Setting Goals & Staying Motivated - Vidcast Transcript

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Hi, everyone! This is Heather from the Purdue Writing Lab. Welcome to our Virtual Intensive Writing Experience! The purpose of this writing experience is to help you make some serious progress with your thesis or dissertation, and I know that getting started can be both exciting and a little scary. But don't fret! We're in this together. Whether you're in the drafting stage of your project or if you've moved on to revising, it's important to have some clear goals in mind to help you make the most out of your writing time. In this video, we will be talking about goal setting and motivation strategies. More specifically, we'll be talking about how to set an overall objective for your writing routine and how to break up that larger goal into smaller, more manageable goals. The purpose of establishing these "bite size" benchmarks is to help you keep your momentum and stay on track with your project.

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Throughout this Intensive Writing Experience video series, there will be moments in our vidcasts for you to set a timer and pause the video so that you can journal or work through an activity. For our first activity, let's pause here and set a ten-minute timer. Challenge yourself to use the full ten minutes to journal, and if you need more time, that's fine! As graduate students, most of us have been asked to write quite a bit, but that doesn't mean we've all had the opportunity to really sit and reflect on our writing process. With this in mind, use the next ten minutes to reflect on your own writing process and how you usually go about setting goals for yourself. It might be helpful to reflect on one or two specific writing projects that you've worked on recently. How did you get started? Did you set specific writing goals for yourself? As you reflect about your past writing processes, try to honestly reflect on what felt successful and what could be improved upon moving forward. Be as clear and concise about those goals as you can.

You can also use this time to reflect on how you feel about writing. Are you excited about your project? Nervous about it? What parts of the writing process do you enjoy and feel you are good at, and what parts feel a bit more tricky or dull or difficult? Your attitudes about writing can impact how you write, and it's helpful to self-reflect and identify some of your strengths and growth areas as a writer.

Now that we've discussed our journaling prompt in more detail, set your timer and start writing. I'll see you in ten minutes!

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Welcome back. Before we move forward to talk about specific goal setting and motivational strategies, it's important to remember that progress takes many forms. When we think about writing progress, we're not just talking about building your word count or page limit. Let me say that again: *making progress with your writing involves more than just adding words to a page*. Writing is a process, and as you start to map out your goals for your project, it's valuable to remember that progress can look like reading scholarship, revisiting data, making notes, building outlines, workshopping content and ideas with other people, and so on. A day spent revisiting data or building outlines is not wasted writing time--it's all part of the writing process and therefore counts toward progress.

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When thinking about ways to establish writing goals that feel productive, helpful, and motivating to you, keep in mind that goal setting is most effective when you work toward *specific* and *measurable* objectives. Imagine you are trying to complete your literature review. An example of a specific and measurable goal to approach that project could be "I will draft two paragraphs of my literature review using five previous studies in forty-five minutes." Notice how this example contains a clear objective and accounts for the amount of time it will take to complete that objective. Now, let's compare this example to a more vague goal you could set for yourself. You could set out with the intention to simply "work on your literature review," but how might that level of open-endedness be a hindrance? It can be tough to get started or to keep going when you feel like you're climbing a mountain. Instead of approaching your work as one massive task, try to break up your to-do list into smaller parts.

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Take a moment to pause here and read through more examples of specific and measurable writing goals. Again, notice how each goal addresses a task that should take no longer than one hour to complete. When you start working on your own project, be mindful of your time estimations, and if you

find that your expectations often turn out to be too generous or too constricting, try to adjust your goals to more accurately reflect your pace.

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So far, we've talked about the importance of creating specific, measurable, and *manageable* goals, but how can we actually go about identifying those goals? Start by acknowledging your overall objective. If you're writing a dissertation, for example, you can't just sit down and write the whole thing in one go. Instead, you are going to be completing a project made up of multiple chapters, each with their own sections and subsections that are created one paragraph at a time, one sentence at a time, one word at a time. To help you feel less overwhelmed, let's consider the large undertaking of a dissertation in terms of the project's smaller parts that are completed over time. It can be useful to approach goal setting for a large project the same way someone might approach a long road trip. When you pull up directions, you can see your overall route on the map, of course, but when you're actually in the car, you can only see and navigate a small section of the road at a time. Similarly, it can be helpful to create writing goals that span short, consistent windows of time (like weekly, for example) to help you give yourself a sense of pacing.

Now that you've seen a number of examples of small, manageable goals, start to make your own list. Set a timer for ten minutes. Begin by identifying your overall goal for this upcoming week. What would you like to have finished by the end of this window of time? Next, think about how many writing sessions you will have in the next week and how long each of those sessions will be. Will you write for one two-hour block each day? More or less than that? This step will help you determine how much time you have to fill with those bite-sized tasks.

Next, write out your top five bite sized goals for your current project that will help you to complete your overall weekly goal. Remember, this list of five objectives needs to be specific, and you should try to estimate the amount of time it will take to complete each task. One way to help you choose bite size tasks is to imagine goals that will take no more than one hour to complete. Finally, look at how much time you estimated those five goals would take and assign them to individual writing sessions.

There are handouts available to help you with this process. When you're

ready, set your timer and start goal setting!

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Welcome back! At this point, you should have a handful of goals to help you approach your writing project with a sense of control and direction. Although goal setting is a useful way to jumpstart progress and to feel motivated to get started, it's not always enough to *maintain* motivation while working on a long writing project. For the rest of this video, then, we'll be talking about strategies to develop a writing routine to keep you going.

To begin, let's talk about motivation and time. It's important to make writing a consistent habit. While it can feel tempting to hide from our work when we start to feel stressed, things become much more manageable if we can approach our work with some level of consistency. Writing every day for a short period of time makes it easier to continue doing so even if you don't much feel like it on one particular day. Writing 500 words--about two pages double spaced--adds up to *thousands* of words a week. Each of your small victories will keep pushing you to the finish line, so keep taking those small bites!

Once you have established your writing schedule, try your best to stick to it. If you've blocked off an hour or so to work on your project, for example, defend that time! To maintain this boundary, try to protect your scheduled writing time from being taken over by other commitments. This means resisting the pressure to allow other meetings or activities to encroach on your writing time. Consider putting your phone on Do Not Disturb or turning off your computer's WIFI unless you're researching something for your project online. Your time is important, and so is your project.

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Let's continue talking about motivation and time. I want to note here that, yes, it's imperative to defend your writing time, but breaks are also important!

One way to feel more refreshed and recharged while writing is to reward yourself periodically for being productive. Working toward small, measured rewards will help you to pace your work sessions and boost productivity by avoiding fatigue and burn-out. What kind of rewards feel motivating to you

during a writing session? Some examples could include taking ten minutes to scroll on social media, walk outside, complete a free yoga video on YouTube, or do something creative. When you're choosing your rewards, remember that finding *balance* is key here. If you work for an hour, for example, consider rewarding yourself with a longer break of maybe fifteen minutes or so. On the other hand, if you work better in shorter bursts of time, punctuate those mini work rounds with brief, five minute breaks.

This discussion about finding a sense of work/reward balance is also an invitation to reflect on your productivity habits. When do you work most efficiently? In the morning? The afternoon? The evening? Your work/reward cycles will probably look different depending on when you're writing, and that's okay! If you're a "morning person" who tends to work better when you first wake up, for example, maybe you could hold a more intense writing session early on in the day and then complete lighter, less intense sessions in the afternoon.

Self-reflection is so important when navigating issues of motivation and productivity, so give yourself permission to experiment and find what works best for you!

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Another way to stay motivated is to lean on social support. Graduate student writers can feel isolated, especially in the later stages of their programs, so it's helpful to find a writing group or an accountability buddy. Whether you're writing with friends over FaceTime, texting progress updates to one another at the end of the day, or sharing your drafts with one another for feedback, checking in with your writing group can help keep you accountable for your work in a low-pressure way.

Another form of social support to consider is to seek out writing tutoring if it is available to you. Remember, writers of *all levels* can benefit from receiving feedback. If you are a writer at Purdue's main campus, please come visit us at the Writing Lab! We are here to serve Purdue students, faculty, and staff. Regardless of where you are in your project, you can find support and motivation with our amazing tutors. If you're curious about tutoring or how it works, please check out some of our videos on the OWLPurdue YouTube page. If you aren't affiliated with Purdue, does your university have a writing center? If so, check them out!

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The third and final method of boosting your motivation that we'll talk about today is the out-put or deliverable based method of approaching your writing schedule. In addition to blocking off daily times to write and work, this method encourages you to establish a daily word count or page length goal. It's important to determine your expectations about the quality of work when you establish these goals about daily deliverables. For example, if you are in the earlier stages of your project, perhaps you could focus more on developing content instead of producing perfectly polished work. Don't let the pressure of wanting to produce "perfect writing" get in the way of writing at all! Again, writing is a process, and you need to have some sort of working draft before you can dive into revisions. If you're already well into the revising stages of your project, your deliverables will, of course, tend to favor more to polished work.

Once you complete your daily deliverable goal, consider giving yourself a reward. After hitting your 500-word count benchmark, for example, you could go make yourself your favorite snack or cozy up with your favorite show. What rewards sound enticing to you?

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I hope you are feeling more excited and ready to dive into your writing projects! Thank you so much for sharing your time with me. If you are a writer at Purdue, please don't hesitate to reach out to us at the Writing Lab to get more support on your project. If you're a writer from a different institution, check out your university or community's resources. Happy writing and revising, everyone. Until next time!