Productivity During a Pandemic

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Many of us who are generally productive academics are now finding ourselves trying to work at the same level we have always done. The trouble is that now we are writing during a pandemic. Things are not normal. We're not in our usual routines. We may have family or roommates at home with us. We also may have pets who want attention. We hear distressing news daily. And speaking of days, they are melting together.

While some of us are finding that writing helps us cope with the stresses and distractions and thus are being highly productive, the combination of events makes writing challenging for many of us, to say the least. And so, many of us are finding it difficult to concentrate, to produce, at all, much less at the same rate we were doing before. And it is important to let ourselves be ok with that. If we don't produce much one day because the kids need attention, or the dean called an emergency video conference, or because we just didn't produce just because, that's ok. It's important to let it go and to take one day at a time.

However, many of us want or need to write. We may have a passion for it. We may have jobs that demand it. We may simply have something we want to say. Following are a few suggestions for maintaining productivity in a time of crisis.

Before you Write, Ensure that you've Got Life Basics Attended to

You will likely be more successful in achieving your writing goals if you first make sure to take care of yourself. Bowen and Watson (2017) recommended that students follow the **SWEET** acronym (sleep, water, exercise, eating, and time) for maintaining life balance, and the same acronym can work well for scholars. We need to attend to life basics, to sleep, eat, and exercise, in order to function so that we can then engage more fully in the writing process.

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Acknowledge the Stress

Most of us have not lived through a pandemic before, and it is likely that even those who have cannot remember such an experience as this. Many of us likely have loved ones or friends who have been sick or have died. Many of us feel the loss of the freedom to see friends or colleagues or simply to go to a restaurant or library. Many of us have added responsibilities of childcare or eldercare. We tend to write better when we acknowledge how we are feeling, and thus we would do well to take the time to process what is going on and how it affects our daily lives prior to beginning the writing process in earnest.

Just Do it

As the famous Nike ad suggests, a big part of success is just doing it. In order to just do it, we may need to let go of our usual habits and rituals, such as writing at our most productive times or in our favorite spots. It simply may not be possible to achieve the ideal writing circumstance, and getting something done in a less than ideal situation can be better than getting nothing done at all. Boice (1994) offered the following advice: Start before you feel ready. Stop before you feel done.

Pace yourself

Try to work in brief but regular sessions. This means also trying to write just a little each day, whether a page or a half a page, or an amount based on time, such as 30 min of writing. You may be surprised at how quickly it turns into something useful. Stop when you need to, preferably in the middle of something, whether a sentence, paragraph, or argument. Doing so will give you a place to pick up for the next writing session and thus can make it a more productive time.

Avoid Binge Writing and Acknowledge all Forms of Writing as Writing

Try to avoid the temptation to binge out of impatience or, alternatively, simply to get something done. While most of us who write have done binge writing from time to time, it is not the best approach for long term productivity. Remember also that pre-writing is writing, and so is re-writing. Spend as much time pre-writing and rewriting as you do on the writing itself. Collecting materials, taking notes, outlining, and drafting all count. Revising and editing is also part of writing.

Have Confidence

Be confident that it's possible to continue to write even in the face of adversity. Challenge yourself to write, and see what works best for you. Think of any time you can put into writing now as an investment for the long term, as it will help you not only be a better writer, but also a more confident and productive one over time.

References

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