

Strategies to Become a Productive Writer
FW 893: Sec. 301
Spring Break 2020
Course Description and Policies

Instructor: Dr. Jen C. Owen (owenj@msu.edu)
Lecture Period: March 2 – 6th; 9*-4pm daily.
Location: 115 International Center
Required items: Laptop computer for writing and anything else needed to write.

In addition, please bring the items that will make you comfortable for the day, such as snacks, note pad, headphones, water bottle, etc. In addition, I recommend wearing comfortable clothes and if you tend to get cold please bring warm layers – you will be sitting a lot. The room will be comfortable for writing – there are large desks with outlets and an upholstered, rolling chair. The food court is next door to the room.

**We start at 9am so students should plan to arrive before then to make sure they ready to go by 9am.*

Course Description

Do you struggle with writing? Do you frequently sit down to write and find yourself surfing the web or on social media websites only to find that an hour later you never actually produced a sentence? Do you always find some reason why you cannot write – e.g. you do not have enough data, you have too much data, you haven't exhaustively read the literature, your desk is too cluttered, you need to clean the house first, you are not good at writing, and the excuses go on! If this sounds like you, rest assured you are not alone. Many people struggle with writing; yet, writing is a core part of graduate school, whether it is writing a thesis/dissertation, grant proposals, and/or publishing your research. Further, if you are pursuing a career in academia or other professional career, writing is going to be the primary means by which you will disseminate your research and communicate with your professional network. Regardless of whether you have good or poor writing skills, it can be a struggle just to get the words on the paper. And, one of the primary ways to become a more proficient writer is by writing more.

Seminar Format:

Each student is expected to have at least one writing project they are working on. It can be a thesis, dissertation chapter, manuscript, grant proposal, or a prospectus/thesis proposal. The seminar is intended for writing and not doing exhaustive literature research or data analysis; hence, everyone should have done their analyses and most of their literature search completed prior to the week-long seminar, or plan to do it during the evenings. There is minimal time given each day to look up items as the goal is to spend most time writing. We will meet in the same location each day and the day will be divided into blocks of time for independent writing separated by lectures or discussions.

The day will start with breaking out into small groups for 10 minutes in which each person in the group will share their goals for the day and reflect on the previous day’s accomplishments. The day will end with the same group meeting up for 10 minutes and each student sharing their successes and challenges from the day’s writing. The make-up of the groups will shift each day to maximize the interactions among students in the class.

The day will be structured with blocks of time dedicated to writing with intervening blocks of time for lectures or discussions (maximum is 2 per day). The lectures are designed to help students develop effective writing and time management strategies that will help them be successful in graduate school and their chosen profession. In addition, the lectures cover topics on writing scientific manuscripts, authorship decisions, initial manuscript submissions to journals, revising and resubmitting manuscripts, and best practices for reference/citation management.

The course does not include any time dedicated to peer reviewing each other’s written work. It is about getting words on paper and making significant progress toward your writing goal.

Seminar requirements/course expectations for a passing grade (P)

1. Must attend daily for the full course time, i.e. typically 9-4pm
2. Must document daily objective for writing project and then document daily accomplishments (e.g # of words, pages, or sections), stumbling blocks and/or successes. Report this information using the shared Google document online.
3. Complete a backward planning timeline for your current project.

Table 1. Example schedule

Monday & Wednesday	Activity	Tuesday, Thursday, & Friday	Activity
9:00 – 9:10	Peer Meet-up	9:00 – 9:10	Peer Meet-up
9:10 – 10:00	Lecture/Discussion	9:10 – 10:30	WRITING
10:00 – 10:15	BREAK	10:30 – 10:45	BREAK
10:15 – 10:30	Prep to write (Mon only)	10:45 – 11:15	Literature Search
10:30 – 12:00p	WRITE	11:15 – 12:00	Lecture
12:00 – 1:00p	LUNCH	12:00 – 1:00p	LUNCH
1:00p – 1:45p	Lecture	1:00 – 2:00p	WRITING
1:45 – 2:15p	Literature Search	2:00 – 2:15	BREAK
2:15 – 2:30	Break	2:15 – 3:00	Lecture
2:30 – 3:50	WRITING	3:00 – 3:50	WRITING
3:50 – 4:00	Peer Debrief	3:50 – 4:00	Peer Debrief