



Taking on the 14-Day Writing Challenge

Staying Accountable through the NCFDD

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Like many writers, I have grappled with writer's block throughout my career. Finding the time required for scholarly writing amidst my other work/life responsibilities has often been challenging. Writing well requires time, space, and for many of us, quiet solitude, and these items are often in short supply.

Not surprisingly, the most difficult time I faced as an academic writer was during the pandemic. Months prior to COVID-19, I'd submitted a chapter proposal for a book collection that I was quite excited about. I had an interesting theoretical approach and what I thought was a rather original take on the text I planned on analyzing.

Three months later, after balancing working from home with serving as an ad-hoc online education facilitator for my children, I was struggling. There was not a lot of predictability or consistency in my schedule and writing felt tedious. I was not alone; the editors of that project eventually amended the due dates for us all which allowed me to finally, painstakingly, complete my work after periods of stagnation.

At this stage in my career and in my current role for the CETL, I engage in scholarly writing for the pure pleasure of critical thinking. I enjoy the intellectual challenge of working through ideas and I relish when a project finally comes into fruition. I recently saw a call for papers that sounded promising. I was intrigued, but again, time was short.

With that in mind, I decided to give the [14-Day Writing Challenge through the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity \(NCFDD\)](#). This is one of the (free) events supported by the NCFDD; and membership in the NCFDD is free for all University of Detroit Mercy faculty and administrators. The challenge essentially asks that participants block of at least 30 minutes of uninterrupted writing time per day for 14 days straight. Participants are assigned to a group comprised of other academic writers and are expected to record details about each day's writing session. Writers can choose the time of day or night that they want to work, and writers can pursue any writing project. Members of my group, for example were working on scholarly articles, web copy, and marketing materials. The event helped establish a pattern of writing and functioned a bit like an online accountability partner.

Benefits of the program

The software used in the 14-Day Challenge allows participants to set goals for each day and to track their progress. It also suggests setting up rewards when such goals are met. I appreciated that it also had space to reflect upon internal and external distractions so those hinderances could be reflected upon and removed.

As far as the timing writing for $\frac{1}{2}$ hour is a very manageable goal. I would estimate that just about everyone can eke out 30 minutes for writing *somewhere* in their day. However, writing just for 30 minutes felt like more like a warmup. I typically need at least an hour to delve into deeper concepts relating to critical literary theory, but the event does allow users to clock in more time (in increments of 30 minutes) once the first timed session is complete. The NCFDD partners sent daily emails congratulating me on my success, and reminded me to reward myself.



How it went

I started the first week with a clear sense of energy and purpose. I had notes from my primary and secondary sources and I made some good progress during the first few days. I find that my energy wanes and sometimes, after a really successful day, I lose my steam. I also typically feel like I rehash and review my first few pages more than the rest of my work because I feel compelled to start at the beginning each and every day. I felt my exuberance waning by Friday of week one. The challenge facilitators must have anticipated such tendencies and suggested that we all take a break from writing on Saturday and Sunday.

Week two ended up being a bit busier at work and at home, which made my nightly writing ritual more of a challenge. During week two, I had several family obligations (school plays and sports events) that cut into my writing time. I felt a little disappointed with my



progress. I also started to question the structure of my piece which led to massive revision.

End Results

Two weeks may not sound like a lot of time, but when I really reflect upon my writing practices, there have been many times I have waited until the last two or three weeks to begin writing in earnest. I have told my former students that I do procrastinate but within reason. There are some arguments in favor of [productive procrastination](#) that suggest that some of our best ideas occur when we field a bit under pressure. To be completely transparent, I am not done with essay as of

Recommendations: You are not penalized for *not* meeting goals, but you are reminded each day and encouraged to progress. I think this was a very structured way to approach writing and overall, I left with about 8 pages completed which was not quite as much as I'd hoped for but a good start nevertheless. If you cannot engage in this particular program, you may wish to ask a colleague to become your [accountability partner](#) so that you can meet your writing goals this semester and beyond.