

THE CHALLENGE

Give yourself eight weeks, five days a week, five minutes at the end of each day and between thirty minutes and three hours at the start of the next. Decide in advance how many hours (between 40 and 120) you will devote to becoming a better writer over the full eight weeks. During those eight weeks, follow the rules at the end of this document.

Spread the hours as evenly as possible over the days and weeks you have given yourself. Book them into your calendar. Book your writing time as early in the day as possible, in multiples of thirty minutes. Try to keep your writing sessions together in a series, between one and six sessions (of 27 minutes each) per day. During the challenge, you will, ideally, do all your scholarly writing as the first thing every day, *and then not again until the next day*.

Remember to make a five-minute appointment with yourself at the end of each working day (it might take ten minutes at the beginning, but you should keep this ‘meeting’ short). Since you are a researcher, think of this as the moment after which you will not learn anything new (at least deliberately) until you get up the next day. It’s simply the last “professional” appointment in your calendar each day. Like any appointment, it can be rescheduled. But it should never simply be cancelled. If you have to move it to the five minutes before you go to bed, so be it. But keep this appointment every working day of the challenge. Ideally, you’ll do this forty times.

At the end of each day, you will make a decision about how to use the writing time you have booked into your calendar for the next day. Decide on what to say by formulating between 1 and 6 key sentences (one for each half hour of planned writing). A key sentence states something you know to be true that you can write a paragraph (at least 6 sentences and at most 200 words) about. If you can’t come up with as many key sentences as you have half hours to write in, *cancel the excess writing time*. Plan to do research at that time instead.

On the next page you will find eight tables, one for each week, covering forty days in all. You should be looking at these during your end-of-the-day meeting with yourself and filling them out. They’re your guide to plan for tomorrow and your record of what you have done today. Feel free to plan ahead as far as you can. But remember that the final decision about what you will do tomorrow will always be made the day before. At the end of the eight weeks, the “key sentence” and “time” column will be a record of decisions you made *the day before*, beside each decision (up to six per day), in the “done” column you will simply set a check mark or not. Did you or did you not write the planned paragraph at the planned time?

Regardless of much you plan to write, and even how much you ultimately write, the “challenge” is just to stick to this discipline of deciding and reporting for forty days.

THE WEEKS

The essence of planning is to appreciate your finitude.

Week 1

Date	Key sentences	Time	Done?	Notes

Week 2

Date	Key sentences	Time	Done?	Notes

Week 3

Date	Key sentences	Time	Done?	Notes

Week 4

Date	Key sentences	Time	Done?	Notes

Week 5

Date	Key sentences	Time	Done?	Notes

Week 6

Date	Key sentences	Time	Done?	Notes

Week 7

Date	Key sentences	Time	Done?	Notes

Week 8

Date	Key sentences	Time	Done?	Notes

THE RULES

1. Always decide the day before what you will write and when you will write, one key sentence and 27 minutes at a time.
2. Never write about something you just learned this week. Always write about something you knew last week at the latest.
3. Always write a single paragraph of at least six sentences and at most 200 words in support, elaboration or defense of a single well-defined claim expressed in the key sentence.
4. Never write a paragraph that you have not planned the day before. Never write at a time you did not plan to.
5. Start on time and finish on time. If you start late, still finish on time.
6. Always take a three-minute break after writing the paragraph. In this break you must do something that is not related to either your writing or the rest of your day's tasks.
7. Do not write from your sources. Write from your notes or from your memory.
8. Do not leave "chores" like proofreading and referencing "for later". They are part of the activity of writing the paragraph for 27 minutes.
9. Read your paragraph out loud sometime in the last five minutes of each 27-minute writing moment.
10. Do not write more than six paragraphs per day. That is, do not write for more than three hours each day.
11. Do not render any absolute judgment on your paragraphs. At most once a week, simply rank them from best to worst.