Finishing Your Dissertation

(MAKING YOUR SUMMER PRODUCTIVE)

PROFESSOR ELDRED
SPRING 2009
Possible Motivations

PLANNING
RESOLUTION
ATONEMENT
DESPERATION
CREATING THE HABIT OF WRITING
Why a habit?

YOU’LL PROBABLY NEED TO WRITE FOR YOUR CAREER

YOU’LL PROBABLY NEED TO WRITE WHILE HAVING A LIFE

YOUR LIFE WILL LIKELY NOT BECOME LESS COMPLICATED
Creating a Successful Writing Habit

BE REASONABLE
BE CONSISTENT
BE ACCOUNTABLE
BE PATIENT
But First. . . .

FACE THE OBSTACLES
Obstacle #1: Not enough time

MAKE WRITING A PRIORITY

SET ASIDE TIME

WHEN & HOW MUCH ISN’T AS IMPORTANT AS MAKING THE COMMITMENT
Obstacle #2: Placing the needs of others above your writing

MAKE YOUR WORK A PRIORITY

TELL YOURSELF AND OTHERS THAT YOU DESERVE THE TIME

WHEN & HOW MUCH ISN’T AS IMPORTANT AS MAKING THE COMMITMENT
Obstacle #3: The Mozart syndrome

Your dissertation doesn’t need to be brilliant. It needs only to be done & defendable. It’s a job!

D + D = SUCCESS!!!
Obstacle #3: The Mozart syndrome

THINK SMALL:
MUCH RESEARCH HAS BEEN DONE IN THE AREA OF ________. MY RESEARCH CONTRIBUTES TO THIS BODY OF WORK BY DOING _________. THIS WORK WILL BE IMPORTANT TO SCHOLARS IN _________ FIELD BECAUSE ____________.
Obstacle #4: A Crisis of Confidence

ANNE LAMOTT’S ADVICE FROM BIRD BY BIRD
Obstacle #5: Writer’s Block

THE ONLY CURE

IS TO WRITE THROUGH IT
Obstacle #6: The over-ritualized writer

PRODUCTIVE RITUAL?

OR PROCRASTINATION?
Obstacle #6: Overcome with isolation

Consider a writing group
# Writing Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dysfunctional</th>
<th>Functional</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○ Any group that produces more excuses than pages</td>
<td>○ Different writers need different kinds of groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Any group that hinders the writing that members might do</td>
<td>○ Articulate group rules</td>
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Obstacle #7: A Bad Match

Do you need a different advisor?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dysfunctional</th>
<th>Functional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You don’t get enough feedback</td>
<td>You get good sound advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You feel awful, demoralized after every meeting</td>
<td>You feel as if you can proceed, like you know where to go after a meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You feel as if there are mismatched expectations</td>
<td>You feel as if you have the same goals for <em>your</em> career</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Back to . . .

Creating a Successful Writing Habit

BE REASONABLE
BE CONSISTENT
BE ACCOUNTABLE
BE PATIENT
A DISSERTATION IS A SERIES OF SMALLER CHUNKS, A LARGE WORK MADE UP OF SMALLER, DISCRETE SECTIONS

SET MANAGEABLE GOALS; BIRD BY BIRD
Do the (very reasonable) math

5 PAGES A WEEK (SUSTAINABLE) = 20 PAGES A MONTH, 60 BY THE END OF SUMMER, 240 A YEAR (THAT’S A BOOK)

10 PAGES = 40 PAGES A MONTH, 120 BY THE END OF SUMMER, 480 A YEAR (THAT’S TWO BOOKS)

15 PAGES (SUSTAINABLE?): YOU’RE BETTER OFF WITH A SUSTAINABLE HABIT 😊
A Kick in the Pants

FACEBOOK
OBSESSIVE EMAIL CHECKING
VACUUMING

???

BITCHING ABOUT HOW YOU DON’T HAVE TIME TO WRITE YOUR DISSERTATION 😊
Be Reasonable

TREAT IT LIKE A JOB, BECAUSE IT IS
Be consistent

MAKE A WEEKLY SCHEDULE

KEEP THE SCHEDULE, MODIFYING IT FOR VACATIONS AND EXCEPTIONS, JUST AS YOU WOULD A JOB

IF YOU MUST MISS WORK, SCHEDULE MAKEUP TIME
START EVERY MORNING, END EVERY EVENING WITH A SPECIFIC PLANNING SESSION

ONCE A WEEK (MONDAY?): TAKE STOCK
KEEP A BINDER WITH YOUR CHAPTERS IN IT. MAKE IT LOOK AS MUCH LIKE A BOOK AS POSSIBLE.

A TITLE PAGE
A TABLE OF CONTENTS, ANNOTATED W/ PROGRESS NOTES
CHAPTERS
It’s a Job!!!

Adhere to fair labor practices: match the demands of your job to the time allotted to it.

Make small, doable lists.

Be ruthless: cut any part of the dissertation that is weighing you down and that just isn’t necessary.
Be accountable

Find a way to make yourself accountable

Report to a group

Write a weekly/monthly memo to your director, even if you don’t send it
Be accountable

MAKE APPOINTMENTS AT THE WRITING CENTER

YOU CAN REPORT ON PROGRESS 😊 AND TALK THROUGH THE NEXT SECTION
Be Patient

KEEP ONE CHEERLEADER ON BOARD

BUT . . .
Be Patient

Be prepared to accommodate failure.

Don’t dwell on failures; recommit to your plan.

If you fail more often than you succeed, something is wrong with your plan.

The sooner you confront issues, the sooner you’re back on the track to finishing your dissertation.
Most Importantly,

**IMAGINE THE DISSERTATION FINISHED**

**DON’T SAY “WHEN I FINISH MY DISSERTATION,” SAY “AFTER I FINISH MY DISSERTATION THIS SUMMER (THIS FALL, THIS SPRING... )**
Most Importantly,

IMAGINE LIFE POST DISSERTATION!

WATCH OUT FOR THE “FRAUD” SYNDROME—YOU DESERVE THIS AS MUCH AS I DO!

WATCH OUT FOR THE “SAINT” OR PRESIDENTIAL SYNDROME—YOU PROBABLY WON’T SOLVE BIG WORLD ISSUES

WATCH OUT FOR FEAR: LET GO! SURE, SOMEONE MIGHT NOT LIKE IT, BUT OH WELL
Conclusion

SO, WHAT’S YOUR PLAN?