

Persistence: Preparing For and Overcoming Writing Obstacles

The process of writing involves a tedious journey, even when your subject matter is well-known and important to you. In fact, your level of passion for a topic can push you towards perfectionism, making the process more tedious. There are common and potential obstacles you will encounter worth mentioning. In this instance, I'm talking about obstacles for the actual process of writing, not procrastination in coming up with a topic, etc. I do not address "writer's block" specifically as I believe it is an aggregate of other obstacles.

Two very real obstacles are limited time and distractions. These are probably at the root of any writing obstacle you will encounter.

Time? Whoever has enough time? There are always competing demands for your time, energy, and attention and no easy solutions. They commonly affect varied parts of our life and work. However, there are some strategies for time-related obstacles. These include identifying what you can take off your plate, setting aside protected time, writing during your most productive time of day, and having an achievable timeline for your project.

In just about any of my leadership talks, I address the importance of having a "not-to-do-list". There is a blog on this website on the topic. In order to be productive and work on projects we find meaningful, we must assess how we really spend time and identify activities we can either eliminate or at least cluster to avoid cutting into productive periods. If writing your manuscript is important to you and you have a message worth sharing, minimize other activities and distractions. Look at what you can take off your plate. What you can "not do".

Most of us have a time of day when we're most productive, usually earlier in the day than later. That said, you may find yourself most productive in the evening when things quieten down. Regardless, set a block of time for writing during that time of day. **PROTECT IT!** Learn to say no to other activities during this time. Also set this time aside regularly, not one or two times a day. Working regularly, by day, helps you maintain progress and avoids having to reorient to where you were in a project. The longer you set something aside, the harder it is to engage again.

Because we have a finite amount of time (hours in the day, days in the week) consider extending your project timeline. Make sure your interim and end goals are feasible based on what you need to accomplish. Time management requires that you keep the goal in mind and keep plugging at it over time.

As for as distractions, your "not-to-do-list" will go a long way to help. Don't get pulled into activities you have identified as nonproductive time-suckers. Identify a workspace where

distractions are minimized. Avoid unexpected interruptions. If you work in an office (or even home), close the door; post a “working on project, do not disturb” note on that door. Avoid checking texts or messages throughout the work period; review them all at once later. If you like to work by music, play music instead of quiet. Plan for white/brown noise, preferred lighting, whatever you need for a productive, optimal work environment.

On perseverance, there are ways to enhance your commitment. In another monograph, I mention working in teams or joining a writing accountability group, both of which help with external accountability. I’ve started keeping a little handbook (One Line a Day), where there is just enough space for a few daily notes. But it is just enough to note that I worked on whatever project I want to accomplish. Use a whiteboard, phone voice memo, notebook—but make your commitment visible.

Perseverance is also enhanced by reasonable goals and deadlines. If your goals are so aggressive they cannot be met, you are likely to simply stop tracking your progress, then lose progress. These goals you set and can monitor. Even small gains add up..

Another perseverance hurdle occurs if you get bogged down by uncertainty about where to start or go next. If you’re unsure, just pick a place. There is nothing wrong in shifting your focus within your plan. Working the components in the order you desire or feel ready is a good tactic. Just start anywhere but start. Then move forward anywhere but move forward.

Perfectionism can become a large obstacle. We are not perfect; our work is not perfect. No draft is perfect. Don’t get caught in the doom loop of expecting and seeking perfection. Do seek feedback from peers if desired but just accept that perfection isn’t likely. Instead, continually seek to grow and improve in your work. And part of that requires acknowledging your gains.

Celebrate each step you accomplish, small or large, and move on. Celebrate by checking off your plan or taking a celebratory break. Realize you are making progress.

There are a couple of authors and associated resources I recommend for overcoming obstacles for any project. I use these myself. Both include an informative website and each of the books has applicable, practical topics.

- First book: James Clear-- *Tiny changes, Remarkable Results: Atomic Habits*. (Building good habits & breaking bad ones)
 - Website: Jamesclear.com
- Second book: Charlie Gilkey-- *Start Finishing: How to Go from Idea to Done*
 - Website: Productiveflourishing.com