

**Some Ideas and Suggestions about Writing**  
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### **How to Get Started**

This stage, when one is beginning one's degree program, we may refer to as the "only just begun" stage. Here are some of our observations and suggestions that are particular important to making progress in this early stage.

- Previously, many of us have had teachers who have done damage to us and made us inhibited about writing.
- A philosophic place to put writing: it's not just when you're sitting writing; it's when you're driving, talking, watching TV, taking a shower. These kinds of "writing" are "writing in your 'mind's eye'"---intellectually processing your experience. So, we need to find ways to help ourselves remember these things we've written, but not yet written on paper. For example, we can set aside as little as ten minutes three times each week to write down our most interesting thoughts (the writing that is not yet on paper) from the previous 48 hours or so. Sometimes, we can even seize the moment and write down a few thoughts on our dinner napkin just to help ourselves remember. "Don't lose your brilliance."
- Don't make the challenge too big. For example, make conscious decisions about when to explore a variety of topics and pursue a variety of learning activities and when to focus and complete one chunk or project at a time.
- Sometimes our image of what we think we should accomplish academically deflects our attention from what kinds of learning activities are really important and meaningful to us.
- A strategy:
  1. Get a key question
  2. Spit out what comes to mind
  3. Put it on tape or write it down (even on the back of a brown paper bag) . . . like a take-home exam where one writes the "juicy" essay questions on the topic with which one is concerned and then one answers in a time-limited fashion (two hours per questions, perhaps) the main ideas that readily come to mind in responding to the question.
  4. Read about it
  5. Talk about it
  6. Write about it
  7. This process can go on and on and repeat over and over again . . .

## The Later Stages of Writing a Thesis or for some major project

The following are some ideas and suggestions which may be especially helpful for people when they are in the later stages of their degree programs.

- Cynthia remembers that when writing her dissertation that she would often routinely write between 4:30 and 7:30 am (!). She recalls that during the first 45 minutes she would often feel that she had nothing to write. But she would write anyway, even if she thought it was garbage. But she would persist in writing on her topic of concern, nevertheless. She goes on to say, “I would leave what I wrote for the whole day and come back to it at the end of the day, and would be surprised at how good it was.”
- Don’t try to make the paper *sound* “academic,” scholarly or “professional.” Instead, try to find ways to keep the reader engaged:
  1. Use examples, and tell stories.
  2. Be real in your own voice—let the reader know why what you’re writing about is important to you, and why it might be important to them.
  3. Do some things to engage the reader early on in whatever you’re writing.
    - ask interesting questions
    - give intriguing and tangible examples
    - be a good “tour guide”—point out things the reader should be alert to and pay attention to, as you guide them on the “tour” of whatever your topic is about
    - invite the reader to think with you about such important matters as “where would you go from here . . . if you were going to think more, do more or write more about this?”