

Becoming a Better Writer: Reminders and Resources

A Communications Program workshop by Greg Harris

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THE KEY to a PRODUCTIVE WRITING PRACTICE: Respecting the internal division of labor between writer, editor, and manager.

Once there is a writing task for public communication, the MANAGER is responsible for ensuring delivery by:

- Scheduling around deadlines
- Analyzing constraints
- Arranging processes
- Securing resources, including research materials, time, money, and support people
- Listening to the writer and editor and
- Mediating their relationship

The WRITER is responsible for:

- Creative, Analytical, Associative, and other thinking
- Discovery through writing process
- Achieving clarity of purpose
- Respecting felt sense

The EDITOR is responsible for:

- Collaborating with the Writer on Design
- Revision and 'Getting the Words Right'
- Researching the 'public' aspect of the writing: conventions

(note, too, that there are further production roles: communications & PR, research, etc. Eliyahu Goldblatt's THE GOAL is helpful in identifying bottlenecks and modeling how to think through them)

Some tips on process:

- I. Form a definite goal with a deadline and reader in mind.
- II. Gain starting momentum by lowering standards, making the mistakes you always make.
- III. Talk through projects, see the thinking as collaborative and part of process.
- IV. Use mapping techniques to allow you to move freely to projects and parts of projects that feel alive and immediate.

- V. Study your time the way field commanders survey a battlefield. Seize, if not the high ground, then at least some defensible terrain. Hold it with a 'bend don't break' attitude.
- VI. Understand the vulnerabilities of the writer, and be prepared to deploy considerable support of yourself in that role, both materially and psychologically.
- VII. Be alert to how fear isolates you and artificially heightens standards, putting a project out of reach.
- VIII. Develop a way to capture and extend moments of inspiration.
- IX. Be rigorous in the pursuit of what works as management—not for all time, but for each project. By "what works" I mean, achieving a state of relaxed focus and intellectual curiosity.

RESOURCES

- I. Timing and internet-limiting software such as *Freedom* or Pomodoro technique reminders.
- II. Project-based writing software such as *Scrivener*.
- III. Motivational books: two among many are Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird*, especially the chapter on "Shitty First Drafts", and Hillary Rettig's *The 7 Secrets of the Highly Prolific*.
- IV. Books on how to structure specific kinds of writing. For academics, Wendy Belcher's "Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks" and Eviatar Zerubavel's "The Clockwork Muse"; for novelists, *The Weekend Novelist* or *No Plot? No Problem*.
- V. Writing groups, and mentorship, broadly construed.