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Setting SMART Writing Goals

When setting goals for your writing projects, it is important to have goals that are for the entire project as well as for certain benchmarks (such as chapters) and specific writing sessions.

When working on your thesis or dissertation, your advisor may help you set goals for your project. You may work together, for example, to set an approximate defense date and work backwards to set deadlines. They also help with benchmark goals, such as drafts and revisions.

However, you will most likely have to set your goals for individual writing sessions for yourself. These smaller goals help you work towards meeting the benchmarks and deadlines for your entire dissertation and also help you make progress on smaller projects, like seminar papers and research articles.

SMART goals

Many of you may be familiar with "SMART goals," often referred to as part of project management. SMART stands for **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant, and **T**ime-Bound. These goals are also useful for academic writing projects. Using this framework for your writing goals can help you create clearer and more reasonable goals to support steady progress.

Your writing goal should be SPECIFIC and MEASURABLE:

In the next two hours, I will:

- Draft 4 pages of my introduction
- Review comments on one chapter
- Read 2 articles on X

Your writing goals should be ATTAINABLE:

In the next two hours, I will:

X draft 12 pages
X revise 3 chapters

In the next two hours, I will:

- Revise 2 sections of my literature review

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Your writing goals should be RELEVANT:

One of the things that can happen easily during a writing/research session is for you to start thinking about other projects, for example a paper due for class or an article based on your dissertation research. These are important projects, but not relevant to getting your dissertation completed.

In the next two hours, I will:

- Draft 4 pages of my *dissertation introduction*
- Review comments on my *methodology chapter*

Your writing goals should be TIME-BOUND:

Often when working on major projects like a dissertation, it is helpful to set aside blocks of time to write. You should think about what you can accomplish during the time you've allotted for writing. You should also set specific deadlines for drafts and revisions and try to stick to them as much as possible.

- In the next two hours I will . . .
- By next Monday, I will . . .

Long-Term Goal Setting

Semester Planning

What is your primary goal for this semester?

- What do you want to complete by the end of this week?
- By mid-semester?
- By winter break?

Considerations for this semester:

- What other obligations do you have this semester?
    - Teaching, coursework, travel, conferences, caretaking, mental breaks, etc.
- What day(s) of the week do you expect to have writing time?
- What times on those days can you set aside for writing sessions?

PhD Program Planning

What goals do you want to reach during your program?

- What project(s) do you plan to work on?
- Which project is highest priority?
- What is your focus for this academic year?
- What do you want to accomplish by the time you are ABD?
- How many conferences or publications do you want by the time you graduate?

Dissertation Planning

Things to consider now:

- In what semester do you hope to defend your dissertation?
- By what time do you need to define your topic?
- What other major plans or obligations (if any) do you have?
    - Teaching, course work, publishing, caretaking, vacations?
- How present and available is your advisor?

Other Considerations?

- What are your common sources of distraction or procrastination?
- What is your plan to avoid these distractions during your writing session?
- What do you need to meet your goals?
    - Writing environment, books, accountability partner, adequate sleep. etc.
- Anything else you need to consider?

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Short-Term Goal Setting

Worksheet #1

SMART GOAL: By [time] _____, I would like to _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

In order to complete this task, here are the smaller tasks I need to accomplish:

Step	Materials Needed	Time Needed
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		

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