



WRITE STUFF

Resources to Inspire and Enhance Your Educational Scholarship

January 2020

▶ THOUGHTS ON WRITING

**People who are unable to motivate themselves
must be content with mediocrity,
no matter how impressive their other talents**

Andrew Carnegie

▶ THE MYTH THAT YOU'RE NOT READY TO START

How often have you told yourself, "I know how to write... I don't have trouble starting... it's just that I am not ready to start!"? Why aren't you ready? More papers to read first? More analyses to run first? More co-author meetings are needed? It is really easy to come up with reasons why we're not ready to get started. In fact, some of us have refined procrastination to an art form. Of course, procrastination can be artfully applied to many aspects of our lives beyond writing. Frequently, chronic procrastination leads to just giving up and focusing on things other than writing. We give up on things that make us feel bad/guilty/inadequate or that are unpleasant or that have no immediate reward. If all three applied to your writing, it is not surprise that it is past tense.

One reason for not writing is not yet knowing what to say. Many people have found that writing helps them figure out what they are trying to say.... *Write it out to figure it out.* And the advantage—to a point—of digital writing is that once down, it is easy to change, sharpen and clarify.

Here are some strategies for readying yourself:

- Start writing as soon as you have an idea: keep a list of possible papers; keep a file of starter papers where you have summarized some ideas, key points, relevant papers, inspirations...
- Write it out to figure it out: write the parts you know, make note of the missing elements, reread it and add to it.. both the knowns and the unknowns...
- Expand your definition of writing: larger blocks of time are frequently hard to reserve for writing, but there are often smaller chunks of time that can be used to make notes, create a summary table, check some references or other parts of the big task we call writing...
- Delegate to other members of the team: it expands the human capital investment and can be liberating... of course it can also be terrifying if you have a hard time letting go of even the small things.

Adapted from Chapter 4: The Myth That You're Not Ready to Start,
in [*WAG Your Work: Writing Accountability Groups*](#).
Kimberly A. Skarupski, PhD MPH. (2018).

▶ A SHORT BREAK



ideas are ghostly things and scholarly writing is a kind of magic

▶ EFFECTIVE LITERATURE REVIEWS: CITATION AS STORYTELLING

Adapted from Writing an Effective Literature Review, Part II: Citation Technique by Lorelei Lingard Perspectives on Medical Education

In the October 2019 Newsletter we talked about writing an effective literature review. This continues the discussion of literature reviews, with a focus on citation, not just as a technical formality but as part of engaging storytelling. We are taught to use citation to acknowledge other scholars and to avoid plagiarism. Dr. Lingard argues that citation identifies a source of knowledge, how it relates to other knowledge and our position relative to that knowledge. "...citation is how we artfully tell the story of what the field knows, how it came to that knowledge, and where we stand in relation to it as we write the literature review section to frame our own work." Different approaches to citation can provide readers with a sense of the depth of our current knowledge, how it varies by geography, discipline or time and its current prominence in the field. Much of this strategy is accomplished by the choice of verbs and descriptors associated with the literature: *reports, argues, describes, studies, explains, contradicts, asserts, refines, addresses, repositions...* each word suggests a different attitude of the author towards the knowledge. [Read More](#)

▶ WRITING RESOURCE: RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Adapted from Research Questions, Hypotheses and Objectives by Patricia Farrugia et al. 2009 Canadian Journal of Surgery

Questions arise out of a perceived knowledge deficit within a field of study. The challenge of developing appropriate research questions is in determining the frontier between knowledge and ignorance. There is an increasing familiarity with the principles of evidence-based medicine and as we have become more aware of the hierarchy of evidence, grades of recommendations and the principles of critical appraisal, there is an increasing familiarity with research design. Clinicians are looking more and more to the literature and clinical trials to guide their practice; as such, it is becoming a responsibility of the research community to attempt to answer questions that are not only well thought out but also clinically relevant.

The development of the research question, including a supportive hypothesis and objectives, is a necessary key step in producing clinically relevant results to be used in evidence-based practice. A well-defined and specific research question is more likely to help guide us in making decisions about study design and population and subsequently what data will be collected and analyzed. This paper focuses on meaningful research questions.

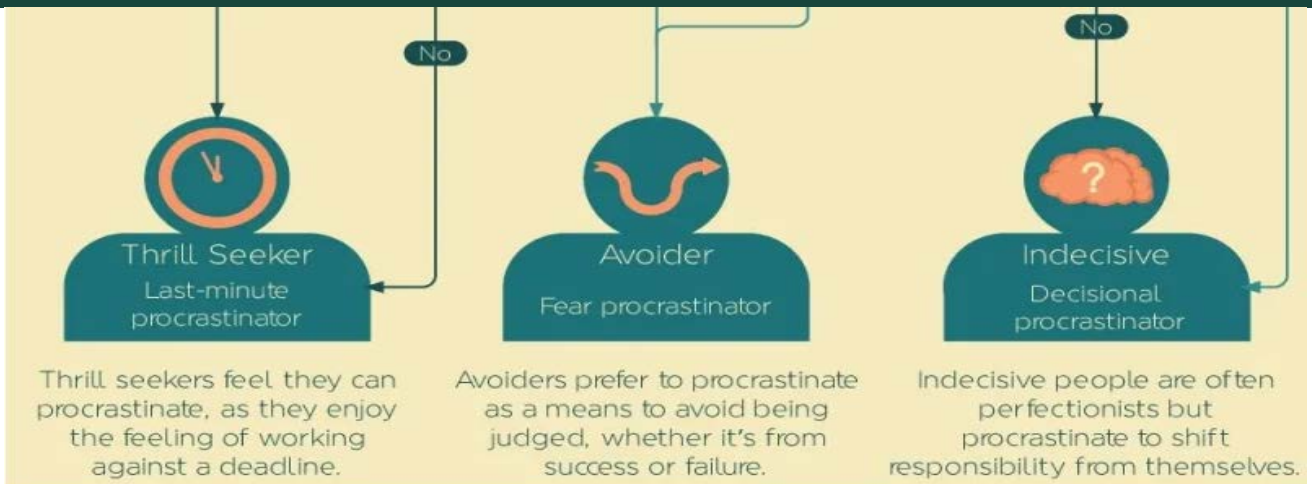
[Read More](#)

▶ WHERE DO YOU WRITE?

“You start into it, inflamed by an idea, full of hope, full indeed of confidence. If you are properly modest, you will never write at all, so there has to be one delicious moment when you have thought of something, know just how you are going to write it, rush for a pencil, and start in exercise book buoyed up with exaltation. You then get into difficulties, don’t see your way out, and finally manage to accomplish more or less what you first meant to accomplish, though losing confidence all the time. Having finished it, you know it is absolutely rotten. A couple of months later you wonder if it may not be all right after all.” **Agatha Christie**



▶ WHAT TYPE OF PROCRASTINATOR ARE YOU?



Procrastinators waste too much time, but to get over this bad tendency, you need to know why you procrastinate. Dr. Joseph Ferrari of DePaul University has categorized a few basic types of time-wasters, and has solutions for them too. Dr. Ferrari is the author of *Still Procrastinating? The No-Regrets Guide To Getting It Done*. In the book, he rounds up several studies done on procrastination by him as well as other psychologists.

OfficeTime took his findings and created a flowchart to help you identify the type of procrastinator you are: Thrill Seeker, Avoider and Indecisive. The flowchart and more information can be found [here](#).

WHY WORK WHEN YOU CAN PROCRASTIBAKE?

Procrastibaking — the practice of baking something completely unnecessary, with the intention of avoiding “real” work — is a surprisingly common habit that has only recently acquired a name. Medical students, romance writers, freelance web designers: Almost anyone who works at home and has a cookie sheet in the cupboard can try it.

Some procrastibakers like to make long, slow recipes that break up the entire day, returning to their writing in between steps like proofing, chilling and rising. Those who use baking as a transition into a creative state of mind are more likely to stir up a quick banana bread or pan of brownies. The complete 2018 story and photos—no recipes though—appeared in the [New York Times](#).

WRITING ABOUT EDUCATIONAL INNOVATIONS

This *From the Editor* in *Academic Medicine* outlines how to approach writing about an educational innovation. While most of us are familiar with the Purpose, Methods, Results, Discussion framework for research-based scholarship, we also know it doesn't feel right for describing educational innovations. Dr. Kanter, then editor of *Academic Medicine*, suggests the following criteria for describing an innovation:

- A clear and thorough description of the problem that prompted the innovation
- A statement about the generalizability of the problem, and the innovative solution
- Key issues of the stakeholders are stated
- Delineation of the possible solutions
- A rationale for the selection of this innovative solution
- Description of the implementation of the innovation
- Critical analysis of the quality of the innovative solution
- Determination of the potential impact of the innovation on current practice
- The extent to which the innovation was sustained or is sustainable

To read the full editorial, [click here](#).

WRITING AND COGNITIVE SCIENCE OF THE PERFECT DAILY ROUTINE

Some of history's most successful and prolific writers were women and men of religious daily routines and odd creative rituals. Such strategies, it turns out, may be psychologically sound and cognitively fruitful. In his 1994 book *The Psychology of Writing*, cognitive psychologist Ronald T. Kellogg explores how work schedules, behavioral rituals, and writing environments affect the amount of time invested in trying to write and the degree to which that time is spent in a state of boredom, anxiety, or creative flow. As Kellogg notes, the psychology of writing is a proxy for the psychology of thinking. The correlation between skill level and task difficulty also plays a role — feeling like your skills are not up to par raises your level of anxiety, which in turn makes noise more bothersome.

Kellogg reviewed a vast body of research to extract a few notable findings. Among them is the role of background noise, which seems to fall on a bell curve of fecundity: High-intensity noise that exceeds 95 decibels disrupts performance on complex tasks but improves it on simple, boring tasks, which raises arousal and helps in alertness during monotonous work.

Location and physical environment also play a role in maintaining a sustained and productive workflow. But the key psychological function of such dedicated environments isn't so much superstitious ritualization as cognitive cueing. This strategy is rather similar to one most often recommended for treating insomnia — instituting a regular bedtime and using the bedroom as a space dedicated solely to sleep, in order to optimize the brain's ability to enter rest mode upon going to bed and cue that behavior each night just by entering that environment. To read more, [click here](#).