WHAT ARE YOU WRITING?

WHAT ARE YOU...
PLAYING
GROWING
LISTENING TO
WATCHING
WRITING
COOKING
CRAFTING

Share some time and reconnect with colleagues

Tara DaPra, Lecturer
English, English Composition, Writing & Applied Arts
What’s Your Purpose?

- Journaling
- A creative project
- An academic project
Gratitude Journals

• Write down things you’re grateful for
  – Writing occasionally, not daily
  – Motivation matters
  – Go for depth over breadth
  – Focus on people rather than things
  – Stimulate gratitude by reflecting on what your life would be like without
  – Unexpected or surprising events elicit stronger levels of gratitude

From https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/tips_for_keeping_a_gratitude_journal
Health Benefits of Writing About Stress

- In April 1999 *The Journal of the American Medical Association* published a study that linked writing about stressful life experiences to improved health.

- Patients with asthma or rheumatoid arthritis wrote about their most stressful life event in 20-minute sittings for three continuous days.

- When tested four months later, **47.1 percent reported a reduction in disease symptoms.**

- As reported in *The Chicago Tribune*, Joshua M. Smyth, the study’s co-author cautioned, “It actually has little to do with raw catharsis, which, I think, is what most people assume.”

- The health benefits were actually a result of **cognitive restructuring**—learning to think about problems in a new way—along with **changing levels of stress and anxiety.**

FROM https://www.creativenonfiction.org/online-reading/writing-memoir-and-writing-therapy
Journaling for the Historical Record

Paul Theroux Recalls a Fear-Filled Lockdown

In 1966, the writer was in Uganda at a time of curfew and violence. It shaped his thinking about travel writing's imperative to bear witness.

― "In times of crisis we should all be diarists and documentarians."

I Spent a Year in Space, and I Have Tips on Isolation to Share

Take it from someone who couldn't go outside.

By Scott Kelly

Mr. Kelly is a retired NASA astronaut who spent nearly a year on the International Space Station.

March 21, 2020

― "...writing about your days will help put your experiences in perspective and let you look back later on what this unique time in history has meant."
Joan Didion, “On Keeping a Notebook”

• “So the point of keeping a notebook has never been, nor is it now, to have an accurate factual record of what I have been doing or thinking.”

• “Remember what it was to be me: that is always the point.”

• “I think we are well advised to keep on nodding terms with the people we used to be, whether we find them attractive company or not.”

• DOING VS. BEING
Journaling or Memoir?

NARRATION & DESCRIPTION
• Tell a story; describe events
• Narrator’s memory and perspective is central
• Invoke sensory detail

REFLECTION
• Narrator tries to make sense of the experience
• Can take years to gain perspective
What is Reflection?

Emily Esfahani Smith’s “FOUR PILLARS” of Meaning

- Belonging
- Purpose
- Transcendence
- Storytelling
Creating “Meaning” From Your Stories  (Begin 6:30-8:45)
TYPES OF WRITER’S BLOCK

• Feeling Empty
• FEAR: Perfectionism/Imposter syndrome/Inner Critic
• Feeling Overwhelmed
• Procrastination

Solutions Ahead!
BLOCK: Feeling Empty

what is creative living?
Any life that is driven more strongly by curiosity than by fear
Elizabeth Gilbert in Big Magic
IDEA FOR GENERATING: Read!

Perfect Reading Spots

- Overstuffed Chair
- Morning Sunbeam
- Rush-Hour Traffic
- Unusual Tree
- Yoga Class
- Business Lunch
- On the Beach
- On the Bus
- Bookshop Window
- Attic Crawl Space
- Secret Library Corner
- Lover’s Embrace
- Frustrating Hammock
- Comfortable Bed
- Alone with My Thoughts
- Outside My Own Head

Grant Snider
IDEA FOR GENERATING: Consult an Expert

“When you do actually know a bit about something, it is such a pleasure to be asked a lot of questions about it” (145-6).

– Anne Lamott, “Calling Around,” *Bird by Bird*
IDEA FOR GENERATING: “Freewriting”

• Write for at least 10 minutes
• Don’t stop to read or “correct”
• Separates generating from editing
• Structured or unstructured
• Look for “center of gravity” sentence
“Perfectionism is the voice of the oppressor, the enemy of the people. It will keep you cramped and insane your whole life, and it is the main obstacle between you and a shitty first draft. I think perfectionism is based on the obsessive belief that if you run carefully enough, hitting each stepping-stone just right, you won't have to die. The truth is that you will die anyway....”
BLOCK: IMPOSTER SYNDROME

(our fear)

(illusion)

(reality)

QUESTION: How can we shift our mindset?

"Your fear of being publicly exposed as a fraud is a stress-related disorder called 'Imposter Syndrome.' It's common among people in high-profile authority positions, and, of course, in actual phonies, like you."

TYPES OF PEOPLE WHO CAN HAVE IMPOSTOR SYNDROME:

- All the smart, successful people that you think have their shit together
REJECT PERFECTIONISM

**maximizers**
- exhaustively seeks the best
- compare decisions with others
- expend more time and energy
- unhappier with outcomes

**satisficers**
- accept good enough
- don't obsess over other options
- can move on after deciding
- happier with outcomes

From Barry Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice*
REJECT PERFECTIONSIM: “Write Bad”

• “When I tell students to write badly I am essentially relieving them of the burden of writing well. This causes them to relax, to stop judging their sentences, to surrender to the improvisatory storytelling mode that produces the most natural and effective prose.”

~Steve Almond

https://www.awpwriter.org/magazine_media/writers_notebook_view/8/on_the_enchantments_and_uses_of_bad_writing
BLOCK: Feeling Overwhelmed
IDEAS FOR GENERATING:
Anne Lamott’s “Short Assignments”

Writing a novel is like driving a car at night.
You can only see as far as your headlights,
but you can make the whole trip that way.

E.L. Doctorow
Motivational Soundtrack: “Do the Next Right Thing” from FROZEN 2
• “Procrastination is an emotion regulation problem, not a time management problem.”

• “...the momentary relief we feel when procrastinating is actually what makes the cycle especially vicious. In the immediate present, putting off a task provides relief — ‘you’ve been rewarded for procrastinating,’ Dr. Sirois said....

• This is precisely why procrastination tends not to be a one-off behavior, but a cycle, one that easily becomes a chronic habit.”

^^Tim Urban, “Inside the Mind of a Master Procrastinator”

↩Charlotte Leiberman, “Why You Procrastinate (It Has Nothing to Do With Self-Control)”
IDEAS FOR ROUTINE: Set the Mood

- Minimize decisions by creating routine
- “A Room of One’s Own”
- Music
- Time of Day & Brain Power
IDEAS FOR ROUTINE:
SKETCH GUY, “Create Your Space...”

PAIN INVOLVED IN
CREATING THINGS

IF I
WAIT FOR
THE MUSE
TO SHOW
UP

IF MY TOOLS
ARE READY

https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/14/your-money/when-you-need-creativity-to-strike-make-way-and-gear-up.html?_r=0
IDEAS FOR ROUTINE: Take Breaks
IDEAS FOR ROUTINE: Be Flexible!

“I will not write unless I’m swaddled in furs and am roosted to perfection upon the couch. Perhaps I could write upon the divan, but never a table. And there must be furs. I will not write unless I am oriented perpendicularly to a large window. I’m not picky, but it must be quite large, and there must be sheets of cold rain pouring down outside. If the rain stops, so do I. I will not write without a bracing rain.”
IDEAS FOR REVISION: Distance Reading
IDEAS FOR REVISION: Play with Structure

- Outline the writing
- Outline on notecards and shuffle/reverse order
- Encyclopedia entries
Follow a PROCESS
The Process is the Reward

GENIUS IS...

1% INSPIRATION 29% PERSPIRATION 5% IMPROVISATION

8% ASPIRATION 7% CONTEMPLATION

15% EXPLORATION 13% DAILY FRUSTRATION

11% Imitation 10.9% DESPERATION 0.1% PURE Elation

A COMIC FOR RED LEMON CLUB BY GRANT SNIDER
Prepare to be Forever Changed

“The Chronicle of Higher Education”

Why You Should Ignore All That Coronavirus-Inspired Productivity Pressure

By Aisha S. Ahmad | March 27, 2020

“...it is foolish to dive into a frenzy of activity or obsess about your scholarly productivity right now. That is denial and delusion. The emotionally and spiritually sane response is to prepare to be forever changed.”
Stage No. 1: Security

“At this stage, I would focus on food, family, friends, and maybe fitness.”

“If you do not put this psychological infrastructure in place, the challenge of necessary physical-distancing measures will be crushing. Build a sustainable and safe social system now.”
Stage No. 2: Mental Shift

“Now more than ever, we must abandon the performative and embrace the authentic. Our essential mental shifts require humility and patience. Focus on real internal change. These human transformations will be honest, raw, ugly, hopeful, frustrated, beautiful, and divine. And they will be slower than keener academics are used to. Be slow. Let this distract you. Let it change how you think and how you see the world.”
Stage No. 3: Embrace a New Normal

“On the other side of this shift, your wonderful, creative, resilient brain will be waiting for you. When your foundations are strong, build a weekly schedule that prioritizes the security of your home team, and then carve out time blocks for different categories of your work: teaching, administration, and research...

New ideas will emerge that would not have come to mind had you stayed in denial.”
Be like RBG

America to Justice Ginsburg: Just. Keep. Planking. #Scotus
SUGGESTED READING LIST

- Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*
- Elizabeth Gilbert, *Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear*
- Grant Snider, *The Shape of Ideas*
- William Zinsser, *On Writing Well*
- Betsy Lerner, *The Forest for the Trees: An Editor’s Advice to Writers*
- Jordan Rosenfeld, *The Writer’s Guide to Persistence*
- Lynda Barry, *What It Is*
- John McPhee, *Draft No. 4: On the Writing Process*
- Austin Kleon, *Steal Like an Artist*
- Natalie Goldberg, *Writing Down to the Bones*
- Danielle Krysa, *Your Inner Critic is a Big Jerk: And Other Truths About Being Creative*
- Julia Cameron, *The Artist’s Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity*
- Kaufman and Gregoire, *Wired to Create: Unraveling the Mysteries of the Creative Mind*
- Barry Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice*