



Writing towards your submission goals: Ideas from participants in the UCT *Writing for Postgraduate Completion* programme

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with ideas from participants in the Writing for Postgraduate Completion programme.

As you finalise your writing in the last months of your degree journey, you may experience:

- A sense of having 'lost' touch with the value and contribution of your study.
- Uncertainty about how to use your existing writing practices strategically for the current demands.
- Feeling pressure to meet tight deadlines, while managing a busy schedule and feeling fatigued, and possibly lonely, overwhelmed, and anxious.

The UCT **Writing for Postgraduate Completion** programme is an intensive, structured, tailored support programme to support Masters and PhD student research writing in the final months before submission. We asked participants in the 2023 programme to share their writing practices with the UCT community, and this is their advice.

"Stay with the 'game.'" Make an appointment with yourself to write regularly. Gift – yourself and your study – a minimum of two hours, daily or a few times a week. Longer gaps between writing sessions require additional time to settle into your writing. If you make these scheduled writing times part of your routine, "it feels like something part of your day instead of 'work' or 'burden', it is just something you do for two hours just like you do everything else."

"Find a rhythm that works for you." Identify the work still to be done and the difficulty of each aspect: first writing; strengthening argument; editing; reading; using feedback; creating visuals; etc. Consider your energy levels, and your mood: When do you write best? How often do you need to take a break? *"Just writing every day, all day long"*, even if you have the time, is not necessarily productive.

"Incremental gains are key even if it's writing a paragraph at a time!" Having reflected on your rhythms, needs, and tasks, you can set goals. *"Planning too far ahead demotivated me when my objectives weren't met. So I have broad long-term goals and detailed short-term goals. At the end of the day, I reward myself if I have achieved the objectives I set for myself."* With small goals you can celebrate small wins, and if you do not realise a goal, you can reflect on why this might be the case and realign: Did I plan to do too much? Might I need to get help on something? Was this difficulty not related to my study at all?

"Join [or start] a writing circle!" Once you have made an appointment with yourself, identify other students you can write with in-person, online, or in hybrid mode. This offers a less-pressured, creative thinking space, a *"sounding board"* for building confidence as you *"freely discuss"* your research. It is a motivating space where you can celebrate small wins and feel less lonely. And a space that is open to your difficulties: *"Voicing them out loud helped me to hear the problem or confusion better to find a solution for them."* And thus an energising space to *"fall in love with my study"*.

How might you use your gift of scheduled writing time?

- **"Do Not Disturb"**. Use virtual and physical tools to keep boundaries around your writing time.
- **"Enter your writing"**. Take a few minutes at the start of your writing session to *"settle in"*. Identify what mind/body activities work for you: breathing, stretching, visualizing, drawing, creative writing, etc.
- **"Step back and try to see the bigger picture of what you are doing... to discover how every section of your work is interconnected"**. Having a storyline – the *"seamless flow of your argument and coherence throughout"* – allows you to communicate your writer's voice, that is, your positioning as someone who has knowledge to contribute to the debates on your topic.
- **"If you have an idea, write it down, it doesn't have to be perfect"**. This helps as *"I do not get stuck on thinking about vocabulary when I am trying to think about the idea/argument."* If you feel you are searching

for the perfect word, leave an open space. As you generate these ideas you can consistently “*feed into*” and shape your storyline, developing your knowledge-maker voice. Then, once you have ideas on the page, you can focus on the writing strategies, including the necessary wording, and the “*glue*” for “*binding the ideas together*.”

- **Listen to the critical, “*negative conversations with yourself*”** that prevent you writing or asking for feedback: “*I can't do this! This is so difficult. How am I ever going to figure this out? Will my reader approve?*” Imagine feedback on your writing as a gift that is intended to strengthen your work. The time your reader has taken to engage with your work is compliment and investment in your growth as a researcher.
- At the end of your writing time, make a to-do list to help you start your next writing appointment productively. Then, you can turn to focus on your other commitments.

Finally, value the writing time with others as a gift to your study, and your future: “*You're never alone in the process; collaborate and share ideas with others. Collaboration is a great way to learn new concepts and techniques quicker and it also helps build strong networks for future publication projects.*”

The next **Writing for Postgraduate Completion** programme, for students aiming to submit by July 2024, will run from February to June 2024. You can find more details and ask questions [here](#). Nominations are made by each Faculty, so keep a look out for postgraduate communications from your Faculty. Nominations close in the first week of February.