

Dissertation Writing: Make Good Use of Your Free Time!

Do you have trouble taking advantage of unstructured time? Do you plan on getting lots of writing done, then realize you've done nothing? Here are some hints for not wasting that time. If you'd like to see the humorous "what not to do" article, see my newsletter in the archives, for March 23, 2005.

I wrote an article in my newsletter on ways to waste unstructured time that you had intended to spend on writing. With Spring Break and summer ahead of you, it's worth thinking about how you can get the most done with the least time wasted, in order to have more time for play. Here are some suggestions, which constitute my ten time-wasting rules in reverse.

- Plan ahead. Whether it's the night or the week before, get very clear what you are going to work on. Be quite specific, particularly with what you are going to do first. If possible, lay out all the materials you'll need ahead of time, and write a few notes on what you should start with.
- Make a schedule ahead of time, and write it down. What time do you plan to write and for how long? Consider this schedule inviolate.
- Often people make the mistake of starting at the beginning. If you're not sure how the beginning will go, start in the middle. Start with what you're the most comfortable starting with! That may be bad grammar, but you get my point. Don't start with the most difficult part, or you might not start at all. If you have some good thoughts, get them down now.
- Use activities that you do frequently as a reward. Email is an example of this. What this means is that you do your scheduled writing, THEN you get to check your email. Don't do the fun thing first.
- The same goes for computer games.
- When you've written a paragraph and then reread it and think it's terrible, do not delete it right away. It might not be as bad as you think. Change it to a different color or put big parentheses around it, but do not delete it. There may be some salvageable thoughts that you can use later. Keep writing and look at it again in your next writing session.
- Do not edit as you go. Allow bad grammar and incomplete thoughts. It will be much easier to edit at a later time.
- If you miss a day, don't punish yourself by trying to do double the next day. You will be more likely to avoid writing. You know your own tendencies – if you do best writing for 30 minutes, only schedule 30 minutes for writing.
- Don't give up on writing just because it's uncomfortable or hard. Loosen yourself up a little bit, do some free writing. See other articles on my website for ways to start writing more easily. If you haven't signed up for my newsletter, the free gift you will get can help you when you get stuck.
- Back up your work!

See my blog for other writing tips and various thoughts on being a graduate student or faculty member. The newsletter archives have lots of articles on how to write more easily. And sign up for the newsletter if you haven't already done so, to get your free gift that will help you with your writing!