Postdoc Writing Group Launch

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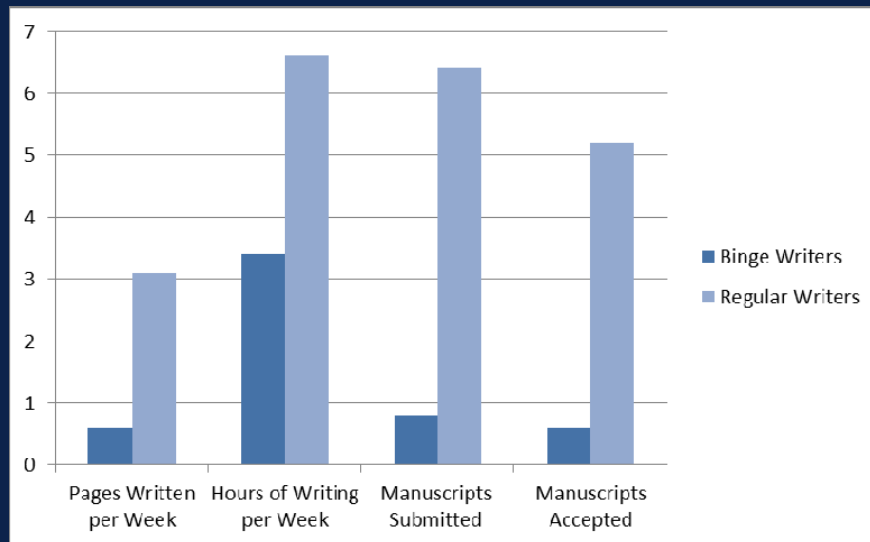
1

Academic Writing

▸ Most academics struggle with writing because:

  ▸ Too little time

  ▸ Lack of momentum

  ▸ Easier to put off than other things

  ▸ Lack of regularity & moderation (i.e., binge writing)

Boice (2000)

2

Benefits of Regular Writing

Boice (2000), p. 144

3

Writing Groups Provide:

▶ Regularity

▶ Structure

▶ Accountability

▶ Support and Encouragement

4

Academic Writing Groups

▶ Increase # of publications and writing progress (e.g., Gray and Birch 2001; McGrail, Rickard, & Jones 2006; Washburn 2008)

　▶ When pre- and post-data were available, **publication rates improved at least twofold** (McGrail, Rickard, & Jones 2006)

▶ Promote work-life balance, promotion, and retention (Davis et al. 2011)

▶ Advocated by experts (e.g., Silvia 2007)

　▶ Use principles of motivation, goal setting, and social support

5

Faculty Writing Groups

▶ Evaluated positively by participants:

　▶ Increased productivity

　▶ Opportunity to set goals and accountability

　▶ Collegiality, camaraderie, and support

　▶ Fewer distractions, less procrastination, less perfectionism, less writer's block, and fewer problems setting aside time to write (Muller 2014)

The UA Spring 2015 Faculty Launch:

"I made more progress this past semester than the three previous semesters combined."

"This program made a big difference for me. It was instrumental in the final stage of completing my manuscript, keeping me on track, focused and productive. Yeah!"

6

Writing Accountability Groups:
The Components
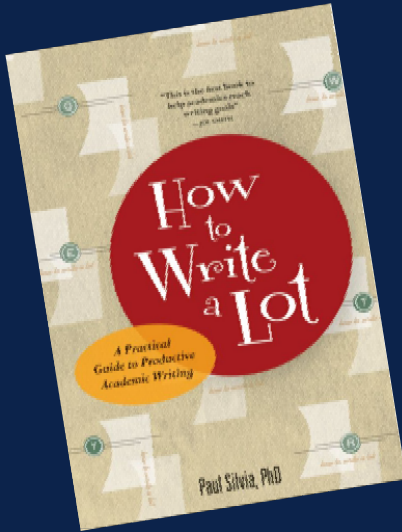
Structure for Accountability Groups

▶ Each person:

  ▶ What progress have I made on my goals?

  ▶ If goals were not met, why?

  ▶ Issues/challenges I want to discuss? [advice offered]

  ▶ "By the next meeting, I will…[say specific concrete goals written in advance of the meeting]"

Component 1: Set concrete, short-term goals

▶ At each meeting, you set goals you commit to completing before the next meeting.

▶ Break project goals (e.g., a book, manuscript or grant proposal) into smaller projects that are achievable.

Why does this work?

▶ Proximal goal setting enhances motivation, perceptions of self-efficacy, self-satisfaction, and task persistence (see Silvia 2007).

▶ When all the sequential components of a project seem doable, we are more likely to undertake it and stick with it.

▶ We can see ways of achieving goals and monitor how quickly we are moving towards our goals.

▶ Promotes continual progress.

9

Tips for Setting Goals

▶ Be specific and concrete. Should be measureable.

  ▶ "Think about my next project" = <u>not</u> good

  ▶ "Make an outline of my next manuscript" = good

  ▶ "Write at least 1,000 words for my book" = good

  ▶ "Write the broader impact section for my NSF proposal" = good

▶ Don't say "try." E.g., "I'm going to *try* to make an outline."

Tips for Setting Goals

▸ Don't always have to be about writing, but can be something that will help produce a publication

  ▸ E.g., analyses, data collection, reading

▸ Help each other set reasonable & concrete goals

▸ Meet at least every other week

  ▸ Beyond 2 weeks, goals become too abstract and long range

Component 2: Monitor Goal Progress

▸ At each meeting, recite your goals from the last meeting and say whether or not you met the goals.

▸ If goals were not met, say why you didn't meet your goals. Discuss challenges. Seek advice.

Why does this work?

  ▸ Creates accountability -- we're more likely to achieve goals and stick to deadlines if we tell others.

    ▸ The group is a constructive source of social pressure.

  ▸ Binge writers feel pressure to make a schedule and stick to it.

  ▸ You will get others' ideas about writing challenges.

  ▸ The motivational effects of monitoring -- keeps you focused and your goals salient.

Component 3: Stick to Writing/Research Goals

▶ During allotted time, don't delve into complaining.

▶ The process may only take a few minutes per person. If you have extra time, discuss challenges associated with writing (e.g., approaching a book publisher, developing a grant proposal for a new agency for the first time, etc.) or simply end early.

Component 4: Carrots & Sticks

▶ Engage in positive reinforcement for the desired behavior and "punishment" for not completing goals.

▶ Reinforce good habits with informal social rewards (e.g., buy coffee) or verbal support.

▶ Don't be unconditionally supportive.
  ▶ If someone fails to meet goals consistently, intervene. Start by asking about their writing schedule.

Summary of Structure for Accountability Groups

▸ Meet at least every other week for 1 hour or less.

▸ All members get equal amounts of time to talk (e.g., 15 minutes).

  ▸ Monitored by self, group, or timer

▸ Each person:

  ▸ What progress have I made on my goals?

  ▸ If goals were not met, why?

  ▸ Issues/challenges I want to discuss? [advice offered]

  ▸ "By the next meeting, I will…[say specific concrete goals written in advance of the meeting]."

Summary of Structure for Accountability Groups

▸ Listen, support, challenge. Offer advice.

▸ Maintain positive, cooperative atmosphere.

▸ Self-sustaining.

Accountability Groups: Optional Aspects

▶ Substantive feedback should be rare. If needed, it should be limited to 15-20 minutes (e.g., small section or outline).

▶ A rotating leader who organizes meetings

▶ Social component

▶ Read a book about academic writing:

  ▶ Silvia, P. J. 2007. *How to Write a Lot: A Practical Guide to Productive Academic Writing*. Washington, DC: APA.

▶ Schedule time(s) to write together (Muller 2014)

Accountability Groups: Summary

▶ Great for providing accountability, support, community, and peer mentoring

▶ Highly efficient

▶ Shown to be effective

▶ No ongoing substantive feedback

▶ Ineffective when individuals do not sustain commitment

Sustained Commitment

▶ Sustained commitment = most difficult problem.

▶ Self-sustaining groups.

▶ To participate, you must be willing to generally meet every other week for 1 hour or less.

▶ Duration: At least through the spring semester.

Accountability Groups

▶ Introductions & exchange contact information

  ▶ Ideally, set a date/time/place for your first meeting.

  ▶ By the initial meeting, have your first set of short-term goals specified. This meeting will be a little different than the rest of given that there will not be a check in about meeting your previous goals. Discuss any challenges you've generally been facing. Where are you now and where do you want to be? What are your ultimate project goals?

Citations

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