

Tackling Big Writing Projects

Plan

Make a calendar for your entire project. If you miss a deadline, don't panic. Re-adjust to accommodate the missed task, being realistic about how long you'll need to complete it.

Explore

Approach your writing as a process and start with low pressure writing activities such as brainstorming, listing, free writing, outlining, and informal drafting. The best way to generate complex ideas is give yourself plenty of space to explore your ideas, the structure of the argument, and others' input before you worry about polishing individual sentences.

Build-in breaks

Scheduling short breaks (taking a week off between field work and writing, for example) will help you clear your head and ensure that you begin working again promptly.

Take baby steps

Try to break the project into manageable chunks. Sure, facing down a 75-page thesis is daunting. Looking at it as five interconnected 15-pagers might make it easier to conceptualize.

Take the path of least resistance

Start writing whichever portion of your project feels easiest, even if that's the middle of it. By the time you get to the harder sections, you'll have had plenty of preparation for them.

Make it a habit

Establish a regular writing schedule so that working on the project becomes a habit. You might decide to write at the same time each day or draft a certain number of pages each day.

Meet your advisor(s) regularly

Establish a regular meeting time with your advisor(s). It is often helpful to give your advisor(s) short pieces of writing in advance of each meeting. Share your projected timeline with them, and don't be afraid to show your advisor(s) work in progress. You'll often get more useful assistance this way than by waiting until you feel something is finished.

Form a writing community

Consider organizing a writing group with colleagues to support you over the course of the project. These writing groups can take many different forms, including those that regularly comment on each other's work, those that meet and write together, or those that simply help keep participants on-task. The Writing Center is happy to help facilitate these groups.