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Planning for Success:

Dr Rachel Baron
30 March 2023

Best Practices for
Preparing your
Paper or Thesis

**What part of the
research process
do you enjoy most?**

1. Planning the study and developing the methodology

2. Carrying out the research in the lab or field

3. Analysing your data and discovering what your study has found

4. Writing up your research for publication or examination



Is this a familiar story?



WWW.PHDCOMICS.COM

This message brought to you by that manuscript you're supposed to be writing.

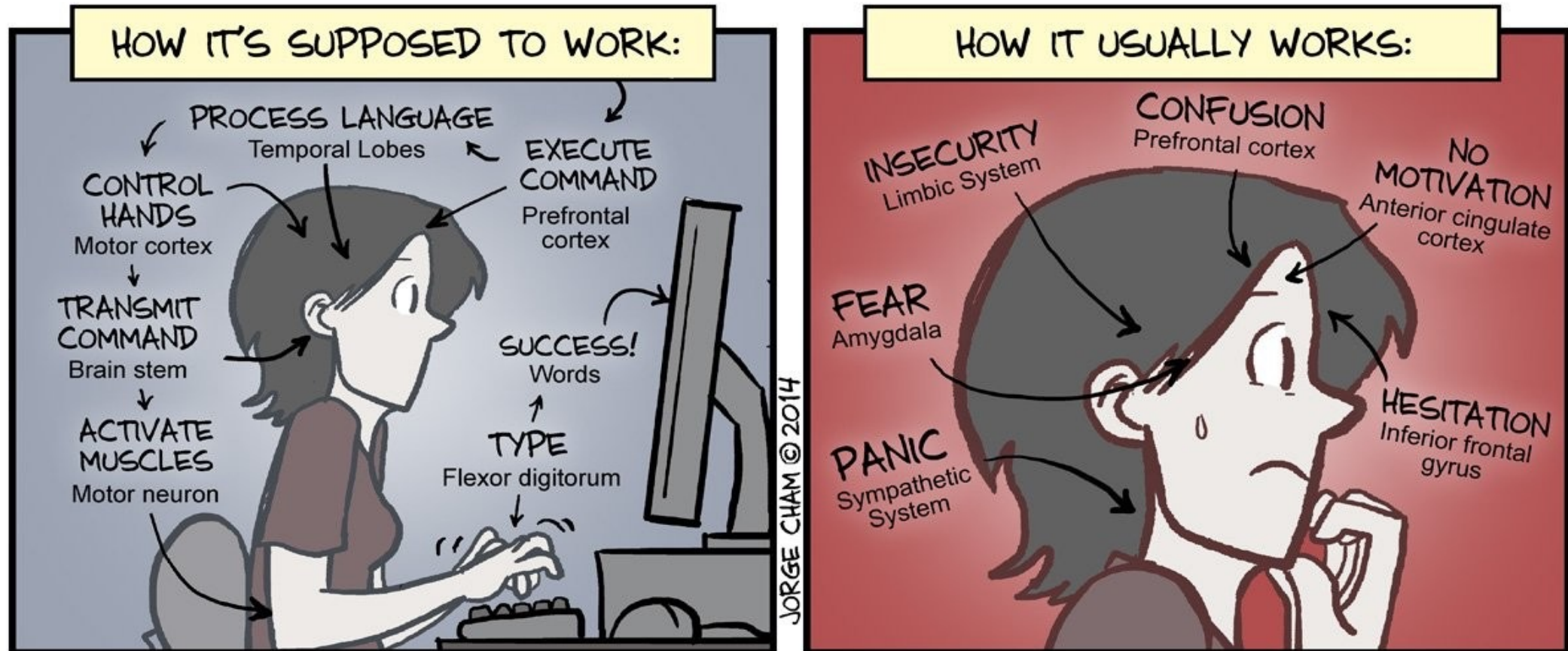
What this webinar will cover:

- ✓ Why is writing so hard?
- ✓ Deciding the direction of your paper, your target audience, and your target journal
- ✓ Organising your resources
- ✓ Making and sticking to a schedule
- ✓ Collaborating effectively
- ✓ Creating a state of flow and avoiding writer's block



Why is writing so hard ?

THE NEUROBIOLOGY OF WRITING

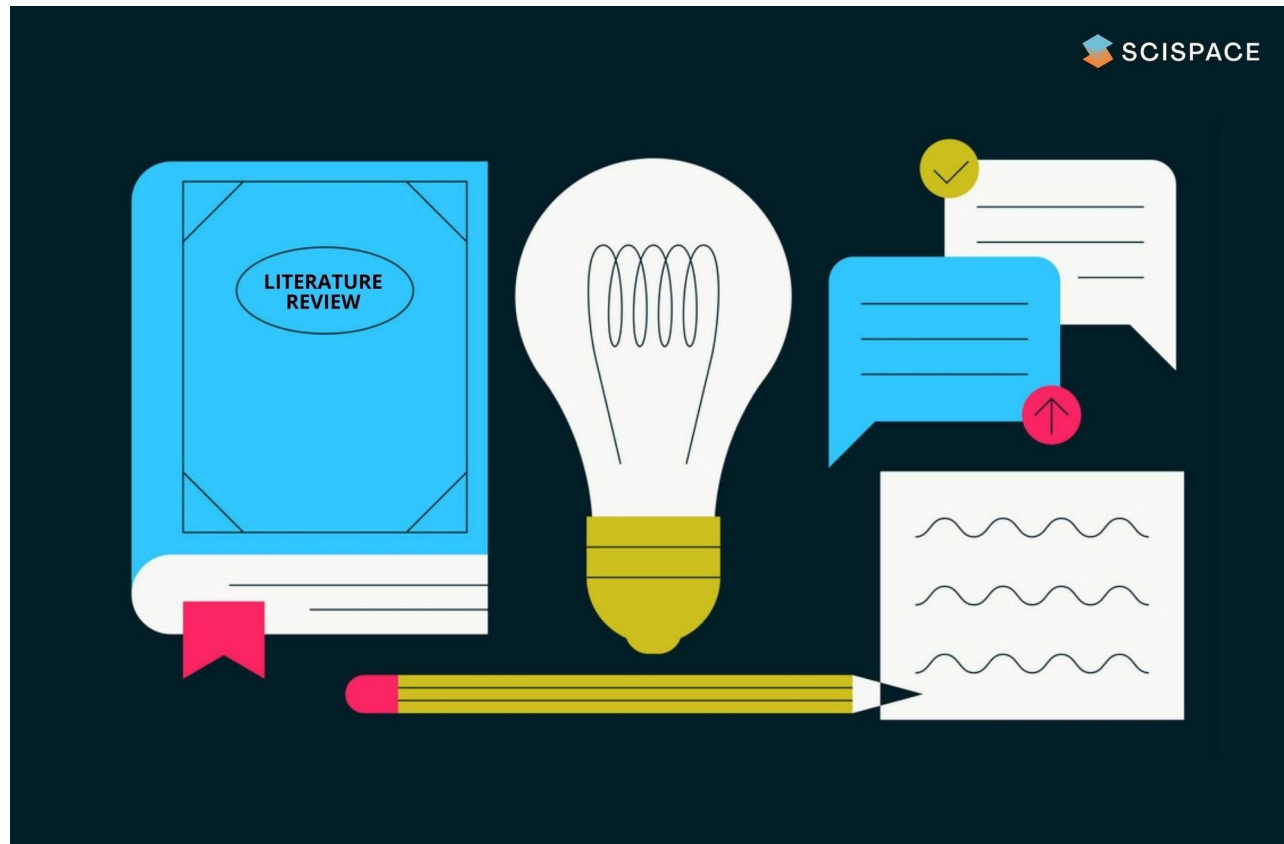


Where does anxiety this come from?

- ✓ Writing skills not taught
- ✓ Fear that "I'm just not a good writer"
- ✓ Competing demands
- ✓ Daunting being at the frontiers of knowledge
- ✓ Fear of judgement
- ✓ Publish or Perish



Always Start with a Plan



When should you begin writing your paper?

- ✓ Even before you start your study!
- ✓ An ongoing and evolving process
 - ❖ Reading and summarising the literature
 - ❖ Making research notes
 - ❖ Generating and sharing ideas
- ✓ Avoids “when am I going to start?”
- ✓ Allows time for revisions

What story do you want your paper to tell?

- ✓ Your story is obviously not fiction!
- ✓ But it does have interesting characters and an exciting plot
- ✓ Your study solves a problem – tell the story of how you solved it
- ✓ Helps to visualize what you're trying to convey

What will be the focus of the paper?

- ✓ A research study can produce an abundance of data
- ✓ How many papers should you produce?
- ✓ Too narrow and the paper will be too “thin”
- ✓ Too broad and the paper loses clarity



"Yes, a trivial observation, but fodder for at least five papers."

Prepare a vision statement

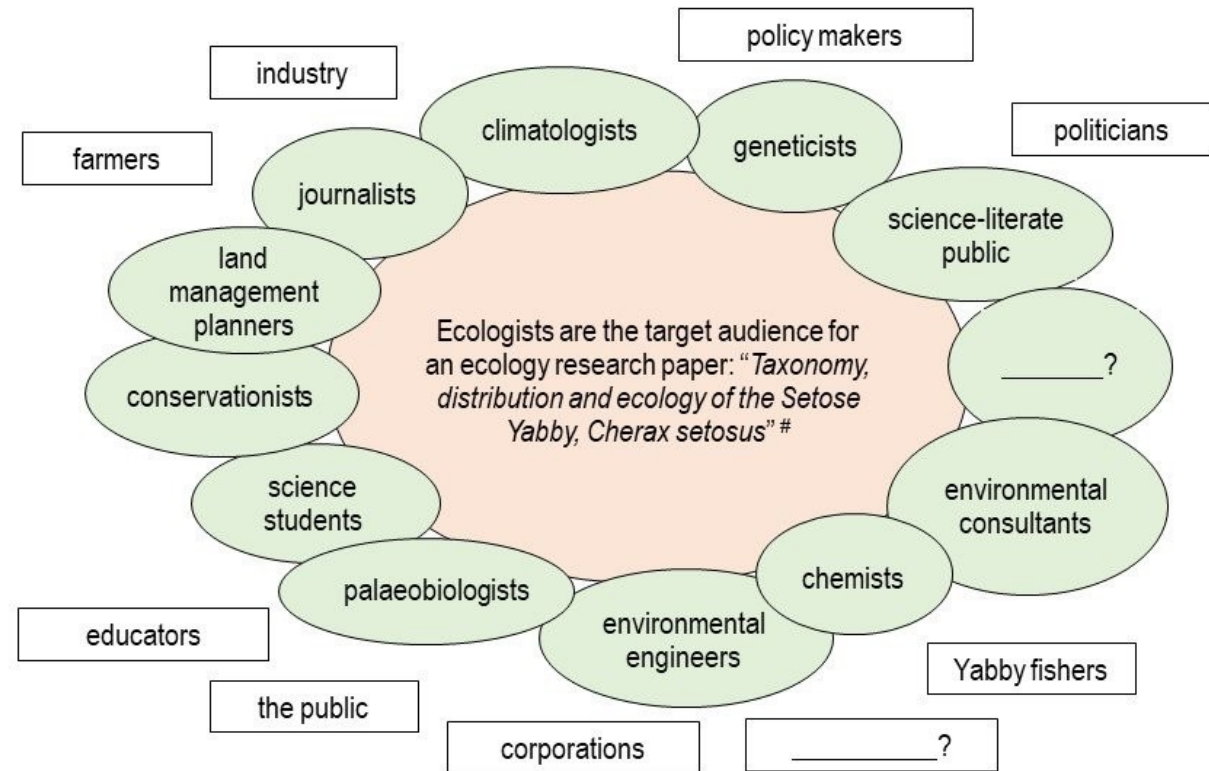
- ✓ Express your take-home message in no more than two sentences
- ✓ Keep this in mind throughout the writing process
 - ❖ Use it as a filter for your ideas and decisions



Who is your target audience?

- ✓ Researchers in your field
- ✓ Researchers in different fields
- ✓ Clinicians, practitioners, policymakers
- ✓ General public

Three audience types for a research paper: 1. target audience 2. secondary audience 3. peripheral audience



McCormack, R. B., & Coughran, J. (2011). Taxonomy, distribution and ecology of the Setose Yabby, *Cherax setosus*. *Crustacean Research*, 40, 1–11.

Content and style should match your audience

- ✓ How much does your audience already know?
- ✓ Consider the use of jargon and technical terms
 - ❖ How much do you need to define and explain?
- ✓ Same or different message for different audiences?
- ✓ Consider different publication types



Select a journal

- ✓ Which article type: research paper, letter, short communication, review...?
- ✓ Selecting a journal early helps to focus the content, message and style
- ✓ Saves time to format correctly



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Scheduling and Organising





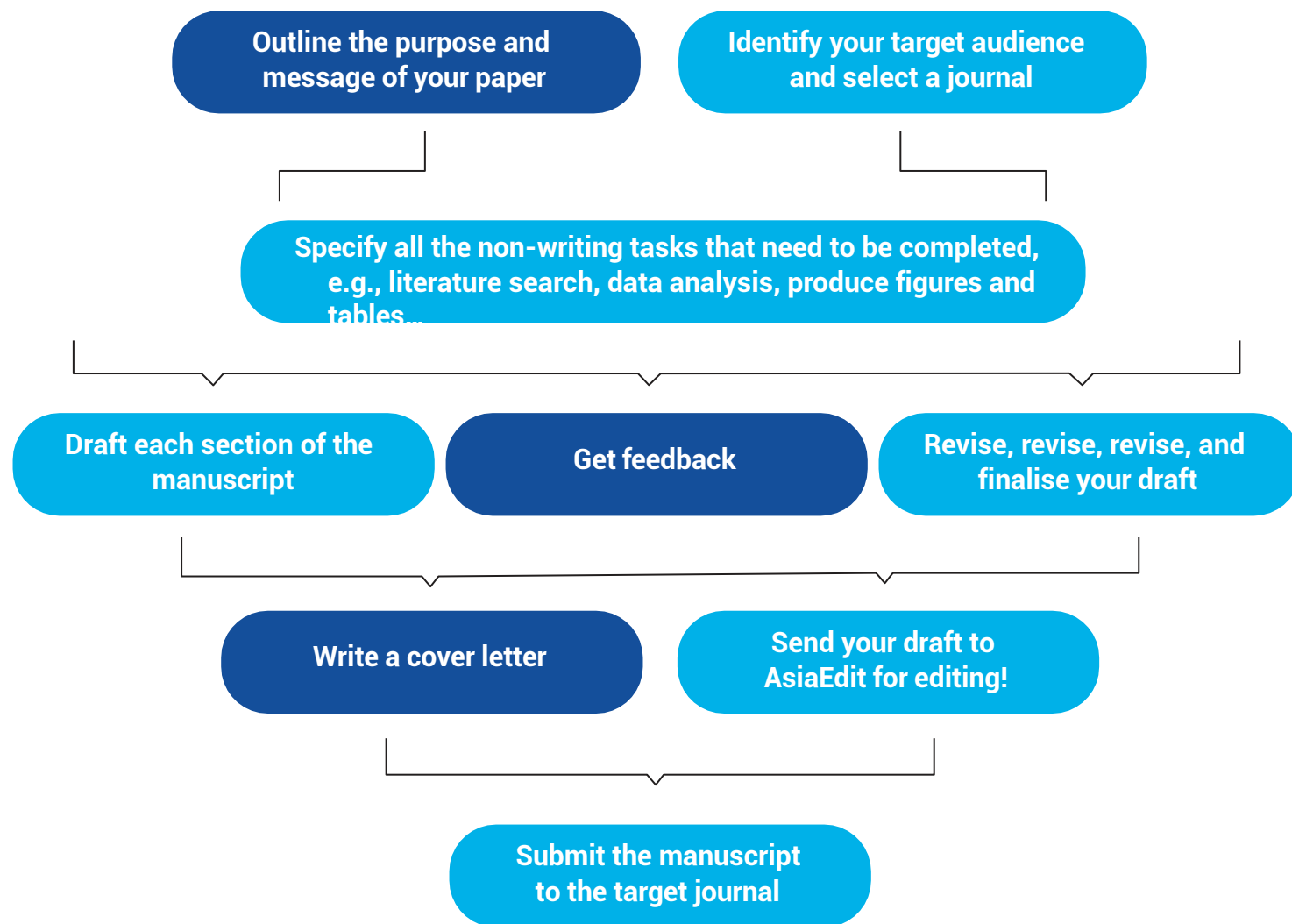
Develop a Schedule

- ✓ Project management approach
- ✓ Work back from your final deadline (it may be years ahead!)
- ✓ Framework for the tasks you need to complete and how and when you will complete them
- ✓ Plan your time and create deadlines

Project Management Software

- ✓ Especially for complex and collaborative research projects
- ✓ Use charts and scheduling software, e.g.:
 - o Pacemaker.press
 - o Trello.com
 - o Clickup.com
 - o Monday.com
 - o Microsoft Project

**For example,
you need to**

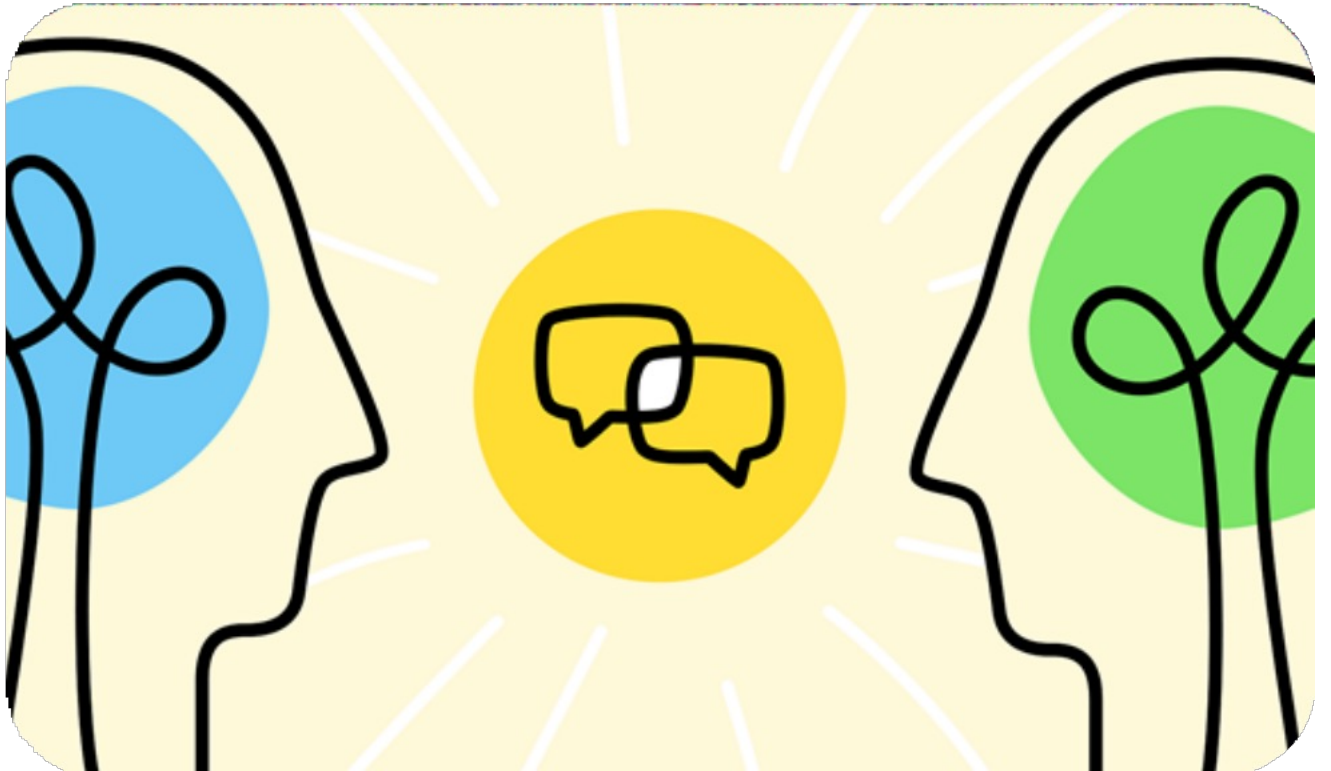


Make yourself accountable

- ✓ Keep your plan accessible and updated
- ✓ Put deadlines for tasks in the calendar
- ✓ Give your PhD supervisor a copy of your plan and deadlines
- ✓ Collaborate with your team to stay on track
- ✓ Ask a colleague to help
- ✓ Join or create a writing group (e.g., <https://shutupwrite.com/>)

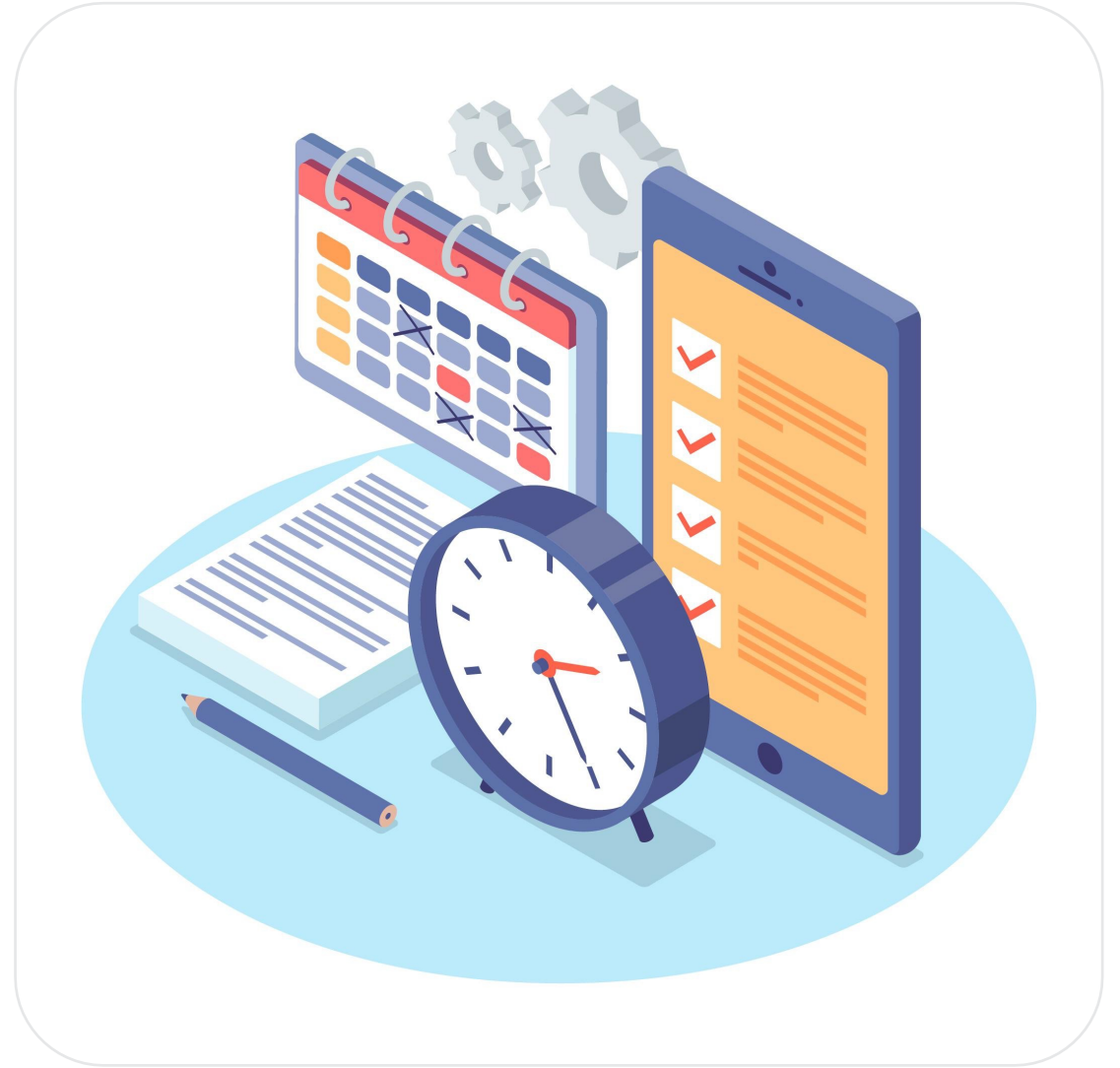
Tips for effective collaboration

- ✓ Decide on roles and responsibilities
- ✓ Determine authorship
- ✓ Agree on the contents and direction of the paper
- ✓ Follow a schedule
- ✓ Communicate regularly



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Organise your resources



Develop a system

Plan how will you organise your

- ✓ Literature
- ✓ Data
- ✓ Research notes
- ✓ Observations
- ✓ Field/lab notes
- ✓ Multimedia content

Keep track of your literature

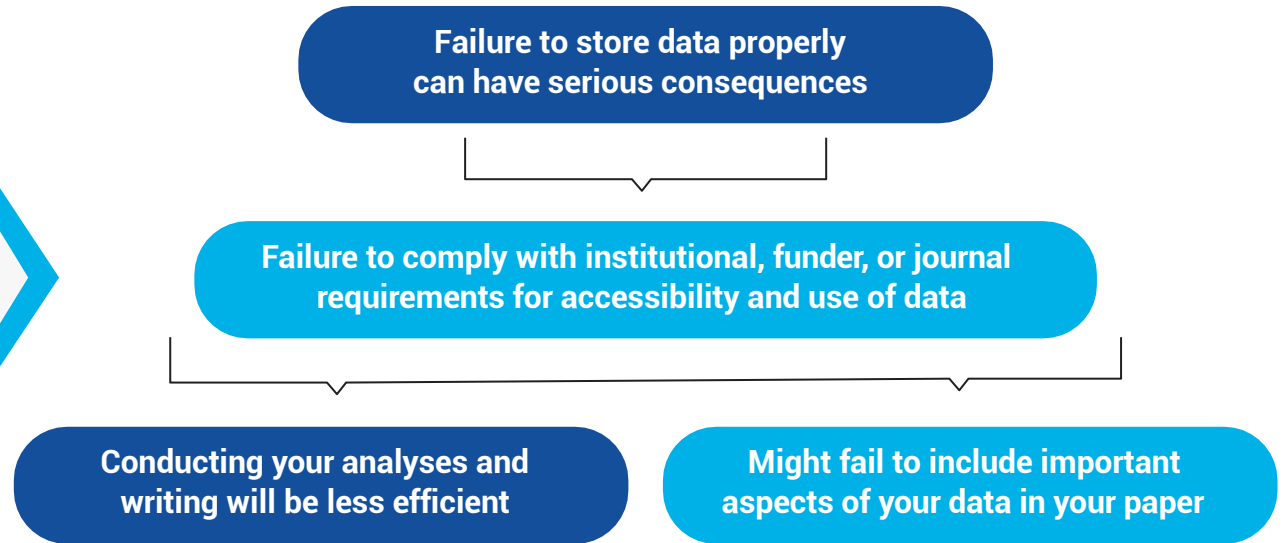
- ✓ Use search databases effectively
- ✓ Use citation management software and keep it updated
 - ❖ Endnote is expensive, but there are plenty of alternatives
 - ❖ Zotero and Mendeley two of the best free referencing packages
 - ❖ Store not only references, but also attach PDFs, audio and video files, websites



Organise to avoid plagiarism

- ✓ Disorganized literature searching/reviewing can lead to plagiarism
- ✓ Never copy and paste without source
- ✓ Put all original quotes and phrases in quotation marks
- ✓ Paraphrase immediately

Data storage



Use a checklist

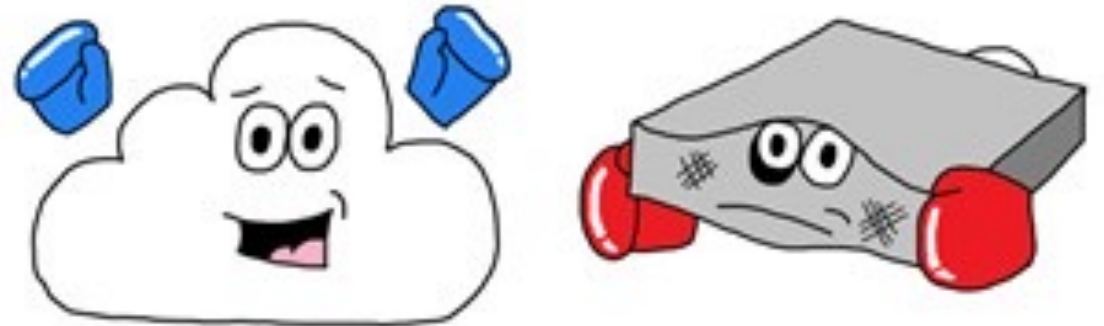
PLOS, the leading open access journal, recommends using a checklist such as the following:

- ✓ What types of data will be created?
- ✓ How will these data be processed?
- ✓ How will they be stored and backed up?
- ✓ How will they be documented (inc. naming conventions, directory structures etc.)?
- ✓ How will these data be of benefit to the broader scientific community?
- ✓ How will they be archived and will they comply with any data/metadata standards?
- ✓ How will they be made available and discoverable to the broader community?
- ✓ What are the policies for sharing, re-use etc.?
- ✓ <https://plos.org/resource/how-to-store-and-manage-your-data/#data-management-plan>

Where and how to store other resources

One important decision is where to store all of these materials.

- ✓ Hard drive is most convenient
 - but subject to loss/damage
 - can only work at your own computer
- ✓ On the cloud is better
 - access files from anywhere
 - less risk of data loss and corruption



Keep it Organised

- ✓ Don't just create a folder and dump everything in it without creating a structure!
- ✓ Develop and stick to a file naming and coding system
- ✓ Use dates and keep track of versions
- ✓ Keep a record of your system!



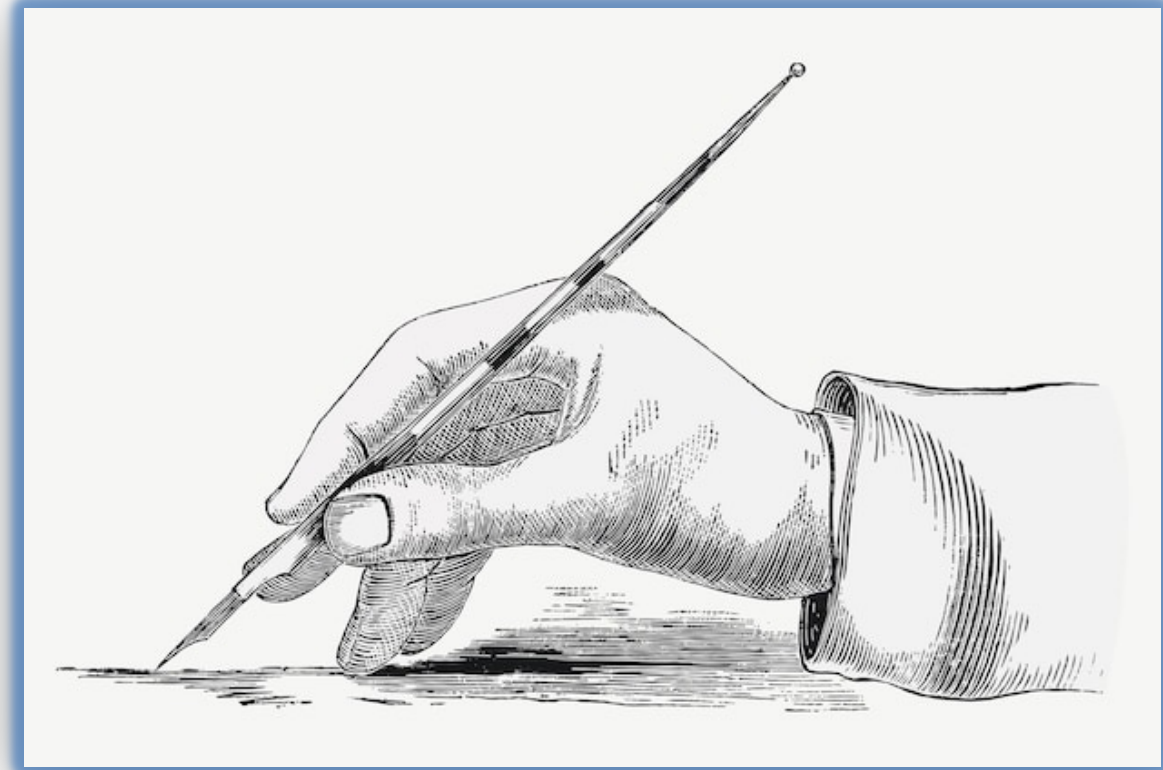
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**Notes and post-its
still have a place!**



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**Prepare
to Write**



Organisational tools for writing

- ✓ Alternatives to word processor; e.g., [scrivener.com](https://www.scrivener.com)
- ✓ Word processor with file management system
- ✓ Prepare sections separately then combine
- ✓ Attach resources and references
- ✓ Keeps everything in one place

Schedule time and place

- ✓ Use a calendar to block out time for writing
- ✓ Make sure nothing else takes over
- ✓ Plan where you will work from
- ✓ Find other opportunities to write
- ✓ Identify your most productive time of day



How long should you plan to write for?

- ✓ “Binge” writing versus “snack” writing
- ✓ Use the pomodoro technique



Use your writing time wisely

- ✓ Try not to:
 - ❖ Get caught in the trap of doing all of the other tasks on your list
 - ❖ Start by reviewing yesterday's writing and get stuck into editing it
 - ❖ Spend all day looking for the perfect reference/quote
 - ❖ Fall down internet rabbit holes
 - ❖ Wait for inspiration



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Create a state of flow

Mihali Csikszentmihalyi

founder of the Positive Psychology movement in the 1970s.

"My mind isn't wandering. I am not thinking of something else. I am totally involved in what I am doing. My body feels good. I don't seem to hear anything. The world seems to be cut off from me. I am less aware of myself and my problems." Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, 1988: 195

Turn off distractions

- ✓ Turn off email, social media, messaging services etc.
- ✓ Use apps to control your internet/website use
- ✓ Keep your office door closed
- ✓ Tell colleagues or fellow students not to disturb you
- ✓ Get comfortable and relaxed
- ✓ Prepare by listening to ambient music, doing yoga, practicing meditation

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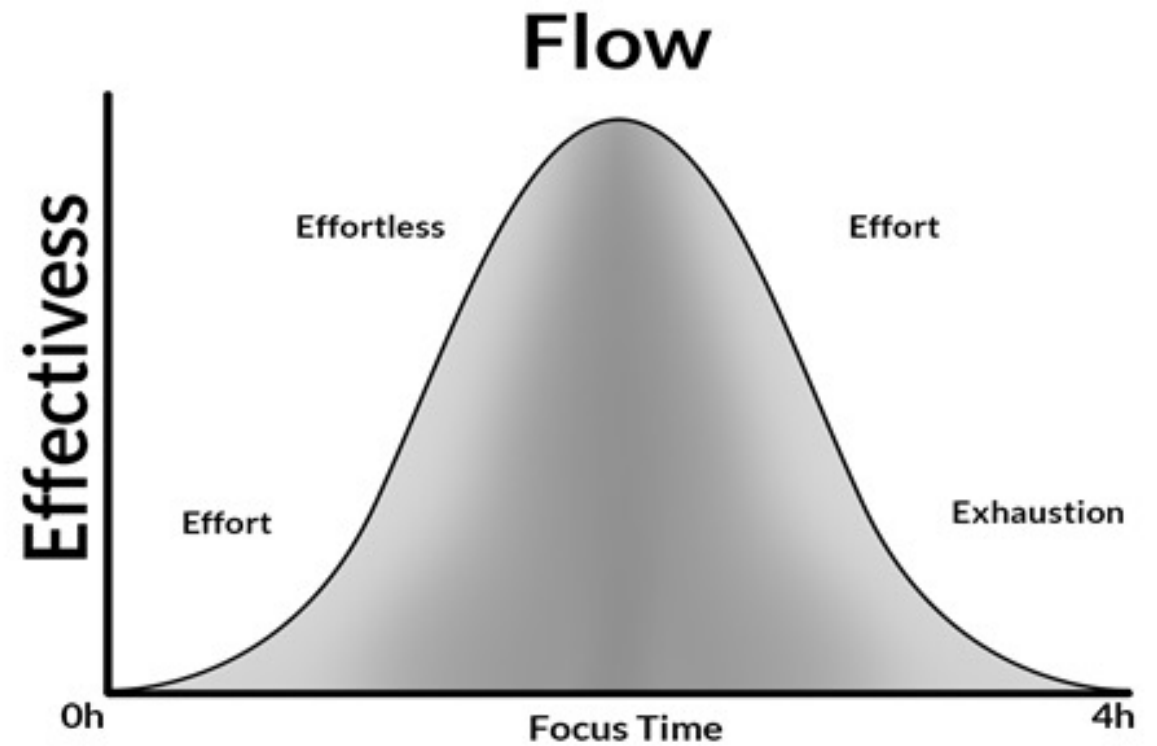


Set a goal for each writing session

- ✓ Clear and realistic short-term goal
- ✓ Needs to be achievable but not too simplistic
- ✓ Start with something manageable to warm up
- ✓ Harder parts become easier once you're in "flow"

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Optimum flow





Avoid **Writer's Block**



Warm up with some free writing

- ✓ Difficulty getting started?
- ✓ Write about anything for five minutes
- ✓ Try using prompts, e.g.,
 - ❖ “The point I’m trying to make here is...” or
 - ❖ “I think this result means that...”
- ✓ Don’t check what you’ve written
- ✓ If you get stuck, go back to your prompt and try again

Try not to be a perfectionist

- ✓ Perfectionism is good – but it can lead to procrastination
- ✓ Free your mind to produce what it will
- ✓ Turn off your inner critic
- ✓ Don't think about the final product (yet)



All progress is good

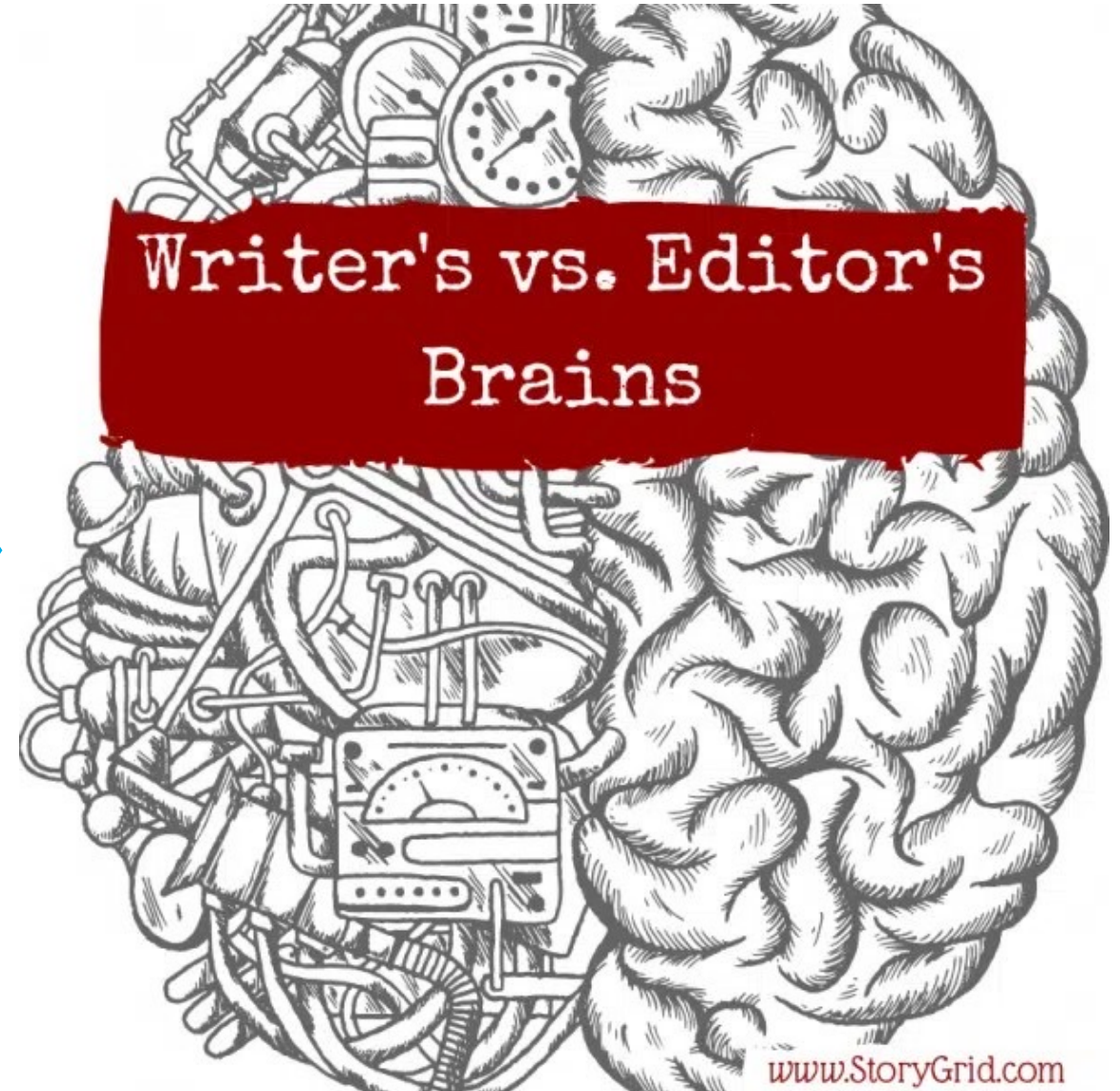
If you're not getting into a flow, be content with just making progress

- ✓ Use placeholders and come back later
- ✓ Change your goal for the session
- ✓ Don't criticise yourself for being unproductive
- ✓ Never say "I'm not a good writer"
- ✓ Even the smallest progress counts towards your goal

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Writing versus Editing

- ✓ Writing involves creating something new that has (possibly) never been said before
- ✓ Capture your ideas first, worry about honing them later
- ✓ Editing is a task in itself – put it aside while writing
- ✓ And remember, good editing services are available!



www.StoryGrid.com

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Thank you!