

## Staying Productive

As writers who need to make meaningful progress on our projects, it is important that you stay focused, motivated, and productive for extended periods of time. However, writing can also prove very challenging, making it difficult to maintain that motivation. Writers who structure their work to incorporate some form of accountability—whether to themselves or to someone else—may find it easier to continue to make progress.

Accountability to someone else can be formal or informal. A formal example might be a [writing group](#), where a number of writers commit to meeting on a regular basis to either write together or to offer feedback on one another's work. An informal example might be an accountability buddy, where two graduate students arrange to check in with one another to see how things are going. Other forms of accountability to someone else might involve regular meetings with your advisor or including specific times to ask for feedback throughout your drafting process.

Accountability to yourself involves forming habits and determining what motivates you. It becomes much easier to produce necessary writing when writing is a habit. There are various [methods for forming writing habits](#). You might use a time-based method where you write for a required number of minutes per day, perhaps 30 minutes or an hour. You might use an output-based method where you must write until you produce a certain number of words each day. Being accountable to someone else, as we mentioned above, can also help with this sort of habit formation.

A common way to foster accountability to yourself (and to help build these habits) is through the judicious use of rewards. Rewards can be small, such as a sticker or a gummy bear, or they can be larger such as watching an episode of a favorite show or reading a chapter in a science fiction novel. Rewards can also be grouped—you might give yourself a sticker for every day that you spend at least an hour writing, and when you have received a sticker for ten consecutive days, you purchase yourself a book that you've been wanting or a fancy coffee drink. Note, however, that rewards do not have to cost anything. Perhaps after writing for an hour, you reward yourself with a ten-minute walk outside when the weather is nice.

As you think about ways to create the habits of writing, remember that writing is more than just writing. If you need to read two journal articles before you can write a paragraph of a

literature review, reading those articles becomes part of your writing process. As such, you can include tasks such as reading those two articles within your accountability framework. In addition, time spent revising or editing should also be considered time spent “writing.”

Motivation and accountability have become part of the business of writing, and the internet has been jumping on the bandwagon. The following are a few tools that you might find useful. Note, however, that spending too much time playing around with various apps might result in too little time spent actually writing, so if an app does not result in more words on the page for you, you’ll want to ditch it fast. And, in fact, sometimes separating your writing time from all electronic distractions will be more helpful than whatever the app promises to provide.

## Some Methods and Tools

The following table shares some methods and tools you can use while you write and plan projects. Feel free to add methods and tools that work for you and also try something new!

	<b>Productivity</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Reading and Writing Support</b>	<b>Time Management</b>
Non-apps	Hiding electronics Rewards Writing groups Accountability buddy Production schedule	Note cards Goal setting Production schedule	Writing centers Paid editors Advisor/committee Other experts Peers Journal for reflection	Goal setting Planners Production schedule
Apps*	Calmly Writer StayFocused Marinara Timer Forest	Trello Mind Genius Asana	Natural Reader Spell Better LearningAlly Microsoft Translator	Time Timer Routinery
What works for you?  What is something new you can try?				

**\*Note:** These apps are a sampling of suggestions from tutors and clients, but the OWL has not vetted these apps and does not endorse any particular app. We encourage you to read reviews, conduct your own research, and make informed choices about which apps you download and use. Consider whether the apps contribute to productivity or whether they become another method of procrastinating.

## Activity: Reflecting on Individual Writing Sessions

**Learning objective:** To reflect on the quality of past writing sessions and identify possible changes to implement in future sessions.

### Directions

Reflection is an important part of growing as a writer because you can figure out what works best for you, which is different from what works for other writers. Below, we have two tables for gathering data for reflection: the first one is to be completed after you complete a writing session, and the second one is to be used to help you reflect on multiple sessions.

Use the table below to collect data on individual writing sessions:

Describe the context of the writing session. What time was it? How long? Where?	
What went well in this session? (This can be productivity; being focused; feeling confident; etc.)	
Why did it go well?	
What did not go well?	
What specific writing tasks did you focus on in this session?	
Were there any writing tasks that you avoided working on in this session, or delay until a future session?	
Did you take any breaks? How many? How long were they?	
What kinds of breaks did you take? (snacks, making tea, taking a walk, going outside, drafting with a pen and paper instead of on a screen. etc.)	
If you did not take any breaks, how did that impact your productivity?	

What distracted you? Were these distractions avoidable? How disruptive were they?	
Are you rewarding yourself for this session? What is the reward?	
What would you change about the next session?	
What would you keep the same for the next session?	

Once you have collected data on multiple writing sessions, you can use the table below to conduct an analysis of how your sessions have been going, and what you can change and keep the same in future sessions.

What times of day work best for you?	
What locations work best for you?	
What kinds of writing tasks do you tend to work on in these sessions? What patterns do you notice?	
What kinds of writing tasks do you avoid in these sessions? What patterns do you notice?	
What helps you stay focused?	
What kinds of breaks help you regain focus?	
What are some minor distractions that kept occurring that can be muted, such as a phone or social media?	
What are major distractions that kept occurring that need to be scheduled during other times, such as responding to emails, teaching/other job responsibilities, familial responsibilities, etc.?	

What kinds of rewards help keep you motivated? What kinds of rewards are not that useful for keeping you motivated? (This can change over time, or with different writing tasks.)	
After reflecting on multiple sessions, what works for you? What will you keep the same for future sessions?	
After reflecting on multiple sessions, what does not work for you? What changes would you make to future sessions?	