



How to Keep a Writing Journal*

Why keep a writing journal?

By keeping a writing journal you can begin immediately by writing, not thinking—it's low hanging fruit—each time you sit down to write.

A writing journal will help you learn how much you write in a sitting. It is a measurable way to keep track of what you are actually getting done. A bound journal small enough to carry with you everywhere you go, with a bright cover that makes it easy to find, is recommended a writing journal. Why bound? So that you don't have loose papers or sticky notes with ideas for your writing scattered all over the place. This can help you later when you realize that you have tried implementing an idea that did not work, or that you have already looked at an article that was not useful, but you forgot that you did that. In other words, part of the object here is to keep you from re-inventing the wheel. Sometimes it helps to think of this as your "idea journal."

What information goes into your writing journal?

Every day during your writing appointment, note the following information in your journal:

1. Time when you sat down to write;
2. What you did; a phrase or two, no need for paragraphs; some people even use visual icons to remind themselves, so that reviewing lab reports becomes an icon of a lab beaker (remember it should reflect your learning style);
3. Your progress: word count or page count but amount is important;
4. How long you spent actually sitting there writing;
5. Where you will begin the next time you write. This may be the most important thing you do, because it will allow you to move forward much more quickly instead of having to reconstruct your thought process. Some people even write a sentence that they know the end to or a question to jog their minds when they start writing the next day.

Note this information even on days when you don't write to see how quickly you are progressing or determine any work patterns you see related to writing.

Your writing journal is a great place to park other information you do not want to forget:

1. Notes to yourself about things you want to look up somewhere;
2. Notes to yourself about restructuring your piece; and
3. Notes about anything else that you are tempted to set your writing aside for (grocery lists, telephone calls, emails).

Other reasons for keeping a writing journal:

1. It helps break a big project down into smaller more manageable pieces;
2. It reminds you to reward yourself at each step of the way, as you get another paragraph, another section, another chapter finished. Go to a movie, drink a cup of tea, spend quality time with partner, read junk fiction, play on the internet, but do something you enjoy!

*With thanks to writing coach Mary Beth Averill for sharing her knowledge on this topic.