

**The Ten Steps**

**Writing**

 1. Write daily for at least 15-30 minutes.

 2. Record your minutes spent writing—share records daily.

 3. Write informally from the first day of your research project.

 4. Outline your manuscript based on an exemplar.

 **Revising**

 5. Find—or write—a key sentence for your manuscript and for each paragraph.

6. Make a list of key sentences as an after-the-fact outline.

 7. Seek informal feedback before peer review.

 8. Respond effectively to feedback.

 9. Read your manuscript out loud.

 10. Kick it out the door and make ’em say “No.”

Writing Daily Worksheet

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Activities I could reduce by 15 minutes/day to write 15 minutes/day** | **Positive changes I expect** |
|  |  |

1. How would your career be different if you started writing daily?

1. On balance, does it make sense for you to start writing daily? Why or why not?

 3. If you want to write daily this week, when are you going to do that each day? Write your times in your planner or electronic calendar. In an electronic calendar, duplicate the time on a recurring basis. (Note: A writing log follows this page but before writing on it, duplicate it so that you will have a clean master copy for other weeks.)

Writing Log

Week Beginning on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Mon | Tues | Wed | Thurs | Fri | Sat | Sun | Total |
| Writing Time\* (e.g., 8:15-8:45a) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Minutes of writing (e.g., 30) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Note: “Writing time”** includes any time working to communicate your research with words, such as freewriting, dictating, outlining, concept mapping, revising, editing, writing paragraphs that will someday appear in the final manuscript, and writing paragraphs so rough that they could never appear in the manuscript. Also, working on tables and figures to help them communicate better—but not to generate the data that appears in them.

**Applying the Steps**

The first two steps below are in bold because they should be done every day unlike the other steps.

**This week I…** [check all that apply.]

**\_\_\_\_\_\_ wrote \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ days and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ minutes.**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_ recorded my minutes spent writing daily and shared them with my coach.**

\_\_\_\_\_\_ wrote informally even if I wasn’t ready to write formally.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ outlined my manuscript based on an exemplar.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ wrote a key sentence for my manuscript and for each section and paragraph.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ made a list of key sentences as an after-the-fact outline.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ sought informal feedback before peer review.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ responded effectively to feedback.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ read my prose out loud.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ kicked my manuscript out the door to a co-author, an informal reader, a granting agency, or a publisher.

**Outlining Based on an Exemplar**

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Create a new document, perhaps named “[Title of your manuscript-Outline],” and then create a table with two columns and seven-ten rows. Or, use the table on the next page of this handout.
2. In the first column of the first row of your table, type the exemplar’s title.
3. In the right column of that first row, type your own title. Can you improve your title based on the exemplar’s title?
4. In the first column, second row, summarize the exemplar’s main idea for the whole manuscript in a *one sentence summary.*
5. In the right column, same row, type a mirrored idea for what could be the main idea of your manuscript in a *one sentence summary.* Can you improve your summary by considering the summary you wrote for the exemplar? Again, take your time.
6. Next, read the first paragraph of the introduction and summarize its main idea in a *one sentence summary*. In the right column, write a mirrored idea for your own first paragraph, also in a *one sentence summary.* Hint: if you can’t summarize your own single paragraphs in one sentence, write two paragraphs.
7. Repeat the above two steps for as many paragraphs as you can, leaving ten minutes for the following steps:
8. Now read the *one sentence summaries* you have written. Do they give you the beginnings of an outline? Can you improve upon it?
9. Next, read the title and the main idea of your manuscript again. Can you improve either? If so, do so.

**Outlining Based on an Exemplar**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Exemplar Title | Your title |
| Exemplar Summary for Manuscript | Your Summary for Manuscript |
| Exemplar 1st Paragraph Summary | Your 1st Paragraph Summary |
| Exemplar 2nd Paragraph Summary | Your 2nd Paragraph Summary |
| Exemplar 3rd Paragraph Summary | Your 3rd Paragraph Summary |
| Exemplar 4th Paragraph Summary | Your 4th Paragraph Summary |
| Exemplar 5th Paragraph Summary | Your 5th Paragraph Summary |

**Identifying Key Sentences**

Key sentences are to paragraphs like street signs are to cities: they orient readers and help them navigate. They have much in common with topic sentences except they announce a point, rather than just a topic. They need not be the first sentence in each paragraph but should be located within the first three sentences.

**Characteristics of Key Sentences**

* Unlock the meaning of the paragraph and bring it into focus
* Announce the point of the paragraph
	+ simply with little detail (the most general statement)
	+ without trying to prove the point
* Are short and memorable
* Appear in the first three sentences of a paragraph
* “Cover” everything in the paragraph, but no more
* Use key words as subjects (e.g. “circuits,” not “it”)

*Directions:* Practice finding key sentences in the following paragraphs. Once you find the best available key sentence for each paragraph, write the number of the sentence in the margin. For example, if the key sentence is the first sentence; write the numeral “1.” If there is no key sentence whatsoever, write “0” in the margin and then write a key sentence and insert it into the paragraph. As you read, know that the best available option for a key sentence will not meet every characteristic of the ideal. Also know that there is more than one good answer for some of the paragraphs depending on how you analyze the paragraph. Assume for simplicity that the authors of these samples wanted each paragraph to remain one paragraph so do not recommend two paragraphs as a solution.

*Example 1.* Cancer is what happens when normal cells start growing and dividing out of control. If we want to prevent cancer, we need to know what causes that switch—why do “good cells go bad?” My research targets that question—I study how genes interact with each other to keep cells working and growing at the “right rate,” and how those interactions break down, turning normal cells into cancer cells. I work on zebrafish because their genes behave similarly to those of people—and you can’t grow people in an aquarium. If we learn what causes growth regulation to break down, we may be able to prevent or reverse it. So, yes, I hope that my work will ultimately contribute to curing cancer (Schimel, 2012, p. 200).

*Example 2.* By definition the true value for each of the unknown variance parameters must be positive. However, it is not uncommon to obtain some estimates of these parameters that are negative. There are many ways to handle this. In this study, negative estimates were handled using the Brennan approach (1983). Brennan’s approach involves replacing the negative estimate with zero, but retaining the original negative estimate in the formula for estimating other variance components. This approach has the advantage of producing unbiased estimates of the other variance components.

*Example 3.* “The United States is at present the world’s largest exporter of agricultural products. Its agricultural net balance of payments in recent years has exceeded $10 billion a year. As rising costs of imported petroleum and other goods have increased the U.S. trade deficit, this agricultural surplus has taken on great financial importance in both the domestic and international markets. First, agricultural exports maintain profitable market prices for the American farmer and bolster the national economy by providing over one million jobs. The income from farm exports alone is used to purchase about $9 billion worth of domestic farm machinery and equipment annually. Exports of U.S. agricultural products also reduce price-depressing surpluses. Without exports the government would be subsidizing American farmers by more than $10 billion a year over the current rate. Finally, agricultural exports provide an entry to foreign markets than can be exploited by other industries” (Williams, Joseph. (1990). Style: Toward clarity and grace. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p. 100).

*Example 4.* “Seven out of eight reigns of the Romanov line after Peter the Great were plagued by some sort of palace revolt or popular revolution. In 1722, Peter the Great passed a law of succession that terminated the principle of heredity. He proclaimed that the sovereign could appoint a successor in order to accompany his idea of achievement by merit. This resulted in many tsars not appointing a successor before dying. Even Peter the Great failed to choose someone before he died. Ivan VI was appointed by Czarina Anna, but was only two months old at his coronation in 1740. Elizabeth, daughter of Peter the Great, defeated Anna, and she ascended to the throne in 1741. Succession not dependent upon authority resulted in boyars’ regularly disputing who was to become sovereign. It was not until 1797 that Paul I codified the law of succession: male primogeniture. But Paul I was strangled by conspirators, one of whom was probably his son, Alexander I” (Williams, Joseph. (1990). Style: Toward clarity and grace. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p. 88).

**Making a List of Key Sentences**

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Before you can begin, you need to create a new document, perhaps named “[manuscript title]-Keys.” At the top, you write the manuscript’s title and the key sentence for manuscript (one-sentence summary of hypotheses, arguments, or research questions).
2. Now, you read your section paragraph-by-paragraph *backwards*, identifying a key sentence as you read each paragraph.
	1. Reading *backwards* keeps the focus on the distinct unit of each paragraph.
	2. Identifying key sentences this way encourages you to ask:
		1. Does every paragraph have a point expressed in a single sentence?
		2. Is that point well supported with evidence?
3. Finally, you put each key sentence you identify in the list of key sentences [within your new “Keys” document].
4. Next, you begin by reading your list of keys backwards, asking if each key contributes to the stated purpose of the manuscript.
5. Delete key sentences that don’t contribute to the purpose of the manuscript.
6. Read the list of keys “forwards,” asking if each key is organized (e.g. logical and coherent).
7. Re-order your keys as necessary to make them better organized.
8. Now, turn your attention to the paragraphs that are based on the keys.
	1. Delete any paragraph that is based on a key that was deleted.
	2. Re-order any paragraph that is based on a key that was re-ordered.
9. Re-read your section forwards to check your work.

Seeking Informal Feedback

**Share *early* drafts with non-experts,** asking them to find two places each where the manuscript could be:

* Clearer
* Better organized
* More persuasive

**Share *middle* drafts with little-e experts,** asking them for help as non-experts or as Capital-E Experts depending on how well you know them, how far along the manuscript is and how close their field is to yours.

**Share *near-final* drafts with Capital-E Experts**

* Include the title and abstract of your manuscript in the body of the email and attach the full manuscript as well.
* Tailor an email to each Expert individually, explaining how their work informed yours.
* Ask specific questions aimed at the intersection of your work and theirs.
* Ask for feedback by asking for a “quick read” of only 20 minutes—sometime in the next two-three weeks.
	+ Consider saying, “I’m not asking for a detailed read with copious comments; just run your eyes over it and tell me the biggest problems you see.”
* Ask “To what outlet would you send this manuscript?”
* Volunteer to read and respond to a manuscript for them now or in the future if they would ever deem it useful.

Hints for Successful Writing Groups

*Before You Meet:*

* Look for the key sentences in your own paragraphs and revise accordingly.
* Make copies of a three-page rough draft for everyone in your group, including you.

*When You Arrive:*

* Be on time.
* Pass your writing log around to others and look at theirs; discuss as others arrive.
* If you forgot your writing log, create one on the spot.

**Writing Groups**

Ground Rules:

* Appoint a time-keeper to set alarms so that the time is divided evenly.
* *Readers:* Create a community of scholars by putting your relationships with each other above any need to improve the manuscripts. In all that you say, remember that the main purpose of writing groups is to motivate the writer to want to write another day. Accomplish this by asking questions instead of making criticisms (e.g. I wonder whether this would be clearer to the reader if…?)
* Avoid commenting on style problems at the sentence level (wording, grammar, punctuation, and so on). Instead, write down style suggestions and pass your copy of the manuscript to the writer when the group discussion is finished.
* *Writers:* Moderate the discussion of your manuscript. As you do, focus your attention on listening, asking questions, and taking notes. Take notes even when the comments seem unhelpful because they may turn out to be helpful once you revisit the ideas and are less defensive.
* Moderating should empower you as a writer and help to reduce the sting of having your work criticized. Instructions for how to moderate are below, but the most important thing is this: Avoid talking too much and explaining what you were trying to say. Instead, just look at the words on the paper and try to see your words through the reader’s eyes. If you do find yourself explaining, be sure to write down your explanation; it’s usually clearer than what is in the manuscript.

First five minutes: Readers and writers read the same manuscript and search for keys

* *Readers:* Identify a key sentence by number for each paragraph (e.g. sentence #2) Prepare to tell which sentence seems to be key and why you think so.
* *Writers:* Pretend you are just another reader and identify a key sentence by number for each of your own paragraphs. You will have new insights by reading your work as others read it because this is like watching yourself speak on a video recording.

Next nine minutes: Discuss keys

* The writer asks, “In paragraph #1, which sentence is the key (#1, #2, #3, etc.)?”
* If readers disagree, discussion ensues. If readers agree, skip to the next question.
* The writer asks, “How could the paragraph communicate a single point more clearly and with better support?”
* Repeat for each paragraph.

Last minutes: The positive round

* The writer asks, “What works in this manuscript?” “What aspects should I keep?”