

a standstill.³ The idea is something of a writer's adaptation of the first law of motion: Authors with a manuscript in motion will keep it in motion, authors with a manuscript at rest. . . .

In addition to place holders assigned for each major chapter, one's set of folders for a work in progress—whether the “folders” themselves are real or only imagined—ought to include a place for anticipated short assignments like preparing a draft of the acknowledgments or updating the list of references. The full set of folders for a project might also include proposed symposia or seminar papers, as well as articles intended for separate journal publication. I emphasize the idea of researchers with chapters at various stages of development.

KEEPING UP THE MOMENTUM

A major writing project such as a monograph or thesis does not proceed with every section at the same stage of development. The more ambitious the total project, the more advantageous to have different sections at different stages of development, so that chores can be varied, and time and mood accommodated. Unforeseen delays should bring neither the research nor the writing to an abrupt halt. Anticipate (and expect) delay and be prepared to turn to other tasks, perhaps even the preparation of the first draft of your *next* article, proposal, or project. Hard to imagine just now, but there may even come a day when you can do this kind of scheduling with a number of “irons in the fire.” If you have writing tasks at several stages of development, you can remain productive in spite of delays in the review process or production schedules.

Opinion varies as to which stage is hardest. In my experience, the first draft of anything I write is always the most difficult one. Provided that I am off to an adequate start, I find pleasure in feeling that my manuscript is taking shape through the subsequent revising and editing, even when the increments are small. No question that revising and editing are critical tasks. To some, these tasks are the most difficult, but I do not concur with Peter Elbow that they are the most unpleasant (Elbow 1981:121). For me, writing enervates and editing exhilarates. The only unpleasant feature about editing is in acknowledging how awful some of my sentences are as originally written. (I started to collect examples of some of my worst sentences but decided that I did not need to convince you that I am as capable of writing them as anyone.)

I cherish the advice recalled by Denise Crockett while she was struggling with her dissertation: “If you can’t write well, write shittily.” You have to have *something* written before you can begin to improve it. In *Bird by Bird*, author Anne Lamott not only recognizes the *possibility* of writing “shitty first drafts” but insists that most writers begin with them: “The only way I can get anything written at all is to write really, really shitty first drafts.” But that does not bother her. She consoles, “All good writers write them. This is how they end up with good second drafts and terrific third drafts” (Lamott 1994:21–22).

Sometimes the writing goes excruciatingly slowly. On days when it doesn’t seem to be going at all, you might devote some time to bringing the reference section up to date. That leaves you armed with a ready reply, should some insensitive but well-meaning colleague raise the anxiety-provoking question, “Well, how did it go today?”

A suggestion that experienced writers offer in order to regain momentum when you return to your writing again (i.e., tomorrow) is to pay close attention to where you decide to stop as you come to the end of the day’s writing session. The advice is to stop at a point where you know you can easily start up again. At the least, jot some key words that capture your train of thought. If you are in the middle of a paragraph that you know you can finish, stop there. If you are copying a long quote from an academic source or an informant, stop at the *beginning* rather than at the end, so that when you start again you can get right to work.

(In actual practice, however, I usually do just the opposite. You probably do, too. I stop when I am stuck and return somewhat hesitantly to see if I can work my way out of the mire the next time—thus the old adage, “Do as I say, not as I do.” And I often begin my day’s writing by reviewing and editing what I wrote the previous day. Admittedly, that is a slow way to get a fast start, although the advice to begin by reviewing what you were writing the previous day is also heard frequently. I think I begin that way because I find editing more satisfying than writing the first draft.)

Editing obviously can become an escape from writing, or at least a hindrance to getting through a first draft. On days when the sentences do not flow, looking back over yesterday’s work does offer a way to get warmed up. Having struggled with particular words or ideas on an earlier attempt, I sometimes see a better resolution on my next try. The editing-reviewing may take up to an hour—about one

quarter of the minimum time I try to set aside for writing. It also violates my Puritan ethic, which holds that the pleasure (editing) should come *after* the pain (writing), not before. But it is a concession I make in order to accomplish my major objective: to keep at it, once the writing begins. Try to make some measurable progress in the development of your manuscript every writing day.

WHEN IT'S TIME FOR DETAILS, GET THEM RIGHT THE FIRST TIME

The proper form for citations, references, footnotes, margin headings, and so forth required by your discipline, your institution (if writing a thesis or dissertation), or your intended journal or publisher should be clearly in mind as you work. Your default mode should be the accepted standard for your discipline, a style with which you need to be thoroughly familiar. When preparing material for publication in a format with which you are not familiar, have at hand a recent issue of the journal, an authoritative style manual, or the web page address for access to the journal's style manual.

You may think it unimportant to bother with such picayune detail as proper citation form in your early drafts. "First things first," you rationalize; why worry about little details until you have some text in place? That might be true if you are tempted to check every source or hunt down every quotation when you first introduce it. Better to push on, concentrating on the gist of what you are writing rather than getting bogged down in detail. But it is easy to note details that need checking, perhaps by marking them in some special way for attention (e.g., with **boldface** or underlining). I assure you that your time will be well spent if, at whatever point you do attend to details, you do so carefully, correctly, and fully, in the form in which the piece is to be submitted. The earlier you get these things recorded correctly, the better.

In the old days, there was always the likelihood of introducing new errors into previously correct copy every time a manuscript had to be retyped. A comforting aspect of working with the computer is that once you get something written—barring rare technical glitches—it is going to stay that way. So get it right the first time.

The more details you attend to in the early stages, the more you can direct your attention to content as the writing progresses. You