

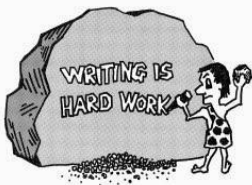
UNLV Writes: For Night Owls and Early Birds

Sponsored by the UNLV Graduate College, Lied Library, and the UNLV Writing Center

Making Time to Write

Most of us have difficulty finding long blocks of time in which to write. Here are some tips that can help you find more time to write:

- **Schedule time to write. Every day.** Mark it in your day planner, calendar, or whatever you use to track your appointments. This is your inviolable writing time.
- **Write in small bites.** If you have fifteen minutes, write for fifteen minutes, even if you just proofread a few paragraphs.
- **Use your phone to record ideas when and where you get them.** Sometimes solutions to problems come to us at the most inconvenient times. Your phone can be an invaluable tool for recording your ideas when they occur to you.
- **Make writing the first thing you do each day.** Begin each day by writing for a specific amount of time. It will become a habit. You may come to depend on that hour of solitude each day!
- **Track your writing time.** Keeping track of the time you spend writing can help you see all of the things that eat away at your writing time. If you answer a phone or text, then you're not writing, and you should not record that time as writing time. You might be surprised at how much of your writing time is devoted to such technological interruptions.



Writing Groups

Studies (Aitchison, 2009; Maher, et al., 2008; Cuthbert, Spark, and Burke, 2009) show that graduate students who commit to working with a

writing group produce not just more writing, but more effective, polished writing than graduate students who do not. The right-hand sidebar has some tips for organizing writing groups and a link to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's *Writing Group Starter Kit*.

And, if you cannot commit to a writing group, commit to coming to the UNLV Writing Center regularly. We can provide support as you write for your academic, professional, civic, and personal lives.



Logo Concept #6, Gayan. From <http://www.logo123.com/The-Early-Bird--amp--Night-Owl-31085>

Organizing a Writing Group

- **Decide on the group's size.** More than five members can be difficult to schedule. Fewer than three can provide too few perspectives.
- **Decide how often, when, where, and for how long to meet.** Be consistent.
- **Decide how you'll communicate** between meetings and share the information you'll need to do it.
- **Decide if you'll share work before** the meeting and a deadline for doing so.
- **Set and respect personal goals.**
- **Set and honor group goals.**
- **For more information,** go to

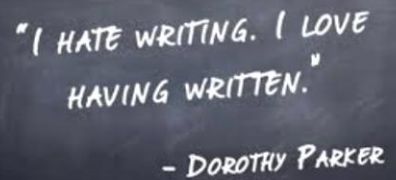
<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/writing-groups/writing-group-starter-kit/>

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Strategies for Getting Started & Overcoming Writer's Block

- **Freewrite.** Turn off your inner editor. Turn off your monitor if you're typing. Write five minutes without stopping or correcting—or thinking. You'll have written a lot of what you think and know about the topic. "Tangents" can be especially productive avenues for exploration.
- **Chunk.** Break up your writing into smaller bites. If you're writing a thesis, dissertation, or book, think of the chapters as discrete arguments and then break them down even further, into discrete claims. Work on one claim at a time. Work on one question at a time. You can add transitions and reorganize things later. The Writing Center has an app for that, too—metaphorically speaking, that is!
- **Outline.** A lot of people will say you should outline before you start, especially if you're embarking on a lengthy text. And they're not wrong. But you should also consider outlining periodically as you write, especially the parts where you pull your arguments together. Summary outlines and purpose outlines can help you revise for clarity and conciseness.
- **Read.** Read comment boards where people discuss the topic you're researching. Read the books and articles that everyone in the conversation is citing. Read them until you understand them. Read your work aloud. Read it aloud to others. Read your work as if someone else wrote it. Read it to someone who doesn't know a lot about your field.
- **Do an image search.** If you're under 30, chances are your brain is strongly stimulated by images. Run an image search using some of your research questions or keywords. Scroll through the images. You may find that it helps you make connections between and among seemingly disparate ideas.
- **Talk.** Talk to others who are interested in your topic or research area but who do not pursue the same specific research questions you do. Talk to smart people from another area altogether—the humanities or social sciences, for instance, if you're in a STEM discipline. Their perspectives and concerns may afford you a new way of approaching your project.
- **Come to the Writing Center. Visit a librarian. Share ideas in a writer's group.**



"I HATE WRITING. I LOVE
HAVING WRITTEN."
- DOROTHY PARKER

UNLV Writing Center Hours

Spring 2016

Mondays-Fridays: 8:00 AM-5:00 PM
Sundays: NOON-6:00 PM

For appointments, call **702.895.3908**, or visit us in the **Central Desert Complex, Building 3** (across from CBC).

The UNLV Writing Center is open to all active UNLV students, faculty and staff. Our trained consultants will work with you at any point in your writing processes.

One-on-one consultations last for up to 45 minutes and are confidential. However, student writers may request that we notify instructors of their visits.

Writers may make up to three appointments per week and may have two of those three in a single day. However, to allow time for revision between consultations, at least two hours must elapse between the end of the first consultation and the start of the second.

Our Professional Writing Consultant can also help GTAs develop effective and appropriate writing assignments for their disciplines.

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Strategies for Tracking Sources

- **Use notecards.** Yep. The way you learned in high school and in your first composition classes. Notecards can be shuffled and moved around, color coded for a variety of purposes, and taken to the library easily.
- **Compose your bibliographic entries as you open the book or article.** Don't wait until you use the text. If you've read it, it may have influenced your thinking. Compose the entries in red font, and change them to black as soon as you've cited it. Anything left in red at the end was consulted, not cited. Move it to a separate bibliographic page called *References Consulted* or *Works Consulted*.
- **Print all online sources.** Print the covers and copyright pages, too. Staple everything together. Make sure to record the URLs right on the hard copies.
- **In your source texts, highlight direct quotes** with one color, paraphrased material with another, and summarized material with yet another. It will make things easier to check for correctness and accuracy during proofreading.
- **Copy and/or scan covers and copyright pages of all sources you borrow.** You may not have access to the same edition or text to collect this information in the future.
- **Include in-text citations** as soon as you use the source, whether you're paraphrasing, summarizing, or directly quoting. Yep. Even the page number.
- **Always use a signal phrase** for paraphrased or summarized material. That way you won't forget whose idea it was later on. This can also help you see when you've used too much source material and too few of your own ideas.
- **Date your in-class notes.** If you want to cite something said in a class discussion, workshop, or lecture, you'll have the date. Record the names of speakers, too. Better yet, record the discussions if you can!
- **Organize emails from your committee.** One of them may make a suggestion you want to cite. Or recommend a source you should use. You'll want to find them easily.
- **Buy the style guide for your discipline.** Read it. You'll be glad to have it when the library & the Writing Center are closed.
- **Come to the Writing Center. Visit a librarian. Share ideas in a writing group.**

UNLV Lied Library

Subject Liaison

Spend one-on-one time with a librarian with expertise in your discipline. Make an appointment with a subject liaison librarian to help you with your special research needs. Liaison librarians are also available to consult on research assignment design and to collaborate on instruction of valuable research skills. Contact them by phone or email!

Phone: 702.895.2111

Text: 702.945.0822

URL for email:

https://www.library.unlv.edu/contact/librarians_by_subject



Source: Dave Coverly. Speed Bump.
Creator's Syndicate, 2003.

[http://www.cartoonistgroup.com/store/
add.php?iid=4334](http://www.cartoonistgroup.com/store/add.php?iid=4334)

UNLV Lied Library

Research Consultation Service

Lied Library's Research Consultation Service is designed for UNLV students, faculty and staff, plus community members needing research assistance with course- and degree-related projects and assignments.

Phone: 702.895.2100

Text: 702.945.0822

Chat: <https://www.library.unlv.edu/consultation>

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Strategies for Organizing as You Write

Headings can help you organize as you write. Headings can eliminate the need for strong transitions between paragraphs and provide signposts for readers if you leave them in. Providing signposts is a kindness to readers.

- **Use a super-large font and a color that will stand out to you for headings.** That will make navigating through your document easier. You can change them to conform to your discipline's style guide later.
 - **WARNING:** Some style guides don't allow headings at all. If your discipline's style is one of them, delete the headings and ensure your transitions are strong. All style guides that allow headings require that they follow a specified pattern for heading levels. It is your responsibility to find out what that pattern is.

Color coding can help visual learners see the connections and contradictions between things they've written in different sections of their text. It can help you find organizational issues as well as help you avoid them in the first place.

- **Use a key** that indicates what concept, relationship, or function each color stands for. Trust me, you won't remember three weeks from now, no matter how clearly you think their meanings are implanted in your brain at the moment.

Making marginal or in-text comments allows writers to leave themselves reminders about connections, relationships, contradictions, and other matters requiring attention as they compose—without losing track of the thread they're pursuing when other ideas occur to them.

Making an outline or story board at any point in the process can help you see where you may be going off track or wandering into irrelevant material.

Using two documents can help you track what you remove from your text. See next page for details!

Come to the Writing Center. Visit a librarian. Share ideas in a writing group.

Some Myths about Writing Debunked

- **Really good writers are born, not made.**
- **Writing comes easily to good writers.**
- **If writing is hard for you, it means you're not a good writer.**

THE FACTS: While it's true that some people just seem to have an easier time writing than others, writing is a skill as well as an art, and guided practice can help just about anyone develop writing skills and improve their own writing.

But writing is like any other acquired skill: You have to keep practicing, and if you don't, you'll lose the skills.


Think about writing like playing an instrument or a sport. If you stop practicing for a while, you lose your chops, get rusty, even forget how to do it, right? Well, it's the same with writing.

The way writers get better is by writing, just as the way athletes and musicians get better is by playing.

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Strategies for Revising



First drafts
don't have to be
perfect.
They just have to
be written.

Revision is NOT “fixing” grammar and punctuation. That's proofreading (see next page). Revision is, literally, re-vision: to see again. It's moving things, and discarding what doesn't fit. In a lot of ways, revision is like remodeling your home. It can involve cutting things apart and splicing things together in fresh ways. For many writers, including the author of this document, revision is the most important part of the writing process. Below are some tips that can help you revise more efficiently and effectively. Of course, if you're organizing as you write, revision will

be a lot easier!

- **Take a break.** Even a few hours away from it can help you look at your work with fresh eyes.
- **Read your work to an educated layperson.** Someone who can reason well can tell you if the argument or reasoning works, even if they don't fully understand it. In fact, their questions can help you find gaps in your reasoning that you should close up.
- **Look for balance and proportion.** Have you spent the most time discussing the most important concepts? Do you have more than 10% quoted, paraphrased, or cited material? If so, you may need to further develop your own ideas—unless you're working on your lit review, of course!
- **Don't throw anything away.** You may find that you need something later that you've deleted now. Why spend time reconstructing it? Save everything. Even if it doesn't work for your current project, it may be the starting point of another. Keep two working documents at all times. Name one as you normally name documents, and name the other the same thing, but add the word *Notes*. Put anything you cut from your text into the *Notes* document. If you number or date them identically, you'll always be able to find what you need.
- **Ignore grammar, mechanics, and punctuation**—unless you're a multilingual or dialect writer whose first language is not Standard American English. Then you might want to spend time on these proofreading and editing issues as you go along. But if you are a native speaker of American English, then cleaning up the little stuff now is kind of like scrubbing the floors before you've finished the construction work. If you're really revising, the grammar and punctuation needs are likely to change. Obsessing over them early in revision can actually be a form of procrastination disguised as perfectionism. Beware!
- **Cut sections of your text into paragraphs.** Ask someone from your field to put it back together as they think it goes based on nothing other than the words you've used. If they put it back together in the order you wrote it, you're in good shape. If they don't, ask them to explain what about the text made them reconstruct it as they did.
- **Come to the Writing Center. Ask a librarian for suggestions. Share ideas in a writing group.**

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Editing is changing your writing at the word and sentence level.

We edit for **conciseness** when we eliminate unnecessary or redundant words. We edit for **clarity** when we add or change the transitions that indicate relationships among ideas. We edit for **accuracy** when we change verbs of attribution from *says* to *argues* if the source author is actually arguing. We edit for **relevance** when we delete material that does not somehow advance our claims. We edit for **style** when we add sentence variety. We edit for academic **tone** when we eliminate uses of the second person (*you*) and when we use the conventional languages, style guides, and formats of our disciplines.

Editing Strategies

- **Reading aloud** can be a very effective strategy for finding editing needs. It can reveal gaps in one's reasoning, too, especially if you read aloud to someone who reasons well, someone like the trained consultants in the UNLV Writing Center, and like the folks in academic writing groups. At the very least, read aloud, slowly, and record what you read. Then, listen to the recording while reading over the text. This is a good strategy for proofreading, too!
- **Come to the Writing Center. Join a writing group.**

Proofreading is kind of like scrubbing the floors after you've finished remodeling. It's the process of finding and correcting grammatical and mechanical errors. Most people have at least one pattern of grammatical or mechanical error of which they're unaware. Mechanical errors are errors in punctuation or formatting and failures to conform to the conventions outlined in your discipline's (or a journal's) style guide. A visit or two to the Writing Center can help you learn what persistent patterns of grammatical and mechanical error you have—and how to correct them—and avoid them in the first place.

Proofreading Strategies

- Combined with **reading aloud**, **reading backward** is one of the best ways I know to proofread. Read the text from back to front, one sentence at a time. This forces your brain to slow down, and since you can't see the argument, it focuses on the way each sentence conveys information. Now. Go through the text, once for each pattern of error you're seeking. It's time-consuming, but you're learning at the same time. One day, you won't make any of the errors you're making persistently now, and you can move on to even more sophisticated writing choices.
- **Come to the Writing Center. Join a writing group.**

More Myths about Writing Debunked

- **Some people are just not "English people." Some people are "math people."**
- **People who are good at STEM subjects are not good at writing.**

THE FACTS: Actually, the left side of the brain controls mathematical **and** language abilities. Logic, too. And in fact, most academic writing involves logic and reasoning as well as language. I think of both academic writing and logic as doing math with words. If you think of it that way, "math people" are "English people"—and vice versa!

- **Good writers know what they're going to say before they begin writing.**

THE FACTS: Scholarly writing at its best can be a process of meaning- and knowledge-making. Some of the best writers don't know what they're going to say until they've done their research and see where the evidence takes them.

- **Writing is a solitary activity. Good writers write well without feedback or input from others.**

THE FACTS: Other people are always present when we write, in the words we've read, and in the concepts we engage—at the very least!

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