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6 DAYS AGO EDIT

Guard Your Academic Writing “A” Time

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Lynn B. Clutter

NURSE AUTHOR & EDITOR, 2018, 28(4), 2

During the busyness of life in the academic world, it is critically important to guard time for writing. This task is difficult to do with the tyranny of urgent and myriad faculty requirements. Typically, writing energy and time is the first to go during the press of the semester. While we may provide excellent teaching, mentor students well, and meet administrative needs, our scholarly contributions and writing can dwindle. In her book, *Write No Matter What*, Joli Jensen acknowledges that academia can be a terrible place for writers. Revealing myths that stall and unpacking numerous useful notions, the author provides practical strategies toward advancing writing productivity. One specific idea has resonated significantly with me.

UNDERSTANDING PERSONAL ENERGY RESOURCES

Identifying writing energy as a, “reliable, renewable resource” (Jensen, 2017, p. 32) can allow us to learn how to best use our own energy patterns. Referencing Zerubavel (1999), Jensen explains that our energy can be divided into “A time,” “B time,” and “C time.” “A time” is when we are most productive with the most energy. “B time” still requires mental alertness but not the most creative vigor. “C time” is for tasks that do not require internal creative energy but need to be completed. Grading, setting up exams in a learning system, email responses and the like can be C tasks. If we align our best energy to the appropriate level, we respect our own rhythms and avoid the sap of vitality that full energy for all time periods would require. We allow the mundane tasks to occupy low energy times. We can give our best strength to what we put in A time.

Pointing out the differing daily schedules of famous authors, Zerubavel (1999) encourages writers to design personally the best possible writing schedule aligned with individualized creativity/productivity hours. To do this keep track of your own times of focus, momentum, and energy level fluctuations. If you design your daily and weekly writing while attuning to A, B, and C tasks, you become deliberately more productive and can later lengthen your uninterrupted A time. Both Jensen (2017) and Zerubavel (1999) emphasize A time as sacred prime time.

TIME TRAPS

One tremendous application for me has been the error of putting C tasks into A time. It is so very easy to do. It is so insidious and academe can be a hard taskmaster. The joy of writing can be siphoned off, drawn out, drained, and sucked away if we regularly put C tasks during A time. This has been driven home to me on many occasions. There are both internal and external typical traps luring us toward this reversal.

Here are some internal traps:

“I will process these emails and then be ready to write.”

This classic mental reasoning can sap minutes to hours every single day. I can deceive myself by thinking that clicking through emails will be all that is needed. But, when even just one requires a response, A time or energy can be hijacked.

“I will just knock off this _____ before writing.”

Nearly everything that fills in the blank of an “I will just” thought is usually a C or perhaps, B time task. In fact, C time tasks are frequently chores, duties, or assignments that can drain your energy.

“I will work through my ‘To Do List’ one by one.”

This mentality is efficient in that you accomplish one task at a time and bring it to completion. The philosophy, touted as an excellent approach for efficiency, does not take into account personal creative energies. A person can give each item full energy then be utterly empty with exhaustion and searching for escape to finish the items on the “To Do” list, which may be those tasks that require A level energy.

Here are some external traps:

“I must attend meetings that happen during my A time.”

No, this is not always necessary. You often have some control of timing and your schedule.

“I must be available during all working hours.”

Availability can still allow energy to be allotted differently for A, B, and C times. While classroom teaching, and “command performance” meetings are not

controllable, we adapt our energy times around the unchangeable meetings only.

“I must accomplish departmental work even when it infringes on my A time.”

I found that when I explored this viewpoint, I was able to find ways to infringe less on my A time while still getting the departmental work done.

If we honor our own energy levels, acknowledging that the amount varies through the day and week, we can apportion tasks to A, B, or C time and use our own inclusion and exclusion criteria—as with research. Respect your own personal rhythms. Maintain a stronger internal locus of control. Enjoy and have energy for each level. Further, remember that all of us tend to re-energize out of the satisfaction of successful productive writing outcomes.

ALIGNING WRITING TASKS TO A, B, AND C TIME

One can use A, B, and C time within specific writing projects. For the most part, academic writing fits into A and B categories (Zerubavel, 1999). Focused creative energy writing and editing usually requires A time energy. B time may be for fact checking, reference work, and creating figures or tables. C time could be for things such as writing query letters, uploading documents, or making telephone calls.

Energy levels can fluctuate even after time allotments have been apportioned through the week. When energy crashes during an A time writing task, different strategies can be employed to re-energize or redirect the time period. I find that a temporary break, a cup of tea, or five minutes reading the newspaper sometimes re-energizes me enough to press through. Other times it is best to reduce the period to B activities and rearrange my A time elsewhere.

BE REALISTIC AND FLEXIBLE

“Energy vampires,” whether they be people, tasks, or events, happen in academic life (Jensen, 2017). Try to put these things into C time and match task to energy the best you can. Use A, B, or C time to keep your scholarly writing on task and be flexible to adapt and thrive in your academic setting.

Strong emotions can hinder A time productivity. An example would be resentment toward work or toward the many, unwanted demands of academia. It is easy to be irritated by having a required meeting scheduled at the last minute that forces a change in your existing schedule. These emotions of resentment or irritation can refract your productivity. Also, internal grief work requires internal energy and can occupy A, B, or C times. This can indirectly reduce scholarly outcomes. Overextending yourself is another way to diminish A time productivity. It takes work to match energy to tasks and times and to decide what to include and exclude in each category. It takes patience and flexibility to adapt.

In allotting A, B, and C activities, it is important to keep some flexibility. Life happens. Sometimes you will choose to give your A time to family or personal aspects of yourself. You will need to adjust priorities and responsibilities. However, if the tyranny of the urgent usurps much of your A time, something is misaligned.

CONCLUSION

Reclaiming focused A time can bring joy back to academic writing. Honoring your own energy levels can bring contentment. Being able to control some inclusion and exclusion to A, B, and C time can regain internal locus of control and greater self-satisfaction. All of these can yield an outcome of greater academic writing productivity.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lynn B. Clutter, PhD, APRN, CNS, CNE is on the faculty at the Oxley College of Health Sciences School of Nursing at the University of Tulsa, Tulsa OK. Her teaching/practice areas are pediatric, maternal-infant, family, community health, genetics, ethics, and research. Her passion is equipping students for effective professional nursing roles as well as providing excellent patient/family care in nursing service. Dr. Clutter also is committed to helping prepare students to pursue advanced degrees by providing a sound educational and research foundation at the BSN level. lynn-clutter@utulsa.edu

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