

Goal-Setting for your Personal Intensive Writing Experience

Setting goals for a writing project is a good way to keep yourself on track and to ensure that you make significant progress. In this personal Intensive Writing Experience (IWE), we challenge you to think about not just your overall writing goal, but how you would break up that goal into smaller “bites” of writing that can be accomplished in a single writing session.

As you think about your goals, it is important that they be *specific* and *measurable*. Vague goals lack the detail necessary to determine whether they have been achieved in a meaningful way at the end of a writing period. Of the two examples below, only the second goal meets the criteria:

- X *I will work on my dissertation.*
- ✓ *I will revise 5 pages of the introduction to my dissertation.*

Even specific and measurable goals can sometimes be unrealistic. This is why your goals should also be *reasonable*—achievable within your time-constraints, abilities as a writer, and work environment. In a 3-day personal IWE, for example, the second goal below is reasonable whereas the first may not be:

- X *I will draft chapter 4 of my dissertation from scratch.*
- ✓ *I will draft 6 polished pages for chapter 4 of my dissertation.*

The remainder of this document will walk you through setting goals for the overall IWE and for each individual writing session.

Setting an Overall IWE Goal

Begin by setting an overall goal for your personal IWE. You will need to take into account the number of individual writing sessions you will have as well as the length of each writing session. For instance, an IWE that spans 3 days, with two 2-hour writing sessions per day, allows for a larger overall goal than an IWE that will only last a single day. Fill in the chart below to determine how much writing time you will need to set goals for.

Number of days in your IWE	Number of 2-hour writing sessions per day	Total number of hours set aside exclusively for writing

Complete the following sentence to state what you hope to have accomplished by the end of your IWE.

My personal IWE will span _____ day(s), in which I hope to meet the following overall goal:

Setting Daily IWE Goals

The next step in setting goals is to determine the tasks that are required to complete the larger goal. For instance, if your overarching goal is to write a rough draft of an introduction, success requires that you complete a number of smaller tasks such as writing a first paragraph, indicating the research gap, stating hypotheses, writing a literature review covering X number of subtopics in your research, etcetera. In order to set daily goals, you need to determine the sub-goals of your overarching goal. Once you have a list of sub-goals, you can divide the tasks into roughly equal parts and assign them to a particular day or writing session. If you are planning for a three-day IWE, you would complete the following sentences. If your IWE will have more or fewer days, adjust accordingly.

By the end of _____, I will have completed:
[date]

By the end of _____, I will have completed:
[date]

By the end of _____, I will have completed:
[date]

These daily goals should serve to guide you as you complete each writing session (e.g., morning and afternoon writing blocks) of your personal IWE. Note that you may have to adjust these goals during the course of your IWE.

The remaining material in this handout explains how to set goals and debrief for individual writing sessions. You will want to go through these steps at the beginning and ending of each writing session during your personal IWE. If it proves helpful during that time, you may want to continue setting goals like this on a regular basis during your normal writing life.

Preparing to Write

You may find it helpful to use this sheet to clear your head of thoughts, feelings, and concerns at the start of each day or even prior to each two-hour writing session. For additional discussion of the importance of doing so, see the *Staying Productive for Long Writing Tasks* and *Scholarly Writing Inventory* handouts. Take a few minutes to jot answers to the questions listed.

What would make my sessions today great?

Today, I am excited about:

Today, I am anxious about:

Worries for another day:

Ideas and thoughts:

Setting Individual Writing Session Goals

Once you've set your goals for the day, use this sheet to divide your daily goals into smaller tasks that you will aim to complete by the end of the next two-hour writing session. Remember to make your goals specific, measurable, and reasonable.

Break your larger goal into tasks that will take between five and fifty-five minutes to complete. For a two-hour writing session, you will want to plan to complete between two and five of these tasks, depending on their estimated length of time. If you have less than two hours to work, adjust the number of tasks to fit the amount of time you plan to spend writing. The examples below illustrate how you might set various types of goals and expected completion times. After reading over the examples, use the table below to set goals for a single writing session (e.g., in our IWEs, a single writing session would be two hours long). During your writing time, as you complete a goal, indicate that in the appropriate column.

- I will draft two paragraphs of my literature review using five previous studies. (45 min.)
- I will write 600 words for my intro about the gap my research fills in the scholarship. (55 min.)
- I will create a detailed outline of my methods section. (30 min.)
- I will re-read my introduction and make sure I have topic and transition sentences. I will write or revise any topic and transition sentences that are missing or misleading. (45 min.)
- I will go through 5 pages of my discussion section to ensure that I have correct in-text citations for quotes, paraphrases, and summaries. (30 min.)
- I will draft five titles for my dissertation and decide if I like them in another session. (10 min.)

Writing Session Goals for _____ [date/time]	Estimated Time to Complete	Finished!
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

Post-Writing Debrief

At the end of each writing session, spend a few minutes reflecting on your progress. What did you accomplish? If you met all your goals, celebrate. If you accomplished less than planned, what were some of the challenges that got in the way?

Work Session Goals:

Percentage of Goals Achieved:

Wins—what went well?:

Next Steps—where will you begin the next time you work on this project?:

After you reflect, revisit your goals for the next writing session. Do they need to be updated considering the previous session? This happens to all of us sometimes, and recalibration is natural as you learn how to set goals that match up with your writing expectations.