



GOAL-SETTING FOR WRITING

To make your writing project manageable and keep yourself on track, break a bigger project (writing a paper, chapter, thesis, dissertation, etc.) into smaller goals. Make each goal specific, measurable, and achievable. This way you can easily determine that you've completed a given goal, check it off your list and move on to the next. Allow for some flexibility! You can always update and adjust your goals if you need to, as you go. Setting habitual goals might also help you to complete your short-term goals. Think of giving yourself some kind of reward for completing each goal, to keep the positive thoughts flowing.

Examples of **long-term project goals**:

- Write a paper/chapter
- Rework a paper/chapter
- Submit a paper/chapter
- Finish a thesis/dissertation

Examples of **short-term project goals**:

- Choose the topic of your piece of writing
- Read 5 sources on your topic
- Outline your piece
- Write a draft of the piece's thesis
- Write the introduction to your piece
- Write a section of your chapter/paper
- Write the conclusion of your paper
- Edit your Bibliography

Examples of **habitual goals**:

- Write for a set number of Pomodoro sessions today (e.g. 20 minutes of writing at a time, with 5-minute breaks between writing sessions)
- Write for a set number of hours per day (e.g. 3 hrs)
- Write a set number of words/pages per day (300 words, 750 words, 2 pages, etc.)
- Leave yourself a memo about where you left off and what you're planning to do next

Aim for goals that are specific, measurable, and achievable!

HELPFUL TIPS FOR GOAL SETTING

HABITUAL GOALS

Find the right *measurable* approach: A habitual goal based on page numbers, word counts, or time is easier to achieve than one based on something nebulous such as a paper section.

Consider working on the project first thing: Accomplishing something on your work before you do anything else, even if it is only 25 words or reading an abstract can help you make steady progress.

Write through a block: Keep your habitual goal by writing out what is holding you back.

Leave yourself a note: Leave a note for yourself about where you are going next when you finish your writing session so you can easily pick back up next time.

PROJECT GOALS/SHORT TERM GOALS

Take a nebulous goal and make it manageable - Finishing a paper or chapter is a long term project goal, but one that is not always clearly defined. Break it down to defined goals.

Think in Parts: Break down every project (or project component) into thirds, and schedule those thirds throughout the week. Don't let your list become overwhelming, give yourself no more than three specific short term goals for a day/writing session

Give yourself time: Budget three times as much as you think you will take to complete a project.

Create a goal setting template: Break down your project goals consistently using a template. We've included one below.

SETTING UP ACCOUNTABILITY FOR YOUR GOALS

Be smart about the accountability that you need- Can it come internally from you or do you need an advisor, colleague, or writing group to keep you on track?

Set up a writing group - Writing in company (in person or digital) or checking in with someone else by phone, text, or email before a writing session can help you to keep both a habitual goal and a project goal.

Reward yourself - A tried and true method! Consider what rewards you get and how they might motivate you. Don't just reward yourself at the end of a project, choose a mini-reward for keeping your habitual goals for a certain number of days, or completing a particularly difficult section.

Adjust your goals - If you keep missing a goal, don't be hard on yourself, adjust accordingly. How might you break it down further into something achievable?

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

Virtuous procrastination: avoid accomplishing tasks that give you a sense of achievement without advancing your writing goals. In other words, your writing time should be spent on writing, not on cleaning your apartment, preparing for class, or writing your bibliography.

Negative self-talk: avoid criticizing your work, your productivity, etc., while you are working. Think nice things to yourself! Be kind and gentle!

Setting unrealistic goals: avoid setting goals that require energy, time, or other resources that you do not currently have.

GOAL-SETTING FOR WRITING

Habitual Goal:

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Project Goal:

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Goal completion date: _____

Plan, in steps:

Step	Goal	Date
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		

DIGITAL TOOLS FOR GOAL SETTING

There are many digital tools out there that aim to help with your productivity. These can be extremely helpful for setting goals and breaking them down into manageable steps. Most of these tools will allow you to set up a digital template that you can use for future projects as well.

Some of our recommendations include:

To Do Lists/Project Managers:

[Trello](#) - Allows for multiple boards and customizable lists. Can also be used to outline writing. See our video.

[Asana](#) - project management app that includes time tracking. Useful for teams and individuals.

[ToDoist](#) - one of the most popular to-do apps out there for a reason

Gamification for Goal Setting:

Gamification can be a form of accountability and reward. Many of these apps encourage you to work with a group to help one another stay on track.

[Habitica](#) - Join a party, go on quests together, get reward with digital pets. Allows for setting habitual/daily goals and project goals.

[Habit Hunter](#) - most RPG like, allows you to easily break down big goals into smaller ones

[Flora](#) - Grow trees by completing to-do lists and by using a focus timer.

Do you thrive on negative consequences? Try:

[Beeminder](#) - charges you money for tasks left undone.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Belcher, Wendy Laura. *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks: A Guide to Academic Publishing Success*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019.

In the first section of her book, Belcher asks her reader to design a twelve-week plan for writing and submitting an article to an academic journal. While the outcome is in this case rather specific, her methodology is adaptable to a variety of writing tasks.

Bolker, Joan. *Writing Your Dissertation in 15 Minutes A Day: A Guide to Starting, Revising, and Finishing Your Doctoral Thesis*. New York: H. Holt.

Bolker takes her reader through the entire dissertation-writing process, from choosing a topic to revising the final document for manuscript publication. Chapters 3-5 are particularly useful for writers beginning a project and looking to build good writing habits, while chapters 9-10 are more helpful for those who are midway through the process and looking to finish the damn thing.

Silva, Paul J. *How to Write a Lot: A Practical Guide to Productive Academic Writing*.

This short guide is largely meant to direct students toward good writing habits, and chapter 2 is particularly helpful in identifying the ways in which we create barriers for ourselves.

Staw, Jane Anne, *Unstuck: A Supportive and Practical Guide to Working Through Writer's Block*. Boston: St. Martin's Press, 2003.

A writing coach and instructor, Staw offers discusses a range of practical solutions for writer's block. Topics including handling anxiety and fear, carving out time and space to write, and managing expectations.