

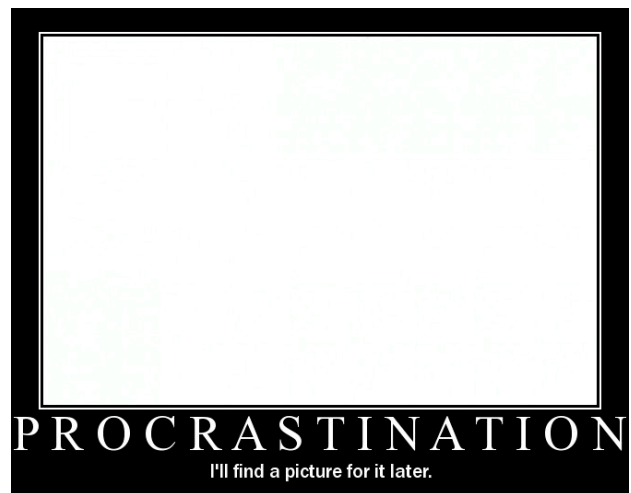
Dear Applied Dissertation Student:

Many doctoral students experience some personal problems in completing their degrees - - in particular the dissertation. Two common problems are [procrastination](#) and [writer's block](#).

First, click on the hyperlink below and watch this quick, humorous video and see if you can relate:

"Procrastination" Tales of Mere Existence"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4P785j15Tzk&feature=related> (1:21)



Procrastination

"Putting off an easy thing makes it hard, and putting off a hard one makes it impossible."
(George H. Lonmer)

"Nothing is so fatiguing as the eternal hanging on of an uncompleted task."
(William James)

"The journey of a thousand miles begins and ends with one step."
(Lao Tse)

All of us have had the experience of starting out to do a particular task and, hours later, realized that we have been side-tracked and are no longer focusing on that task. Something else has attracted our attention and, sometimes without even realizing it, we have shifted our focus. This happens often when it comes dissertation work. On the other hand, many of us believe that if we think about our study long enough that when we sit down to write it, the words will flow easily. So on we wait and another semester comes and goes.

Writing is time-consuming and angst-ridden. There will never be an ideal time to write, because writing is hard! Therefore, since there is never a better time, you might as well get that chapter started - - now!

According to *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, *procrastinate* means to put off intentionally and habitually doing something that should be done. It is a habit that steals away some of life's greatest opportunities, yet it is a habit most of us possess. Many books deal with overcoming procrastination, yet we seem to put off reading them or, if we do, fail to heed their advice. This habit, quite common among dissertation students, can result in an *ABD (all-but-dissertation)* status rather than an Ed.D. This amounts to aborting the climb to the peak and settling for *Heartbreak Hill*. I am acutely aware of the whole complex of dazzling excuses proffered by dissertation writers. For some doctoral students, dissertation avoidance is often elevated to an elegant art form. Certainly, there are occasionally excellent reasons for putting off working on your dissertation. Emergencies, interruptions from others, and acts of God happen to all of us from time to time. However, the students I worry about are those who keep themselves from starting or continuing because they fear the unknown, lack the self-confidence to move ahead on their own, or engage in irrational thinking, such as awfulizing. They convince themselves the task is awful, horrible, and unbearable. But putting it off only postpones the inevitable. **It is critical that you learn to recognize those signs that indicate you are putting off working.**



You and the *Law of Inertia*

Newton's law of inertia says: A body in motion tends to stay in motion; a body at rest tends to stay at rest. In other words, it takes greater force to get a body moving than it does to keep it moving, and when it gets moving, it takes less force to keep it moving than to stop it. Physical inertia is regulated by outside forces, but the real changes in our life's attitudes and habits come from within. As **William James**, (often referred to as the father of American psychology) said, "The greatest discovery of my generation is that a person can alter his life by altering his attitude of mind." Those who succeed do so because, when they head toward a specific destination, they keep going until they reach it. It's hard to stop them.

There are lots of reasons for procrastinating on the dissertation. Doing a dissertation calls for a significant shift in working patterns, especially if you have just spent two or three years taking courses with other students and having the semester schedule of classes, the tasks to be completed, and the timeline for completion all set by someone else (the

professors). Now along comes the dissertation and it can be a solitary activity that also requires you to make, on your own, many decisions about time allocation, what to work on at any given point and when to contact your faculty advisor.

One idea to combat this loneliness is “**the writing date**” and some of you may have seen in a three-page article from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. This is only one strategy (there are many), but I do endorse it as often we do not want to disappoint or let down another person; so we need this extra guilt for motivation. Try it and let me know what you think.



Writer's Block

When asked about the most frightening thing he had ever encountered, novelist Ernest Hemingway said, "A blank sheet of paper."

What's the hardest part of writing? Or, to put it another way, what stage of the writing process gives you the most difficulty? Is it drafting? Revising? Editing? Proofreading? For many of us, the hardest part of all is *getting started*. Sitting down in front of a computer screen or a blank sheet of paper, rolling up our sleeves, and--and nothing.

We *want* to write. We may be facing a deadline that should *compel* us to write. But instead of feeling motivated or inspired, we grow anxious and frustrated. Those negative feelings can make it even harder to get started. That's what we call "writer's block." If it's any consolation, we're not alone. Even many professional writers--of fiction and nonfiction, poetry and prose--have also had frustrating encounters with the empty page.

All dissertation writers experience writer's block at some point during the process. It's that longing to be anywhere **BUT** in front of the computer. When this happens, everything else in your life takes priority over writing. Taking the dog for a walk, cleaning your closets, running errands, washing clothes, and emailing friends appear crucial. Writer's block can be caused by any number of factors: lack of confidence, fear, time constraints, no outline, personal issues, frustration with your topic, perfectionism, weariness, etc. It is important to identify obstacles that stifle your writing. In other words, take time to "fall back and regroup."

Here are some helpful resources:

The Writing Life by Stephen King, Sunday, October 1, 2006

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/28/AR2006092801398_pf.html

Symptoms and Cures for Writer's Block

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/567/01/>

Writers on Writing: Overcoming Writer's Block

<http://grammar.about.com/od/yourwriting/a/wblockquotes.htm>

Top 10 Tips for Overcoming Writer's Block

<http://fictionwriting.about.com/od/writingroadblocks/tp/block.htm>

Overcoming Writer's Block

http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/composition/brainstorm_block.htm

Videos:

Bob Moresco of Crash on Writers Block

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpVagt_oGRo (1:36)

How to Overcome Writer's Block -- Your Writing Coach

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7jfPXclP6Y&feature=related> (4:16)

How to Become a Professional Writer: How to Handle Writers' Block

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHI3xBZVt7s&feature=related> (2:54)

Dissertation Specific:

Writing your dissertation

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z9TFZ6blzAg&feature=related> (7:02)

Dissertation Camp: Writing Tips (48minutes)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xBS9Alq7m28> (48:01)

Humorous: 😊

Dissertation Blues

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmOepdJn6LE> (2:08)

“The I hate dissertations” song

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QfUILZ3SUGc&feature=related> (2:16)

Okay, now that you have gotten through this dissertation newsletter, go write! Get to work; do not procrastinate any longer! Do not get up until you have written about 400 words or spent a good hour clicking away in front of the computer. Do not clean the house, turn on the television, go to the fridge, or take a walk, until you have put some words on paper. Then you can take a break. You will feel so much better and then one or two pages will soon become three to four pages. Okay?

Best wishes,

Robert Hill

Robert Hill, Ed.D.

Applied Dissertation Chair & Program Professor



Some of this was taken from:

Completing a Professional Practice Dissertation: A Guide for Doctoral Students and Faculty (2010) by Jerry Willis, Deborah Inman, & Ron Valenti from IAP.

The Dissertation Journey: A Practical and Comprehensive Guide to Planning, Writing, and Defending your Dissertation (2004) by Carol M. Roberts from Corwin Press.

Writing the Winning Thesis of Dissertation: A Step-by-Step Guide (2nd ed.) (2005) by Allan A. Glatthorn & Tandy L. Joyner from Corwin Press.