Iowa State University

From the SelectedWorks of Kasthurirangan Gopalakrishnan

Spring April 23, 2015

The Productive Academic Writer: An Easy-To-Read Guide to Low-Stress Prolific Writing

Kasthurirangan Gopalakrishnan, Iowa State University

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/kasthurirangan-gopalakrishnan/1/
The Productive Academic Writer
An Easy-To-Read Guide to Low-Stress Prolific Writing

Kasthirirangan Gopalakrishnan, Ph.D.

ALSO BY K. GOPALAKRISHNAN

Efficient Book Writing: A Strategic Program for Improving Writing Productivity
EDITORIAL REVIEWS FOR “THE PRODUCTIVE ACADEMIC WRITER”

"An interesting introductory guide to writing, which is very useful for both academics and non-academics."

- Prof. Miklas Scholz, The University of Salford, Greater Manchester, UK

“If you have had the intention to write something, but you have not been able to achieve your goal, The Productive Academic Writer will explain why you haven’t and what you can do to make your intentions a reality….I am sure academic writing teachers and writers, in general, really appreciate being understood by another writer, Gopalakrishnan, who had the time to present our doubts and common stressful situations with answers to overcome all of them.”

- Prof. Beatriz Manrique, University of Zulia, Maracaibo, Venezuela

“There are plenty books on the market telling the would-be author (academic or otherwise) how to write with clarity and grammatical precision. There are fewer books dealing with the issue of how to get motivated to write in the first place. That's why "The Productive Academic Writer" is so useful, for it provides sound advice, which, if followed, is sure to make the would-be writer more disciplined and productive…Although this book is primarily written for people in academia (where one's job often depends on written productivity), anyone who writes a lot, whether as an avocation or a career, will benefit from its advice.”

- Dr. Doug Erlandson (Amazon Top 50 Reviewer), Adjunct Instructor of Philosophy, Southeast Community College, Lincoln, NE

“The Productive Academic Writer, like the subtitle suggests, is an easy to read primer that applies simple time management skills to writing in an academic context. The book gives lots of tips and ideas for getting started immediately. Would recommend to anyone getting started on academic writing, but unsure where to start.”

- Sugu Althomsons, English Instructor, Kansai International Academy, Osaka, Japan

“The Productive Academic Writer is a timely help for me, a novice researcher who always struggles with the task academic writing and feels stressed out by it. The limiting beliefs described in the book, like perfectionism, procrastination, and lack of accountability, are too familiar to me. Academic writing seems much more a mental, rather than intellectual, obstacle to me! The book presents an assortment of
wonderful and practical solutions to my problems with writing. I am really fond of such tips as "free writing", "daily writing", and “the promdoro technique”, etc., which, I believe, serve to foster importantly healthy writing habits for me and many other like-minded struggling academics. More interestingly, this book provides the links to useful software or apps for us to put those techniques into practice. For academics aspiring to improve their writing productivity, it is an “engaging and easy-to-read” book worth reading and remembering.”

- Prof. Weiqiang Wang, School of English for International Business, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, China

“I will definitely recommend this book to my students and colleagues. It has also helped me a lot to recognize problems that I have with writing. For me, the added value is the concise, yet extremely valuable, exposition of the problems that potential writers face leading to failure in writing, and how to overcome them. Easy-to-read, convince yourself and you’re writing.”

- Dr. Rogelio Palomera-Garcia, Professor, Department of Electrical & Computer Engineering, University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez, Puerto Rico

“The Productive Academic Writer: An Easy-To-Read Guide To Low-Stress Prolific Writing is a useful guide which addresses academic writing, an important issue of academics who are affected by a range of factors. In this book, Kasthurirangan Gopalakrishnan asserts that although productive writing is key to success, many people have different idiosyncrasies and blocks which prevent them from being academic writers. This book is very useful for people struggling to find out what affects their writing, and also offers solutions and systematically points out useful books which provide further info in each case… Overall, I found the book useful, with wide appeal, and I felt that it was very down to earth, direct, and sympathetic while denouncing an unduly harsh approach to writing productivity.”

- Reviewed By Nandita Keshavan for Readers’ Favorite
CONTENTS

Preface
Chapter 1 Introduction
Chapter 2 Overcome Your Limiting Beliefs
   The Perfectionist Mindset
   Your Inner Critic
Chapter 3 Set SMART Goals
   Specific
   Measurable
   Attainable
   Relevant
   Time-bound
Chapter 4 Create Your Daily To-Do Lists
Chapter 5 Write Daily
   When to Write?
   Use Freewriting
   Writing is Thinking
Chapter 6 Set a Timer When You Write
   The Pomodoro Technique
   Monitor Your Output
Chapter 7 Eliminate distractions
   Avoid Online Distractions
   Get Internal Focus and Calmness
Chapter 8 Be Accountable
Chapter 9 Wrap Up
Dedicated to my
Teachers
With utmost gratitude!
The Guardian, a British national daily newspaper, recently featured a news article on how the intense pressure of graduate, post-doctoral study, and early-career academia can be quite stressful leading to mental health problems. The “demand for increased product and productivity” was blamed as the primary cause for “rising levels of mental health problems among academics”. If you like, you can read the full article here: http://goo.gl/C1DuH7.

Graduate students need to produce journal articles and conference papers to graduate. While the internet age has opened up access to all kinds of information available never before, the burden now rests on the students to stay up-to-date with the state-of-the-art research advancements at the global level. The consequence is that most students are forced to subscribe to the culture of rapid scanning and skimming of pieces of information from multiple electronic sources with very little time to concentrate and contemplate on the actual research questions. As someone rightly said, “these days we click a lot of links, read less, and remember even lesser”.

The writing productivity of graduate students is under siege from multiple directions: finding the fine balance between their coursework and research, managing time wisely amidst all the distractions, the pressure to find a job after graduation, etc.

Postdocs and researchers are under similar pressure to publish and write proposals to secure funding on an ongoing basis.

Young tenure-track faculty are working harder and harder to meet the promotion and tenure requirements which are becoming stricter year by year. First, scholarship in most disciplines was measured in terms of number of publications which created the publish-or-perish syndrome. With the increasing number of open-access journals all over the place, the emphasis then shifted to the number of publications one needs to have in high-impact Science Citation Indexed (SCI) journals. Now, the number of citations and H-index have taken the high seat.

Each discipline and university will have its own requirements for promotion and tenure, but everyone would agree that the pressure on young faculty to publish is enormous in the middle of often overloaded teaching and service responsibilities.
Without going through all the details, it is suffice to mention that our personal and social lives add their own flavor to our already stressed-out lives.

My aim in going through this is not to enlist the number of excuses to justify why academicians can’t write, but to underscore the need for some compassion towards ourselves and empathy towards our colleagues in similar situations. We deserve every bit of encouragement first from ourselves to keep going. In other words, let us not be too hard on ourselves!

By saying this, I am in no way encouraging some sort of self-indulgence or complacency. But, productive academic writers are those who realistically strive for excellence in their pursuit of writing goals with a down-to-earth attitude.

Bullying, calling names, punishment, and pressure tactics are negative, fear-inducing strategies that can never truly inspire anyone. Rather, they lead to more severe problems than the ones they originally intended to solve. On the other hand, genuine appreciation and positive reinforcement of even the minor efforts made towards our goals has far-reaching positive implications leading to high levels of low-stress productivity. This will be a recurring theme of this book.

There are already so many good books on this subject, so what was the need for one more book like this, you ask. A valid question. In one sense, there is nothing new in this book that has not been discussed before. The aim was not to create new knowledge or new strategies to productive writing as such, but present available information on this topic in an easy-to-read, and hopefully engaging manner.

I have tried to present proven productivity strategies and tips in a way that doesn’t demand you to add more activities to your already stressed-out schedule. Rather, this book’s aim is to assist you to do what you are already doing more effectively and efficiently with minimal stress, and possibly to identify and eliminate those activities and habits that interfere with your writing productivity. In other words, be productive and have a happy life!

Considering the vast body of existing information on this topic, this book has heavily drawn on the work of others. The author cannot fail to acknowledge with deep gratitude the contributions made by every individual whose work is referenced in this book.
"Everywhere I go I’m asked if I think the university stifles writers. My opinion is that they don’t stifle enough of them."

– Flannery O’Connor

Academic writing is hard. You may wonder why I begin this book on an apparently negative note. Well, I could have started it by saying “academic writing is the easiest and most lovable task that you can ever imagine”. May be for some. But, for most of us students, post-docs, researchers, and professors, that’s far from the truth. Most of the time, we just have the opposite experience - at least when it comes to getting the writing done.

We don’t seem to mind reading other’s work, doing the research, collecting the data, conducting data analysis, interpreting the data, etc. And, we definitely enjoy the moment and even celebrate when our work is published with our name on it in the form of a journal article or a book chapter or a book. But, we do seem to resist what comes in between these two – the writing process.

Have you had the excruciating experience of sitting in front of the computer and staring at the monitor hoping that words would start appearing magically forming sentences and paragraphs? Have you ever given up after starting a manuscript resigning to the idea that you just don’t have enough time to complete it now, but that you will come
back to it later which never happened? How many times have you determined that you’ll use those summer months to finish writing up your pending papers and proposals, but never followed through?

Available at: http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00WLJ0UVC/