



Susan R. Johnson

srj.susanjohnson@gmail.com

Time management strategies for academic success

thriving
a m i d s t c h a o s

www.thrivingamidstchaos.com

Agenda

Organize

- Defining and organizing your work

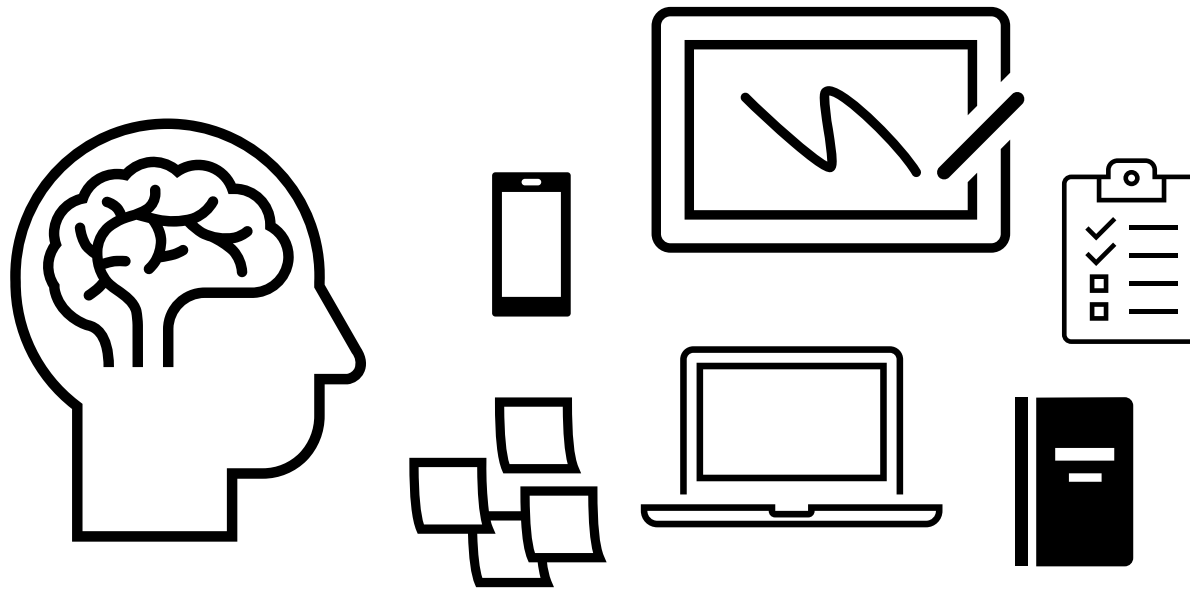
Plan

- Tactical planning: the week and the day

Do

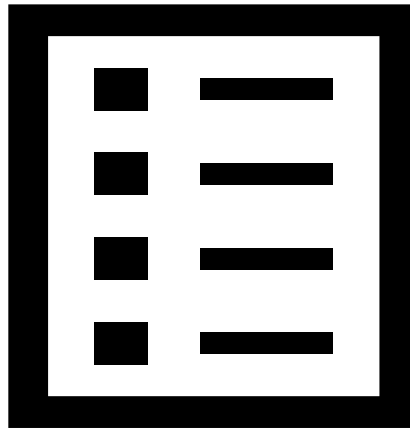
- Finding time for writing and other project work

Keep track of
your “to-dos”



The “here, there, anywhere” task management system

ONE MASTER TASK LIST



The “only here” system

Master task list

Master List

Features

- All the tasks you intend to do
- Never-ending: tasks get added and taken off as appropriate;
- Does not need to be in any specific order



Time-specific prioritized lists

the tasks I have selected to complete today, or this week, or this month

Problems with task lists:

- **The task is too vague:** “Florida guy”

→ Instead: “find business card of guy from the Florida conf, then email my question re: his talk.”

Problems with task lists:

- **You include things that you have not yet decided to do...**

Problems with task lists:

- The “task” is too big: “create budget”

Project: a “to-do” that requires *multiple* tasks and more than one day to complete.

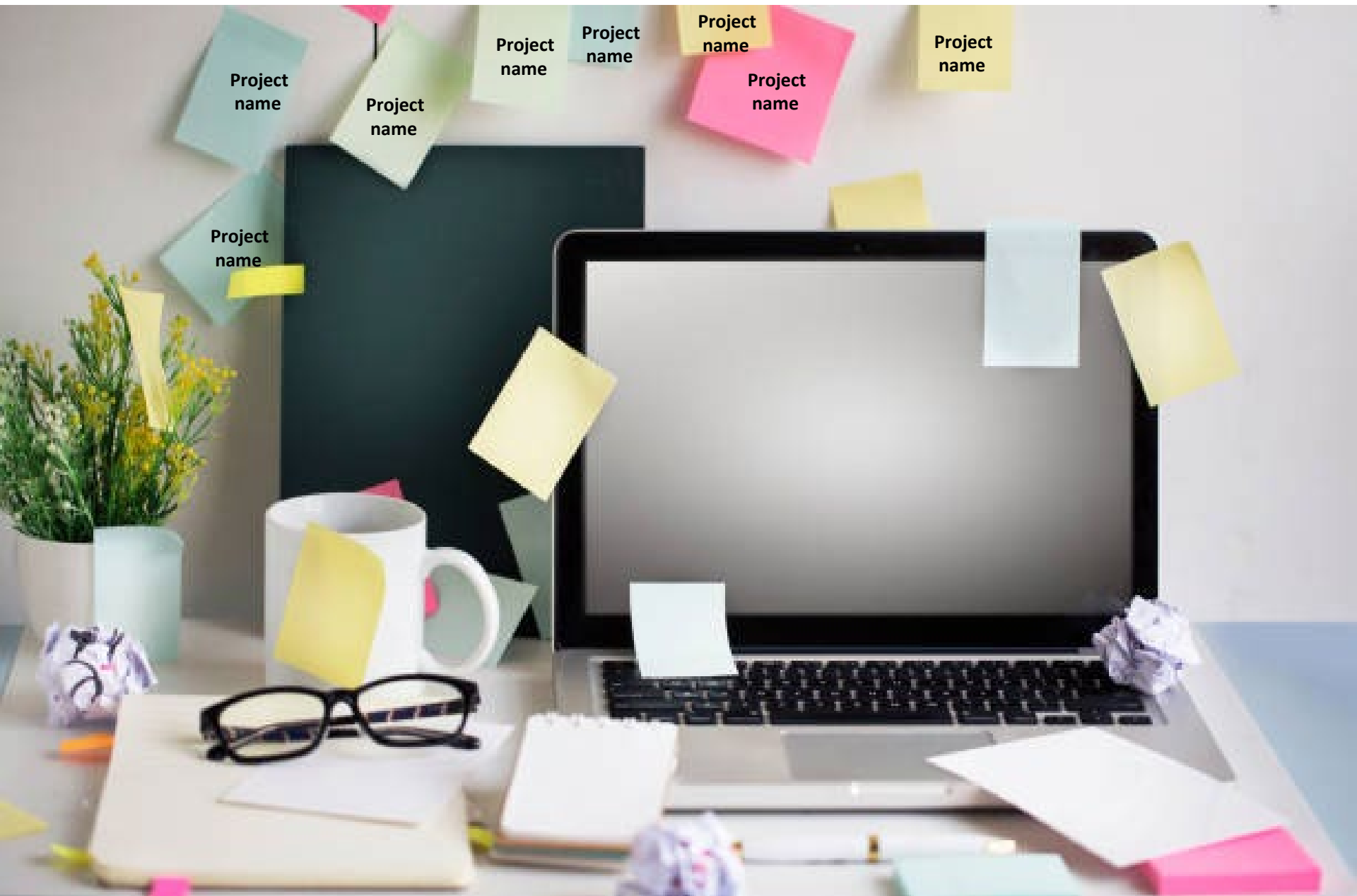
What are YOUR current projects?

Obvious academic projects:

- Write a paper or grant
 - Prepare a talk
 - Create a new curriculum
- Plan... ... a conference, a vacation
 - Prepare... for a recertification exam
 - Learn... ... a statistical method
 - Decide... whether to respond to an RFP
 - Fix... ... the problem with my computer
 - Buy... ... a house, a computer, a car

Keep a master project list!



- Meeting deadlines
- Prioritizing
- Making decisions about pruning, deferring to later, saying yes or no to new work



Every project needs a task..

Projects

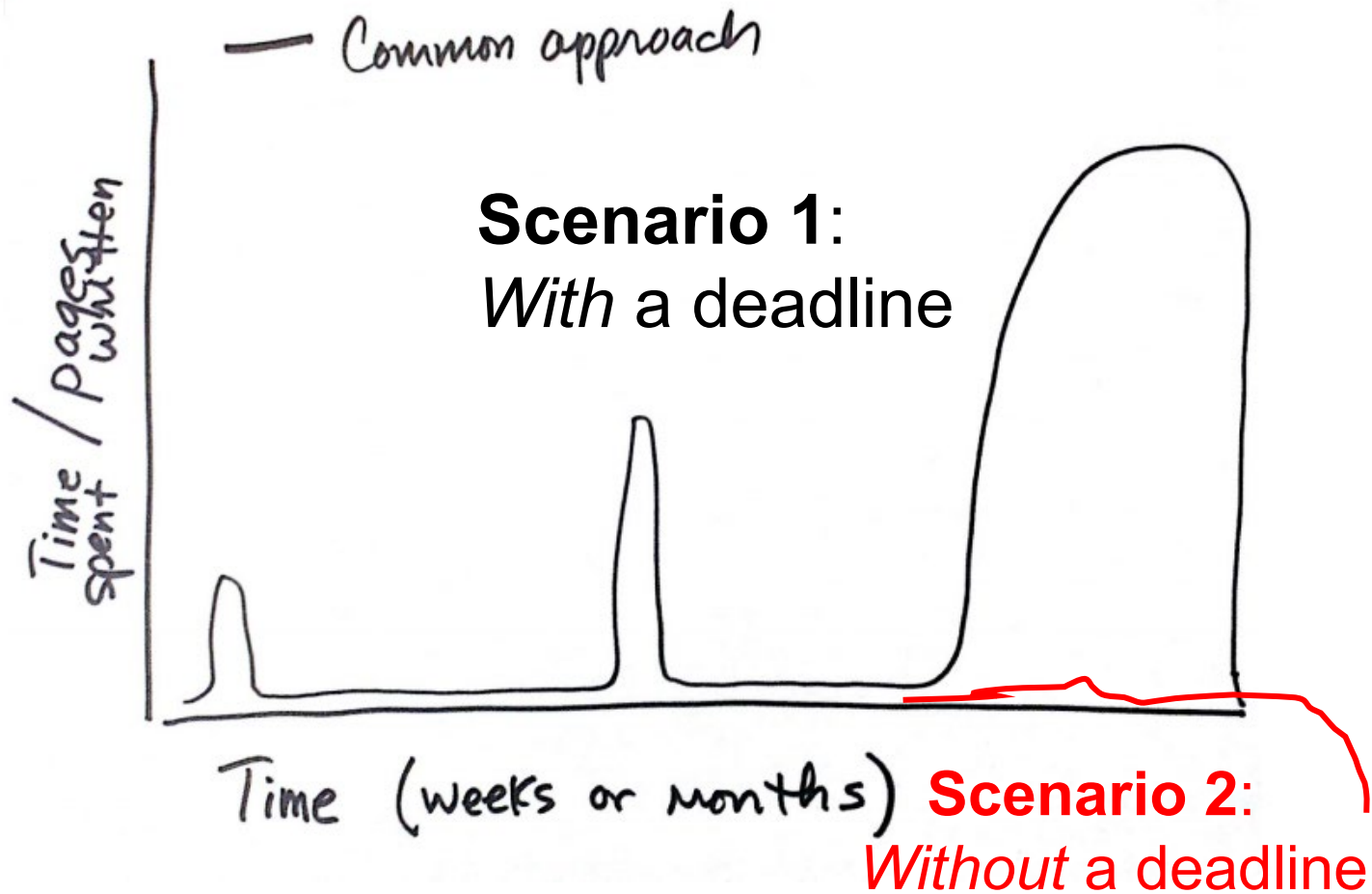
The next task

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Write paper “X” (submit ~early April) |  | <input type="checkbox"/> Schedule 1 hour block to draft M&M |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Complete Dissertation (~fall 22) |  | <input type="checkbox"/> Do lit search on “single cell DNA methylation” |

**A framework
for finding
project work
time.**

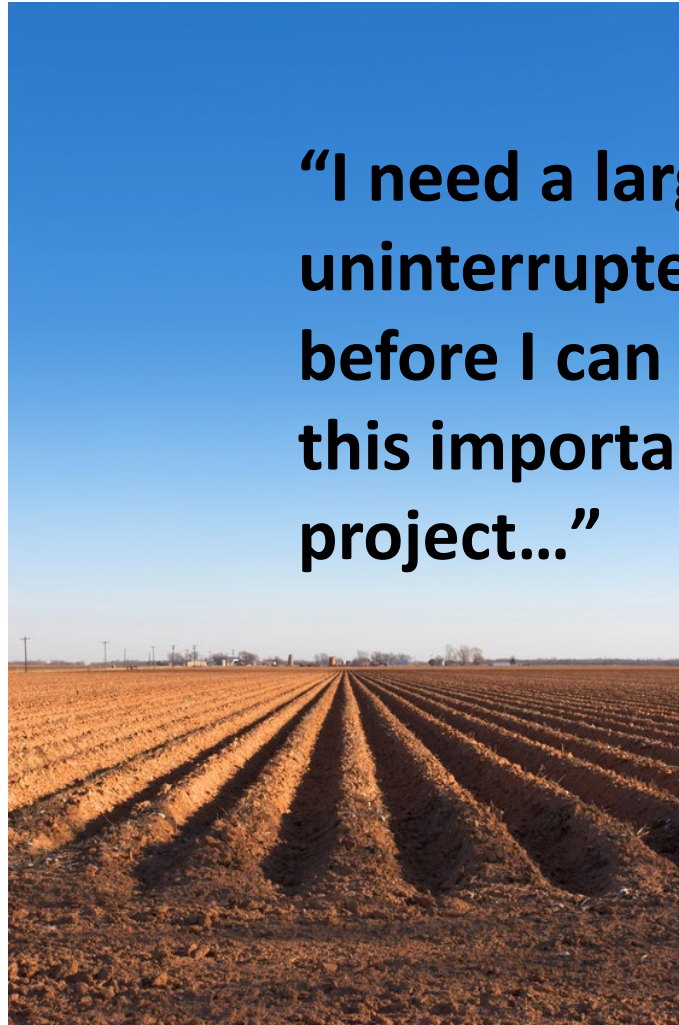
Applies to any project, but especially

{writing}



Myth

“I need a large block of uninterrupted time before I can work on this important project...”



Reality Check



“... if you want to successfully integrate more [writing / project work] into your professional life, you cannot just wait until you find yourself with lots of free time and in the mood to concentrate. **You have to actively fight to incorporate this into your schedule.**”

Cal Newport,
Deep Work (2016)

A framework

Key Strategy:

Be prepared to work on your projects no matter how much time you have.

Three timeframes:



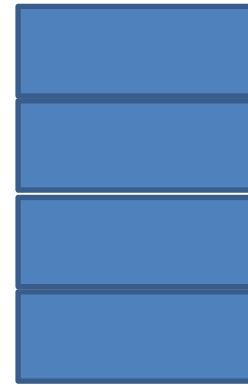
10 minutes or less

BRIEF



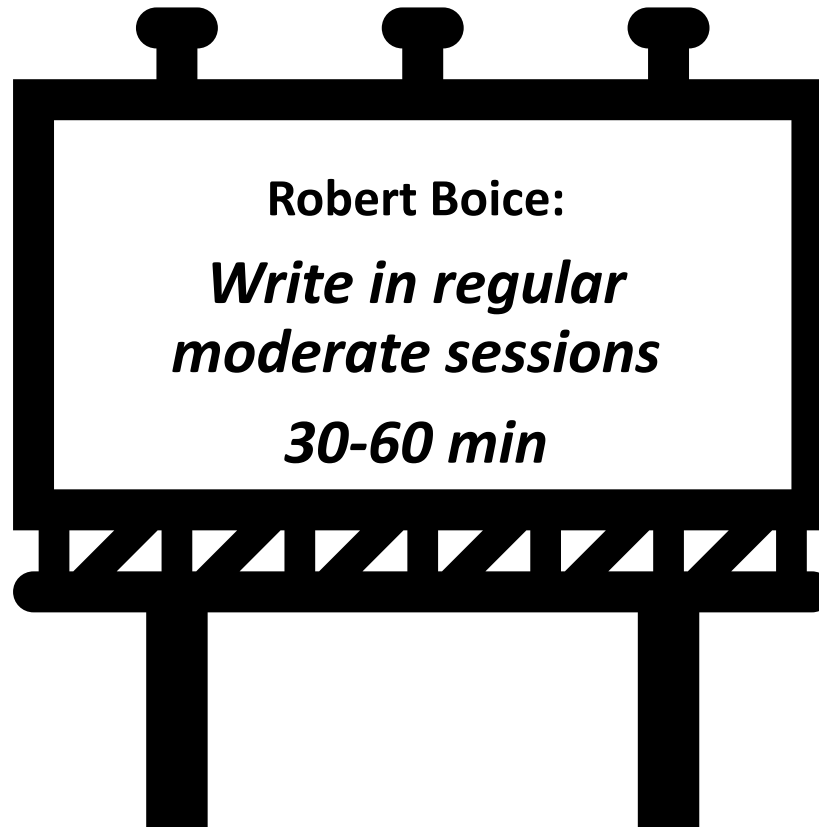
30-60 minutes

MODERATE



2 hours or more

LONG



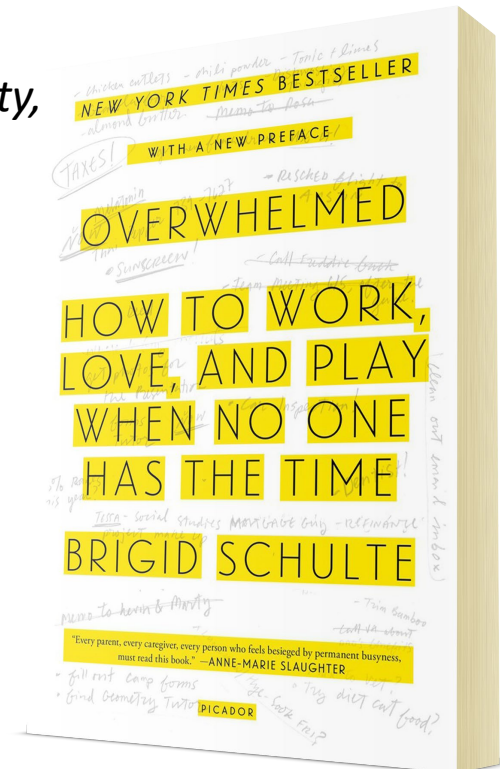
Robert Boice:

*Write in regular
moderate sessions*

30-60 min

As a single mother on the tenure track, I wrote much of my second book in **20-minute increments** defined by the length of *Dora the Explorer* episodes. I kept **an outline of topic sentences** for each chapter, and if lucky, I could write exactly one paragraph as my daughter delighted in the animated adventure.... . All time was precious; even those skimpy morsels that **Brigid Schulte*** calls **"time confetti."**

Kristen R. Ghodsee is a professor of gender, sexuality, and women's studies at Bowdoin College.



Key Strategy:

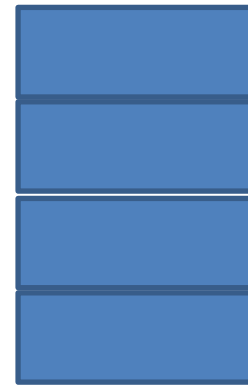
Be prepared to work on your projects no matter how much time you have.

Three timeframes:



30-60 minutes

MODERATE



2 hours or more

LONG



_____ I have learned to use my 'ten minutes.' I once thought it was not worth sitting down for a time as short as that; now I know differently and, if I have ten minutes, I use them, even if they bring only two lines, and it keeps the book alive."

- RUMER GODDEN

A House with Four Rooms

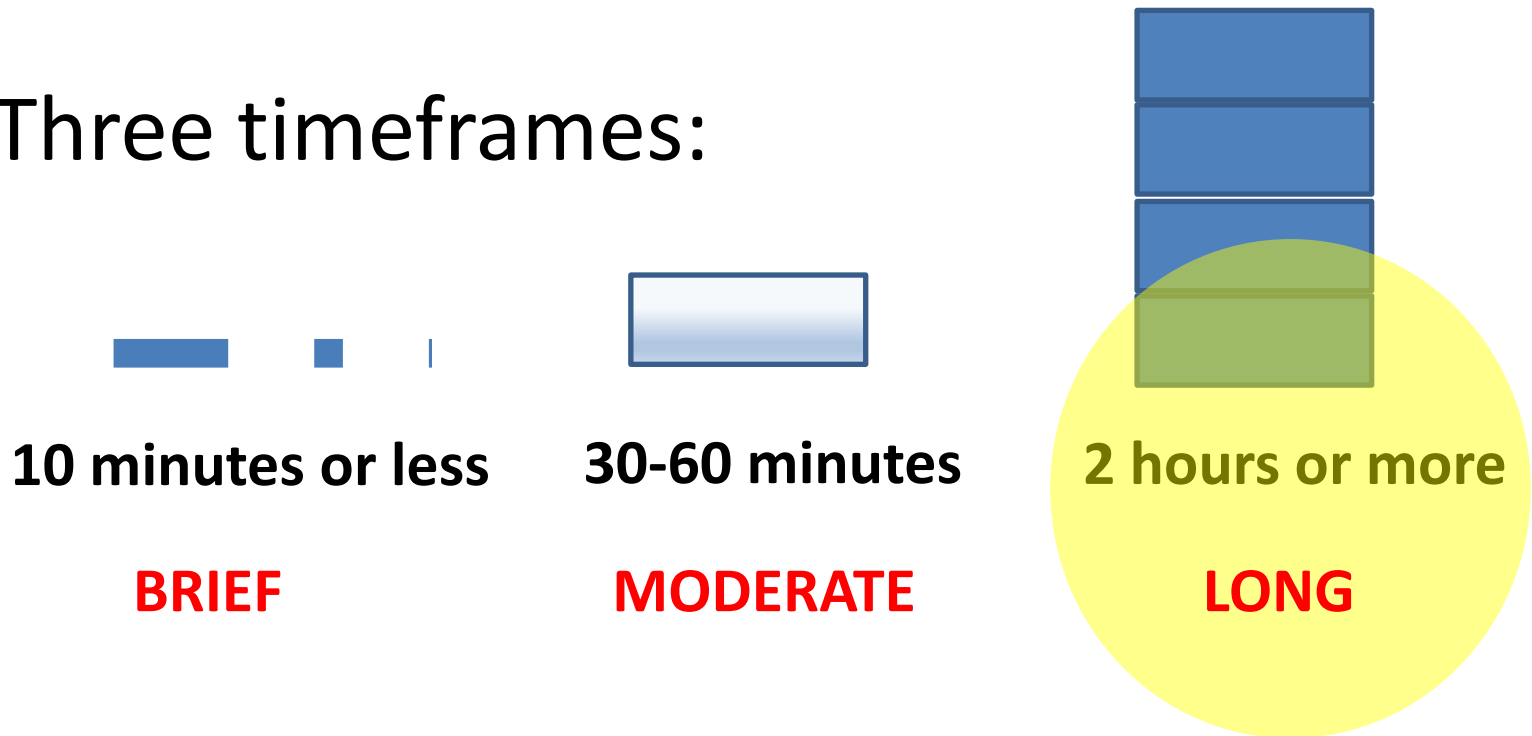
Yes, a small bit of writing!

- Margaret **Rumer Godden** OBE (10 December 1907 – 8 November 1998) was an English author of more than 60 fiction and non-fiction books.

Key Strategy:

Be prepared to work on your projects no matter how much time you have.

Three timeframes:



Time blocking

Mon	
8	
12	
5	
8	

- **Have a goal for the block & a simple action to get started.**

**** Focused Work ****

- **Plan a starting task for the next session, then stop**



Write down what you are going to do

25 + 5

25 + 5

25 + 5

25 + **15**

Repeat as needed

Manage
interruptions

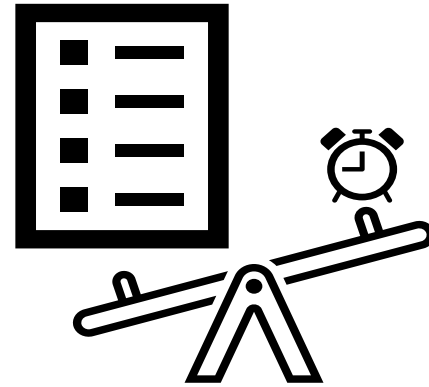
Francesco Cirillo

<http://www.pomodorotechnique.com/>

the Pomodoro technique

* Check your play store for a Pomodoro phone app

Plan your
weeks
and days.



Weekly Planning #1

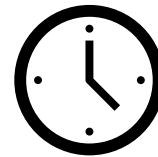
Set work boundaries, schedule “margin”

Week of:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
0600	Exercise						
0700							
0800							Bike ride
0900							
1000							
1100							
1200							
1300							Friends birthday party
1400							
1500							
1600							
1700							
1800							Eat out With friends
1900							
2000				Movie			
2100							
				Night OFF			Day OFF

SET a STOP TIME

Do it sometime between
Friday and Sunday night.



**Approximately
30 min.**

A basic weekly review & plan

STEP 1:
Get a piece of
paper

Review & Plan for week of May 21

**May 7, 2023 -
May 13, 2023**

			SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Pacific 5 AM	Eastern 8 AM	Central 7 AM	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
6	9	8				Student lecture			
7	10	9		Clinic	Clinic	Committee meeting		Research group meeting	
8	11	10							
9	12 PM	11						Committee meeting	
10	1	12 PM							
11	2	1		Clinic		Clinic	Grand rounds		
12 PM	3	2					Zoom call		
1	4	3							
2	5	4							
3	6	5							
4	7	6							

Johnson, Susan R

1

5/7/2023 10:31 AM

Project List

Create a lecture for Aug 2

Draft Ann Fam Med paper

Analyze data for diabetes study

Hire research assistant

Plan res research day

STEP 2:

Gather your “inventory of work”

Tasks (wherever they may be!)

call John 351-5555 re: meeting
draft introduction to budget report
buy staple remover for office
~~talk to Emma re: workshop~~
print 25 copies of handout
google "climbs mount everest"
purge one file drawer
read article on strategic planning

STEP 3: Calendar review: Review each scheduled event & ask “Any advance prep needed?”

[illegible]

Review & Plan for week of May 21

Calendar notes

☐ Wed meeting: Get zoom link, review agenda

STEP 4a: Project list review:

Pick 1-3 to focus on this week

Project List

Create a lecture for Aug 2

Draft Ann Fam Med paper ★★

Analyze data for diabetes study

Hire research assistant ★

Plan res research day ★

STEP 4b: Plan a “chunk” of work for each selected project

“Work on ...”

(e.g., “Work on Am Fam Med Paper”)

➔ **Complete a draft of the discussion for Ann Fam Med paper**

Review & Plan for week of May 21
Calendar notes

☐ Wed meeting: Get zoom link, review agenda

Project plans

Draft Ann Fam Med paper ★★

☐ **TB:** complete draft of discussion:

☐ **Action:** schedule 1-hour time block to get started

Hire research assistant ★

☐ **Action:** Email dept admin to ask for job description template

Plan res research day ★

☐ **Action:** Call Ebony Jones re: doing the keynote

STEP 5: Tasks review

Task List

- ★ call John 351-5555 re: meeting
- ★ draft introduction to budget report
- buy staple remover for office
- ~~talk to Emma re: workshop~~
- ★ print 25 copies of handout
- google "climbs mount everest"
- purge one file drawer
- read article on strategic planning

Review & Plan for week of May 21

Calendar notes

- ☐ Wed meeting: Get zoom link, review agenda

Project notes

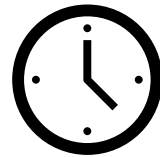
- ☐ Add 1-hour time block to start draft of discussion
- ☐ Draft an email to residents to get keynote topics
- ☐ Ask dept admin for draft res asst job description

Task notes: most important

Options:

- record here
- highlight on the list
- resort the list if in an app

Do it the day before.



**Approximately
10 to 15 min.**

Make a daily plan.

Make an “MIT” list

Must* be done today

- .
- .
- ...

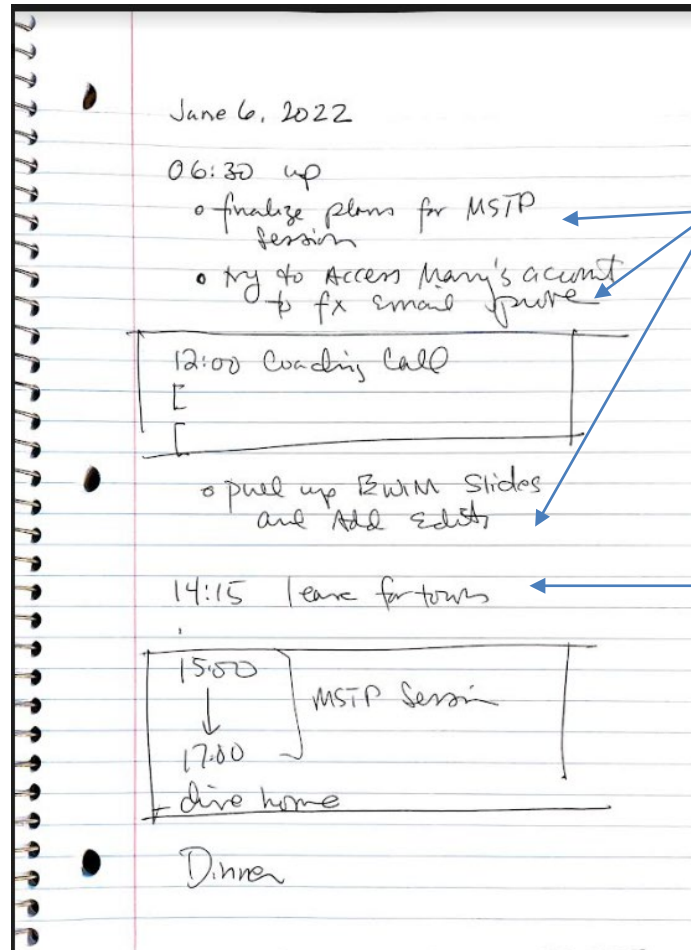
Aim* to do today

- 1..
- 2..
- 3..

*** The deadline is today**

*** “It will be so great if I get this done today but nothing bad will happen if it don’t.”**

Sketch a time allocation plan



Pencil in key tasks

Scheduled event

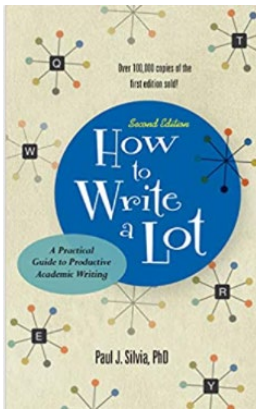
Include transition time

Scheduled event

My articles written for *Academic Physician & Scientist*.
(Posted at www.thrivingamidstchaos.com)

- [Code O: Recovering from overwhelm](#)
- [The basics of organizing your work and time](#)
- [Priorities: How to decide what to do, and when](#)
- [Execution: Getting your work done](#)
- [Getting e-mail under control](#)
- [Becoming a productive academic writer](#)
- [A plan for professional reading](#)
- [Time blocking](#)
- [Interruptions](#)
- [Delegation](#)

To learn more about developing an academic writing practice & time blocking & procrastination

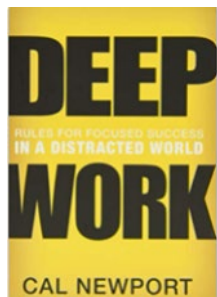
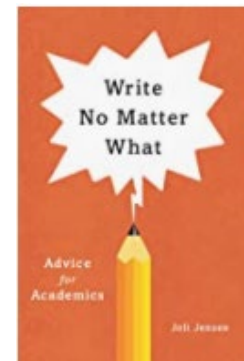


Paul J. Silvia (2018, **second edition**). *How to Write a Lot: A Practical Guide to Productive Academic Writing*.

Silvia is an academic psychologist, and this book is perhaps the most popular in this genre. This second edition reflects the authors new status as a dad with young children (making his advice about finding time to write more realistic). The book has been updated to apply to a wider variety of disciplines, and has a new chapter devoted to **grant and fellowship writing**.

Joli Jensen (2017). *Write No Matter What: Advice for Academics*, The University of Chicago Press

Joli Jensen is a communications studies professor) with extensive experience teaching writing to graduate students and faculty members. She sends the same message as Silvia - write nearly every day - but covers some additional reasons for resistance and has different views on some issues. She provides welcome detail on **writing accountability group options**, and **how to deal with stalled projects**.

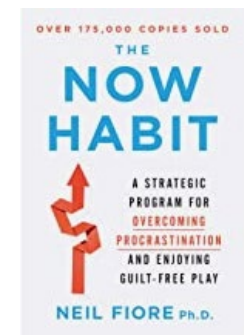


Cal Newport (2016). *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World*, 2016

- Detailed strategies for planning time to write, with emphasis on time blocking.
- See also, Study Hacks blog: Cal posts about "deep work" and other productivity topics: <http://calnewport.com/blog/>

Neil Fiore (2007). *The Now Habit*, 2007

- Practical approaches to procrastination originally designed for graduate students have trouble writing their dissertations.





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thriving
amidst chaos

**Email me with your comments, questions,
and tips!**

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