

PREFACE

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Writing productivity research and advice can be summarized in a single sentence: In order to be productive we need frequent, low-stress contact with a writing project we enjoy. Our problem is that academic life offers us the exact opposite: infrequent, high-stress contact with projects that come to feel like albatrosses.

Outsiders think academe is a supportive writing environment. We know it is not. Yes, we have semester breaks and time off in the summer, and we meet with only a few classes each day, but we are in a hectic, demanding, distracting work environment that is definitely not writing-friendly. Academe sets the stakes very high (publish or perish) while mystifying the writing process. We are expected to figure out—all on our own—how to publish prolifically, teach well, and be of service to students and colleagues.

It is up to us to create better conditions to support our writing—to find ways to have frequent, rewarding contact with enjoyable projects. But first we need to stop blaming our situation or ourselves. Academic life is unsupportive to writing for reasons beyond our legitimate complaints about having too much to do or our secret fears about being lazy and undisciplined. There are insights we can have, and skills we can develop, that will help us do our academic writing no matter what.

In this book I focus on the process of academic writing rather than on the content. There are already many useful books on writing style and on the publication process for academic articles or books. This book is about dealing with whatever is keeping you from getting your academic writing done. It shows you how to create and sustain frequent, low-stress writing contact with a project you care about, no matter how stuck you are, frustrated you feel, or uncongenial your writing environment seems.

In the following pages, I ask you to let go of the fantasy that you need to be somewhere else, or become someone else, in order to write productively. I ask you to stop beating yourself up for not already knowing how to write happily and often. I ask you to stop blaming

teaching and service (as well as students and colleagues) for filling your time and draining your energy. When we let go of our rationalizations, we free ourselves to address the obstacles that really stand in our way.

In the sections that follow I draw on popular and scholarly insights on what hinders, as well as supports, the writing process. I combine these with my own writing struggles and insights from thirty-plus years as a professor, along with what I've learned from developing and directing a writing program for faculty at the University of Tulsa. The techniques and suggestions I offer here are helping colleagues in a variety of humanities, social and behavioral sciences, and scientific disciplines at my university and elsewhere. Yes, we academics work in a particularly challenging writing environment, but it really is possible to write happily and productively in academe. In the following pages I tell you how.