever you want.
- When the timer goes off get back to work. Check in with your writing buddies; do they have the same goals?

There are many blogs and online options for joining a Shut up and Write community. It's also easy to organise – just remember maintain social distancing, keep it virtual for now. See this blog post by The Thesis Whisperer which describes the experience

<https://thesiswhisperer.com/2011/06/14/shut-up-and-write/>

Exercise

Our bodies need to move when we're stressed, so let it. The UCD Sports Centre is offering free access to online fitness classes (see UCD Student Update email 24 March for details) and lots of other fitness and sports organisations are running similar schemes for the duration of this crisis. If you are lucky enough to have a garden, use it. If it's safe to go for a walk and in line with government advice, get out and go for a run or walk – while maintaining good hygiene etiquette, wash your hands regularly and maintain social distancing.

Recognise when you've hit a wall

If you are banging your head against a wall and can't work out a knot in your assignment, can't get your thoughts straight and none of your usual techniques work – allow yourself to stop. You can maintain momentum by setting a SMART goal for a specified time later. Prioritise sleep, loved ones, and eating well.

Reduce your expectations

To go back to the beginning – reduce your expectations. This are unprecedented times, and we have to adjust our expectations accordingly. Let go of perfect, and settle for good enough.